the road …' (Meagher) The three leaders changed their carriage and headed for Carrick. It was believed that this town had 2,000 clubmen, most of them armed, and that the garrison had only 200 men – almost the inverse of the position in Kilkenny. With these odds, Carrick could give the rebels the first victory that would have set all Ireland alight.[52]

About five miles from the town, they met John O'Mahony, a local landowner, president of his club, and a young man whose 'fine and soldierly appearance' and conviction that Tipperary's men would fight created what Meagher called 'the most joyous confidence … He represented to us that the country all about Carrick, on towards Clonmel and along the Suir on the Tipperary side, was thoroughly alive and ready to take the field at once'. At Carrick, which they entered on Monday afternoon, they were met by a 'torrent of human beings … , whirling in dizzy circles, and tossing up its dark waves, with sounds of wrath, vengeance, and defiance … , eyes red with rage and desperation … It was the Revolution, if we had accepted it,' Meagher thought, and, writing afterwards, he owned that he could not explain their failure to accept it – that is, to begin the battle there and then.[53] They addressed a large crowd in the main street (a Crown witness at O'Brien's trial estimated the attendance at 4-5,000), and O'Brien said, 'I will now test your courage … by calling you at once to the field … Are your hearts stout, and your arms nerved [*sic*], to stand by me in the coming struggle … If you are ready, I for one am ready to strike the blow' and prepared 'to sacrifice my life'. Meagher asked, 'Are you ready to stand before the military … Now is the time to strike the blow to make Ireland for her lovely sons.' Clarendon considered the speeches in Carrick 'unquestionable treason', involving 'incitement to levy war against the Crown' and duly signed warrants for the arrest of the 'traitors'.[54]

The Lord Lieutenant was increasingly concerned about the capacity of his forces to prevent a rising. However, behind the public enthusiasm of the Carrick people there was something less than steely resolve. O'Mahony, who had ridden in with O'Brien, later told Doheny of how the arrival of O'Brien and his companions was 'unexpected, sudden and startling', and that they made a peremptory and uninspiring demand that Carrick should protect them from arrest.[55] In his own account, O'Mahony recalled that they found the club officers in 'doubt and dismay … They seemed confounded at the magnitude of the step they were called on to take, and a very manifest desire to get Mr O'Brien out of town appeared to sway the great majority of them. One man asked the gentlemen why they had come to that little town to commence the rising. Was Carrick able to fight the British Empire? Were they, the leaders, rejected by everywhere else?' O'Brien, showing 'evident disap-

pointment and disgust', told them he wanted Carrick to provide 600 armed men with 'sufficient means for self support to guard him and his companions while they were raising the country. For this no man was prepared, not anticipating any such demand.' O'Mahony reminded those who now asked why the three men had come to Carrick that, 'Our own boastings brought them to us'. Doheny wrote that, 'The great argument relied upon by every one was, why should Carrick be selected?' This view 'seems to have prevailed. Other arguments no doubt, were urged, such as want of provisions, want of arms, and want of ammunition. The moment of indecision is the harvest of evil passions – avarice, selfishness, cowardice cloud the intellect, and blast the destiny of man.' Thus the men of Carrick, 'with shrinking hand, marred their immortal lot'.[56] Meagher described a scene of utter confusion as each officer proclaimed his own plan of action:

> One was for commencing there and then. Another proposed that the night should be spent in preparation, and that the morning should be ushered in with the volleying of guns and the gleaming of the pikeheads. A third suggested – altogether overlooking the Suspension Act – that the elections for the Council of Three Hundred should take place with as little delay as possible, and that the delegates should proceed immediately upon their election to the Rotundo, each escorted by one thousand armed men, selected from the constituents of his electoral division. A fourth was in favour of a camp on Slievenamon. A fifth for taking to the loughs and glens of the Commeraha, and there holding out until the country had armed herself more formidably. There was a sixth proposition, too; and a seventh; and an eighth; and, for all I remember to the contrary, there may have been as many as the First Book of Euclid contains.
>
> Never did I behold so perplexing and bewildering a tumult! Never did there occur to me a scene less susceptible of repose, of guidance, of any clear, steady, intelligent control!
>
> Within, there was this confusion and uproar of tongues; without, there was the tossing and surging of the mighty throng, whose deep vibrations shook the walls of the house in which we were assembled. Add to this that hundreds were blocking up the stair-case; crowding and crushing on the landing-places; crowding and crushing round the table at which we sat; pressing down upon us in their hot anxiety to see and hear us; and, for this very reason, and urged on by this same vehement and generous passion, were overpowering every exertion we strove to make; drowning completely every word we uttered; exhausting our strength, and rendering us incapable of guiding with a firm hand the elements that swept and roared around us.[57]

Perhaps O'Brien could have been more effective in controlling this tumult, but it would appear that he knew what he wanted – 600 armed men – and encountered

club leaders who were more keen to argue and declaim than take the field 'to fight the British Empire'. Again, the failure to prepare is obvious. Carrick's clubs, 12 of which had been formed in the previous six weeks, lacked anything like the coherent organisation and leadership needed to launch a military campaign. O'Brien's low opinion of Carrick's men and his view that, lying as it did between two garrisoned towns (Waterford and Clonmel), Carrick was not defensible, made him decide to move on. Late on Monday, 'O'Brien and his comrades left the town deeply disappointed, if not in actual disgust and despair' (Doheny). O'Mahony (and Duffy) subsequently considered this decision a 'sad mistake', for he and other club leaders managed next day to raise a substantial force in the surrounding countryside. O'Mahony's own club sent 400 men with 80 guns and 'a goodly muster of pikes', and 1,000 came from Grangemockler; in all, O'Mahony reckoned, 12–15,000 men, 'enough surely to commence the revolution', were ready to march on Carrick, but they had to be stood down when it was found that O'Brien had left the area to travel to Cashel, almost 30 miles away. Even if his figures were not precise, O'Mahony, lamenting this lost opportunity, was probably right in his judgement that more men were ready to take the field that day, Tuesday 25 July, than at any subsequent point; thereafter, he believed, fear, doubts about the capacity of the leaders, and the opposition of the priests combined to ensure that so such muster could be repeated.[58]

Meagher, O'Mahony and Doheny all noted the absence of one man who might have given the lead that was necessary. In April, Father Patrick Byrne, one of Carrick's curates, had promised in a public letter that if a rising began 'the Irish priests shall be found amid the fight, invoking heaven's blessing upon it'. O'Mahony considered Byrne and the priests 'the originators of the [club] movement' in south Tipperary. Byrne told him in mid-July that, '*My heart, my heart is panting for that day*' when they would fight together.[59] Now O'Mahony was struck by the 'remarkable' fact that 'Father Byrne was not to be found. The day after which his heart panted had not come …' Meagher, disappointed not to see 'the trusted guide and leader … of the local clubs,' sent him a note 'earnestly begging of him to come over and give us the benefit of his honest and affectionate advice'. However, Byrne did not turn out.[60] The priests were soon actively discouraging involvement. Father Morrissey of Ballyneal (outside Carrick) dispersed a crowd of volunteers with the argument 'that he would put himself at the head of the people if they but waited three weeks' (Doheny). O'Mahony found on a subsequent visit to Carrick that Byrne and the priests were all against a rising, calling it 'premature' and arguing that 'it should be put off at least a *fortnight* until the harvest ripened. That O'Brien *must be mad*.' Meagher met Byrne on Wednesday morning, in Carrick, when the priest said that the country was not ready for a rising, and, a few days later, Byrne told

Michael Cavanagh that he thought O'Brien 'mad' and he could see only 'ultimate disaster to the devoted men who persevered in upholding what he believed to be a hopeless cause'. These priests, who it may be presumed had no intention of leading an insurrection at any time, may have defeated a national revolution, but they also averted a bloodbath, as they headed off an enterprise which (Doheny recalled) Byrne 'designated as rash, ill-designed, and fraught with ruin to the town'.[61]

The leaders arrived in Cashel at 2 o'clock on Tuesday morning. They went there to find Michael Doheny; unfortunately, the latter had gone to meet them in Carrick, not the last time that such mis-chances would befall the rebel leaders as they moved around Tipperary. 'My absence,' Doheny wrote, 'was used as an argument, sincere or pretended, against any effort in that town [Cashel]. Mr O'Brien, in ignorance of whom to apply to, took counsel with one man, at least, since accused of the darkest treachery. Others, from whom I had different hopes, shrunk from an encounter which, at other times, they seemed to long for as the dearest blessing Heaven could bestow.' Littleton, the club leader on whom they called, flatly refused to help in any way.[62] Discouraged by their reception in Cashel, the leaders decided to depart later on Tuesday morning. Meagher left for Waterford intending to collect 1,000 men from his own club there. He sent its president a letter summoning the men to meet him outside the city, but nobody came. Before the day was out he was back in Carrick with the news that his men would not march without the consent of Father Tracy. 'This Tracy, I afterwards understood, was the "Byrne" of Waterford' (O'Mahony). Michael Cavanagh discovered on Saturday, 29 July, that there were many in Waterford who expressed their 'willingness to follow him [Meagher] to death' and said they were 'both amazed and sorely disappointed at not having received any orders from him'; Cavanagh believed that Meagher was 'deceived', and the '*sacred cause* betrayed, by a few pusillanimous wretches' who had misrepresented Tracy. It is impossible to know if what Cavanagh heard was anything more than the sort of bluster that was the constant refrain of 1848. Equally, his being told by a soldier outside Waterford that two-thirds of his regiment 'were true Irishmen – and ready to prove it – *when called upon*' may have signified everything – or nothing.[63]

O'Brien and Dillon left Cashel with a new set of young companions, Patrick O'Donohoe and James Cantwell from Dublin, and James Stephens of Kilkenny. Stephens, a 24-year-old employee of the Limerick and Waterford Railway Company, recalled how at Doheny's house he had 'stepped over to Smith O'Brien and asked him if he were actually in the field, "for if you be," I observed, "I would wish to