

# OLLSCOIL NA hÉIREANN

## THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND

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TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS DELIVERED BY JOHN J. MCHENRY, M.A. (CANTAB.), D.SC.; VICE-CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY; PRESIDENT OF UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, CORK, ON APRIL 14TH, 1966, ON THE OCCASION OF THE CONFERRING OF THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF LAWS, *honoris causa*, ON MRS. KATHLEEN CLARKE.

### CHANCELLOR AND MEMBERS OF THE UNIVERSITY :

Thomas Clarke had grown to manhood during a period when the Irish people were broken by famine and dispirited by the failure of the Young Irelanders in 1848 and of the Fenians in 1867. As a young man he joined the I.R.B., the secret oath-bound revolutionary organization whose sole aim was to drive the English from Ireland by force of arms.

Like many young Irishmen of his own and subsequent generations he was forced to emigrate to the United States. There he maintained his revolutionary connections, becoming a member of the Clan na Gael, the American counterpart of the I.R.B. After some training in the use of explosives he sailed for England in 1883. He was arrested there. Charged with being "concerned in a Fenian dynamite plot" he was sentenced to penal servitude for life. The unspeakable hardships he suffered during fifteen years of solitary confinement seem only to have hardened his resolution to prepare for another attempt to win independence for Ireland by armed force.

Shortly after his release from prison in 1898 Clarke had again to emigrate to the United States of America. There, in 1901, he married Kathleen Daly, niece of his fellow-prisoner and close friend, John Daly of Limerick.

Then followed six years in New York. During this time he was secretary to John Devoy and helped to found the "Gaelic American", a new weekly organ of Clan na Gael. In 1907 Clarke decided to return to Ireland, convinced that only there could his objective be achieved. It must have been a difficult decision for the young Mrs. Clarke. However, she loyally agreed with him, and they returned to Ireland with their young son in December 1907.

Soon after his return to Ireland Clarke was coopted to the Supreme Council of the I.R.B. To the young militant leaders of the Republican movement he represented a bridge between themselves and all the generations of Irishmen who had risen in armed revolt against British rule. These young men sought him out, and many of them were enrolled by him in the I.R.B. He founded the new republican paper 'Irish Freedom' and cooperated with all the forces which were striving towards Irish freedom. The founding of the Irish Volunteers in 1913, and the impending European war, convinced Clarke and his associates that no time should be lost before making an armed rising. Unnoticed even by the officers and men themselves, the Supreme Council of the I.R.B. assumed control of the Irish Volunteers. Towards the end of 1915 a Military Council was formed which finally consisted of the seven signatories of the 1916 Proclamation of the Irish Republic. The Council prepared its plans for the Rising, urgently and quietly, towards the end of 1915 and in the early months of 1916.

During Easter Week Clarke fought in the General Post Office. He had been the first to sign the Proclamation of the Irish Republic on behalf of the Provisional Government. After the surrender he was one of the first to be executed, and soon most of the senior members of the I.R.B. had been removed from the scene by execution or death in battle, or imprisonment. However, before the Rising, all the important plans and decisions of the I.R.B. had been given to the young Mrs. Clarke, with lists of members and funds for the families of those who were to lose their breadwinners as a result of the rising. Later, as men were released from gaol or detention camp they made their way to her and gradually preparations were resumed for the next stage of the struggle.

She formed the First Committee of the Republican Prisoners' Dependents Fund in 1921. She had been a District Justice of the Sinn Féin Courts and had acted occasionally as Circuit Court Judge from 1920 to the dissolution of the Republican Courts. She was elected to Dáil Éireann in 1921 and later in 1927, and became a member of Seanad Éireann in December 1928. The Corporation of Dublin elected her Lord Mayor in 1939, the first woman to receive that honour.

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PRAEHONORABILIS CANCELLARIE, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS :

Praesento vobis hanc meam filiam, quem scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneam esse qui admittatur *honoris causa* ad gradum Doctoratus in utroque Jure, tam Civili quam Canonico, idque tibi fide mea testor as spondeo, totique Academiae.