

There is a feature that all revolutions — however ‘glorious’ — share: though their supporters perceive them as struggles for political or social liberation, they are also civil wars. 1916 is no exception, as Iris Murdoch argued in her book *The Red and the Green*, published one year before the fiftieth anniversary of the Rising. At the time, her view fell predominantly on deaf ears. As in most countries which underwent revolutionary traumas, in the Republic the received narrative of the events of Easter Week was long dominated by those who had supported the winning side. Indeed, I remember the days — not long ago — when the owners of documents similar to those displayed in this exhibition would have regarded the idea of publishing them with alarm and felt uneasy even about allowing scholars to examine them, fearing that they might shed a ‘controversial’ light on their ancestors’ attitudes to the Rising and, therefore, to Ireland. However, most of us would now take the view that there were many ways to be patriotic in 1916, and indeed both before and since. Nor were all the fighters in this civil war animated by hatred for the other side. As T.C. Kingsmill Moore noted about his own experience of defending Trinity College against the Volunteers, ‘to be forced in self-defence to shoot down our countrymen — these are things which even the knowledge of duty well fulfilled cannot render anything but sad and distasteful.’ And Ernest Bateman, then Church of Ireland Curate of Taney, eloquently expressed the same anguish in a poem composed while the fighting was raging:

*My heart is hot
To see your sacrifice
Pour down in rain
Of blood, a cruel price,
Spent but in vain.*

In the end, their sacrifice was not ‘in vain’, as Bateman himself was ready to acknowledge a little later, when in another poem he wrote that it was the patriot’s duty:

*To fling aside the outworn party creeds,
Bad heritage of faction and of hate,
To learn to trust, before it be too late,
To follow where his country’s genius leads,
To cast far from him everything that breeds
Unworthy fears, suspicions, and slate,
To aid the fortunes of our new-born state,
In good and evil times, by words and deeds,*

*This is the patriot's service — to forget
The past with all its bitterness and wrong,
To lay it with the dead where it belongs,
And on the future all his purpose set,
Unheeding blame and seeking not for praise,
Content to give his country all his days.*

In this spirit, we ought to approach the evidence displayed here. It constitutes a remarkable testament to an age of rapid and dramatic changes, which enthused many but left others perplexed and painfully aware of the need to make difficult choices.

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