

668 S. W.
ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S.

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 899

Witness

Rev. Father Laurence, O.D.C.,
St. Theresa's,
Clarendon St.,
Dublin.

Identity.

Friend of Canon Watters who was Chaplain in
Mountjoy Prison, 1920.

Confessor to some of the Irish Volunteers
Easter Week, 1916.

Subject.

Kevin Barry's last moments as recalled
by Canon Watters.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S. 2204

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY FATHER LAWRENCE,
St. Theresa's, Clarendon Street, Dublin.

Some years ago after an illness I was on holidays at the Mulrany Hotel and Canon Watters happened to be staying there also. He used to be Chaplain at Mountjoy Prison before he got a parish and was made Vicar General.

One day we were walking along the paths through the grounds, talking. He told me he said the Mass for Kevin Barry in the condemned cell on the morning of the execution and Kevin served his Mass. "As long as I live, I shall never forget that day", he said. We were walking along the lawn. "Do you see that grass lawn?", he said. "I put my hand on Kevin's heart to see was it fluttering. Well, it was as calm and unruffled as that grass, although my own was fluttering violently." That was when he was sitting on an old stool in the condemned cell repeating the Thanksgiving prayers with Kevin after Mass and Communion.

Suddenly the door opened and a tall, rather cultured looking man entered whom the Canon had not seen before, but he took him to be a doctor. This man came in and asked Kevin to stand up and hold out his hand, and the Canon thought he was going to feel his pulse. That was why he took the stranger to be a doctor. Then the Canon said, "I noticed that the man pinioned Kevin's two hands behind his back, saying 'I won't hurt you!'". Then the Canon realised that the strange man was the executioner or his assistant. The Canon said he had never heard the hangman speak before to a condemned man and he had been

present at a number of executions before that. I think the cultured looking man was the assistant hangman.

I said to Canon Watters, "Do the prisoners see the rope before the execution?". He said they did. He told me that Kevin was extraordinarily brave and never once faltered but died most heroically. The black cap was pulled over Kevin's head when he mounted the scaffold. The Canon accompanied him to the scaffold, saying the prayers with him. Immediately the body dropped, he anointed him.

Kevin was an altar boy in our church for a couple of years. Brother Joseph, who died last February and was forty years sacristan, knew him very well. He had a photo of him hanging up in the former altar boys' room. Brother Anthony, who happens to be away, will be back in a few days. He may know where it is. It must have been taken down in the change over of the altar boys to another room.

I should also mention that, during the 1916 Rising, on Easter Monday I happened to be coming down Lower Leeson Street and, when I came into Stephen's Green, I noticed the gates at that end were closed and a barricade erected with a round barrel-shaped vessel on wheels of the type that were often on the street then, though I never seem them now. There were men in civilian clothes with bandoliers firing shots. I walked along the south side of the Green and into Cuffe Street and, when I came as far as Jacobs, there were numbers of tenement women rushing, frantic and upset, around the place. They were panic stricken that the British would come along and have a battle with the

Volunteers and destroy their houses.

I walked past New Street into a street I think they call Blackpitts. There was a barricade there too. A Volunteer in uniform, with a fixed bayonet, said, "You can't come this way". Another man in civilian clothes said, "It is all right, you can pass". He brought me into a sort of a brewery and down to the basement where there were a number of Volunteers. It seemed to be a store with grain and there was a smell of yeast about. I was told that the main entrance was in New Street and I must have been brought in through the back entrance. The men, numbering about twelve or fourteen, asked for Confession as they were oath-bound to remain there and they might at any moment be engaged in conflict with the British, as soon as these knew what was happening. There were no women there. I said, "What is it all about?" They answered that it was a Rising and they were bound to stay there and, as soon as the British got word of it, there would be a conflict with the soldiers of the British Army. They were all strangers to me. I heard their Confessions at their request. There were no wounded there as it was quite early, about 12.30 p.m., and they had only just taken up their positions. I asked no questions and they did not seem inclined to give me any information at all.

SIGNED:

Father Laurence O.D.C.

DATE:

30th October 1953.

(Father Laurence, O.D.C.)

30th October, 1953.

WITNESS:

P. M. Cowan

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