

Official Reprisals on Irishwomen By the Officers and Gentlemen of the British Army

"There is nothing the British Government feel more seriously about than the unfortunate sufferings of innocent persons and their property owing to the state of civil war in Ireland."—Sir Hamar Greenwood in the House of Commons, May 25, 1921.

The hypocritical cant of British statesmen who shed tears in England over the outrages they order and organise in Ireland is of a piece with the whole shameful policy now in operation in this country. At the time when "reprisals" were taken at the bidding of any constable who chose to suggest them, the British Government pleaded for a fair hearing for its murderers and incendiaries and publicly condoned their acts. Since "reprisals" have become "official" and are ordered by military governors, in whom Sir Hamar Greenwood has "full confidence," the British press has taken for granted that the appalling excesses which accompanied earlier sackings no longer occur. The statements we publish below are a sufficient comment upon that view. The following points must be emphasised:

(a) The sufferers were in each case unprotected women, the destruction of whose homes was ordered by military governors who know that the residences were those of women only; (b) The "reprisals" were carried out by members of the regular British Army, and it was under officers of this Army that the most shameful indignities were heaped upon the defenceless women; (c) In the case of Ballycoe House, two women under temporary arrest were pelted with rotten eggs by British soldiers. The officers permitted this and the only man present with the decency to protest was a private; (d) In both cases every little dastardly refinement of cruelty likely to add to the pain of the women whose homes were being destroyed was committed by the troops in the presence of their officers without a word of rebuke from them.

And here is the final touch of baseness in this base drama. Capt. Thomas, who superintended the destruction of Ballycoe House, and participated in the brutalities of the scene, had been captured in the very ambush as a result of which the house was destroyed, and, having been treated with the respect due to his rank, was released unhurt. England is solemnly complaining of the light punishment inflicted upon war criminals at Leipzig! Her own war criminals, for more blackguardly acts, go scot free.

The Destruction of Ballycoe House

Statement of Miss Elizabeth Dunlea concerning the destruction of her home at Ballycoe House, Dungarvan, Co. Waterford, by the British Military Forces as an "Official Reprisal."

"Note (1) An ambush of the Crown forces took place at Burgery, Dungarvan, about 2 a.m. on March 19, 1921. Of that ambush we knew nothing beforehand. It did not take place on the Ballycoe Road and was not visible from Ballycoe.

"Note (2) There lived in our house only my mother, my sister, myself, one maid and one man-servant.

Preliminary Raid

"On Holy Thursday, March 24, about 6 a.m., we were awakened by the knocking of a party of military, about 30 or 40 in charge of three officers. My sister threw on a cloak and hurried down in bare feet to open the door. At once an officer, whom I believe to be Lieut. Turner, rushed upstairs, entered my bedroom, brandishing a revolver, and ordered everybody to leave the house. I had hastily thrown on a coat, but when I wished to put on more clothing, this officer refused to leave the room, although requested to do so. I could only pull on stockings and slippers. He then followed me into my mother's room and ordered her out. She was similarly clad. He then went to the wing of the house where the man-servant slept and ordered him, though undressed, on to our stairway when we were coming down. I returned to my room to give the man time to put on his trousers, but Lieut. Turner rushed in after me and ordered me out. When we reached the ground floor we found the rooms already filled with soldiery searching. As my sister had no shoes or stockings on she refused to leave the house, and so we were allowed to remain in the hall. The search of the house proceeded, and during it Capt. Thomas asked my sister the following questions:—

(1) 'How many wounded had you in the house after the ambush?' She answered that we had no wounded.

(2) 'When did you last see——?' mentioning a certain name. She answered: 'Two years ago in Dublin.'

(3) 'When was —— last in Ballycoe?' She answered 'Three years ago.'

"The only suspicious objects found in the house were a small piece of old ordinary household muslin, less than a foot square, which Lieut. Griffiths declared to be wound dressing, and a Wolessy valise folding bath and small tent, portion of the equipment of my brothers, who had both served as chaplains during the late war. (Note: My brothers did not live with us but in Dublin, about 150 miles away.)

Chaplains in the British Army

"These articles were being taken away in the lorry when my mother said to one of the soldiers that these things belonged to her sons who had been in the army. He said: 'The Irish Army, I suppose?' She answered: 'No, in the British Army as chaplains.' He asked: 'Protestant chaplains?' She said: 'No, Catholic chaplains.' He said: 'We don't trust these fellows; they are responsible for all the ambushes.' Subsequently an officer asked my sister where her brothers were. 'On the run, I suppose?' he said. She said: 'No. They are priests in Dublin.'

"When Lieut. Griffiths was searching the outhouses we heard a smashing of glass. Griffiths soon entered the house with his hand bleeding and proceeded to rummage clothing, etc., leaving stains of blood on the articles. This is important, because it was subsequently said that blood-stained bandages had been found. These were the only blood-stains in the house.

"The fastener for the front lapels of my brother's khaki greatcoat was found. Lieut. Griffiths held it to my sister's nose, asking what it smelt of. As she made no answer he said: 'Blood, blood; doesn't it smell of blood?' There was no blood on it. When the raid was over, my mother's gold neck-chain with watch and silver sodality medal was missing. It was subsequently reported that a soldier was wearing it publicly in the town. There were also missing the servant-man's overcoat, razor, etc.

The Destruction

"On the following day, Good Friday, March 25, about 3 p.m., a party of soldiers, numbering about 50 or 60, in charge of same officers, i.e., Capt. Thomas, Lieut. Griffiths, and Lieut. Turner, arrived in motor lorries with an armored car mounting machine-guns. The armored car was stationed at the entrance gate; the lorries dashed up the avenue and the house was surrounded. The hall door was open, and Capt. Thomas, accompanied by Lieuts. Griffiths and Turner and several soldiers, confronted us in the hall. They presented a document signed by General Cameron, which my sister read aloud. It ordered our house to be completely destroyed because we had not given warning of an ambush on March 19, which ambush, it said, we must have known of beforehand. We were given an hour to remove foodstuffs, jewellery, and clothing. We hardly knew what to take.

Loot

"My mother first went to take a small painting of my father (dead some 15 years). We were told we could not have it because it was a picture of Roger Casement. We insisted that it was only my father, and after a considerable portion of the hour had been spent in this wrangle, we were allowed to take it. When we went upstairs to get other things we found the soldiers already in the rooms searching for loot. I saw such things as boots, leggings, etc., belonging to my brothers being thrown through the windows to those down below. Repeatedly when we took up objects such as souvenirs, photos, etc., they were taken out of our hands by the soldiery. We succeeded in taking out to the front some articles of clothing, but when I wished to take some table-ware, Lieut. Griffiths prevented me, saying that it was furniture. No trace of the smaller objects of this kind, such as spoons, tongs, etc., could be found subsequently, and they were presumably carried off as loot.

"When the hour allotted was nearly up we found that the clothing, etc., which we had carried out was brought back into the house. I protested, alleging the permission