

CAB/37/152/4

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CONFIDENTIAL

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I CIRCULATE, for the information of my colleagues, a letter addressed to Sir Edward Grey by Miss Eva Gore Booth, a sister of the Countess de Markevitz.

C.

Foreign Office, July 19, 1916.

Dear Sir,

33, Fitzroy Square, London, July 17, 1916.

I AM taking the great liberty of sending you the enclosed papers and begging you to read them. It seems quite clear from the priest's evidence that Casement really came to Ireland in a frantic attempt to dissuade the Sinn Fein leaders from what he considered the fatal mistake of the rising. It seems to me an intolerably ghastly idea that he should be hung as a result of this self-sacrificing and devoted effort, facing, as he did, almost certain death for the sake of preventing bloodshed and misery in Ireland. It would be impossible to exaggerate the feeling in Ireland on this matter, and the hopeless despair and bitterness with which the prospect of another execution is regarded — what they consider the deliberate and cold-blooded execution of a man who was not even in the rising, but whose generous and romantic personality has made him a favourite national hero. And this feeling is not confined to Sinn Feiners, but is shared by many who, like myself, are not Sinn Feiners, but long for peace in Ireland. May I beg you to use your power on the side of mercy. An act of grace now would do more to conciliate the ordinary Irish people than any concessions to political leaders, however valuable these may be.

Please forgive my troubling you with this letter. I do not think this evidence has yet been made known.

Yours faithfully,

EVA GORE BOOTH.

P.S.—Although I am not in the Sinn Fein movement, I do think I understand something of their point of view through my sister, Constance de Markevitz.

E. G. B.

On the 6th April Casement was in a nursing home in Germany, when he heard through a spy's report that there was going to be a rising in Ireland. He went straight to Berlin, where with great difficulty he got a submarine to take him to Ireland. The submarine broke down off Heligoland, and he had to wait for some days to get another. His object in going was to stop the rising, which he considered a fatal mistake. The captain of the second submarine did not know Ireland, and landed him on a part of the coast where he knew nobody. Nobody, of course, expected him. He hid himself while Bailey and Monteith went to Tralee to get a motor-car. They found a shop with Sinn Fein colours, went in, and arranged for a car. One went in the car, the other cycled: but they were followed by police, and never found Casement, who was meanwhile arrested. Meanwhile another car, nothing to do with Casement, met with an accident and two men were drowned. When Casement, in the train, heard someone mention this he thought it must be Bailey and Monteith, and broke down.

Casement begged to be allowed to communicate with the leaders to try and stop the rising, but he was not allowed. On Easter Sunday, at Scotland Yard, he implored again to be allowed to communicate or send a message. But they refused, saying, "It is a festering sore; it is much better it should come to a head." It is quite clear from this that if Casement had not been so frightfully anxious to stop the rising he would not have been caught and be in danger of being hanged. This was not told at the trial, because Casement would not allow it. He said the Irish people would think he was

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going back on them, and trying to save his neck by telling the world he did not approve of the rising. Anybody knowing his character would understand this, and the almost fantastic sense of pride and honour that he has.

These are the absolute facts. Whatever people think of the Sinn Feiners, they must know that they are courageous to a fault, and incapable of trying to save their lives by shuffling.

“ After that,” Father Ryan continued, “ I was sent for and allowed to speak privately with the prisoner. He told me his name, and after some conversation of a purely spiritual nature, he said, ‘ I want you to tell the volunteers in the town and elsewhere to keep perfectly quiet. Tell them I am a prisoner and that the rebellion will be a dismal hopeless failure, as the help they expect will not arrive.’ The chaplain reminded the prisoner that he had come as a chaplain at his request and not as a political ambassador. ‘ Do what I ask you,’ pleaded Sir Roger, ‘ and you will bring God’s blessing on the country and on everyone concerned.’ (Father Ryan promised to think it over.) I came to the conclusion that it would be the best thing not alone for the police, but for the volunteers and the country, that I should convey the message to the volunteers, and thereby be the means through which bloodshed and suffering might be avoided. I saw the leader of the volunteers in Tralee, and gave him the message. He assured me that he would do his best to keep the volunteers quiet, and they did keep quiet. I also told the head constable of the steps I had taken, and he agreed with me that it was perhaps the wisest course to follow.”—“ Dublin Evening Mail,” Saturday, May 20, 1916.

Dear Mr. Gavan Duffy,

Roscrea, County Tipperary, July 12, 1916.

Sir Roger Casement saw me in Tralee on the 21st April, and told me he had come to Ireland to stop the rebellion then impending. He asked me to conceal his identity as well as his object in coming until he should have left Tralee, lest any attempt should be made to rescue him. On the other hand he was very anxious that I should spread the news broadcast after he had left.

Sincerely yours,

F. M. RYAN, O.P.

P.S.—My address for three weeks after next Saturday will be, “The Presbytery, Buncrana, Co. Donegal.”

F. M. R.