



4.0 **The seven members of the Provisional Government**

4.5 **Éamonn Ceannt**

Éamonn Ceannt, member of the Provisional Government of the Irish Republic and commandant of the 4th Battalion of the Irish Volunteers.

Éamonn Ceannt (1881-1916) was born Edward Thomas Kent in the police barracks at Ballymoe, Co. Galway, the son of James Kent, an officer in the Royal Irish Constabulary, and his wife, Joanne Galway. James Kent was transferred to Ardee, Co. Louth, where Éamonn attended the De La Salle national school, becoming an altar boy—he remained a devout Catholic all his life. The family next moved to Drogheda, where he attended the Christian Brothers' school at Sunday's Gate. Finally, on the father's retirement in 1892, the family settled in Dublin; there, Éamonn attended the O'Connell Schools on North Richmond Street run by the Christian Brothers, and University College, Dublin. He found employment with Dublin Corporation in the rates department and later the city treasury office.

Éamonn was deeply interested in Irish cultural activities, especially music. In 1899 he joined the central branch of the Gaelic League, where he met Patrick Pearse and Eoin MacNeill. He became a fluent Irish speaker and adopted the Irish form of his name by which he was always known afterwards. He taught Irish part-time at various Gaelic League branches, gaining a reputation as an inspiring teacher. He played a number of musical instruments, the Irish war and uilleann pipes being his particular favourites. In February 1900 he was involved with Edward Martyn in setting up the

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Dublin Pipers' Club, of which he became secretary. He managed to procure a printing press on which he printed a journal, *An Piobaire*, designed to promote the club, the first issue appearing on 5 July 1901. While leading a group of Irish athletes in Rome in 1908, he performed on the uilleann pipes for Pope Pius X.

Ceannt had socialist sympathies and was involved in the unionisation of his fellow workers in Dublin Corporation, eventually becoming chairman of the Dublin Municipal Officers' Association. His first serious involvement in national politics, however, was in 1907 when he joined Arthur Griffith's new political party, Sinn Féin, which opposed Home Rule, promoted the concept of national self-reliance, and aimed at national independence; he was eventually elected to the national council of Sinn Féin. It appears that he was sworn into the Irish Republican Brotherhood by Seán MacDiarmada on 12 December 1912. On the foundation of the Irish Volunteers in November 1913, he was elected to the provisional committee, becoming involved in raising finance for the procurement of arms; he was present at both the Howth and Kilcoole importations.

Following the withdrawal of the National Volunteers under Redmond, Ceannt, Pearse and Plunkett were elected to key offices in the Irish Volunteers, giving them virtual control. In addition, Ceannt became commandant of the 4th Battalion of the Dublin Brigade in March 1915. Soon after he was co-opted to the IRB Military Council. Many of the Military Council meetings took place at his house in Dolphin's Barn.

On Easter Monday 1916, Ceannt and 120 men of the 4th Battalion of the Irish Volunteers, who reported for duty, occupied the South Dublin Union, a workhouse/ hospital spread over fifty-two acres of James's Street and also some covering buildings. They held part of the complex until they were informed of the general surrender the following Sunday.

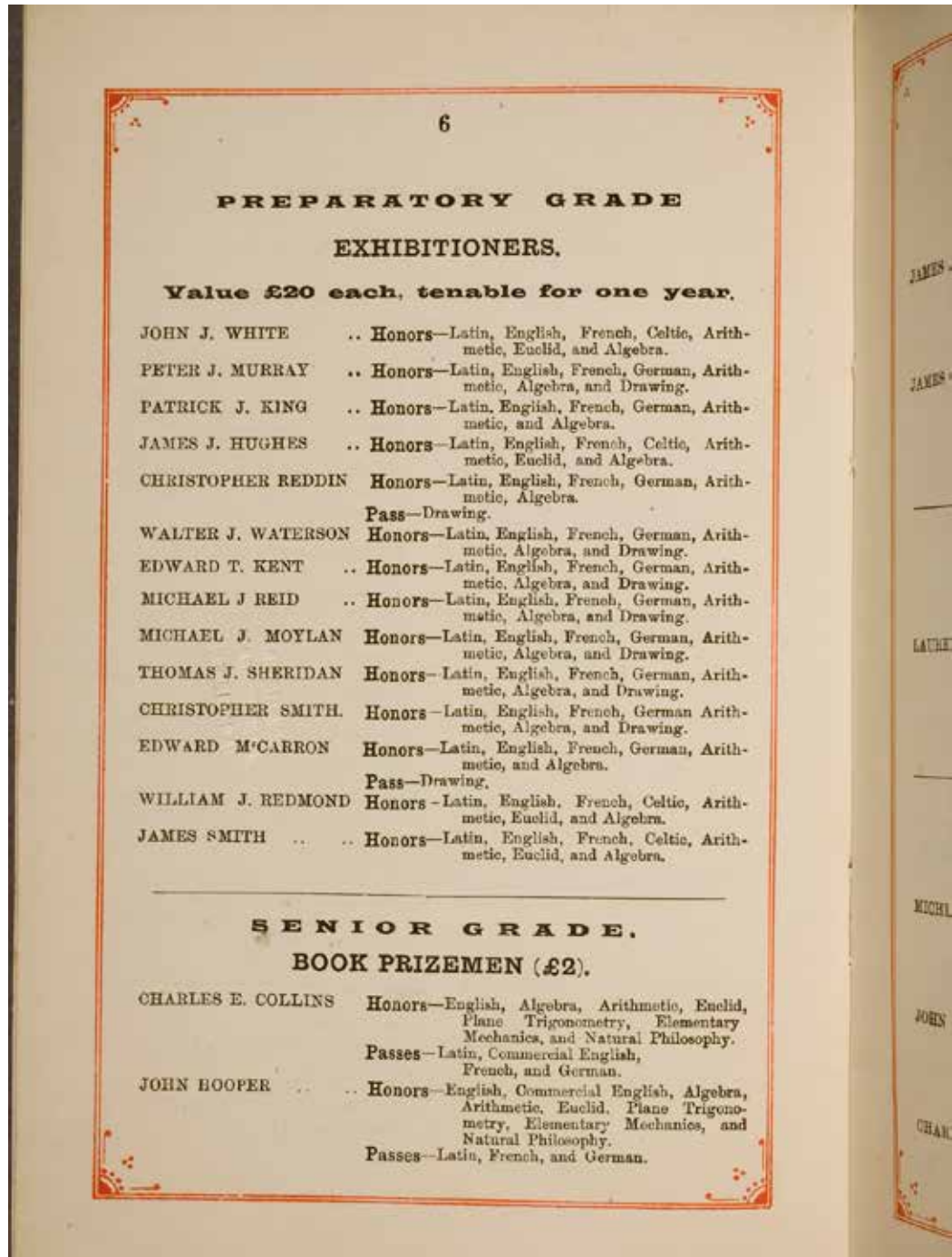
Ceannt was tried by court-martial and executed by firing squad in Kilmainham Jail on 8 May. Among his surviving relatives were his wife Áine O'Brennan, his young son Rónán, and his brother William, a colour sergeant-major in the Royal Dublin Fusiliers (British army) stationed in Fermoy, Co. Cork.

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Éamonn Ceannt. He has been described as over six feet tall and as a dark, proud and aloof man. (Keogh 237).

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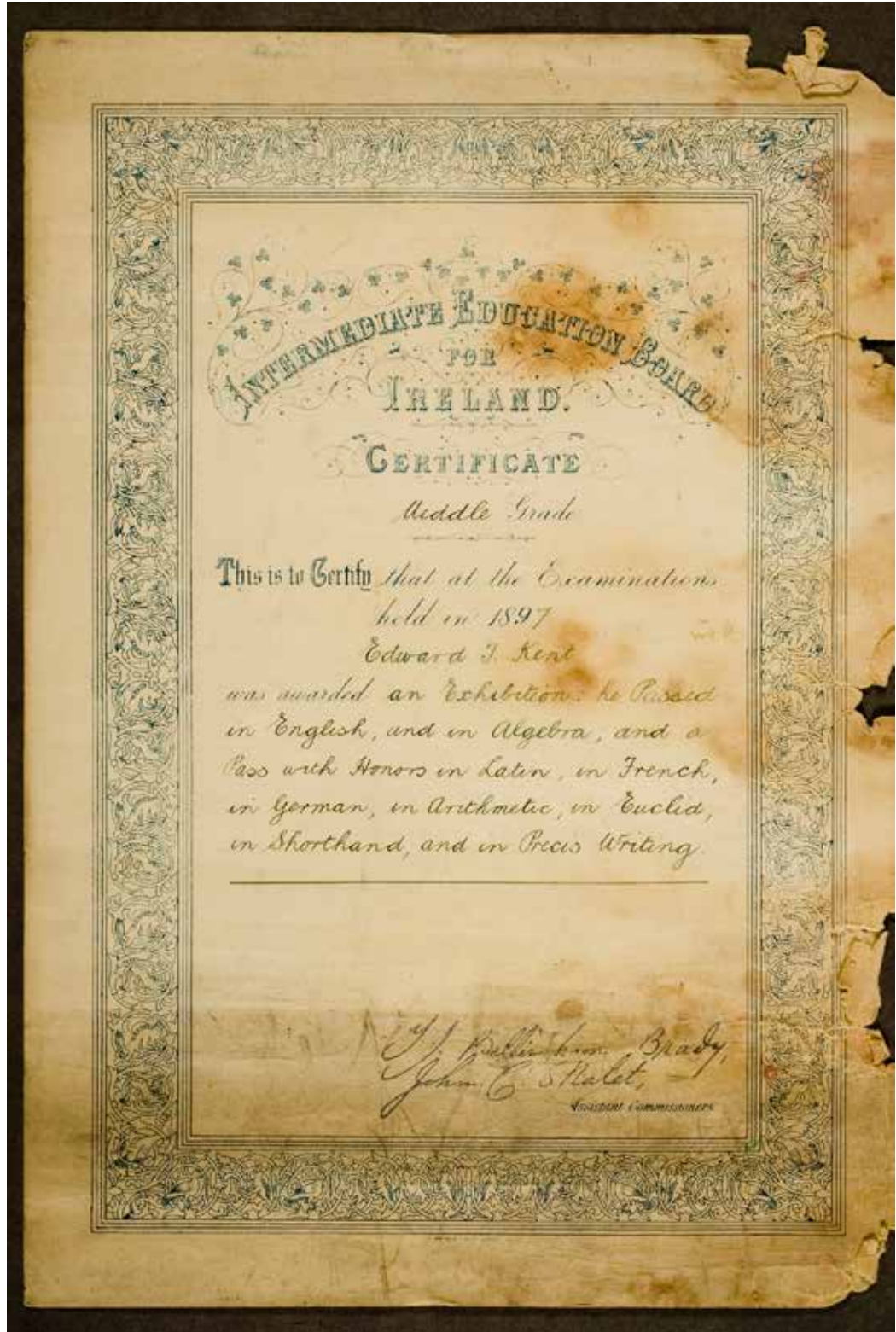
Published results of the O'Connell Schools (Christian Brothers), North Richmond Street, Dublin, 1894, 1896. (Ms. 13,069/44).

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Published results of the O'Connell Schools (Christian Brothers), North Richmond Street, Dublin, 1894, 1896. (Ms. 13,069/44).

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State education certificate, 1897. (Ms. 13,069/45).

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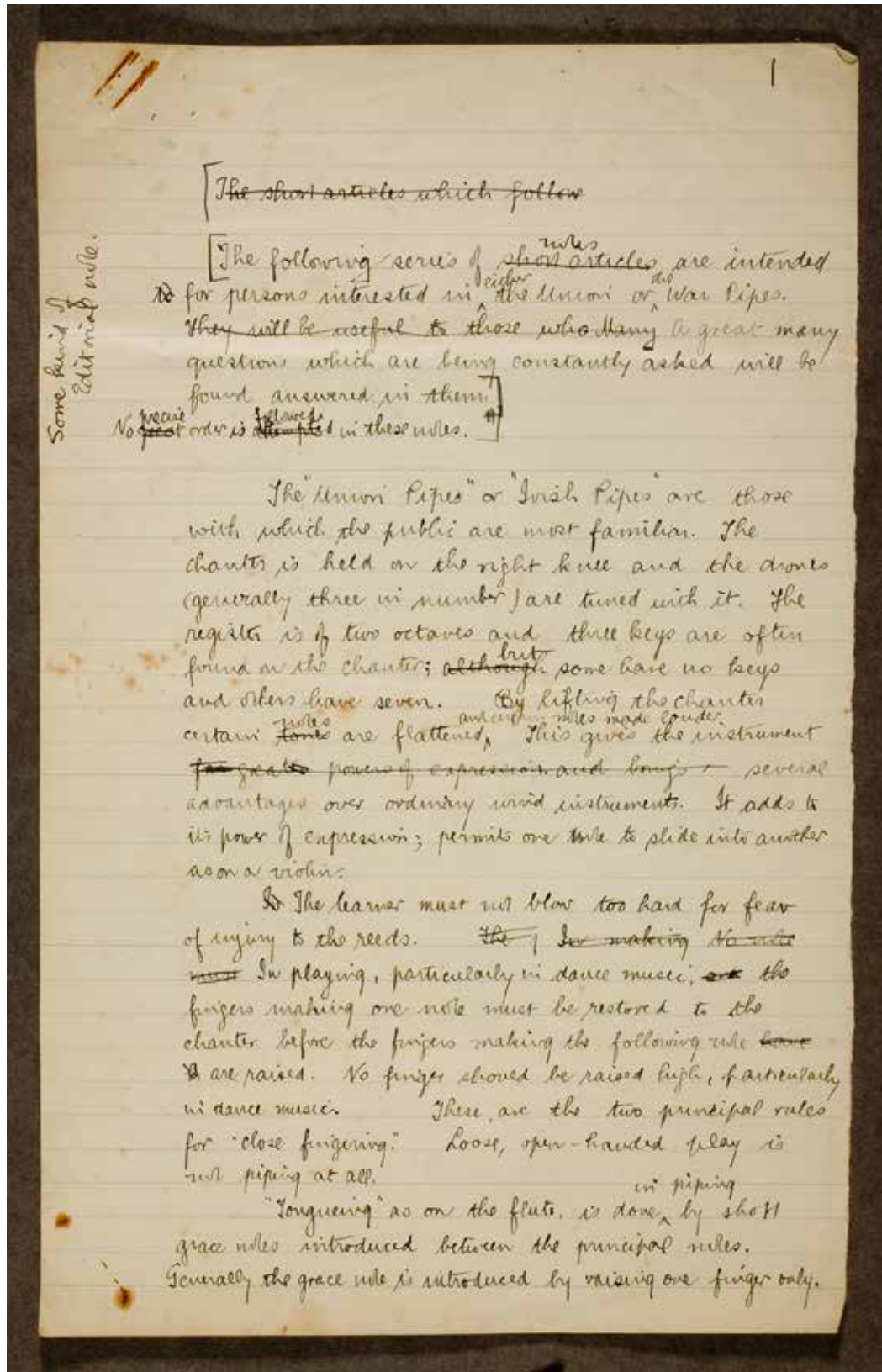
A delegate's pass for the Gaelic League annual congress, 1905 (Ms. 13,069/26).

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Self-portrait by Ceannt, 1909. 'Mé Féin' is Irish for 'myself'. (Ms. 13,069/55).

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Draft of an article by Ceannt on the union pipes, c.1910. (Ms. 13,069/33).

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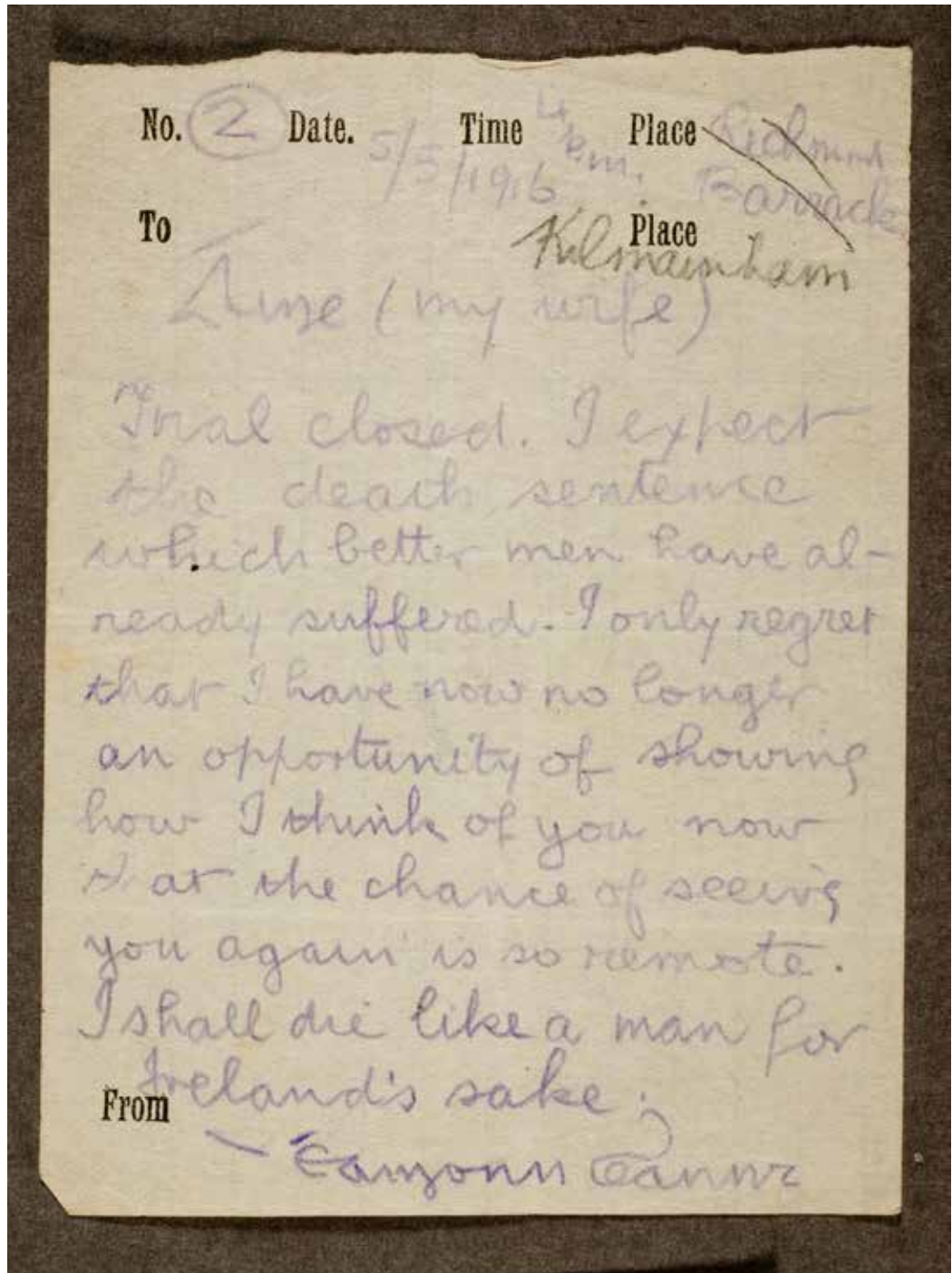
A marching song composed by Ceannt for the Irish Volunteers who feature on the front cover.

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A marching song composed by Ceannt for the Irish Volunteers who feature on the front cover.

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Letter from Ceannt to his wife; Kilmainham Jail, 5 May 1916. (Ms. 13,069/8).

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(COPY)

Cell 88, Kilmainham Gaol, 7 May 1916.

I leave for the guidance of other Irish Revolutionaries who may tread the path which I have trod this advice, never to treat with the enemy, never to surrender at his mercy, but to fight to a finish. I see nothing gained but grave disaster caused by the surrender which has marked the end of the Irish Insurrection of 1916 - so far at least as Dublin is concerned. The enemy has not cherished one generous thought for those who, with little hope, with poor equipment, and weak in numbers, withstood his forces for one glorious week. Ireland has shown she is a Nation. This generation can claim to have raised sons as brave as any that went before. And in the years to come Ireland will honour those who risked all for her honour at Easter in 1916. I bear no ill will against those whom I have fought. I have found the common soldiers and the higher officers human and companionable, even the English who were actually in the fight against us. Thank God, soldiering for Ireland has opened my heart and made me see poor humanity where I expected to see only scorn and reproach. I have met the men who escaped from me by a ruse under the Red Cross. But I do not regret having with-held my fire. He gave me cakes !!

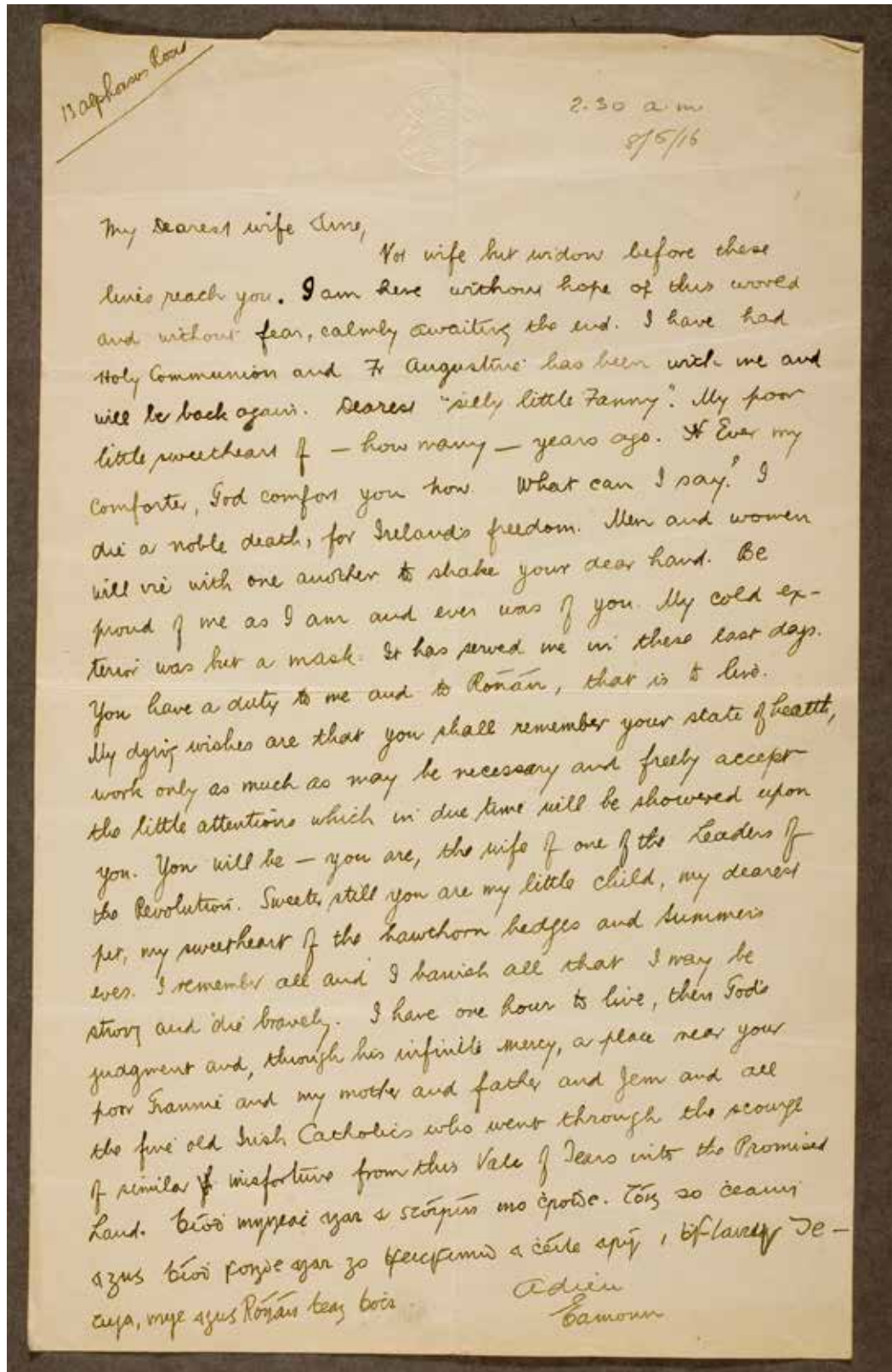
I wish to record the magnificent gallantry and fearlessness, and determination of the men who fought with me. All, all, were simply splendid. Even I knew no fear nor panic nor shrank from no risk, even as I shrink not now from the death which faces me at daybreak. I hope to see God's face even for a moment in the morning. His Will be done.

All here are very kind. My poor wife saw me yesterday, and bore up -- so my warder told me -- even after she left my presence. Poor Aine, poor Ronan. God is their only shield now that I am removed. And God is a better shield than I. I have just seen Aine, Nell, Richard and Mick and bade them a conditional good-bye. Even now they have hope !!

ÉAMONN CEANNT.

Typescript copy of statement issued by Ceannt from Kilmainham Jail, 7 May 1916. (Ms. 3198).

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Ceannt's last letter to his wife; Kilmainham Jail, 8 May 1916. (Ms. 13,069/9).