

Ireland Since Parnell eBook

Ireland Since Parnell by D.D. Sheehan

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.



Contents

Ireland Since Parnell eBook.....	1
Contents.....	2
Table of Contents.....	8
Page 1.....	9
Page 2.....	10
Page 3.....	11
Page 4.....	12
Page 5.....	13
Page 6.....	15
Page 7.....	16
Page 8.....	17
Page 9.....	18
Page 10.....	20
Page 11.....	21
Page 12.....	22
Page 13.....	23
Page 14.....	24
Page 15.....	26
Page 16.....	27
Page 17.....	29
Page 18.....	30
Page 19.....	31
Page 20.....	32
Page 21.....	33
Page 22.....	34



[Page 23..... 35](#)

[Page 24..... 36](#)

[Page 25..... 37](#)

[Page 26..... 38](#)

[Page 27..... 39](#)

[Page 28..... 40](#)

[Page 29..... 41](#)

[Page 30..... 42](#)

[Page 31..... 43](#)

[Page 32..... 44](#)

[Page 33..... 45](#)

[Page 34..... 46](#)

[Page 35..... 47](#)

[Page 36..... 48](#)

[Page 37..... 50](#)

[Page 38..... 52](#)

[Page 39..... 53](#)

[Page 40..... 54](#)

[Page 41..... 55](#)

[Page 42..... 56](#)

[Page 43..... 57](#)

[Page 44..... 58](#)

[Page 45..... 59](#)

[Page 46..... 61](#)

[Page 47..... 62](#)

[Page 48..... 63](#)



[Page 49..... 64](#)

[Page 50..... 65](#)

[Page 51..... 66](#)

[Page 52..... 67](#)

[Page 53..... 68](#)

[Page 54..... 69](#)

[Page 55..... 70](#)

[Page 56..... 71](#)

[Page 57..... 72](#)

[Page 58..... 73](#)

[Page 59..... 74](#)

[Page 60..... 75](#)

[Page 61..... 76](#)

[Page 62..... 77](#)

[Page 63..... 78](#)

[Page 64..... 79](#)

[Page 65..... 80](#)

[Page 66..... 81](#)

[Page 67..... 82](#)

[Page 68..... 83](#)

[Page 69..... 84](#)

[Page 70..... 85](#)

[Page 71..... 86](#)

[Page 72..... 87](#)

[Page 73..... 89](#)

[Page 74..... 90](#)



[Page 75..... 91](#)

[Page 76..... 92](#)

[Page 77..... 93](#)

[Page 78..... 94](#)

[Page 79..... 95](#)

[Page 80..... 96](#)

[Page 81..... 97](#)

[Page 82..... 98](#)

[Page 83..... 99](#)

[Page 84..... 100](#)

[Page 85..... 101](#)

[Page 86..... 102](#)

[Page 87..... 103](#)

[Page 88..... 104](#)

[Page 89..... 105](#)

[Page 90..... 106](#)

[Page 91..... 107](#)

[Page 92..... 108](#)

[Page 93..... 109](#)

[Page 94..... 110](#)

[Page 95..... 111](#)

[Page 96..... 112](#)

[Page 97..... 113](#)

[Page 98..... 114](#)

[Page 99..... 115](#)

[Page 100..... 116](#)



[Page 101..... 118](#)

[Page 102..... 119](#)

[Page 103..... 120](#)

[Page 104..... 121](#)

[Page 105..... 122](#)

[Page 106..... 123](#)

[Page 107..... 124](#)

[Page 108..... 125](#)

[Page 109..... 126](#)

[Page 110..... 127](#)

[Page 111..... 128](#)

[Page 112..... 129](#)

[Page 113..... 130](#)

[Page 114..... 131](#)

[Page 115..... 132](#)

[Page 116..... 133](#)

[Page 117..... 134](#)

[Page 118..... 135](#)

[Page 119..... 136](#)

[Page 120..... 137](#)

[Page 121..... 138](#)

[Page 122..... 139](#)

[Page 123..... 140](#)

[Page 124..... 141](#)

[Page 125..... 143](#)

[Page 126..... 144](#)



[Page 127..... 146](#)

[Page 128..... 148](#)

[Page 129..... 149](#)

[Page 130..... 150](#)

[Page 131..... 151](#)

[Page 132..... 152](#)

[Page 133..... 153](#)

[Page 134..... 154](#)

[Page 135..... 155](#)

[Page 136..... 156](#)

[Page 137..... 157](#)

[Page 138..... 158](#)

[Page 139..... 160](#)

[Page 140..... 161](#)

[Page 141..... 162](#)

[Page 142..... 163](#)

[Page 143..... 164](#)

[Page 144..... 165](#)

[Page 145..... 167](#)

[Page 146..... 168](#)

[Page 147..... 170](#)

[Page 148..... 171](#)

[Page 149..... 172](#)

[Page 150..... 174](#)

[Page 151..... 175](#)



Table of Contents

Section	Table of Contents	Page
Start of eBook		1
CHAPTER I		1
FOOTNOTES:		5
CHAPTER II		5
CHAPTER III		9
FOOTNOTES:		11
CHAPTER IV		11
CHAPTER V		15
CHAPTER VI		19
CHAPTER VII		25
CHAPTER VIII		30
FOOTNOTES:		37
CHAPTER IX		37
CHAPTER X		47
CHAPTER XI		56
CHAPTER XII		62
CHAPTER XIII		71
CHAPTER XIV		78
CHAPTER XV		87
CHAPTER XVI		92
CHAPTER XVII		96
CHAPTER XVIII		103
CHAPTER XIX		107
CHAPTER XX		113
CHAPTER XXI		118
CHAPTER XXII		122
CHAPTER XXIII		124
CHAPTER XXIV		129
CHAPTER XXV		134
CHAPTER XXVI		138
CHAPTER XXVII		142
CHAPTER XXVIII		146



Page 1

CHAPTER I

A leader appears

There are some who would dispute the greatness of Parnell—who would deny him the stature and the dignity of a leader of men. There are others who would aver that Parnell was made by his lieutenants—that he owed all his success in the political arena to their ability and fighting qualities and that he was essentially a man of mediocre talents himself.

It might be enough to answer to these critics that Parnell could never hold the place he does in history, that he could never have overawed the House of Commons as he did, nor could he have emerged so triumphantly from the ordeal of *The Times* Commission were he not superabundantly endowed with all the elements and qualities of greatness. But apart from this no dispassionate student of the Parnell period can deny that it was fruitful in massive achievement for Ireland. When Parnell appeared on the scene it might well be said of the country, what had been truly said of it in another generation, that it was “as a corpse on the dissecting-table.” It was he, and the gallant band which his indomitable purpose gathered round him, that galvanised the corpse into life and breathed into it a dauntless spirit of resolve which carried it to the very threshold of its sublimest aspirations. To Isaac Butt is ascribed the merit of having conceived and given form to the constitutional movement for Irish liberty. He is also credited with having invented the title “Home Rule”—a title which, whilst it was a magnificent rallying cry for a cause, in the circumstances of the time when it was first used, was probably as mischievous in its ultimate results as any unfortunate nomenclature well could be, since all parties in Ireland and out of it became tied to its use when any other designation for the Irish demand might have made it more palatable with the British masses. Winston Churchill is reported to have said, in his Radical days, to a prominent Irish leader: “I cannot understand why you Irishmen are so stupidly wedded to the name ‘Home Rule.’ If only you would call it anything else in the world, you would have no difficulty in getting the English to agree to it.”

But although Isaac Butt was a fine intellect and an earnest patriot he never succeeded in rousing Ireland to any great pitch of enthusiasm for his policy. It was still sick, and weary, and despondent after the Fenian failure, and the revolutionary leaders were not prone to tolerate or countenance what they regarded as a Parliamentary imposture. A considerable body of the Irish landed class supported the Butt movement, because they had nothing to fear for their own interests from it. They were members of his Parliamentary Party, not to help him on his way, but rather with the object of weakening and retarding his efforts.

Page 2

It was at this stage that Parnell arrived. The country was stricken with famine—the hand of the lord, in the shape of the landlord, was heavy upon it. After a season of unexampled agricultural prosperity the lean years had come to the Irish farmer and he was ripe for agitation and resistance. Butt had the Irish gentry on his side. With the sure instinct of the born leader Parnell set out to fight them. He had popular feeling with him. It was no difficult matter to rouse the democracy of the country against a class at whose doors they laid the blame for all their woes and troubles and manifold miseries. Butt was likewise too old for his generation. He was a constitutional statesman who made noble appeal to the honesty and honour of British statesmen. Parnell, too, claimed to be a constitutional leader, but of another type. With the help of men like Michael Davitt and John Devoy he was able to muster the full strength of the revolutionary forces behind him and he adopted other methods in Parliament than lackadaisical appeals to the British sense of right and justice.

The time came when the older statesman had perforce to make way for the younger leader. The man with a noble genius for statesman-like design—and this must be conceded to Isaac Butt—had to yield place and power to the men whose genius consisted in making themselves amazingly disagreeable to the British Government, both in Ireland and at Westminster. “The Policy of Exasperation” was the epithet applied by Butt to the purpose of Parnell, in the belief that he was uttering the weightiest reproach in his power against it. But this was the description of all others which recommended it to the Irish race—for it was, in truth, the only policy which could compel British statesmen to give ear to the wretched story of Ireland’s grievances and to legislate in regard to them. It is sad to have to write it of Butt, as of so many other Irish leaders, that he died of a broken heart. Those who would labour for “Dark Rosaleen” have a rough and thorny road to travel, and they are happy if the end of their journey is not to be found in despair, disappointment and bitter tragedy.

Parnell, once firmly seated in the saddle, lost no time in asserting his power and authority. Mr William O’Brien, who writes with a quite unique personal authority on the events of this time, tells us that there is some doubt whether “Joe” Biggar, as he was familiarly known from one end of Ireland to the other, was not the actual inventor of Parliamentary obstruction. His own opinion is that it was Biggar who first discovered it but it was Parnell who perceived that the new weapon was capable of dislocating the entire machinery of Government at will and consequently gave to a disarmed Ireland a more formidable power against her enemies than if she could have risen in armed insurrection, so that a Parliament which wanted to hear nothing of Ireland heard of practically nothing else every night of their lives.

Page 3

Let it be, however, clearly understood that there was an Irish Party before Parnell's advent on the scene. It was never a very effective instrument of popular right, but after Butt's death it became a decrepit old thing—without cohesion, purpose or, except in rare instances, any genuine personal patriotism. It viewed the rise of Parnell and his limited body of supporters with disgust and dismay. It had no sympathy with his pertinacious campaign against all the cherished forms and traditions of "The House," and it gave him no support. Rather it virulently opposed him and his small group, who were without money and even without any organisation at their back. Parnell had also to contend with the principal Nationalist newspaper of the time—*The Freeman's Journal*—as well as such remnants as remained of Butt's Home Rule League.

About this time, however, a movement—not for the first or the last time—came out of the West. A meeting had been held at Irishtown, County Mayo, which made history. It was here that the demand of "The Land for the People" first took concrete form. Previously Mr Parnell and his lieutenants had been addressing meetings in many parts of the country, at which they advocated peasant proprietorship in substitution for landlordism, but now instead of sporadic speeches they had to their hand an organisation which supplied them with a tremendous dynamic force and gave a new edge to their Parliamentary performances. And not the least value of the new movement was that it immediately won over to active co-operation in its work the most powerful men in the old revolutionary organisation. I remember being present, as a very little lad indeed, at a Land League meeting at Kiskeam, Cork County, where scrolls spanned the village street bearing the legend: "Ireland for the Irish and the Land for the People."

The country people were present from far and near. Cavalcades of horsemen thronged in from many a distant place, wearing proudly the Fenian sash of orange and green over their shoulder, and it struck my youthful imagination what a dashing body of cavalry these would have made in the fight for Ireland. Michael Davitt was the founder and mainspring of the Land League and it is within my memory that in the hearts and the talks of the people around their fireside hearths he was at this time only second to Parnell in their hope and love. I am told that Mr John Devoy shared with him the honour of co-founder of the Land League, but I confess I heard little of Mr Devoy, probably because he was compulsorily exiled about this time.[1]

In those days Parnell's following consisted of only seven men out of one hundred and three Irish members. When the General Election of 1880 was declared he was utterly unprepared to meet all its emergencies. For lack of candidates he had to allow himself to be nominated for three constituencies, yet with marvellous and almost incredible energy he fought on to the last polling-booth. The result

Page 4

was astounding. He increased his following to thirty-five, not, perhaps, overwhelming in point of numbers, but remarkable for the high intellectual standard of the young men who composed it, for their varied capacities, for their fine patriotism, and their invincible determination to face all risks and invite all dangers. It has been said of Parnell that he was an intolerant autocrat in the selection of candidates for and membership of the Party, and that he imposed his will ruthlessly upon them once they were elected. I am told by those who were best in a position to form a judgment, and whose veracity I would stake my life upon, that nothing could be farther from the truth. Parnell had little to say with the choosing of his lieutenants. Indeed, he was singularly indifferent about it, as instances could be quoted to prove. Undoubtedly he held them together firmly, because he had the gift of developing all that was best in a staff of brilliant talents and varied gifts, and so jealousies and personal idiosyncrasies had not the room wherein to develop their poisonous growths.

I pass rapidly over the achievements of Parnell in the years that followed. He gave the country some watchwords that can never be forgotten, as when he told the farmers to "Keep a firm grip of your homesteads!" followed by the equally energetic exhortation: "Hold the harvest!" They were his Orders of the Day to his Irish army. Then came the No-Rent Manifesto, the suppression of the Land League after only twelve months' existence, Kilmainham and its Treaty, and the Land Act of 1881, which I can speak of, from my own knowledge, as the first great forward step in the emancipation of the Irish tenant farmer. Mr Dillon differed with Parnell as to the efficacy of this Act, but he was as hopelessly wrong in his attitude then as he was twenty-two years later in connection with the Land Act of 1903. In 1882 the National League came into being, giving a broader programme and a deeper depth of meaning to the aims of Parnell. At this time the Parliamentary policy of the Party under his leadership was an absolute independence of all British Parties, and therein lay all its strength and savour. There was also the pledge of the members to sit, act and vote together, which owed its wholesome force not so much to anything inherent in the pledge itself as to the positive terror of a public opinion in Ireland which would tolerate no tampering with it. Furthermore, a rigid rule obtained against members of the Party seeking office or preferment for themselves or their friends on the sound principle that the Member of Parliament who sought ministerial favours could not possibly be an impeccable and independent patriot.

Page 5

But the greatest achievement of Parnell was the fact that he had both the great English parties bidding for his support. We know that the Tory Party entered into negotiations with him on the Home Rule issue. Meanwhile, however, there was the more notable conversion of Gladstone, a triumph of unparalleled magnitude for Parnell and in itself the most convincing testimony to the positive strength and absolute greatness of the man. A wave of enthusiasm went up on both sides of the Irish Sea for the alliance which seemed to symbolise the ending of the age-long struggle between the two nations. True, this alliance has since been strangely underrated in its effects, but there can be no doubt that it evoked at the time a genuine outburst of friendliness on the part of the Irish masses to England. And at the General Election of 1885 Parnell returned from Ireland with a solid phalanx of eighty-four members—eager, invincible, enthusiastic, bound unbreakably together in loyalty to their country and in devotion to their leader.

From 1885 to 1890 there was a general forgiving and forgetting of historic wrongs and ancient feuds. The Irish Nationalists were willing to clasp hands across the sea in a brotherhood of friendship and even of affection, but there stood apart, in open and flaming disaffection, the Protestant minority in Ireland, who were in a state of stark terror that the Home Rule Bill of 1886 meant the end of everything for them—the end of their brutal ascendancy and probably also the confiscation of their property and the ruin of their social position.

Then, as on a more recent occasion, preparations for civil war were going on in Ulster, largely of English Party manufacture, and more with an eye to British Party purposes than because of any sincere convictions on the rights of the ascendancy element. Still the Grand Old Man carried on his indomitable campaign for justice to Ireland, notwithstanding the unfortunate cleavage which had taken place in the ranks of his own Party, and it does not require any special gift of prevision to assert, nor is it any unwarrantable assumption on the facts to say, that the alliance between the Liberal and Irish Parties would inevitably have triumphed as soon as a General Election came had not the appalling misunderstanding as to Gladstone's "Nullity of Leadership" letter flung everything into chaos and irretrievably ruined the hopes of Ireland for more than a generation.

And this brings me to what I regard as the greatest of Irish tragedies—the deposition and the dethronement of Parnell under circumstances which will remain for all time a sadness and a sorrow to the Irish race.

FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 1: Devoy, although banished, did turn up secretly in Mayo when the Land League was being organised, and his orders were supreme with the secret societies.]

CHAPTER II



Page 6

A leader is DETHRONED!

In the cabin, in the shieling, in the home of the “fattest” farmer, as well as around the open hearth of the most lowly peasant, in town and country, wherever there were hearts that hoped for Irish liberty and that throbbed to the martial music of “the old cause,” the name of Parnell was revered with a devotion such as was scarcely ever rendered to any leader who had gone before him. A halo of romance had woven itself around his figure and all the poetry and passion of the mystic Celtic spirit went forth to him in the homage of a great loyalty and regard. The title of “The Uncrowned King of Ireland” was no frothy exuberance as applied to him—for he was in truth a kingly man, robed in dignity, panoplied in power, with a grand and haughty bearing towards the enemies of his people—in all things a worthy chieftain of a noble race. The one and only time in life I saw him was when he was a broken and a hunted man and when the pallor of death was upon his cheeks, but even then I was impressed by the majesty of his bearing, the dignity of his poise, the indescribably magnetic glance of his wondrous eyes, and the lineaments of power in every gesture, every tone and every movement. He awed and he attracted at the same time. He stood strikingly out from all others at that meeting at Tralee, where I was one of a deputation from Killarney who presented him with an address of loyalty and confidence, which, by the way, I, as a youthful journalist starting on my own adventurous career, had drafted. It was one of his last public appearances, and the pity of it all that it should be so, when we now know, with the fuller light and knowledge that has been thrown upon that bitterest chapter of our tribulations, that with the display of a little more reason and a juster accommodation of temper, Parnell might have been saved for his country, and the whole history of Ireland since then—if not, indeed, of the world—changed for the better. But these are vain regrets and it avails not to indulge them, though it is permissible to say that the desertion of Parnell brought its own swift retribution to the people for whom he had laboured so potently and well.

I have read all the authentic literature I could lay hold of bearing upon the Parnell imbroglio, and it leaves me with the firm conviction that if there had not been an almost unbelievable concatenation of errors and misunderstandings and stupid blunderings, Parnell need never have been sacrificed. And the fact stands out with clearness that the passage in Gladstone’s “Nullity of Leadership” letter, which was the root cause of all the trouble that followed, would never have been published were it not that the political hacks, through motives of party expediency, insisted on its inclusion. That plant of tender growth—the English Nonconformist conscience—it was that decreed the fall of the mighty Irish leader.



Page 7

It is only in recent years that the full facts of what happened during what is known as "The Parnell Split" have been made public, and these facts make it quite clear that neither during the Divorce Court proceedings nor subsequently had Parnell had a fair fighting chance. Let it be remembered that no leader was ever pursued by such malignant methods of defamation as Parnell, and it is questionable how far the Divorce Court proceedings were not intended by his enemies as part of this unscrupulous campaign. Replying to a letter of William O'Brien before the trial, Parnell wrote: "You may rest quite sure that if this proceeding ever comes to trial (which I very much doubt) it is not I who will quit the court with discredit." And when the whole mischief was done, and the storm raged ruthlessly around him, Parnell told O'Brien, during the Boulogne negotiations, that he all but came to blows with Sir Frank Lockwood (the respondent's counsel) when insisting that he should be himself examined in the Divorce Court, and he intimated that if he had prevailed the political complications that followed could never have arisen. On which declaration Mr O'Brien has this footnote: "The genial giant Sir Frank Lockwood confessed to me in after years: 'Parnell was cruelly wronged all round. There is a great reaction in England in his favour. I am not altogether without remorse myself.'"

Not all at once were the flood-gates of vituperation let loose upon Parnell. Not all at once did the question of his continued leadership arise. He had led his people, with an incomparable skill and intrepidity, not unequally matched with the genius of Gladstone himself, from a position of impotence and contempt to the supreme point where success was within their reach. A General Election, big with the fate of Ireland, was not far off. Was the matchless leader who had led his people so far and so well to disappear and to leave his country the prey of warring factions—he who had established a national unity such as Ireland had never known before? "For myself," writes William O'Brien, "I should no more have voted Parnell's displacement on the Divorce Court proceedings alone than England would have thought of changing the command on the eve of the battle of Trafalgar in a holy horror of the frailties of Lady Hamilton and her lover."

The Liberal Nonconformists, however, shrieked for his head in a real or assumed outburst of moral frenzy, and the choice thrust upon the Irish people and their representatives was as to whether they should remain faithful to the alliance with the Liberal Party, to which the Irish nation unquestionably stood pledged, or to the leader who had won so much for them and who might win yet more if he had a united Ireland behind him, unseduced and unterrified by the clamour of English Puritan moralists. O'Brien and Dillon and other leading Irishmen were in America whilst passions were being excited and events marching to destruction over here. "The knives were out," as one fiery protagonist of the day rather savagely declared. It is, as I have already inferred, now made abundantly clear that Gladstone would not have included in his letter the famous "Nullity of Leadership" passage if other counsels had not overborne his own better judgment.

Page 8

It was this letter of Gladstone which set the ball rolling against Parnell. Up till then the members of the Irish Party and the Irish people were solidly and, indeed, defiantly with him. No doubt Michael Davitt joined with such zealots as the Rev. Mr Price Hughes and W.T. Stead in demanding the deposition of Parnell, but one need not be uncharitable in saying that Davitt had his quarrels with Parnell—and serious ones at that—on the Land Question and other items of the national demand, and he was, besides, a man of impetuous temperament, not overmuch given to counting the consequences of his actions.

Then there came the famous, or infamous, according as it be viewed, struggle in Committee Room 15 of the House of Commons, when, by a majority of 45 to 29, it was finally decided to declare the chair vacant, after a battle of unusual ferocity and personal bitterness. And now a new element of complication was added to the already sufficiently poignant tragedy by the entry of the Irish Catholic bishops on the scene. Hitherto they had refrained, with admirable restraint, from interference, and they had done nothing to intensify the agonies of the moment. It will always remain a matter for regret that they did not avail themselves of a great opportunity, and their own unparalleled power with the people, to mediate in the interests of peace—whilst their mediation might still avail. But unfortunately, with one notable exception, they united in staking the entire power of the Church on the dethronement of Parnell. The effect was twofold. It added fresh fury to the attacks of those who were howling for the head of their erstwhile chieftain and who were glad to add the thunderbolts of the Church to their own feebler weapons of assault; but the more permanent effect, and, indeed, the more disastrous, was the doubt it left on the minds of thousands of the best Irishmen whether there was not some malign plot in which the Church was associated with the ban-dogs of the Liberal Party for dishing Home Rule by overthrowing Parnell. It was recalled that the Catholic priesthood, with a few glorious exceptions, stood apart from Parnell when he was struggling to give life and force to the Irish movement, and thus it came to pass that for many a bitter year the part of the Irish priest in politics was freely criticised by Catholics whose loyalty to the Church was indisputable.

Even still—if only the temporary withdrawal of Parnell were secured—all might have been well. And it was to this end that the Boulogne negotiations were set on foot. Mr William O'Brien has, perhaps, left us the most complete record of what transpired in the course of those fateful conversations. Parnell naturally desired to get out of a delicate situation with all possible credit and honour, and his magnificent services entitled him to the utmost consideration in this respect. He insisted on demanding guarantees from Mr Gladstone on Home Rule and the Land Question, and these given he expressed



Page 9

his willingness to retire from the position of Chairman of the Party. At first he insisted on Mr William O'Brien being his successor, but O'Brien peremptorily dismissed this for reasons which were to him unalterable. Mr Dillon was then agreed to, and a settlement was on the point of achievement when a maladroit remark of this gentleman about the administration of the Paris Funds so grievously wounded the pride of Parnell that the serenity of the negotiations was irreparably disturbed, and from that moment the movement for peace was merely an empty show.

Chaos had come again upon the Irish Cause, and the Irish people, who were so near the goal of success, wasted many years, that might have been better spent, in futile and fratricidal strife, in which all the baser passions of politics ran riot and played havoc with the finer purposes of men engaged in a struggle for liberty and right.

CHAPTER III

The death of A leader

There is no Irishman who can study the incidents leading up to Parnell's downfall and the wretched controversies connected with it without feelings of shame that such a needless sacrifice of greatness should have been made.

Parnell broke off the Boulogne negotiations ostensibly on the ground that the assurances of Mr Gladstone on the Home Rule Question were not sufficient and that if he was to be "thrown to the English wolves," to use his own term, the Irish people were not getting their price in return. But giving the best thought possible to all the available materials it would seem that Mr Dillon's reflection on Parnell's *bona fides* was really at the root of the ultimate break-away.

Mr Barry O'Brien, in his *Life of Parnell*, thus describes the incident:

"Parnell went to Calais and met Mr O'Brien and Mr Dillon. The Liberal assurances were then submitted to him and he considered them unsatisfactory; but this was not the only trouble. Mr O'Brien had looked forward with hope to the meeting between Parnell and Mr Dillon. He believed the meeting would make for peace. He was awfully disappointed. Mr Dillon succeeded completely in getting Parnell's back up, adding seriously to the difficulties of the situation. He seemed specially to have offended Parnell by proposing that he (Mr Dillon) should have the decisive voice in the distribution of the Paris Funds.... Mr Dillon proposed that the funds might be drawn without the intervention of Parnell; that, in fact, Mr Dillon should take the place Parnell had hitherto held.[1] Parnell scornfully brushed aside this proposal and broke off



relations with Mr Dillon altogether, though to the end he remained on friendly terms with Mr O'Brien."

It is a vivid memory with me how closely we in Ireland hung upon the varying fortunes and vicissitudes of the Boulogne pourparlers, and how earnest was the hope in every honest Irish heart that a way out might be found which would not involve our incomparable leader in further humiliations. But alas for our hopes! The hemlock had to be drained to the last bitter drop. Meanwhile Parnell never rested day or night. He rushed from one end of the country to the other, addressing meetings, fighting elections, stimulating his followers, answering his defamers and all the time exhausting the scant reserves of strength that were left him.



Page 10

Considering all the causes of his downfall in the light of later events the alliance of the Irish Party with English Liberalism was, in my judgment, the primary factor. Were it not for this entanglement or obligation—call it what you will—the Gladstone letter would never have been written. And even that letter was no sufficient justification for throwing Parnell overboard. If it were a question of the defeat of the Home Rule cause and the withdrawal of Mr Gladstone from the leadership of the Liberal Party, something may be said for it, but the words actually used by Mr Gladstone were: “The continuance of Parnell’s leadership would render my retention of the leadership of the Liberal Party almost a nullity.” Be it observed, Gladstone did not say he was going to retire from leadership; nor did he say he was going to abandon Home Rule—to forsake a principle founded on justice and for which he had divided the Liberal Party and risked his own reputation as a statesman.

To think that Gladstone meant this is not alone inconceivable, but preposterous. And, indeed, it has been recently made abundantly clear in Lord Morley’s book of personal reminiscences that the Parnell Split need never have taken place at all had steps been taken by any responsible body of intermediaries to obtain Gladstone’s real views. We now know it for absolute fact that Gladstone had had actually struck out of his letter as prepared by him for publication the fatal and fateful passage and that it was only reinserted at Mr John Morley’s dictation. Mr Morley’s own narrative of the circumstances deserves quotation:

“At 8 to dinner in Stratton Street. I sat next to Granville and next to him was Mr G. We were all gay enough and as unlike as possible to a marooned crew. Towards the end of the feast Mr G. handed to me, at the back of Granville’s chair, the draft of the famous letter in an unsealed envelope. While he read the Queen’s speech to the rest I perused and reperused the letter. Granville also read it. I said to Mr G. across Granville: ‘But you have not put in the very thing that would be most likely of all things to move him,’ referring to the statement in the original draft, that Parnell’s retention would mean the nullity of Gladstone’s leadership. Harcourt again regretted that it was addressed to me and not to P. and agreed with me that it ought to be strengthened as I had indicated if it was meant really to affect P.’s mind. Mr G. rose, went to the writing-table and with me standing by wrote, on a sheet of Arnold M.’s grey paper, the important insertion. I marked then and there under his eyes the point at which the insertion was to be made and put the whole into my pocket. Nobody else besides H. was consulted about it, or saw it.”

Thus the fate of a great man and, to a very considerable extent also, the destiny of an ancient nation was decided by one of those unaccountable mischances which are the weapons of Fate in an inscrutable world. I think that to-day Ireland generally mourns it that Parnell should ever have been deposed in obedience to a British mandate—or perhaps, as those who conscientiously opposed Mr Parnell at the time might prefer to term it, because of their fidelity to a compact honestly entered into with the Liberal Party—an alliance which they no doubt believed to be essential to the grant of Home Rule.



Page 11

We have since learned, through much travail and disappointment, what little faith can be reposed in the most emphatic pledges of British Parties or leaders, and we had been wiser in 1890 if we had taken sides with Parnell against the whole world had the need arisen. As it was, fought on front and flank, with the thunders of the Church, and the ribaldry of malicious tongues to scatter their venomd darts abroad, Parnell was a doomed man. Not that he lacked indomitable courage or loyal support. But his frail body was not equal to the demands of the undaunted spirit upon it, and so he went to his grave broken but not beaten—great even in that last desperate stand he had made for his own position, as he was great in all that he had undertaken, suffered and achieved for his country. It was a hushed and heart-broken Ireland that heard of his death. It was as if a pall had fallen over the land on that grey October morning in 1891 when the news of his passing was flashed across from the England that he scorned to the Ireland that he loved. It may be that those who had reviled him and cast the wounding word against him had then their moment of regret and the wish that what had been heatedly spoken might be unsaid, but those who loved him and who were loyal to the end found no consolation beyond this, that they had stood, with leal hearts and true, beside the man who had found Ireland broken, maimed and dispirited and who had lifted her to the proud position of conscious strength and self-reliant nationhood.

FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 1: This is not exact. What Dillon proposed was that Parnell, McCarthy and Dillon himself should be the trustees, the majority to be sufficient to sign cheques. When Parnell objected to a third being added, Dillon made the observation which ruined everything: “Yes, indeed, and the first time I was in trouble to leave me without a pound to pay the men” (O’Brien’s *An Olive Branch in Ireland*).]

CHAPTER IV

An appreciation of Parnell

With the death of Parnell a cloud of despair seemed to settle upon the land. Chaos had come again; indeed, it had come before, ever since the war of faction was set on foot and men devoted themselves to the satisfaction of savage passions rather than constructive endeavour for national ideals. We could have no greater tribute to Parnell’s power than this—that when he disappeared the Party he had created was rent into at least three warring sections, intent for the most part on their own miserable rivalries, wasting their energies on small intrigues and wretched personalities and by their futilities bringing shame and disaster upon the Irish Cause. There followed what Mr William O’Brien describes in his *Evening Memories* as “eight years of unredeemed blackness and horror, upon which no Irishman of any of the three contending factions can look back without shame and few English Liberals without remorse.”

Page 12

And thus Ireland parted with “the greatest of her Captains” and reaped a full crop of failures as her reward. Too late there were flashing testimonials to his greatness. Too late it became a commonplace observation in Ireland, when the impotence of the sordid sections was apparent: “How different it would all be if Parnell were alive.” Too late did we have tributes to Parnell’s capacity from friend and foe which magnified his gifts of leadership beyond reach of the envious. Even the man who was more than any other responsible for his fall said of Parnell (Mr Barry O’Brien’s *Life of Parnell*):

“Parnell was the most remarkable man I ever met. I do not say the ablest man; I say the most remarkable and the most interesting. He was an intellectual phenomenon. He was unlike anyone I had ever met. He did things and said things unlike other men. His ascendancy over his Party was extraordinary. There has never been anything like it in my experience in the House of Commons. He succeeded in surrounding himself with very clever men, with men exactly suited for his purpose. They have changed since—I don’t know why. Everything seems to have changed. But in his time he had a most efficient party, an extraordinary party. I do not say extraordinary as an opposition but extraordinary as a Government. The absolute obedience, the strict discipline, the military discipline in which he held them was unlike anything I have ever seen. They were always there, they were always ready, they were always united, they never shirked the combat and Parnell was supreme all the time.”

“Parnell was supreme all the time.” This is the complete answer to those—and some of them are alive still—who said in the days of “the Split” that it was his Party which made him and not he who made the Party. In this connection I might quote also the following brief extract from a letter written by Mr William O’Brien to Archbishop Croke during the Boulogne negotiations:

“We have a dozen excellent front bench men in our Party but there is no other Parnell. They all mean well but it is not the same thing. The stuff talked of Parnell’s being a sham leader, sucking the brains of his chief men, is the most pitiful rubbish.”

Time proved, only too tragically, the correctness of Mr O’Brien’s judgment. When the guiding and governing hand of Parnell was withdrawn the Party went to pieces. In the words of Gladstone: “they had changed since then”—and I may add that at no subsequent period did they gain the same cohesion, purpose or power as a Party.

It may be well when dealing with Parnell’s position in Irish history to quote the considered opinion of an independent writer of neutral nationality. M. Paul Dubois, a well-known French author, in his masterly work, *Contemporary Ireland*, thus gives his estimate of Parnell:

Page 13

“Parnell shares with O’Connell the glory of being the greatest of Irish leaders. Like O’Connell he was a landlord and his family traditions were those of an aristocrat. Like him, too, he was overbearing, even despotic in temperament. But in all else Parnell was the very opposite of the ‘Liberator.’ The Protestant leader of a Catholic people, he won popularity in Ireland without being at all times either understood or personally liked. In outward appearance he had nothing of the Irishman, nothing of the Celt about him. He was cold, distant and unexpansive in manner and had more followers than friends. His speech was not that of a great orator. Yet he was singularly powerful and penetrating, with here and there brilliant flashes that showed profound wisdom. A man of few words, of strength rather than breadth of mind—his political ideals were often uncertain and confused—he was better fitted to be a combatant than a constructive politician. Beyond all else he was a Parliamentary fighter of extraordinary ability, perfectly self-controlled, cold and bitter, powerful at hitting back. It was precisely these English qualities that enabled him to attain such remarkable success in his struggle with the English. Pride was perhaps a stronger motive with him than patriotism or faith.”

We have here the opinions of those who knew Parnell in Parliament—the one as his opponent, the other as, perhaps, his most intimate friend—and of an independent outsider who had no part or lot in Irish controversies. It may be perhaps not amiss if I conclude this appreciation of Parnell with the views of an Irishman of the latest school of Irish thought. Mr R. Mitchell Henry, in his work, *The Evolution of Sinn Fein*, writes:

“The pathetic and humiliating performance (of the Butt ‘Home Rulers’) was ended by the appearance of Charles Stewart Parnell, who infused into the forms of Parliamentary action the sacred fury of battle. He determined that Ireland, refused the right of managing her own destinies, should at least hamper the English in the government of their own house; he struck at the dignity of Parliament and wounded the susceptibilities of Englishmen by his assault upon the institution of which they are most justly proud. His policy of Parliamentary obstruction went hand in hand with an advanced land agitation at home. The remnant of the Fenian Party rallied to his cause and suspended for the time, in his interests and in furtherance of his policy, their revolutionary activities. For Parnell appealed to them by his honest declaration of his intentions; he made it plain both to Ireland and to the Irish in America that his policy was no mere attempt at a readjustment of details in Anglo-Irish relations but the first step on the road to national independence. He was strong enough both to announce his ultimate intentions and to define with precision the limit which must be placed upon the immediate measures to be taken.... He is



Page 14

remembered, not as the leader who helped to force a Liberal Government to produce two Home Rule Bills but as the leader who said 'No man can set bounds to the march of a nation....' To him the British Empire was an abstraction in which Ireland had no spiritual concern; it formed part of the order of the material world in which Ireland found a place; it had, like the climatic conditions of Europe, or the Gulf Stream, a real and preponderating influence on the destinies of Ireland. But the Irish claim was, to him, the claim of a nation to its inherent rights, not the claim of a portion of an empire to its share in the benefits which the Constitution of that empire bestowed upon its more favoured parts."

Judged by the most varied standards and opinions the greatness of Parnell as the leader of a nation is universally conceded. The question may be asked: But what did Parnell actually accomplish to entitle him to this distinction? I will attempt briefly to summarise his achievements. He found a nation of serfs, and if he did not actually make a nation of freemen of them he set them on the high road to freedom, he gave them a measure of their power when united and disciplined, and he taught them how to resist and combat the arrogance, the greed and the inbred cruelty of landlordism. He struck at England through its most vulnerable point—through its Irish garrison, with its cohorts of unscrupulous mercenaries and hangers-on. He struck at it in the very citadel of its own vaunted liberties—in the Parliament whose prestige was its proudest possession and which he made it his aim to shatter, to ridicule and to destroy. He converted an Irish Party of complaisant time-servers, Whigs and office-seekers into a Party of irreproachable incorruptibility, unbreakable unity, iron discipline and a magnificently disinterested patriotism. He formulated the demand for Irish nationhood with clearness and precision. He knew how to bargain with the wiliest and subtlest statesman of his age, and great and powerful as Gladstone was he met in Parnell a man equally conscious of his own strength and equally tenacious of his principles. In fact, on every encounter the ultimate advantage rested with Parnell. He won on the Land Question, he won on the labourer's demands, he won on the Home Rule issue and he showed what a potent weapon the balance of power could be in the hands of a capable and determined Irish leader.

Not alone did he create an impregnable Irish Party; he established a united Irish race throughout the world. His sway was acknowledged with the same implicit confidence among the exiled Irish in America and Australia as it was by the home-folk in Ireland. He was the great cementing influence of an Irish solidarity such as was never before attempted or realised. He did a great deal to arrest the outflow of the nation's best blood by emigration, and, if he had no strong or striking policy on matters educational and industrial, he gave manhood to the people, he developed character in them, he gave them security in their lands and homes, and, if the unhappy cataclysm of his later days had not be-fallen, he would unquestionably have given them a measure of self-

government from which they could march onward to the fullest emancipation that the status of nationhood demands.



Page 15

There was never stagnation, nor stupidity, nor blundering in the handling of Irish affairs whilst his hand was on the helm. It was only later that the creeping paralysis of inefficiency and incompetence exhibited itself and that a people deprived of his genius for direction and control sank into unimagined depths of apathy, indifference and gloom.

He thwarted and defeated what appeared to be the settled policy of England—namely, to palter and toy with Irish problems, to postpone their settlement, to engage in savage repressions and ruthless oppressions until, the race being decimated by emigration or, what remained, being destroyed in their ancient faiths by a ruthless method of Anglicisation, the Irish Question would settle itself by a process of gradual attenuation unto final disappearance.

It was Parnell who practically put an end to evictions in Ireland—those “sentences of death” under which, from 1849 to 1882, there were no less than 363,000 peasant families turned out of their homes and driven out of their country. It was his policy which invested the tenants with solid legal rights and gave them unquestioned guarantees against landlord lawlessness. He and his lieutenants had their bouts with Dublin Castle, and they proved what a very vulnerable institution it was when courageously assailed.

Taken all in all, he brought a new life into Ireland. He left it for ever under manifold obligations to him, and whilst grass grows and water runs and the Celtic race endures, Ireland will revere the name of Parnell and rank him amongst the noblest of her leaders.

CHAPTER V

The wreck and ruin of A party

The blight that had come upon Irish politics did not abate with the death of Parnell. Neither side seemed to spare enough charity from its childish disputations to make an honest and sincere effort at settlement. There was no softening of the asperities of public life on the part of the Parnellites—they claimed that their leader had been hounded to his death, and they were not going to join hands in a blessed forgiveness of the bitter years that had passed with those who had lost to Ireland her greatest champion. On the other hand, the Anti-Parnellites showed no better disposition. It had been one of their main contentions that Parnell was not an indispensable leader and that he could be very well done without. They were to prove by their own conduct and incapacity what a hollow mockery this was and how feeble was even the best of them without the guidance of the master mind. They cut a pitiful figure in Parliament, where their internal bickerings and miserable squabbles reduced them to positive impotence. For years the “Antis,” as they were termed, were divided into two almost equal sections, one upholding the claims of John Dillon and the other faithful to the flag of T.M. Healy. Meanwhile Justin



Page 16

McCarthy, a man of excellent intention but of feeble grasp, occupied the chair of the Party, but did nothing to direct its policy. He was a decent figurehead, but not much else. William O'Brien lent all the support of his powerful personality to Mr Dillon in the hope that, by establishing his leadership and keeping the door open for reconciliation with the Parnellite minority, he could restore the Party to some of its former efficiency and make it once again the spear-head of the constitutional fight for Ireland's liberties. Mr Healy, whose boldness of attack upon Parnell had won him the enthusiastic regard of the clergy as well as the title of "The Man in the Gap," was also well supported within the Party—in fact, there were times when he carried a majority of the Party with him. After Parnell's overthrow a committee was elected by the Anti-Parnellites to debate and decide policy, but it was in truth left to decide very little, for the agile intellect of Mr Healy invariably transferred the fight from it to the Party, which had now become a veritable hell of incompatibilities and disagreements.

At this time also indications came from outside that all was not well within the Liberal ranks. Some of the most prominent members of this Party began to think that the G.O.M. was getting too old for active leadership and should be sent to the House of Lords. Justin McCarthy also reported an interview he had with Gladstone, in which the G.O.M. plainly hinted that, so far as Home Rule was concerned, he could no longer hope to be in at the finish, and that there was a strong feeling among his own friends that Irish legislation should be shelved for a few years so that place might be yielded to British affairs. The General Election of 1892 had taken place not, as may be imagined, under the best set of circumstances for the Liberals. The Nationalist members were still faithful to their alliance, which had cost Ireland so much, and which was to cost her yet more, and this enabled the Liberals to remain in office with a shifting and insecure majority of about 42 when all their hosts were reckoned up.

It is claimed for the Home Rule Bill of 1893 that it satisfied all Mr Parnell's stipulations. However this may be, Mr Redmond and his friends seemed to think otherwise, for they raised many points and pressed several amendments to a division on one occasion, reducing the Government majority to 14 on the question of the Irish representation at Westminster, which the Parnellites insisted should remain at 103. How the mind of Nationalist Ireland has changed since then!

Mr Thomas Sexton was one of the brilliant intellects of the Party at this period, a consummate orator, a reputed master of all the intricacies of international finance, and in every sense of the word a first-rate House of Commons man. But he had in some way or other aroused the implacable ire of Mr T.M. Healy, whose sardonic invective he could not stand. A politician has no right to possess a sensitive skin, but somehow Mr Sexton did, with the result that he allowed himself to be driven from public life rather than endure the continual stabs of a tongue that could be very terrible at times—though

I would say myself of its owner that he possesses a heart as warm as ever beat in Irish breast.



Page 17

The fate of the Home Rule Bill of 1893 was already assured long before it left the House of Commons. Like the Bill of 1886 it came to grief on the fear of the English Unionists for the unity of the Empire. Home Rule was conquered by Imperialism, and the Ulster opposition was merely used as a powerful and effective argument in the campaign.

Ireland had sunk meanwhile into a hopeless stupor. The attitude of the Irish masses appeared to be one of despairing indifference to all the parties whose several newspapers were daily engaged in the delectable task of hurling anathemas at each other's heads. Interest in the national cause had almost completely ebbed away. A Liberal Chief Secretary, in the person of Mr John Morley, reigned in Dublin Castle, but all that he is remembered for now is that he started the innovation of placing Nationalist and Catholic Justices of the Peace on the bench, who became known in time as "the Morley magistrates." Otherwise he left Dublin Castle as formidable a fortress of ascendancy authority as it had ever been. Under conditions as they were then, or as they are now, no Chief Secretary can hope to fundamentally alter the power of the Castle. "Imagine," writes M. Paul Dubois in *Contemporary Ireland*: "the situation of a Chief Secretary newly appointed to his most difficult office. He comes to Ireland full of prejudices and preconceptions, and, like most Englishmen, excessively ignorant of Irish conditions.... It does not take him long to discover that he is completely in the hands of his functionaries. His Parliamentary duties keep him in London for six or eight months of the year, and he is forced to accept his information on current affairs in Ireland from the permanent officials of the Castle, without having even an opportunity of verifying it, and to rely on their recommendations in making appointments. The representative of Ireland in England and of England in Ireland he is 'an embarrassed phantom' doomed to be swept away by the first gust of political change. The last twenty years, indeed, have seen thirteen chief secretaries come and go! With or against his will he is a close prisoner of the irresponsible coterie which forms the inner circle of Irish administration. Even a change of Government in England is not a change of Government in Ireland. The Chief Secretary goes, but the permanent officials remain. The case of the clock is changed, but the mechanism continues as before.... The Irish oligarchy has retained its supremacy in the Castle. Dislodged elsewhere it still holds the central fortress of Irish administration and will continue to hold it until the concession of autonomy to Ireland enables the country to re-mould its administrative system on national and democratic lines."

Page 18

When it came to Gladstone surrendering the sceptre he had so long and brilliantly wielded, I do not remember that the event excited any overpowering interest in Ireland. Outside the ranks of the politicians the people had almost ceased to speculate on these matters. A period of utter stagnation had supervened and it came as no surprise or shock to Nationalist sentiment when Home Rule was formally abandoned by Gladstone's successor, Lord Rosebery. "Home Rule is as dead as Queen Anne," declared Mr Chamberlain. These are the kind of declarations usually made in the exuberance of a personal or political triumph, but the passing of the years has a curious knack of giving them emphatic refutation.

Divided as they were and torn with dissensions, the Nationalists were not in a position where they could effectively demand guarantees from Lord Rosebery or enter into any definite arrangement with him. They kept up their squalid squabble and indulged their personal rivalries, but a disgusted country had practically withdrawn all support from them, and an Irish race which in the heyday of Parnell was so proud to contribute to their war-chest, now buttoned up its pockets and in the most practical manner told them it wanted none of them.

In this state of dereliction and despair did the General Election of 1895 surprise them. The Parnellites had their old organisation—the National League—and the Anti-Parnellites had established in opposition to this the National Federation, so that Ireland had a sufficiency of Leagues but no concrete programme beyond a disreputable policy of hacking each other all round. As a matter of fact, we had in Cork city the curious and almost incredible spectacle of the Dillonites and Healyites joining forces to crush the Parnellite candidate, whilst elsewhere they were tearing one another to tatters, as it would almost appear, for the mere love of the thing.

There was one pathetic figure in all this wretched business—that of the Hon. Edward Blake, who had been Prime Minister of Canada and who had surrendered a position of commanding eminence in the political, legal and social life of the Dominion to give the benefit of his splendid talents to the service of Ireland. It was a service rendered all in vain, though, to the end of his life, with a noble fidelity, he devoted himself to his chosen cause, thus completing a sacrifice which deserved a worthier reward.

At this period the Home Rule Cause seemed to be buried in the same grave with Parnell. It may be remarked that there were countless bodies of the Irish peasantry who still believed that Parnell had not died, that the sad pageant of his funeral and burial was a prearranged show to deceive his enemies, and that the time would soon come when the mighty leader would emerge from his seclusion to captain the hosts of Irish nationality in the final battle for independence. This idea lately found expression in a powerful play by Mr Lennox Robinson, entitled *The Lost Leader*.

Page 19

But, alas! for the belief, the chieftain had only too surely passed away, and when the General Election of 1895 was over it was a battered, broken and bitterly divided Irish Party which returned to Westminster—a Party which had lost all faith in itself and which was a byword and a reproach alike for its helpless inefficiency and its petty intestine quarrels.

CHAPTER VI

TOWARDS LIGHT AND LEADING

Whilst the slow corruption of the Party had been going on in Ireland, the cause of Home Rule had been going down to inevitable ruin. The warnings on which Parnell founded his refusal to be expelled from the leadership by dictation from England were more than justified in the event. And later circumstances only too bitterly confirmed it, that any blind dependence upon the Liberal Party was to be paid for in disappointment, if not in positive betrayal of Irish interests. A Tory Party had now come into power with a large majority, and the people were treated alternately or concurrently to doses of coercion and proposals initiated with the avowed object of killing Home Rule with kindness. This had been the declared policy of Mr Arthur Balfour when his attempt to inaugurate his uncle Lord Salisbury's policy of twenty years of resolute government had failed, and when, with considerable constructive foresight, he established the Congested Districts Board in 1891 as a sort of opposition show—and not too unsuccessful at that—to the Plan of Campaign and the Home Rule agitation.

With the developments that followed the Irish Party had practically no connection. They were neither their authors nor instruments, though they had the sublime audacity in a later generation to claim to be the legitimate inheritors of all these accomplishments. Mr Dillon had now arrived at the summit of his Parliamentary ambition—he was the leader of “the majority” Party, but his success seemed to bring him no comfort, and certainly discovered no golden vein of statesmanship in his composition. The quarrels and recriminations of the three sectional organisations—the National Federation of the Dillonites, the National League of the Parnellites, and the People's Rights Association of the Healyites—continued unabated. But beyond the capacity for vulgar abuse they possessed none other. Parliamentarianism was dying on its legs and constitutionalism appeared to have received its death-blow. The country had lost all respect for its “Members,” and young and old were sick unto death of a movement which offered no immediate prospects of action and no hope for the future. A generation of sceptics and scoffers was being created, and even if the idealists, who are always to be found in large number in Ireland, still remained unconquerable in their faith that a resurgent and regenerated Ireland must arise some time, and somehow, they were remarkably silent in the expression of their convictions. Mr William O'Brien thus describes the unspeakable depths to which the Party had fallen in those days:

Page 20

“The invariable last word to all our consultations was the pathetic one, ‘Give me a fund and I see my way to doing anything.’ And so we had travelled drearily for years in the vicious circle that there could be no creative energy in the Party without funds, and that there could be no possibility for funds for a party thus ingloriously inactive. Although myself removed from Parliament my aid had been constantly invoked by Mr Dillon on the eve of any important meeting of the Party in London, or of the Council of the National Federation in Dublin, for there was not one of them that was not haunted by the anticipation of some surprise from Mr Healy’s fertile ingenuity. There is an unutterable discomfort in the recollections of the invariable course of procedure on these occasions—first, the dozens of beseeching letters to be written to our friends, imploring their attendance at meetings at which, if Mr Healy found us in full strength, all was uneventful and they had an expensive journey for their pains; next, the consultations far into the night preceding every trial of strength; the painful ticking off, man by man, of the friends, foes, and doubtfuls on the Party list, the careful collection of information as to the latest frame of mind of this or that man of the four or five waverers who might turn the scale; the resolution, after endless debates, to take strong action to force the Party to a manful choice at long last between Mr Dillon and his tormentors, and to give somebody or anybody authority enough to effect something; and then almost invariably the next day the discovery that all the labour had been wasted and the strong action resolved upon had been dropped in deference to some drivelling hesitation of some of the four or five doubtfuls who had become *de facto* the real leaders of the Party.”

I venture to say that a confession of more amazing impotency, indecision and inefficiency it would be impossible to make. It brings before the mind as nothing else could the utter degradation of a Party which only a few brief years before was the terror of the British Parliament and the pride of the Irish race.

One occasion there was between the Parnell Split and the subsequent reunion in 1900 when the warring factions might have been induced to compose their differences and to reform their ranks. A Convention of the Irish Race was summoned in 1906 which was carefully organised and which in its character and representative authority was in every way a very unique and remarkable gathering. I attended it myself in my journalistic capacity, and I was deeply impressed by the fact that here was an assembly which might very well mark the opening of a fresh epoch in Irish history, for there had come together for counsel and deliberation men from the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Newfoundland, the Argentine, as well as from all parts of Great Britain and Ireland—men who, by reason of their eminence, public worth, sympathies

Page 21

and patriotism, were calculated to give a new direction and an inspiring stimulus to the Irish Movement. They were men lifted high above the passions and rivalries which had wrought distraction and division amongst the people at home, and it needs no great argument to show what a powerful and impartial tribunal they might have been made into for the restoration of peace and the re-establishment of a new order in Irish political affairs. But this great opportunity was lost. The factions had not yet fought themselves to a standstill. Mr Redmond and Mr Healy resisted the most pressing entreaties of the American and Australian delegates to join the Convention, and, beyond a series of laudable speeches and resolutions, a Convention which might have been constituted the happy harbinger of unity left no enduring mark on the life of the people or the fate of parties.

When Mr Gerald Balfour became Chief Secretary for Ireland after the Home Rule debacle of 1895 he determined to continue the policy, inaugurated by his more famous brother, of appeasement by considerable internal reforms, which have made his administration for ever memorable. There have ever been in Irish life certain narrow coteries of thought which believed that with every advance of prosperity secured by the people, and every step taken by them in individual independence, there would be a corresponding weakness in their desire and demand for a full measure of national freedom. A more fatal or foolish conviction there could not be. The whole history of nations and peoples battling for the right is against it. The more a people get upon their feet, the more they secure a grip upon themselves and their inheritance, the more they are established in security and well-being, the more earnestly, indefatigably and unalterably are they determined to get all that is due to them. They will make every height they attain a fortress from which to fight for the ultimate pinnacle of their rights. The more prosperous they become, the better are they able to demand that the complete parchments and title-deeds of their liberty and independence shall be engrossed. Hence the broader-minded type of Irish Nationalist saw nothing to fear from Mr Balfour's attempts to improve the material condition of the people. Unfortunately for his reputation, Mr Dillon always uniformly opposed any proposals which were calculated to take the yoke of landlordism from off the necks of the farmers. He seemed to think that a settlement of the Land and National questions should go hand in hand, for the reason that if the Land Question were once disposed of the farmers would then settle down to a quiescent existence and have no further interest in the national struggle.



Page 22

Accordingly Mr Balfour's good intentions were fought and frustrated from two opposing sources. His Land Act of 1906 and his Local Government (Ireland) Act, 1898, were furiously opposed by the Irish Unionists and the Dillonites alike. The Land Bill was by no means a heroic measure, and made no serious effort to deal with the land problem in a big or comprehensive fashion. The Local Government Bill, on the other hand, was a most far-reaching measure, one of national scope and importance, full of the most tremendous opportunities and possibilities, and how any Irish leader in his senses could have been so short-sighted as to oppose it will for ever remain one of the mysteries of political life. This Bill broke for ever the back of landlord power in Irish administration. It gave into the hands of the people for the first time the absolute control of their own local affairs. It enfranchised the workers in town and country, enabling them to vote for the man of their choice at all local elections. It put an end to the pernicious power of the landed gentry, who hitherto raised the rates for all local services, dispersed patronage and were guilty of many misdeeds and malversations, as well of being prolific in every conceivable form of abuse which a rotten and corrupt system could lend itself to. To this the Local Government Act of 1898 put a violent and abrupt end. The Grand Juries and the Presentment Sessions were abolished. Elected Councils took their place. The franchise was extended to embrace every householder and even a considerable body of women. It was the exit of "the garrison" and the entrance of the people—the triumph of the democratic principle and the end of aristocratic power in local life.

Next to the grant of Home Rule there could not be a more remarkable concession to popular right and feeling. Yet Mr Dillon had to find fault with it because its provisions, to use his own words, included "blackmail to the landlords" and arranged for "a flagitious waste of public funds"—the foundation on which these charges rested being that, following an unvarying tradition, the Unionist Government bribed the landlords into acceptance of the Bill by relieving them of half their payment for Poor Rate, whilst it gave a corresponding relief of half the County Dues to the tenants. He also ventured the prediction, easily falsified in the results, that the tenants' portion of the rate relief would be transferred to the landlords in the shape of increased rents. As a matter of fact, the second term judicial rents, subsequently fixed, were down by an average of 22 per cent.

Mr Redmond, wiser than Mr Dillon, saw that the Bill had magnificent possibilities; he welcomed it, and he promised that the influence of his friends and himself would be directed to obtain for the principles it contained a fair and successful working. But, with a surprising lack of political acumen, he likewise expressed his determination to preserve in the new councils the presence and power of the landlord and *ex-officio* element. This was, in the circumstances, with the Land Question unsettled and landlordism still an insidious power, a rather gratuitous surrender to the privileged classes.



Page 23

Before the Local Government Act was sent on its heaven-born mission of national amelioration another considerable happening had taken place: the Financial Relations Commission appointed to inquire into the financial relations between Ireland and Great Britain having tendered its report in 1896. Financial experts had long contended that Ireland was grievously overtaxed, and that there could be no just dealing between the two countries until the amount of this overtaxation was accurately and scientifically ascertained and a proper balance drawn. It was provided in the Act of Union that the two countries should retain their separate budgets and should each remain charged with their respective past debts, and a relative proportion of contribution to Imperial expenses was fixed. But the British Parliament did not long respect this provision. In 1817 it decreed a financial union between the two countries, amalgamated their budgets and exchequers, and ordered that henceforth all the receipts and expenditure of the United Kingdom should be consolidated into one single fund, which was henceforward to be known as the Consolidated Fund. It was not long before we had cumulative examples of the truth of Dr Johnson's dictum that England would unite with us only that she may rob us. Successive English chancellors imposed additional burdens upon our poor and impoverished country, until it was in truth almost taxed out of existence. The weakest points in the Gladstonian Home Rule Bills were admittedly those dealing with finance.

The publication of the report of the Financial Relations Commission, which had been taking evidence for two years, created a formidable outcry in Ireland. We had long protested against our taxes being levied by an external power; now we knew also that we were being robbed of very large amounts annually. The Joint Report of the Commission, signed by eleven out of thirteen members, decided that the Act of Union placed on the shoulders of Ireland a burden impossible for her to bear; that the increase of taxation laid on her in the middle of the nineteenth century could not be justified, and, finally, that the existing taxable capacity of Ireland did not exceed one-twentieth part of that of Great Britain (and was perhaps far less), whereas Ireland paid in taxes one-eleventh of the amount paid by Great Britain. Furthermore, the actual amount taken each year in the shape of overtaxation was variously estimated to be between two and three quarters and three millions. Instantly Ireland was up in arms against this monstrous exaction. For a time the country was roused from its torpor and anything seemed possible. All classes and creeds were united in denouncing the flagrant theft of the nation's substance by the predominant partner. By force and fraud the Act of Union was passed: by force and fraud we were kept in a state of beggary for well-nigh one hundred years and our poverty flaunted abroad as proof of our idleness

Page 24

and incapacity. What wonder that we felt ourselves outraged and wronged and bullied? Huge demonstrations of protest were held in all parts of the country. These were attended by men of all sects and of every political hue. Nationalist and Unionist, landlord and tenant, Protestant and Catholic stood on the same platform and vied with each other in denunciation of the common robber. At Cork Lord Castletown recalled the Boston Tea riots. At Limerick Lord Dunraven presided at a meeting which was addressed by the Most Rev. Dr O'Dwyer, the Catholic bishop of the diocese, and by Mr John Daly, a Fenian who had spent almost a lifetime in prison to expiate his nationality.

There was a general forgetfulness of quarrels and differences whilst this ferment of truly national indignation lasted. But the cohesive materials were not sound enough to make it a lasting union of the whole people. There were still class fights to be fought to their appointed end, and so the agitation gradually filtered out, and Ireland remains to-day still groaning under the intolerable burden of overtaxation, not lessened, but enormously increased, by a war which Ireland claims was none of her business.

The subsidence of the political fever from 1891 to 1898 was not without its compensations in other directions. Ireland had time to think of other things, to enter into a sort of spiritual retreat—to wonder whether if, after all, politics were everything, whether the exclusive pursuit of them did not mean that other vital factors in the national life were forgotten, and whether the attainment of material ambitions might not be purchased at too great a sacrifice—at the loss of those spiritual and moral forces without which no nation can be either great or good in the best sense. There was much to be done in this direction. The iron of slavery had very nearly entered our souls. Centuries of landlord oppression, of starvation, duplicity and Anglicisation had very nearly destroyed whatever there was of moral virtue and moral worth in our nature. The Irish language—our distinctive badge of nationhood—had almost died upon the lips of the people. The old Gaelic traditions and pastimes were fast fading away. Had these gone we might, indeed, win Home Rule, but we would have lost things immeasurably greater, for “not by bread alone doth man live”—we would have lost that independence of the soul, that moral grandeur, that intellectual distinction, that spiritual strength without which all the charters of liberty which any foreign Parliament could confer would be only so many “scraps of paper,” assuring us it may be of fine clothes and well-filled stomachs and self-satisfied minds, but conferring none of those glories whose shining illumines the dark ways of life and leads us towards that light which surpasseth all understanding.

Thanks to the workings of an inscrutable Providence it was, however, whilst the worst form of political stagnation had settled on the land that other deeper depths were stirring and that the people were of themselves moving towards a truer light and a higher leading.



Page 25

CHAPTER VII

FORCES OF REGENERATION AND THEIR EFFECT

“George A. Birmingham” (who in private life is Canon Hannay), in his admirable book, *An Irishman Looks at his World*, tells us: “The most important educational work in Ireland during the last twenty years has been done independently of universities or schools,” and in this statement I entirely agree with him. And I may add that in this work Canon Hannay himself bore no inconsiderable part. During a political campaign in Mayo in 1910 I had some delightful conversations with Canon Hannay in my hotel at Westport, and his views expressed in the volume from which I quote are only a development of those which he then outlined. Both as to the vexed questions then disturbing North and South Ireland and as to the lines along which national growth ought to take place we had much in common. We agreed that nationality means much more than mere political independence—that it is founded on the character and intellect of the people, that it lives and is expressed in its culture, customs and traditions, in its literature, its songs and its arts. We saw hope for Ireland because she was remaking and remoulding herself from within—the only sure way in which she could work out her eventual salvation, whatever political parties or combinations may come or go.

This process of regeneration took firm root when the parties were exhausting themselves in mournful internal strife. Through the whole of the nineteenth century it had been the malign purpose of England to destroy the spirit of nationality through its control of the schools. Just as in the previous century it sought to reduce Ireland to a state of servitude through the operations of the Penal Laws, so it now sought to continue its malefic purpose by a system of education “so bad that if England had wished to kill Ireland’s soul when she imposed it on the Sister Isle she could not have discovered a better means of doing so” (M. Paul Dubois). And the same authority ascribes the fatalism, the lethargy, the moral inertia and intellectual passivity, the general absence of energy and character which prevailed in Ireland ten or twelve years ago to the fact that England struck at Ireland through her brain and sought to demoralise and ruin the national mind.

Thank God for it that the effort failed, but it failed mainly owing to the fact that a new generation of prophets had arisen in Ireland who saw that in the revival and reform of national education rested the best hope for the future. They recalled the gospel of Thomas Davis and the other noble minds of the Young Ireland era that we needs must educate in order that we may be free. They sought to give form and effect to the splendid ideals of the Young Irelanders. A new spirit was abroad, and not in matters educational alone. The doctrine of self-help and self-reliance was being preached and, what was better, practised.



Page 26

The Gaelic League, founded in 1893 by a few enthusiastic Irish spirits, was formed to effect an Irish renaissance in matters of the mind and spirit. It was non-sectarian and non-political. Its purpose was purely psychological and educational—it sought the preservation of the Irish language from a fast-threatening decay, it encouraged the study of ancient Irish literature and it promoted the cultivation of a modern literature in the Irish language. Its beginnings were modest, and its founders were practically three unknown young men whose only special equipment for leadership of a new movement were boundless enthusiasm and the possession of the scholastic temperament. Douglas Hyde, the son of a Protestant clergyman, dwelt far away in an unimportant parish in Connaught, and, while still a boy, became devoted to the study of the Irish language. Father O'Growney was a product of Maynooth culture, whose love of the Irish tongue became the best part of his nature, and John MacNeill (now so well known as a Sinn Fein leader) was born in Antrim, educated in a Belfast school and acquired his love for Irish in the Aran islands. It is marvellous to consider how the programme of the new League “caught on.” Some movements make their appeal to a class or a cult—to the young, the middle-aged or the old. But the Gaelic League, perhaps because of the very simplicity and directness of its objects, made an appeal to all. It numbered its adherents in every walk of life; it drew its membership from all political parties; it gathered the sects within its folds, and the greatest tribute that can be paid it is that it taught all its disciples a new way of looking at Ireland and gave them a new pride in their country. Ireland became national and independent in a sense it had not learnt before—it realised that “the essential mark of nationhood is the intellectual, social and moral patrimony which the past bequeaths to the present, which, amplified, or at least preserved, the present must bequeath to the future, and that it is this which makes the strength and individuality of a people.”

Its branches spread rapidly throughout Ireland, and the movement was taken up abroad with equal enthusiasm. Irish language classes were organised, Irish history of the native—as distinct from the British—brand was taught. Lessons in dancing and singing were given and the old national airs were revived and became the popular music of the day. It would take too much of my space to recount all the varied activities of the League, all that it did to preserve ancient Irish culture, to make the past live again in the lives of the people, to foster national sports and recreations, to organise Gaelic festivals of the kind that flourished in Ireland's artistic past, to create an Irish Ireland and to arrest the decadence of manners and the Anglicisation which had almost eaten into the souls of the people and destroyed their true Celtic character. Mr P.H. Pearse truly



Page 27

said of it: "The Gaelic League will be recognised in history as the most revolutionary influence that ever came into Ireland." It saved the soul of Ireland when it was in imminent danger of being lost, and its triumph was in great measure due to the fact that it held rigidly aloof from the professedly political parties, although it may be said for it that it undoubtedly laid the foundations of that school of thought which made all the later developments of nationality possible. And the amazing thing is that the priest and the parson, the gentry and the middle classes, equally with the peasantry, vied with each other in extending the influence and power of the movement. One of its strongest supporters was a leader of the Belfast Orangemen, the late Dr Kane, who observed that though he was a Unionist and a Protestant he did not forget that he had sprung from the Clan O'Cahan. The stimulation given to national thought and purpose spread in many directions. A new race of Irish priests was being educated on more thoroughly Irish lines, and they went forth to their duties with the inspiration, as it were, of a new call. A crusade was started against emigration, which was fast draining the country of its reserves of brain, brawn and beauty. The dullness of the country-side, an important factor in forcing the young and adventurous abroad, was relieved by the new enthusiasm for Irish games and pastimes and recreations—for the *seanchus*, the *sgoruidheacht*, the *ceilidhe* and the *Feiseanna*.

In giving to the young especially a new pride in their country and in their own, great and distinctive national heritage, it did a great deal to strengthen the national character and to make it more independent and self-reliant. It started the great work of rooting out the slavery which centuries of dependency and subjection had bred into the marrow of the race. Mr Arthur Griffith has admitted that the present generation could never have effected this work had not Parnell and his generation done their brave labour before them, but considered in themselves the achievements of the Gaelic League can only be described as mighty both in the actual revolution it wrought in the moral, intellectual and spiritual sphere, in the reaction it created against the coarser materialism of imported modes and manners, and in the new spirit which it breathed into the entire people.

Coincident with the foundation of the Gaelic League, other regenerative influences were also at work. These aimed at the economic reconstruction and the industrial development of the country by the inculcation of the principles of self-help, self-reliance and co-operation, and by the wider dissemination of technical instruction and agricultural education. Ireland, by reason, I suppose, of its condition, its arrested development and its psychology, is a country much given to "new movements," most of which have a very brief existence. They are born but



Page 28

to breathe and then expire. In the ease, however, of the Gaelic League, and the movements for co-operation amongst the farmers, and for technical instruction in the arts and crafts most suitable to the country, these movements were conceived and created strongly to endure. And to the credit of their authors and, be it said also, of the country for whose upliftment and betterment they were intended, they have endured greatly, and greatly fulfilled their purpose.

It is conceded by all who have any knowledge of the subject that the economic decadence of Ireland is not due to any lack of natural resources; neither is it due to insufficiency of capital or absence of workers. It is due to want of initiative, want of enterprise, want of business method, want of confidence, and want of education on the right lines. The education which should have been fashioned to fit the youth of Ireland for a life of work and industry and usefulness in their own land was invented with the express object of making of them "happy English children." There are possibly a few hundred millions sterling of Irish money, belonging in the main to the farmers and well-to-do shopkeepers, lying idle in Irish banks, and the irony of it is that these savings of the Irish are invested in British enterprises. They help to enrich the British plutocrat and to provide employment for the British worker, whilst the vast natural resources of Ireland remain undeveloped and the cream of Ireland's productive power, in the shape of its workers, betake themselves to other lands to assist in strengthening the structure and stability of other nations, when they should be engaged in raising the fabric of a prosperous commonwealth at home.

Those, however, who would blame Ireland for its present position of industrial stagnation forget that it was not always thus—they do not bear it in mind that Ireland had a great commercial past, that it had its own mercantile marine doing direct trade with foreign countries, that it had flourishing industries and factories and mills all over the country, but that all these were killed and destroyed and driven out of existence by the cruel trade policy of England, which decreed the death of every Irish industry or manufacture which stood in the way of its own industrial progress.

Those who sought the economic reconstruction of the country had accordingly to contend against a very evil inheritance. The commercial spirit had been destroyed; it should be educated anew. The desire to foster home products and manufactures had ceased to exist; it should be re-born and a patriotic preference for home manufactures instilled into the people. Pride in one's labour—the very essence of efficiency—had gone out of the country. It should be aroused again. Economic reform should proceed first on educational lines before it could be hoped to establish new industries with any hope of success. The pioneer in this work was the Hon. (now Sir) Horace Plunkett who returned to Ireland

Page 29

after some ranching experiences in the United States and set himself the task of effecting the economic regeneration of rural Ireland by preaching the gospel of self-help and co-operation. It is no part of my purpose to inquire into the secret motives of Sir Horace Plunkett, if he ever had any, or to allege, as a certain writer (M. Paul Dubois) has done, that Sir Horace promoted the movement for economic reform in the hope of reconciling Ireland to the Union and to Imperialism. I may lament it, as I do, that Sir Horace, who now believes himself to be the discoverer of Dominion Home Rule, did not raise his voice either for the Agrarian Settlement or for Home Rule during all the years while he was a real power in the country. I am not however going to allow my views on these questions to deflect my judgment from the real merit of the work performed by Sir Horace and his associates in the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society, which in the teeth of considerable difficulties and obstacles succeeded in propagating through Ireland the principles of self-help and co-operation.

From the first, the Society had many and powerful enemies, most of the opposition springing from interested and malevolent parties. But there is, perhaps, no man in all the world so quick to see what is really for his advantage as the Irish farmer, and so the movement gradually found favour, and co-operative associations began to be formed in all parts of Ireland. The agricultural labourer has all along regarded the Creamery side of co-operation with absolute dislike. He declares that it is fast denuding the land of labour, that it tends to decrease tillage, and is one of the most active causes of emigration. They say, and there is ocular evidence of the fact, that a donkey and a little boy or girl to drive him to the Creamery now do the work of dairymaids and farm hands. But, whilst this is a criticism justified by existing conditions, it does not mean that co-operation is a thing bad in itself, or that there is anything inherently vicious in it to cause or create the employment of less labour. What it does mean is that the education of the farmer is still far from complete, that he does not yet know how to make the best use of his land, and that he does not till and cultivate it as he ought to make it really fruitful. Besides the Creamery system there are other forms of co-operation which have exercised a most beneficent influence amongst the peasantry. These include agricultural societies for the improvement of the breed of cattle, a number of country banks, mostly of the Raiffeisen type, co-operative associations of rural industries, principally lace, and societies for the sale of eggs and fowls, the dressing of flax, and general agriculture.



Page 30

A direct outcome of the Co-operative Movement was the creation by Act of Parliament in 1899 of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction in Ireland—a Department which, though it possesses many faults of administration and of policy, has nevertheless had a distinctly wholesome influence on Irish life. In relation to the Co-operative Movement the judgment of Mr Dillon was once again signally at fault. He gave it vehement opposition at every point and threw the whole weight of his personal following into the effort to arrest its growth and expansion. Happily, however, the practical good sense of the people saved them from becoming the dupes of parties who had axes of their own, political or personal, to grind, and thus co-operation and self-help have won, in spite of all obstacles and objections, a very fair measure of success.

Meanwhile a remarkable development was taking place in the matter of bringing popular and educative literature within reach of the masses. Public and parish libraries and village halls were widely established. These were supplementary to the greater movements to which reference has been made, but they were indicative of the steady bent of the national mind towards enlightenment and education, and of a desire in all things appertaining to the national life for more and better instruction. Another important movement there was to which little reference is made in publications dealing with the period—namely, the organisation of the town and country labourers for their political and social improvement. It was first known as the Irish Democratic Trade and Labour Federation, but this went to pieces in the general confusion of the Split. It was resurrected subsequently under the title of the Irish Land and Labour Association. I mention it here as an additional instance of the regenerative agencies that were at work in every domain of Irish life, and among all classes, at a time when the politicians were tearing themselves to pieces and providing a Roman holiday for their Saxon friends.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BIRTH OF A MOVEMENT AND WHAT IT CAME TO

Whilst Ireland was thus finding her soul and Mr Gerald Balfour pursuing his beneficent schemes for “killing Home Rule with kindness,” the country had sickened unto death of the “parties” and their disgusting vagaries. Mr William O’Brien, although giving loyal support and, what is more, very material assistance to Mr Dillon and his friends, was not himself a Member of Parliament, but was doing far better work as a citizen, studying, from his quiet retreat on the shores of Clew Bay, the shocking conditions of the Western peasantry, who were compelled to eke out an existence of starvation and misery amid the crags and moors and fastnesses of the west, whilst almost from their very doorsteps there stretched away mile upon mile of the rich green pastures from which their fathers were evicted during the clearances that followed the Great Famine of 1847, and which M. Paul Dubois describes as “the greatest legalised crime that humanity has ever accomplished against humanity.”



Page 31

“To look over the fence of the famine-stricken village and see the rich green solitudes, which might yield full and plenty, spread out at the very doorsteps of the ragged and hungry peasants, was to fill a stranger with a sacred rage and make it an unshirkable duty to strive towards undoing the unnatural divorce between the people and the land” (William O’Brien in an *Olive Branch in Ireland*).

Mr Arthur Balfour had established the Congested Districts Board in 1891 to deal with the Western problem, where “the beasts have eaten up the men,” and when Mr O’Brien settled down at Mallow Cottage he devoted himself energetically to assisting the Board in various projects of local development. But his experiences proved that these minor reforms were at the best only palliatives, “sending men ruffles who wanted shirts,” and that there could be only one really satisfactory solution—to restore to the people the land that had been theirs in bygone time, to root out the bullocks and the sheep and to root in the people into their ancient inheritance. It was only after years of patient effort that he at last succeeded in persuading the Congested Districts Board to make its first experiment in land purchase for the purpose of enlarging the people’s holdings and making them the owners of their own fields.[1] The scene was Clare Island, “the romantic dominion of Granya Uaile, the ‘Queen of Men,’” who for many years brought Elizabeth’s best captains to grief among her wild islands. The lordship of this island of 3949 acres, with its ninety-five families, had passed into the hands of a land-jobber, “with bowels of iron,” who sought to extract his cent. per cent. from the unfortunate islanders by a series of police expeditions in a gunboat, with a crop of resulting evictions, bayonet charges and imprisonments.

The result of the experiment was, beyond expectation, happy. After many delays the Congested Districts Board handed over the island to its new peasant proprietors, now secure for ever more in their own homesteads, but this transfer was not completed until the Archbishop of Tuam and Mr O’Brien had guaranteed the payment of the purchase instalments for the first seven years—a guarantee which to the islanders’ immortal credit never cost the guarantors a farthing.

Fired to enthusiasm by the success of this experiment Mr O’Brien conceived the idea of a virile agitation for the replantation of the whole of Connaught, so that the people should be transplanted from their starvation plots to the abundant green patrimony around them. He avows that no political objects entered into his first conceptions of this movement in the West. But the approach of the centenary of the insurrection of 1798, with its inspiring memories of the United Irishmen, furnished him with the idea, and the happy title for a new organisation which, in his own words, “drawing an irresistible strength and reality from the conditions in the West, would

Page 32

also throw open to the free air of a new national spirit those caverns and tabernacles of faction in which good men of all political persuasions had been suffocating for the previous eight years.” Accordingly the United Irish League was born into the world at Westport on the 16th January 1898, to achieve results which, if they be not greater—though great, indeed, they are—the fault assuredly rests not with the founder of the League, but with those others who malevolently thwarted his purposes. The occasion was opportune. The three several movements of the Dillonites, Redmondites and Healyites were in ruins, and Ireland went its way unheeding of them. The young men were busy with their '98 and Wolfe Tone Clubs. They drank deep of the doctrines of a heroic age. Centenary celebrations were held throughout the country, at which men were exhorted to study the history of an era when men were proud to die for the land they loved. For a space we listened to the martial music of other days, and our hearts throbbed to its stirring notes. The soul of the nation was uplifted above the squalid rivalries of the “ites” and the “isms.” It awaited a unifying influence and a programme which would disregard the factions and leave a wide-open door for all Nationalists to come in, no matter what sides they had previously taken or whether they had taken any at all.

This wide-open door and this broad-based programme the United Irish League offered. Mr Dillon attended the inaugural meeting, but from what Mr O'Brien tells us he did not seem to grasp the full potentialities of the occasion, “and he made his own speech without any indication that any unusual results were expected to follow.” Mr Timothy Harrington, one of the leading and most levelheaded of the Parnellite members, also attended, in defiance of bitter attack from his own side, showing a moral courage sadly lacking in our public men, either then or later. By what I cannot help thinking was a most fortuitous circumstance for the League, at a moment when its existence was not known outside three or four parishes, Mr Gerald Balfour determined to swoop down upon it and to crush it with the whole might of the Crown forces. Two Resident Magistrates and the Assistant Inspector-General of Constabulary, with a small army corps of special police, were sent to Westport. Result—the inevitable conflict between the police and people took place, prosecutions followed, extra police taxes were put on and a store of popular resentment was aroused, the League getting an advertisement which was worth scores of organisers and monster meetings. I am myself satisfied that it was the ferocity of the Crown attack upon the League which gave it its surest passport to popular favour. Whilst the United Irish League was struggling into life in the west I was engaged in the south in an attempt to lead the labourers out of the bondage and misery that encompassed them—their own sad legacy of generations of servitude and subjection—but I am nevertheless pleased to recall now that, as the editor of a not unimportant provincial newspaper in Cork, I followed the early struggles of the new League with sympathy and gave it cordial welcome when it travelled our way.



Page 33

As a mere statement of indisputable fact, it is but just to say that the entire burden of organising the League fell upon the shoulders of Mr O'Brien. When it was yet an infant, so to speak, in swaddling-clothes, and indeed for long after, when it grew to lustier life, he had to bear the whole brunt of the battle for its existence, without any political party to support him, without any great newspaper to espouse his cause and without any public funds to supply campaign expenses. Nay, far worse, he had to face the bitter hostility of the Redmondites and Healyites "and the scarcely less depressing neutrality" of the Dillonites, whilst under an incessant fire of shot and shell from a Coercion Government. After Mr Dillon's one appearance at Westport he was not seen on the League platform for many a day. At Westport he had exhorted the crowd to "be ready at the call of their captain by day or night," but having delivered this incitement he left to others the duty of facing the consequences, candidly declaring that he had made up his mind never to go to jail again. Mr Harrington, however, remained the steadfast friend of the League, and Mr Davitt also gave it his personal benediction, all the more generous and praiseworthy in that his views of national policy seldom agreed with those of Mr O'Brien. Confounding all predictions of its early eclipse, and notwithstanding a thousand difficulties and discouragements, the League continued to make headway, and after eighteen months' Herculean labours Mr O'Brien and his friends were in a position to summon a Provincial Convention at Claremorris, in the autumn of 1899, to settle the constitution of the organisation for Connaught. Two nights before the Convention Mr Dillon and Mr Davitt visited Mr O'Brien at Mallow Cottage to discuss his draft Constitution. It is instructive, having in mind what has happened since, that Mr Dillon took exception to the very first clause, defining the national claim to be "the largest measure of national self-government which circumstances may put it in our power to obtain." This was the logical continuance of Parnell's position that no man had a right to set bounds to the march of a nation, but Mr Dillon seemed to have descried in it some sinister purpose on the part of Mr O'Brien and Mr Davitt to abandon the constitutional Home Rule demand in the interest of the physical force movement. Eventually a compromise was agreed on, but in regard to other points of the Constitution—particularly that which made the constituencies autonomous and self-governing—Mr Dillon was obstinately opposed to democratic innovation. It would appear to me that in these days was sown the seeds of those differences of opinion between those close friends of many years' standing which were later to develop into a feeling of personal hostility which, on the part of one of them (Mr Dillon) at least, was black and bitter in its unforgivingness. The Claremorris Convention was such a success its "dimensions and character almost took my own breath away with wonder; all other feelings vanished from the minds of us all except one of thankfulness and rapture in presence of this incredible spectacle of the foes of ten years' bitter wars now marching all one way 'in mutual and beseeching ranks,' radiant with the life and hope of a national resurgence" (Mr O'Brien).



Page 34

The first test of the strength and power of the League was shortly to come. Mr Davitt resigned his seat for South Mayo and proceeded to South Africa to give what aid he could to the Boers in their desperate struggle for freedom. A peculiar situation arose over the Parliamentary vacancy that was thus created. The enemies of the United Irish League hit upon the astute political device of nominating Major M'Bride, himself a Mayo man, who was at the moment fighting in the ranks of the Irish Brigade in the Boer service. Mr O'Brien was naturally confronted with a cruel dilemma. To allow the seat to go uncontested was to confess a failure and to give joy to another brigade—the Crowbar Brigade—who wished for nothing better than the early overthrow of the League, which was the only serious menace to their power in the country. To contest the seat was to have the accusation hurled at his head that he was lacking in enthusiasm for the Boer cause, which Nationalist Ireland to a man devotedly espoused. The question Mr O'Brien had to ask himself was what was his duty to Ireland and to the oppressed peasantry of the West. It could not affect the Boer cause by a hair's-breadth who was to be future member for South Mayo, but it meant everything to Irish interests whether the United Irish League was to make headway and to gain a grip on the imagination and sympathies of the people. And, influenced by the only consideration which could be decisive in a situation of such difficulty, Mr O'Brien offered to the electors of South Mayo Mr John O'Donnell, the first secretary and organiser of the League, who was then lying in Castlebar Jail as the result of a Coercion prosecution. After a contest, in which all the odds seemed to lie on the side of the South African candidate, Mr O'Donnell was returned by an overwhelming majority.

The South Mayo election meant the end of one chapter of Irish history and the opening of another in which the political imbecility and madness which had distorted and disgraced the years since the Parnell Split could no longer continue their vicious courses. The return of Mr O'Donnell had focussed the attention of all Ireland on the programme and policy of the League. Branches multiplied amazingly, until it would be no exaggeration to say that they spread through the country like wildfire. The heather was ablaze with the joy of a resurgent people who had already almost forgotten the weary wars that had sundered them and who blissfully joined hands in one more grand united endeavour for the old land.

Having in several pitched battles defeated the forces of the Rent-offices and the politicians and disposed of some of the vilest conspiracies which the police emissaries of the Castle could hatch against it, the League had to engage in more desperate encounters before it could claim its cause won. I have already remarked that when the Local Government Bill was receiving the benediction of all parties in Parliament, except



Page 35

Mr Dillon, Mr Redmond promised that his influence would be extended to an effort to return the landlord and ascendancy class to the new Councils. The United Irish League determined to take issue with him on this. When the elections under the new Act were announced, Mr Redmond, honestly enough, proceeded to give effect to his promise. Mr O'Brien decided, and very rightly and properly in my judgment, that it would be a fatal policy, and a weak one, to surrender to the enemy, whilst he was still unconquered and unrepentant, any of those new Councils which could be made citadels of national strength and a new fighting arm of the constitutional movement. It meant that having driven the landlords forth from the fortresses from which they had so long oppressed the people, they should be immediately readmitted to them, having made no submissions and given no guarantees as to their future good behaviour. Mr Redmond and his followers made brave appeal from the landlord platforms to their supporters "not to be bitten by the Unity dog." Mr Healy's newspaper and influence took a similar bent. Mr Dillon's majority, as usual helpless and indecisive, promulgated no particular policy. For Mr O'Brien and the United Irish League there could be no such balancings or doubts. It is good also to be able to say of Mr Davitt that he assisted in fighting the insidious attempt to denationalize the County and District Councils. The League and its supporters won all along the line. The few reverses they sustained were negligible when compared with the mighty victories they obtained all over Ireland, and when the elections were over the League was established in an impregnable position as the organisation of disinterested and genuine nationality.

The Parliamentarians, seeing how matters stood, and no doubt with a wise thought of their own future, now proceeded to compose their quarrels. They saw themselves forgotten of the people, but they were resolved apparently that the people should not forget them. They took their cue from a country no longer divided over sombre futilities, and unable to make up their minds for themselves they accepted the judgment of the country once they were aware that it was irrevocably come to. Mr Dillon after his re-election to the chair of his section in 1900 immediately announced his resignation of the office, and being, as we are assured on the authority of Mr O'Brien, always sincerely solicitous for peace with the Parnellites, he caused a resolution to be passed binding the majority party in case of reunion to elect as their chairman a member of the Parnellite Party, which numbered merely nine.



Page 36

Naturally Mr Redmond and his friends did not hesitate to close with this piece of good fortune, which opened an honourable passage from a position of comparative isolation to one of triumph and power. The Healyites, whose quarrel appeared to be wholly with Mr Dillon, to whom Mr Healy in sardonic mood had attached the sobriquet of “a melancholy humbug,” made no difficulty about falling in with the new arrangement, and the three parties forthwith met and signed and sealed a pact for reunification without the country in the least expecting it or, indeed, caring about it. Probably the near approach of a General Election had more to do with this hastily-made pact than any of the nobler promptings of patriotism. I believe myself the country would have done much better had the United Irish League gone on with its own blessed work of appeasement and national healing unhampered by what, as after knowledge conclusively proved to me, was nothing but a hypocritical unity for selfish salvation’s sake. Mr O’Brien puts the whole position in a nutshell when he says: “The Party was reunified rather than reformed.” The treaty of peace they entered into was a treaty to preserve their own vested interests in their Parliamentary seats.

But a generous and forgiving nation was only too delighted to have an end of the bickerings and divisions which had wrought such harm to the cause of the people, and accordingly it hailed with gratification the spectacle of a reunited Irish Party.

It is probable, nevertheless, that had the process of educating the people into a knowledge of their own power gone on a little further the United Irish League would have been able at the General Election to secure a national representation which would more truly reflect national dignity, duty and purpose.

The first result of the Parliamentary treaty was the election of Mr John E. Redmond to the chair. In the circumstances, the majority party having pledged themselves to elect a Parnellite, no other choice was possible. Mr Redmond possessed many of the most eminent qualifications for leadership. He had an unsurpassed knowledge of Parliamentary procedure and seemed intended by nature for a great Parliamentary career. He was uniformly dignified in bearing, had a distinguished presence, a voice of splendid quality, resonant and impressive in tone, and an eloquence that always charmed his hearers. Had he possessed will power and strength of character in any degree corresponding to his other great gifts, there were no heights of leadership to which he might not have reached. As it was, he lacked just that leavening of inflexibility of purpose and principle which was required for positive greatness as distinct from moderately-successful leadership. At any rate, he was the only possible selection, yet once again Mr Dillon exhibited a disposition to show the cloven hoof. For some inscrutable reason he made up his mind to oppose Mr Redmond’s election to the chair, but when Mr O’Brien and Mr Davitt (who had returned from the Transvaal) got word of the plot they wired urgent messages to their friends in Parliament that Mr Redmond’s selection was the only one that could give the leadership anything better than a farcical character. Result—Mr Redmond was elected by a very considerable majority, and Mr

Dillon had further reason for having his knife in his former friend and comrade, Mr O'Brien.

Page 37

The three sectional organisations—the National Federation, the National League and the People’s Rights Association thereafter died a natural death. There were no ceremonial obsequies and none to sing their requiem.

The first National Convention of the reunited country was then summoned by a joint committee consisting of representatives of the United Irish League and the Party in equal numbers, and it gave the League a constitution which made it possible for the constituencies to control the organisation, to select their own Parliamentary representatives and generally to direct national affairs within their borders. The conception of the Constitution was sound and democratic. But in any organisation it is not the constitution that counts, but the men who control the movement. And the time came all too soon when this was sadly true of the United Irish League.

FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 1: To Dr Robert Ambrose belongs the credit for having first introduced, as a private member, in 1897, a Bill to confer upon the Congested Districts compulsory powers for land purchase. This was subsequently adopted as an Irish Party measure. Dr Ambrose was also the author of a measure empowering the County Councils to acquire waste lands for reclamation. He was one of the pioneers of the Industrial Development Movement and wrote and lectured largely on the subject. He was, with the late Bishop Clancy, prominent in promoting “the All-Red Route,” which would have given Ireland a great terminal port on its western coast at Blacksod Bay. He, at considerable professional sacrifice, entered the Party, at the request of Mr Dillon and Mr O’Brien, as Member for West Mayo. The reward he received for all his patriotic services was to find himself opposed in 1910 by the Dillonite caucus because of his independent action on Irish questions. Mr Dillon had no toleration for the person of independent mind, and thus a man who had given distinguished service to public causes was ruthlessly driven out of public life.]

CHAPTER IX

THE LAND QUESTION AND ITS SETTLEMENT

The General Election of 1900 witnessed a wonderful revival of national interest in Ireland. Doubtless if the constituencies had been left to their own devices they would have returned members responsive to the magnificent resolves of the people. But the Parliamentarians were astute manipulators of the political machine: they had for the most part wormed themselves into the good graces of the local leaders, and arranged for their own re-election when the time came. But there was nevertheless a considerable leavening of new members—young, enthusiastic and uncontaminated by the feuds and paltry personalities of an older generation. They brought, as it were, a

whiff of the free, democratic air of the country to Parliament with them, and gave an example of fine

Page 38

unselfishness and devotion to duty which did not fail to have their influence on their elder and more cynical brethren. The feud between the Dillonites and Healyites had not, however, been ended with the general treaty of peace. Mr Redmond did not want Mr Healy fought, but in the interests of internal peace Mr Dillon, Mr Davitt and Mr O'Brien appear to have come to the conclusion that they could not have Mr Healy in the new Party. Accordingly, Mr Healy and his friends were fought wherever they allowed themselves to be nominated, and Mr Healy himself was the only one to survive after a desperate contest full of exciting incidents in North Louth.

I made my first bid for Parliamentary honours in the 1900 election, when I had my name put forward as Labour candidate at the South Cork convention. I was not very strongly supported then, but the following May, on the death of Dr Tanner, I was nominated again as Labour candidate for Mid-Cork, and after a memorable tussle at the Divisional Convention I headed the poll by a substantial majority. Hence I write from now onward with what I may claim to be an intimate inside knowledge of affairs.

The first few years after the 1900 election saw us a solidly united opposition in Parliament for the first time for ten years. Question time was a positive joy to us younger members, who developed almost diabolical capacity for heckling Ministers on every conceivable topic under the sun. Our hostility to the Boer War also brought us into perennial conflict with the Government. The Irish members in a very literal sense once more occupied "the floor of the House," and there were some fierce passages-at-arms, resulting on one occasion in the forcible ejection of a large body of Nationalists by the police—an incident which had no relish for those who were jealous of the prestige and fair fame of the Mother of Parliaments. In Ireland the fight for constitutional reform went on with unabated energy. All the old engines of oppression and repression were at work, and the people proved that they had lost none of their wit or resource in the struggle with the forces of the Crown. Mr George Wyndham, whom I like to look back upon as one of the most courtly and graceful figures in the public life of the past generation, was installed in Dublin Castle as Chief Secretary. I can imagine that nothing could have been more distasteful to his generous spirit than to be obliged to use the hackneyed weapons of brute force in the pursuance of British policy. As an answer to the agitation for compulsory land purchase and a settlement of the western problem Mr Wyndham introduced in 1902 a Land Purchase Bill which fell deplorably short of the necessities of the situation. It would have deprived the tenants of all free will in the matter of the price they would be obliged to sell at, and left them wholly at the mercy of two landlord nominees on the Estates Commissioners, whilst it did not even pretend to find any remedy for

Page 39

the two most crying national scandals of the western “congests” and the homeless evicted tenants. No doubt there were many good and well-meaning men in the Party, and out of it, who thought this Bill should have been accepted as “an instalment of justice.” But there are times when to be moderate is to be criminally weak, and this was one of them. It is as certain as anything in life or politics can be that if the Bill of 1902 had been accepted, the Irish tenants would be still going gaily on under the old rent-paying conditions. The United Irish League was still in the first blush of its pristine vigour, and when the delegates of the National Directory came up from the country to Dublin they soon showed the mettle they were made of. They wanted no paltry compromises, and it was then and there decided to enter upon a virile campaign against rack-renters, grazing monopolists and land-grabbers such as would convince the Government in a single winter how grossly they had under-estimated the requirements of the country.

Some of the older men of the Party were pessimistic about the new campaign. Messrs Dillon, Davitt and T.P. O’Connor wrote a letter to Mr O’Brien remonstrating with him, in a tone of gentle courtesy, on the extreme character of his speeches and actions. But Mr O’Brien was not to be deflected from his purpose by any friendly pipings of this kind. The country was with him. The country was roused to a pitch of passionate resistance to the Wyndham Bill, and the Government, seeing which way the wind blew, and realising that the time for half-measures was past, withdrew their precious Purchase Bill. Then followed a fierce conflict along the old lines. The Government sought to suppress the popular agitation by the usual antiquated methods. Proclamation followed proclamation, until two-thirds of the Irish counties, and the cities of Dublin, Cork and Limerick, were proclaimed under the Coercion Act and the ordinary tribunals of justice abolished. Public meetings were suppressed. The leaders of the people were thrown into prison: at one time no less than ten members of Parliament were in jail. The country was seething with turmoil and discontent and there was no knowing where the matter would end. The landlords, feeling the necessity for counter-action of some kind, organised a Land Trust of L100,000 to prosecute Messrs Redmond, Davitt, Dillon and O’Brien for conspiracy. The United Irish League replied by starting a Defence Fund and arranging that Messrs Redmond, Davitt and Dillon should go to the United States to make an appeal in its support. All the elements of social convulsion were gathering their strength, when an unknown country gentleman wrote a letter to the Irish newspapers dated 2nd September 1902, in the following terms:—



Page 40

“For the last two hundred years the land war in this country has raged fiercely and continuously, bearing in its train stagnation of trade, paralysis of commercial business and enterprise and producing hatred and bitterness between the various sections and classes of the community. To-day the United Irish League is confronted by the Irish Land Trust, and we see both combinations eager and ready to renew the unending conflict. I do not believe there is an Irishman, whatever his political feeling, creed or position, who does not yearn to see a true settlement of the present chaotic, disastrous and ruinous struggle. In the best interests, therefore, of Ireland and my countrymen I beg most earnestly to invite the Duke of Abercorn, Mr John Redmond, M.P., Lord Barrymore, Colonel Saunderson, M.P., the Lord Mayor of Dublin, the O’Conor Don, Mr William O’Brien, M.P., and Mr T.W. Russell, M.P., to a Conference to be held in Dublin within one month from this date. An honest, simple and practical suggestion will be submitted and I am confident that a settlement will be arrived at.”

The country rubbed its eyes to see who it was that had put forward this audacious but not entirely original proposal. (It had been suggested by Archbishop Walsh fifteen years before.) Captain John Shawe-Taylor’s name suggested nothing to the Nationalist leaders. They had never heard of him before. In the landlord camp he stood for nothing and had no authority—he was simply the young son of a Galway squire, with entire unselfishness and boundless patience, who conceived that he had a mission to settle this tremendous problem that had been rendered only the more keen by forty-two Acts of the Imperial Parliament that had been vainly passed for its settlement. It is surely one of the strangest chances of history that where generations of statesmen and parliaments had failed the *via media* for a final arrangement should have been made by an unknown officer who prosecuted his purpose to such effect that he forced his way into the counsels of the American Clan-na-Gael, and even, as we are told, “beyond the ante-chambers of royalty itself.” It is probable that Captain Shawe-Taylor’s invitation would have been regarded as the usual Press squib had it not been followed two days later by a public communication from Mr Wyndham in the following terms:—

“No Government can settle the Irish Land Question. It must be settled by the parties interested. The extent of useful action on the part of any Government is limited to providing facilities, in so far as that may be possible, for giving effect to any settlement arrived at by the parties. It is not for the Government to express an opinion on the opportuneness of the moment chosen for holding a conference or on the selection of the persons invited to attend. Those who come together will do so on their own initiative and responsibility. Any conference is a step in the right direction if it brings the prospect of a settlement between the parties near, and as far as it enlarges the probable scope of operations under such a settlement.”

Page 41

This official declaration gave an importance and a significance to Captain Shawe-Taylor's letter which otherwise would never have attached to it. The confession that "no Government can settle the Irish Land Question" was in itself a most momentous admission. It was the most ample justification of nationalism, which held that a foreign Parliament was incompetent to legislate for Irish affairs, and now the accredited mouthpiece of the Government in Ireland had formally subscribed to this doctrine. This admission was in itself and in its outflowing an event comparable only to Gladstone's conversion to Home Rule. It amounted to a challenge to Irishmen to prove their competence to settle the most sorely-beset difficulty that afflicted their country. Not only were Irishmen invited to settle this particularly Irish question, but they were given what was practically an official assurance that the Unionist Party would sponsor their agreement, within the limits of reason.

Immediately Captain Shawe-Taylor's proposal became canvassed of the newspapers and the politicians. Mr Dillon seemed to be sceptical of it, as a transparent landlord dodge. It was, however, enthusiastically welcomed by the *Freeman*, whilst *The Daily Express*, the organ of the more unbending of the territorialists, denounced it mercilessly, and no sooner did the Duke of Abercorn, Lord Barrymore, the O'Connor Don and Colonel Saunderson learn that Mr Redmond, the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Mr T.W. Russell and Mr O'Brien were willing to join the Conference than they wrote to Captain Shawe-Taylor declining his invitation. The Landowners Convention, the official landlord organisation, also by an overwhelming majority decided against any peace parley with the tenants' representatives. But the forces in favour of a conference were daily gaining force even amongst the landlord class; whilst on the tenants' side a meeting of the Irish Catholic Hierarchy, attended by three archbishops and twenty-four bishops, with Cardinal Logue in the chair, cordially approved the Land Conference project and put on record their earnest hope "that all those on whose co-operation the success of this most important movement depends may approach the consideration of it in the spirit of conciliation in which it has been initiated." The Irish Party, on the motion of Mr Dillon, also unanimously adopted a resolution approving of the action taken by Messrs Redmond, O'Brien and Harrington in expressing their willingness to meet the landlord representatives. The mass of the landlords were so far from submitting to the veto of the Landowners' Convention that, headed by men of such commanding position and ability as the Earl of Dunraven, Lord Castletown, the Earl of Meath, Lord Powerscourt, the Earl of Mayo, Colonel Hutcheson-Poe and Mr Lindsay Talbot Crosbie, they formed a Conciliation Committee of their own to test the opinion of the landlords over the heads of the Landowners Convention. The plebiscite taken by this Committee more than justified them. By a vote of 1128 to 578 the landlords of Ireland declared themselves in favour of a Conference, and empowered the Conciliation Committee to nominate representatives on their behalf.

Page 42

Thus the first stage of the struggle for a settlement by consent was victoriously carried.

The next stage was the discussion of the terms upon which the landlords would allow themselves to be expropriated throughout the length and breadth of the land. Here there were, unfortunately, violent divergences of opinion on the tenants' side. Mr O'Brien postulated, as an essential ingredient of any settlement that could hope for success, that the State should step in with a liberal bonus to bridge over the difference between what the tenants could afford to give and the landlords afford to take. When this proposal was first mooted it was regarded as a counsel of perfection, and Mr O'Brien was looked upon as a genial visionary or a well-meaning optimist. But nobody thought it was a demand that the Government or Parliament would agree to. Happily, however, for the foresight of Mr O'Brien, it was his much-derided bonus scheme which became the very pivot of the Land Conference Report.

Meanwhile events were moving rapidly behind the scenes. It was conveyed to Messrs Redmond, Davitt, Dillon and O'Brien that Mr Wyndham had offered the Under-Secretaryship for Ireland to Sir Antony MacDonnell, who had lately retired from the position of Governor of Bengal. They were told by his brother, Dr Mark Antony MacDonnell, who was one of the Nationalist members, that Sir Antony was hesitating much as to his decision. Sir Antony conveyed that he had made it clear to Mr Wyndham that, as he was an Irish Nationalist and a believer in self-government, he could not think of going to Ireland to administer a Coercion regime, and, further, that he favoured a bold and generous settlement of the University difficulty. Mr Wyndham, it was understood, had given the necessary assurances, and Sir Antony now wished it to be conveyed to the Irish leaders that he would not accept the post against their will or without a certain measure, at least, of benevolent toleration on their part.

All these happenings foreshadowed a joyous transformation of the political scene, to the incalculable advantage of those who had made such a magnificent stand for Irish rights; but the Irish Party was determined that until rumours had crystallised into realities they were going to relax none of their extra-constitutional pressure upon the Government. It was, for instance, resolved to begin the Autumn Session with a resounding protest against Coercion and to carry on the conflict in the country more determinedly than ever.

The just and reasonable demand for a day to debate the administration was unaccountably avoided by the Government, whose reply was that a day would be granted if the demand came from the official Liberal Opposition. The Nationalists could not submit to this degradation of their independent position in Parliament, and when they attempted to secure their end by a motion for the adjournment of the House they found that two Irish Unionists had "blocked" them by placing

Page 43

on the Order Paper certain omnibus resolutions on the state of Ireland. Since the days of Parnellite obstruction such scenes were not witnessed as those that followed. The Party defied all rules of law and order, worried the Government by all sort of lawless interruptions and irrelevant questions, flagrantly flouted the authority of the chair and, finally, after a week of Parliamentary anarchy, it was determined that even more extreme courses would be adopted unless the constitutional right of Ireland to be heard in the Chamber was conceded. Hint of this was conveyed to Mr Speaker Gully, who, regardful of the honour of the House, used his good offices with the Government to such effect that the blocking motions were incontinently withdrawn and the discussion in due course took place.

Whilst these developments were taking place Mr O'Brien had taken every possible precaution to guard himself against any charge of autocracy in the direction of the movement, whether in Parliament or in the country. At the request of his colleagues on the Land Conference he had drafted a Memorandum containing the basis of settlement which would be acceptable to Nationalist opinion. This was submitted to Messrs Redmond, Davitt and Sexton, with an urgent entreaty for their freest criticism or any supplementary suggestions of their own. None of these could, therefore, complain that Mr O'Brien was attempting to do anything over their heads. And impartial judgment will declare that if either Mr Sexton, Mr Dillon or Mr Davitt had views of their own, or had any vital disagreements with Mr O'Brien's suggestions, now was the time to declare them. Far from committing himself to any dissent, when Mr O'Brien, after a fortnight, wrote to Mr Sexton for the return of his Memorandum, Mr Sexton wrote:

"I have read the Memo. carefully two or three times and now return it to you as you want to use it and have no other copy. It will take some time to look into your proposals with anything like sufficient care. You will hear from me as soon as I think I can say anything that may possibly be of use."

Be it here noted that Mr Sexton never did communicate, even when he had looked into Mr O'Brien's proposals "with sufficient care." Later he waged implacable war on the Land Conference Report and the Land Act from his commanding position as Managing Director of *The Freeman's Journal* (the official National organ). He did so in violation of the promise on which the Party had entrusted him with that position, that he would never interfere in its political direction.

Other informal meetings between Sir Antony MacDonnell and the Irish leaders followed, the purpose of Sir Antony being, before he accepted office in the Irish Government, to gather the views of leading Irishmen, especially as to the possibility of a genuine land settlement, which he regarded as the foundation of all else. Subsequently it transpired that Mr Sexton had engaged in some negotiations on his own

Page 44

account with Sir Antony MacDonnell, and it is not improbable that part at least of his quarrel with the Land Conference was that the settlement propounded by it superseded and supplanted his own scheme. Neither Mr O'Brien nor his friends were made aware of these private pourparlers, entered into without any vestige of authority from the Party or its leader, and they only learnt of them casually afterwards. The incident is instructive of how the path of the peacemaker is ever beset with difficulties, even from among his own household.

After surmounting a whole host of obstacles the Land Conference at long last assembled in the Mansion House, Dublin, on 20th December 1902. Mr Redmond submitted the final selection of the tenants' representatives to a vote of the Irish Party and, with the exception of one member who declined to vote, the choice fell unanimously upon those named in Captain Shawe-Taylor's letter. Although their findings were subsequently subjected to much embittered attack, no one had any right to impugn their authority, capacity, judgment or intimate knowledge of the tenants' case.

The landlords' representatives were also fortunately chosen. The Earl of Dunraven was a man of the most statesmanlike comprehension, whose high patriotic purpose in all the intervening years has won for him an enduring and an honourable place in the history of his country. He strove to imbue his own landlord class with a new vision of their duty and their destiny, and if only a few of the later converts to the national claim of Ireland had supported him when he came forward first, in favour of the policy of national reconciliation, many chapters of tragedy in our national life would never have been written. With a close knowledge of his labours and his personality I can write this of him—that a man more passionately devoted to his country, more sincerely anxious to serve her highest interests, or more intrepid in pursuing the courses and supporting the causes he deems right, does not live. He has been a light in his generation and to his class, and he deserves well of all men who admire a moral courage superior to all the shafts of shallow criticism and a patriotism which undoubtedly seeks the best, as he sees it, for the benefit of his country. And more than this cannot be said of the greatest patriot who ever lived. The Earl of Mayo also brought a fine idealism and high patriotism to the Conference Council Board. He had a genuine enthusiasm for the development of Irish industries and was the moving spirit in the Irish Arts and Crafts Exhibitions. Colonel Hutcheson-Poe, a gallant soldier, who had lost a leg in Kitchener's Soudan Campaign, a gentleman of sound judgment and excellent sense, was one of the moderating elements in the Conference. Finally, Colonel Nugent Everard represented one of the oldest Anglo-Irish families of the Pale and the author of several projects tending to the betterment of the people. The tenants' representatives presented a concise list of their own essential requirements as drafted by Mr O'Brien. It was as follows:—



Page 45

BASIS.—ABOLITION OF DUAL OWNERSHIP

1. For landlords, net second-term income, less all outgoings.
2. For occupiers, reduction of not less than 20 per cent. in second-term rents or first-term correspondingly reduced. Decennial reductions to be retained.
3. Difference between landlords' terms and occupiers' terms to be made up by State bonus and reduced interest with, in addition, purchase money in cash and increased value for resale of mansion and demesne.
4. Complete settlement of evicted tenants' question an indispensable condition.
5. Special and drastic treatment for all congested districts in the country (as defined by the Bill of 1902).
6. Sales to be between parties or through official commissioners as parties would prefer.
7. Non-judicial and future tenants to be admitted.
8. (Query.) Sporting rights to be a matter of agreement.

I do not propose to go into any detailed account of what transpired at the sittings (six in number) of the Land Conference. All this information is available in Mr O'Brien's *An Olive Branch in Ireland*. Suffice it to say that seven out of eight of the tenants' requirements were conceded outright and the eighth was covered by a compromise which would have enabled any tenant in the country, whether non-judicial or future tenants, to become the proprietor of his own holding on reasonable terms. On 4th January 1903 a unanimous report was published. The country scarcely expected this, and its joy at this ever-memorable achievement was correspondingly greater. It was inconceivable that the landlords should have, in solemn treaty, signed their own death warrant as territorialists, yet this was the amazing deed to which they affixed their sign manual when their four representatives signed the Land Conference Report.

Ever since the first Anglo-Norman set foot in Ireland and began to despoil the ancient clans of their land there has been trouble in connection with the Irish Land Question. The new race of landlords regarded their Irish land purely as a speculation, not as a home; they were in great part absentees, having no aim in Ireland beyond drawing their rents. They had no duties to their tenants in the sense that English landlords have. They had no natural ties with the country and they regarded themselves as free from all the duties or obligations of ownership. They never advanced capital for the improvement of the land or the erection of buildings, and never put a farthing into the



cultivation of the soil. The tenant had to do everything out of his own sweat and blood —build his home and out-offices, clean and drain the land, make the fences, lay down the roads and, when he had done all this and made the property more valuable, his rent was raised on him, even beyond the value of the improvements he had effected. Woe to the

Page 46

industrious man, for he was taxed upon his industry! And yet who is not familiar with the foolish and the ignorant tribe of scribblers who, with no knowledge of the facts, prate about “the lazy Irish”? And if they were lazy—which I entirely deny—who made them so? Had they no justification for their “laziness”? Why should they wear their lives out so that a rapacious landlord whom they never saw should live in riotousness and debauchery in the hells of London or the Continent?

“One could count on one’s fingers,” said the Cowper Commission in 1887, “the number of Irish estates on which the improvements have been made by the landlord.” The Irish landlord class never did a thing for Ireland except to drain her of her life-blood—to rob and depopulate and destroy, to make exaction after exaction upon the industry of her peasants, until their wrongs cried aloud for redress, if not for vengeance. In England it was estimated in 1897 that the landlord class had spent in investments in landlord property a sum estimated at L700,000,000. These can justly claim some right in the land. In Ireland the landlord was simply the owner of “the raw earth”—the bare proprietor of the soil, a dead weight upon the industry and honest toil of the tenant, receiving a rent upon the values that the labour and the energy of generations of members of a particular family had created. The Irish landlord and his horde of hangers-on—his agents, his bailiffs, his process-servers, his bog-rangers, his rent-warners—created a system built upon corruption, maintained in tyranny, and enforced with all the ruthless severities of foreign laws enacted solely for the benefit of England’s garrison. “I can imagine no fault,” said Mr Arthur Balfour, speaking as Prime Minister in the House of Commons, 4th May 1903, “attaching to any land system which does not attach to the Irish system.” Evictions in Ireland came to be known as “sentences of death,” so cruel and numerous were they until the popular agitation was strong enough to check them.

Even the Gladstonian legislation of 1881, though it admittedly did something substantial towards redressing the balance between landlord and tenant by securing to the tenants what were known as “the three F.’s”—viz. Fixity of Tenure, Fair Rent, and Free Sale—yet left the question in a wholly unsettled state. The fixing of fair rents, no doubt, acted as a curb on landlord rapacity, but from the tenants’ point of view it was a wholly vicious, indeterminate and unsatisfactory system. It was incentive to indifferent farming, since the commissioners who had the fixing of rents, and the inspectors who examined the farms, made their valuations upon the farms as they saw them. True, the tenant could claim for his improvements, but in practice this was no real safeguard. The more industrious the tenant the higher the rent—the less industrious and the less capable the lower the figure to be paid.



Page 47

Hence, after the failure of countless Acts of Parliament, it was borne in upon all earnest land-reformers that there could be only one final and satisfactory solution: that was the abolition of dual ownership—in other words, the buying out of the landlord and the establishment of the tenant in the single and undisputed ownership of the soil on fair and equitable terms. A tentative start had been made in land purchase by the Land Purchase Act of 1885—called, after its author, the Ashbourne Act. This experiment had proved an immense success, for in six years the ten millions sterling assigned for its operations were exhausted and 25,867 tenants had been turned into owners of their farms.

It became clear that a scheme of purchase which would, within a definite period, root out the last vestige of landlordism was the one only real and true solution for the land problem. And now, blessed day, and glory to the eyes that had lived to see it, and undying honour to the men whose genius and sacrifices had made it possible, the decree had gone forth that end there must be to landlordism. And, wonder of wonders, the landlords themselves had agreed to the fiat decreeing their own extinction as a ruling caste. It was with heartfelt hope and relief, and with the sense of a great victory achieved, that the country received the wondrous news of the success of the Land Conference. The dawn of a glorious promise had broken through the long night of Ireland's suffering, but the mischief-makers were already at work to see that the noonday sun of happiness did not shine too strongly or too steadily.

CHAPTER X

LAND PURCHASE AND A DETERMINED CAMPAIGN TO KILL IT

I can only rapidly sketch the events that followed the publication of the Land Conference Report. Mr Sexton made it his business in *The Freeman's Journal* to decry its findings on the sinister ground that they offered too much to the landlords and were not sufficiently favourable to the tenants, sneering at the proposal for a bonus, hinting that no Government would find money for this purpose. Mr Davitt, who was an earnest disciple of Henry George's ideal of Land Nationalisation, naturally enough found nothing to like in the proposals for land purchase, which would set up a race of peasant-proprietors who would never consent to surrender their ownership to the State and would consequently make the application of the principles of Land Nationalisation for ever impossible in Ireland. Besides, Michael Davitt had cause for personal hatred of landlordism, which exiled his parents after eviction, and incidentally meant the loss of an arm to himself, and a violence of language which would be excusable in him would not be justifiable or allowable in the cases of men who had not suffered similarly, such as Messrs Dillon and Sexton. Yet the fault was not theirs if the Land Conference did not end in wreckage and such a glorious chance of national reconciliation and appeasement was not lost to Ireland.



Page 48

In the meantime Sir Antony MacDonnell, greatly daring and, I would likewise say, greatly patriotic, accepted the offer of the Irish Under-Secretaryship in a spirit of self-abnegation beyond praise. Mr Redmond and Mr O'Brien had, at his request, met him, early in February, 1903, to discuss the provisions of the contemplated Purchase Bill. It may be remarked that Messrs Dillon and Davitt were invited to meet Sir Antony on the same occasion, but they declined. They apparently desired the position of greater freedom and less responsibility, from which they could deliver their attacks upon their friends. They received little support from the country in their guerrilla warfare on the Land Conference findings. The Standing Committee of the Catholic Hierarchy left no room for doubt as to their views. They declared the holding of the Land Conference "to be an event of the best augury for the future welfare of both classes" (landlords and tenants), and they expressed the hope that its unanimity would result in legislation which would settle the Land Question once for all "and give the Irish people of every class a fair opportunity to live and serve their native land." The Irish Party and the National Directory of the United Irish League, the two bodies invested with sovereign authority to declare the national policy, unanimously, at specially convened meetings, approved the findings of the Land Conference and accepted them as the basis of a satisfactory settlement of the Land Question. Neither Mr Dillon nor Mr Davitt attended either of these meetings. Indeed, Mr Dillon ostentatiously took his departure from Dublin on the morning the meetings were held, but strangely enough he attended an adjourned meeting of the Party at Westminster the following day and opposed a proposal to raise the question of the Land Conference Report on the Address. Mr Redmond entered a dignified protest against Mr Dillon's conduct, pointing out that the previous day was Mr Dillon's proper opportunity for submitting any objections of his to his colleagues of the Party and of the National Directory. Mr Dillon did not find a single supporter for his attitude, and he was obliged to disclaim, with some heat, that he had any grievance in reference to the Conference. Next day he went abroad for the benefit of his health.

The debate on the Amendment to the Address had the most gratifying results. Mr Wyndham accepted, in principle, the Land Conference Agreement and announced that the Government would smooth the operations of Land Purchase by a bonus of twelve millions sterling as a free grant to Ireland. The debate accomplished another striking success, that it elicited from all the men of light and leading in the Liberal Party—from Mr Morley, Sir H. Campbell-Bannerman, Sir E. Grey, Mr Haldane and Mr John Burns—expressions of cordial adhesion to the policy of pacification outlined by the Chief Secretary, thus effecting the obliteration of all English Party distinctions for the first time where one of Ireland's supreme interests was concerned. It required only the continuance of this spirit to give certain assurance of Ireland's early deliverance from all her woes and troubles. But an adverse fate, in the form of certain perverse politicians, ordained it otherwise.



Page 49

On 25th March 1903 Mr Wyndham introduced his Bill. It adopted fully the fundamental principles of the Land Conference and undertook to find Imperial funds for the complete extinction of landlordism in Ireland within a period which Mr Wyndham estimated at fifteen years. Furthermore the tenants were to obtain the loans on cheaper terms than had ever been known before—viz. an interest of 2-3/4 per cent. and a sinking fund of 1/2 per cent., being a reduction in the tenants' annuity from L4 to L3, 5s. as compared with the best of the previous Acts. In addition a State grant-in-aid to the extent of L12,000,000—roughly equivalent to three years' purchase—was produced to bridge the gap between what the tenants could afford to pay and the landlords to accept. The Bill fell short of the requirements of the Land Conference in certain respects, notably in that it proposed to withhold one-eighth of the freehold from the tenants as an assertion of State right in the land, and that the clauses dealing with the Evicted Tenants and Congested questions were vague and inadequate. Other minor defects there also were, but nothing that might not be remedied in Committee by conciliatory adjustments. A National Convention was summoned for 16th April to consider whether the Bill should be accepted or otherwise. Previously there was much subterranean communication between Messrs Dillon, Davitt, Sexton and T.P. O'Connor, all with calculated intent to damage or destroy the Bill. And it is also clear that certain members of the Irish Party (Messrs Dillon and T.P. O'Connor), who were pledge-bound to support majority rule "in or out of Parliament," were carrying on official negotiations of their own with the Minister in charge of the Bill and were using the organ of the Party to discredit principles and proposals to which the Party had given its unanimous assent. It would not, in the circumstances, be unjust to stigmatise this conduct as disloyalty, if not exactly treachery, to the recorded decisions of the Party. At any rate it was the source and origin of incredible mischief and the most deplorable consequences to Ireland. The opponents of the Bill made a concerted effort to stampede the National Convention from arriving at any decision regarding the Bill. They wanted it to postpone judgment. But the Convention, in every sense magnificently representative of all that was sound and sincere in the constitutional movement, was too much alive to all the glorious possibilities of the policy of national reconciliation which was taking shape and form before their eyes to brook any of the ill-advised counsels of those who had determined insidiously on the wreck of this policy.

In all the great Convention there were only two voices raised in support of the rejection of the Bill. And when Mr Davitt moved the motion, concerted between Mr T.P. O'Connor, Mr Sexton and himself, that the Convention should suspend judgment until it was brought in its amended Third Reading Form before an adjourned sitting of the Convention, he was so impressed by the enthusiastic unanimity of the delegates that he offered, after some parley, to withdraw his motion, and thus this great and authoritative assembly pledged the faith of the Irish nation to the policy of national reconciliation and gave its loyal adhesion to the authors of that policy.

Page 50

But this decision of the people, constitutionally and legitimately expressed, was not long to remain unchallenged. Immediately after the Convention Mr Davitt waited upon Mr Redmond, at the Gresham Hotel, Dublin, and blandly told him: "I have had a wire from Dillon to-day from the Piraeus, to say he is starting by the first boat for home and from this day forth O'Brien and yourself will have Dillon, T.P. and myself on your track." Thus was set on foot what, with engaging candour, Mr Davitt himself later described in an article he contributed to *The Independent Review* as "a determined campaign" against the national policy which had been authoritatively endorsed and approved by every organisation in the country entitled to speak on the subject. The country has had to pay much in misery, in the postponement of its most cherished hopes and in the holding up of land purchase over great areas owing to the folly, the madness and the treachery of this "determined campaign." Mr Dillon, at a later stage, with a certain Machiavellian cunning, raised the cry of "Unity" from every platform in the country against those who had never acted a disloyal part in all their lives, whilst his own political conscience never seemed to trouble him when he was flagrantly and foully defying that very principle of unity which he had pledged himself to maintain and uphold "in or out of Parliament."

The National Convention was followed by an event which might easily have been made a turning point in Ireland's good fortune had it been properly availed of. Lord Dunraven and his landlord Conciliation Committee met the day after the Land Convention and resolved to support sixteen out of the seventeen Nationalist amendments. They furthermore sent a message to Mr Redmond offering to co-operate actively with the members of the Irish Party throughout the Committee stage of the Wyndham Bill. Every consideration of national policy and prudence would seem to urge the acceptance of this generous offer. It would, if accepted, be the outward and visible sign of that new spirit of grace that had entered into Irish relations with the foregathering of the Land Conference. But fear of what Mr Dillon and the *Freeman* might do if this open association with a landlord—even if a friendly landlord—interest took place apparently operated on Mr Redmond's judgment. Although urged by Mr O'Brien, who made the utmost allowance for the leader's difficulties, to accept the offer of Lord Dunraven and his friends for continued co-operation, Mr Redmond temporised, and the opportunity passed into the limbo of golden possibilities gone wrong.



Page 51

When Mr Dillon, in pursuance of his wire to Mr Davitt, returned from his holiday, he proceeded to make good the threat to be “on the track of Redmond and O’Brien.” He made himself as troublesome as he could during the Committee stage of the Bill and did his utmost to force its rejection. He sought to commit the Party to a policy which must have meant the defeat or withdrawal of the measure. He made vicious personal attacks upon Lord Dunraven. He did everything in his power to delay and frustrate the passage of the Bill in Committee. And the most generous construction that can be placed upon his actions is that he did all this in support of the theory, which he is known to have consistently held, that Home Rule should precede the settlement of the Land Question, or any other Irish question. Notwithstanding Mr Dillon’s criticisms, not then well understood either in the Party or the country, the Bill at length emerged triumphantly from its ordeal, with the good will of all parties in Parliament. It should have created—and it would, if it had only been given a fair chance—a new heaven and a new earth in Ireland. As far as could be prognosticated all the omens were favourable. Even the atmosphere of administration, so important a matter where any Irish Act is concerned, was of the most auspicious kind. The Lord-Lieutenant was Lord Dudley, who was immensely popular in Ireland, and who had made public proclamation of his desire that “Ireland should be governed in accordance with Irish ideas.” Two out of the three Estates Commissioners, in whose hands the actual administration of the Act lay, were men of whose absolute impartiality the Nationalist opinion of the country was assured. Sir Antony MacDonnell was the power in Dublin Castle, and not much likely to be intimidated by the permanent gang there. All that was required was that the Irish Party and the United Irish League should agree upon a broad-based policy for combining the various classes affected to extract the best possible advantage from the provisions of the Act. A meeting of the National Directory was summoned to formulate such a policy, but shortly before it was held Mr Dillon went down to Swinford and, from the board-room of the workhouse there, definitely raised the standard of revolt against the new Land Act. Nothing could be said against his action if he had come out from the Party and fulminated against its authority, but to remain a member of the Party and then to indict its conduct of the nation’s business was, to put it mildly, indefensible. He denounced the new spirit of conciliation that had been so fast gaining ground, attacked the landlords, who had proved themselves friendly to a settlement, in rather ferocious language, and spoke in violent terms of those who would “in a moment of weakness mortgage the future of Ireland to an intolerable extent.” Clearly Mr Dillon intended carrying out his threat of “taking the field” against Mr Redmond and Mr O’Brien and of damning the consequences. But the country was not yet “rattled” into disaffection by Mr Dillon’s melancholy vaticinations and rather vulgar appeals to the baser passions of greed and covetousness which are perhaps more firmly rooted in the peasant than in any other class.

Page 52

The National Directory, unintimidated by Mr Dillon's pronouncement, met and calmly proceeded to formulate plans for the better working of the Purchase Act. A clear and definite plan of campaign was outlined for the testing of the Act. Mr O'Brien was also in favour of handling the disaffection of Mr Dillon and the *Freeman* in straightforward manner and of pointing out to them their duty of loyally supporting the decisions of the Party and of the League. Mr Redmond shrank from decisive action. It was part of the weakness of his estimable character that he always favoured "the easier way." He thought that when the Directory spoke out the recalcitrant elements would subside. Little did he understand the malignant temper of the powerful group who, with the aid of the supposedly national organ, were determined to kill the operations of the Purchase Act and to destroy the policy of Conciliation which had promised such splendid fruit in other directions. Mr Dillon went to Swinford again and he and his associates did everything in their power to stir up a national panic and to spread the impression that the Purchase Act was a public calamity, "a landlord swindle," and that it would lead straight to national bankruptcy.

Even yet those who sought the wreck and ruin of land purchase might be met with and fought outright if the announcement had not appeared in the *Freeman* that Mr Redmond had sold his Wexford estate at "24-1/2 years' purchase," or over two years' purchase higher in the case of second-term rents and four and a half years' purchase in the case of first-term rents than the prices which the National Directory had a few weeks previously resolved to fight for, with all the force of the tenants' organisation as a fair standard. True enough Mr Redmond was able to plead later that these were not the terms finally agreed upon between his tenants and himself, and beyond all question he made no profit out of the transaction. Where the mischief lay was in the original publication, which gave a headline to the landlords all over the country and, what was far more regrettable from the purely national standpoint, irretrievably tied the hands of Mr Redmond so far as making any heroic stand against Mr Dillon and his fellow-conspirators was concerned. Thus the country drifted along, bereft of firm leadership or strong guidance. Mr O'Brien had to hold his hand whilst "the determined campaigners" were more boldly and defiantly inveighing against the declared and adopted national policy and trampling upon every principle of Party discipline and loyalty. The situation might have been saved if Mr Redmond had taken his courage in both his hands, summoned the Party together and received from it an authoritative declaration defining anew the National policy and the danger that attended it from those who had set out recklessly to destroy it; or if he sought an opportunity for publicly recalling the country to its duty and its allegiance to himself



Page 53

and to the Party whose chosen leader he was. Mr Redmond was fully alive to the danger, but he hesitated about taking that bold action which could alone bring the recalcitrants to heel. He was afraid of doing anything which might provoke a fresh "split." Later he delivered himself of the unstatesmanlike and unworthy apophthegm: "Better be united in support of a short-sighted and foolish policy than divided in support of a far-sighted and wise one." This was the fatuous attitude which led him down the steep declivity that ended so tragically for him and his reputation. In those fateful days, when so much was in the balance for the future of Ireland, Mr O'Brien pressed his views earnestly upon Mr Redmond that unless he exercised his authority, and that of the Party and the Directory, it would be impossible for them to persevere in their existing programme, and that the only alternative left for him would be to retire and leave those who had opposed the policy of Conciliation a free stage for any more heroic projects they might contemplate. Mr Redmond still remained indecisive and Mr O'Brien—whether wisely or unwisely will always remain a debatable point with his friends—quietly quitted the stage, resigning his seat in Parliament, withdrawing from the Directory of the United Irish League, and ceasing publication of his weekly newspaper on the ground, as he says himself, that "the authorised national policy having been made unworkable, nothing remained, in order to save the country from dissension, except to leave its wreckers an absolutely free field for any alternative policy of their own."

It is no exaggeration to say that the country was thrown into a state of stupefaction by Mr O'Brien's retirement. It did not know the reason of it. Very few members of the Party did. I was then a member of it—perhaps a little on the outer fringe, but still an ordinarily intelligent member—and I was not aware of the underground factors and forces which had caused this thunderbolt out of the blue, as it were. Needless to say, the country was in a state of more abysmal ignorance still, and it is questionable whether outside of Munster, owing to a scandalous Press boycott of Mr O'Brien's speeches for many years afterwards, the masses of the people ever had an understanding of the motives which impelled him "to stand down and out" when he was undoubtedly supreme in the Party and in the United Irish League and when he might easily have overborne "the determined campaigners" if he had only knit the issue with them in a fair and square fight. This, however, was the thing of all others he wished to avoid. Perhaps if he could have foreseen how barren in any alternative policy his sapient critics were to be he might have acted otherwise, but the credit is due to him of making dissension impossible by leaving no second party to the quarrel.

Page 54

Speaking at Limerick a few days after his retirement, Mr Redmond avowed that Mr O'Brien's principles were his own, and added these memorable words: "But for Mr William O'Brien there would have been no Land Conference and no Land Act." Every effort was made to induce Mr O'Brien to withdraw his resignation. A delegation of the leading citizens of Cork travelled all the way to Mayo to entreat him to reconsider his decision. To them he said: "There is not the smallest danger of any split either in the Party, or in the League, or in the country. There will be a perfectly free field for the development of any alternative policy; and I will not use my retirement in any way whatever to criticise or obstruct; neither, I am certain, will anybody in the country who has any regard for my wishes."

But having got all they wanted, "the determined campaigners" mysteriously abandoned their determined campaign. Mr Dillon's health again required that he should bask 'neath the sunny southern skies of Italy, whilst Mr Davitt betook himself to the United States, without either of them making a single speech or publishing a single suggestion to the tenants how they were to guard themselves against the "inflated prices" and the national insolvency they had been threatening them with. Having destroyed the plans of the National Directory for testing the Purchase Act they had no guidance of their own to offer. The tenants were left leaderless, to make their own bargains as best they could, with the inevitable result that the landlords, thanks to "the determined campaigners," were able to force up prices two years above the standard which the Directory of the League had decided to stand out and fight for.

It used to be said of Daniel O'Connell that whenever *The Times* praised him he subjected himself to an examination of conscience to find out wherein he had offended as against Ireland. Likewise one would have supposed that when Mr Dillon found himself patted on the back by the extreme Orange gang he might have asked himself: "Wherein am I wrong to have earned the plaudits of these people?" For if Mr Dillon was rabid in his opposition to the policy of Conciliation the Ulster Orangemen were ferocious in their denunciation of it, Mr Moore, K.C., referred to it as "the cowardly, rotten, and sickening policy of Conciliation." Small wonder that the Orange extremists should have dreaded this policy, since it had already been the means of creating in the North an Independent Orange Order, who unhesitatingly declared as the first article of their creed that they were "Irishmen first of all," and who had an honest and enthusiastic spokesman in the House of Commons in the person of Mr Thomas Sloane, and an able and, indeed, a brilliant leader in Ireland in Mr Lindsay Crawford. But so it was—every advance towards national reconciliation and mutual understanding was opposed by those two divergent forces as if they had a common interest in defeating it.



Page 55

Mr O'Brien having retired from Cork, the vacancy should, in the ordinary course, have been filled in the course of a few weeks. But the Nationalists of "the City by the Lee" made it clear that they wanted no other representative than Mr O'Brien, and they forbade the issue of a writ for a new election. And so there was the extraordinary spectacle of a people who voluntarily disfranchised themselves rather than give up the last hope of a policy of National Conciliation in which they descried a Home Rule settlement by Consent as surely as the abolition of landlordism already decreed. As an example of loyalty and personal devotion, as well as of patriotic foresight, it would be difficult to parallel it. Towards the close of the session of 1904 Mr Jasper Tully, a more or less free lance member of the Party, took it upon himself to play them the trick of moving the writ for a new election. And the Nationalists of Cork knew their own business so well that, without a line of communication with Mr O'Brien, they had him nominated and re-elected without anybody dreaming that anything else was humanly possible. There were no conditions attaching to Mr O'Brien's re-election. He was free to rejoin the Irish Party if it should resume its position of twelve months ago or to remain out of it if a policy of mere destruction were persisted in. He was re-elected because the people of Cork had the most absolute confidence in his integrity, good faith and political judgment, and because they were convinced that his return to public life represented the only hope of the resumption of the great policy in which their confidence never for a moment wavered.

Within a week of Mr O'Brien's re-election an event took place which once again made it possible for him to take up the threads of his policy where he had surrendered them. The landlords' Conference Committee, to the number of three hundred of the leading Irish nobles and country gentlemen, met in Dublin and resolved themselves into a new Association, under Lord Dunraven's leadership, which was named the Irish Reform Association. It immediately issued a manifesto proclaiming "a policy of conciliation, of good will and of reform," by means of "a union of all moderate and progressive opinion irrespective of creed or class animosities," with the object of "the devolution to Ireland of a large measure of self-government" without disturbing the Parliamentary Union between Great Britain and Ireland.

Within three days of the publication of the manifesto Mr Redmond, who was on a mission to the States pleading for Irish-American support, cabled: "The announcement [of the Irish Reform Association] is of the utmost importance. It is simply a declaration for Home Rule and is quite a wonderful thing. With these men with us Home Rule may come at any moment." It is known that the idea of the Irish Reform Association had been talked over between Mr Wyndham, Lord Dunraven and Sir Antony MacDonnell, but it is probable that it would never have emerged into the concrete if the Cork election had not opened up the prospect of a fair and sympathetic national hearing for a project of self-government, now advocated for the first time by a body of Unionist Irishmen. Mr Redmond's fervid message from America also was as plain a welcome to the new movement for genuine national unity as words could express. But "the fly was in the ointment nevertheless."



Page 56

CHAPTER XI

THE MOVEMENT FOR DEVOLUTION AND ITS DEFEAT

The vital declaration of the objects of the Irish Reform Association was contained in the following passage:—

“While firmly maintaining that the Parliamentary Union between Great Britain and Ireland is essential to the political stability of the Empire and to the prosperity of the two islands, we believe that such a Union is compatible with the devolution to Ireland of a larger measure of self-government than she now possesses. We consider that this devolution, while avoiding matters of Imperial concern and subjects of common interest to the kingdom as a whole, would be beneficial to Ireland and would relieve the Imperial Parliament of a mass of business with which it cannot now deal satisfactorily. In particular we consider the present system of financial administration to be wasteful and inappropriate to the needs of the country.”

And then the manifesto proceeded to enumerate various questions of national reform “for whose solution we earnestly invite the co-operation of all Irishmen who have the highest interests of their country at heart.”

The enemies of Home Rule had no misconceptions either as to the purpose, scope or object of the Reform Association. They saw at once how absolutely it menaced their position—how completely it embodied in substance the main principle of the constitutional movement since the days of Parnell—namely, the control of purely Irish affairs by an Irish assembly subject to the supremacy of the Imperial Parliament. From debates which followed in the House of Lords (17th February 1905) it became clear that the new movement had no sinister origin—that it was honestly conceived and honestly intended for Ireland’s national advantage. But the Irish, whether of North or South, are a people to whom suspiciousness in politics is a sort of second nature. It is the inheritance of centuries of betrayals, treacheries and duplicities—broken treaties, crude diplomacies and shattered faiths. And thus we had a Unionist Attorney-General (now Lord Atkinson) asking “whether the Devolution scheme is not the price secretly arranged to be paid for Nationalist acquiescence in the settlement of the Land Question on gracious terms”; and *The Times* declaring (1st September 1904): “What the Dunraven Devolution policy amounts to is nothing more nor less than the revival in a slightly weakened and thinly disguised form of Mr Gladstone’s fatal enterprise of 1886”; whilst on the other hand those Irish Nationalists who followed Mr Dillon’s lead attacked the new movement with a ferocity that was as stupid as it was criminal. For at least it did not require any unusual degree of political intelligence to postulate that if *The Times*, Sir Edward Carson, *The Northern Whig* and other Unionist and Orange bravoes and journals were denouncing the Devolution proposals



Page 57

as “worse than Home Rule,” Irish Nationalists should have long hesitated before they joined them in their campaign of destruction and became the abject tools of their insensate hate. Sir Edward Carson wrote that, much as he detested the former proposals of Home Rule, he preferred them to “the insidious scheme put forward by the so-called Reform Association.” So incorrigibly foolish were the attacks of Mr Dillon and his friends on the Reform Association that Lord Rathmore was able to say in the House of Lords: “Not only did the Unionist Party in Ireland denounce the Dunraven scheme as worse than the Home Rule of Mr Gladstone, but their language was mild in comparison to the language of contempt which a great many of the Irish Nationalist patriots showered upon the proposals of the noble earl.”

It is the mournful tragedy of all this period that a certain section of Nationalist opinion should have seen in every advance towards a policy of conciliation, good will and understanding between brother Irishmen, some deep and sinister conspiracy against the National Cause, and in this unaccountable belief should have allowed themselves to become the dupes and to play the game of the bitterest enemies of Irish freedom. But so it was, to the bitter sorrow of Ireland; and many a blood-stained chapter has been written because of it. Whether a fatal blindness or an insatiate personal rancour dictated this incomprehensible policy Providence alone knows, but oceans of woe, and misery and malediction have flowed from it as surely as that the sun is in the heavens.

After Mr O’Brien’s retirement, as I have already remarked, the country was left without a policy or active national guidance. The leaders of the revolt against the authorised policy of the nation went abroad “for the benefit of their health.” (What a lot of humbug this particular phrase covers in political affairs only the initiated are aware of!) No sooner was the Cork election announced than Mr Dillon returned from his holiday, ready “to take the field” against the Irish Reform Association and anyone who dared to show it toleration or regard. He declared in a speech at Sligo that its one object was “to break national unity in Ireland and to block the advance of the Nationalist Cause,” and he went on to deliver this definite threat: “Now I say that any attempt such as was made the other day in the city of Cork to force on the branches of the national organisation, or on the National Directory itself, any vote of confidence in Lord Dunraven or any declaration of satisfaction at the foundation of this Association would tear the ranks of the Nationalists of Ireland to pieces.”



Page 58

Note Mr Dillon's extreme zeal for national unity—the man who, less than twelve months before, had set himself at the head of “a determined campaign to defy the decisions of the Irish Party, the National Directory and the United Irish League,” and who did not in the least scruple whether or not he “would tear the ranks of the Nationalists of Ireland to pieces” in the gratification of his purpose! The “attempt made in the city of Cork” which called forth Mr Dillon's thunders was a resolution of the Cork branch of the United Irish League which hailed with sympathy the establishment of the Irish Reform Association as proof of the continuance of the spirit of conciliation “among those classes of our countrymen who have hitherto held aloof from us”—a spirit which had already led to such happy results in the abolition of landlordism “by common consent,” and which was capable of “still wider and more blessed results in the direction of a National Parliament of our own.” The resolution also expressed gratification “at the statesmanlike spirit in which Mr Redmond has greeted the establishment of the new Association.” It will be observed that there was here a clear line of demarcation. Mr O'Brien and his friends wanted, in moderate and guarded language, without in any way binding themselves “to the particular views set forth in the programme of the Irish Reform Association,” to give a message of encouragement to a body of Irish Unionists, who, as Sir Edward Carson, *The Times* and every other enemy of Home Rule declared, had become converts to the National demand for self-government and who looked likely to bring the bulk of the Protestant minority in Ireland with them. Mr Dillon and those who thought with him savagely repelled this movement towards a national unity which would embrace all classes and creeds to the forgetfulness of past wrongs, animosities and deep divisions. It seemed to have got into their minds that the appearance of the Irish Reform Association covered some occult plot between Lord Dunraven, Mr Wyndham, Sir Antony MacDonnell and Mr O'Brien. Mr Davitt declared that “No party or leader can consent to accept the Dunraven substitute without betraying a national trust.” Others of lesser note denounced the new movement and its authors with every circumstance of insult and used language of a coarseness that deserves the severest condemnation.

Mr Joseph Devlin, who had succeeded Mr John O'Donnell as Secretary of the United Irish League, now began to be a rather considerable figure in Irish politics on the Dillonite side. He told his constituents in North Kilkenny that they were not going to seek “the co-operation of a few aristocratic nobodies,” and he, quite unjustly, as I conceive, attributed to Lord Dunraven and his friends a desire to weaken the national demand.



Page 59

During this time the Government had given no sign that the Devolution movement might not find favour in their sight. Had its main objects met with a more cordial reception from the arbiters of the national policy it is more than probable that the Unionist Government would have stood sponsor for a large and generous instalment of self-government which would have received the joyous assent of the Liberal Party and passed through both Houses of Parliament with the acclamations of everybody. In his first speech at Cork after his election Mr O'Brien sought to rouse the country to a real perception of the momentous issues that were at stake. He pointed out that the proposals of the Reform Association were only "mere preliminary materials for discussion and negotiation and that they are rather addressed towards the removal of the prejudices of Unionists than put forward as a final and unalterable answer to our national demand." And then he went on to say: "Lord Dunraven and his friends may be all that is diabolical, but at least they are not such born idiots as to expect us to surrender our own organisation, or, as it has been absurdly put, to coalesce with the new Association on such a programme." As a matter of fact, Lord Dunraven had, in the most outspoken manner, stated that he expected nothing from the Nationalists except friendly toleration and fair play, whilst he and those associated with him were engaged in the hard task of conquering the mass of racial prejudice and sectarian bigotry that had been for so long arrayed against the National claim.

The efforts to induce in the intransigent section of the Party a spirit of sweet reasonableness were, however, foredoomed to failure. Mr Dillon declined to address a meeting at Limerick, specially summoned to establish a concordat between the Irish leaders. Mr Redmond and Mr O'Brien accepted the invitation, and the former made it clear that he still regarded the Land Conference policy as the policy of the nation. He said: "It has been stated in some newspapers of our enemies that the Land Conference agreement, which was endorsed by the Irish Party, endorsed by the Directory of the League and endorsed by the National Convention and accepted by the people, has been in some way repudiated recently by us. I deny that altogether.... I speak to-day only for the people and, so far as the people are concerned, I say that the agreement, from the day it was entered upon down to this moment, has never been repudiated by anybody entitled to speak in their name."

Had the spirit of the Limerick meeting and the unity which it symbolised been allowed to prevail, all might yet have been well and the national platform might have been broadened out so that all men of good will who wished to labour for an independent and self-governed Ireland could stand upon it. But such a consummation was not to be. There was no arguing away the hostility of Mr Dillon, *The Freeman's Journal* and those others upon whom they imposed their will. Mr Dillon could give no better proof of statesmanship or generous sentiment than to refer to "Dunraven and his crowd" and to declare that "Conciliation, so far as the landlords are concerned, was another name for swindling."



Page 60

From the moment Mr Wyndham had placed his Purchase Act on the Statute Book, with the assent of all parties in England and Ireland, his hopes were undoubtedly set on the larger and nobler ambition of linking his name with the grant of a generous measure of self-government. The blood of a great Irish patriot, Lord Edward Fitzgerald, coursed through his veins, and it is not impossible that it influenced his Irish outlook and stimulated his purpose to write his name largely on Irish affairs. And at this time nothing was beyond his capacity or power. He was easily the most notable figure in the Cabinet, by reason of the towering success that had attended his effort to remove from the arena of perennial contention a problem that had daunted and defeated so many previous attempts at solution. In all quarters the most glorious future was prophesied for him. His star shone most brightly in the political firmament—and there were many in high places who were quite willing to hitch their wagon to it. He was immensely popular in the House and he had captured the public imagination by his many gifts and graces of intellect and character. He had an exquisite personality, a wonderful charm of manner, a most handsome and distinguished presence and was a perfect courtier in an age which knew his kind not at all. His like was not in Parliament, nor, indeed, can I conceive his like to be elsewhere in these rougher days, when the ancient courtesies seem to have vanished from our public life. There can be no doubt about it that in his first tentative approaches towards Home Rule Mr Wyndham received encouragement from leading members of the Cabinet, including Lord Lansdowne and Mr Balfour. Sir Antony MacDonnell had been the welcome guest of Lord Lansdowne at his summer seat in Ireland, and the latter made no secret of the fact that their conversation turned upon the larger question of Irish self-government. When Lord Dunraven was attacked in the House of Lords for his Devolution plans Lord Lansdowne “declined to follow Lord Rathmore in the trenchant vituperation Lord Dunraven’s scheme had encountered,” and he admitted that Sir Antony MacDonnell had been in the habit of conferring with Lord Dunraven on many occasions, with the full knowledge and approval of the Chief Secretary, and had collaborated with him “in working out proposals for an improved scheme of local government for Ireland.”

The Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, the Earl of Dudley, made open avowal of his sympathies and stated repeatedly that it was his earnest wish to see Ireland governed in accordance with Irish ideas.

It was in this friendly atmosphere that the Irish Reform Association propounded its scheme of Devolution which Mr T.P. O’Connor (before he came under the influence of Mr Dillon) happily described as “the Latin for Home Rule,” and which Mr Redmond welcomed in the glowing terms already quoted. The Convention of the United Irish League of America, representing the best Irish elements in the United



Page 61

States, also proclaimed the landlord concession as embodied in the Irish Reform Association to be “a victory unparalleled in the whole history of moral warfare.” Here was an opportunity such as Wolfe Tone, Robert Emmet, Thomas Davis and the other honoured patriots of Ireland’s love sighed for in vain, when, with the display of a generous and forgiving spirit on all sides, the best men of every creed and class could have been gathered together in support of an invincible demand for the restoration of Irish liberty. I do not know how any intelligent and impartial student of the events of that historical cycle can fail to visit the blame for the miscarriage of a great occasion, and the defeat of the definite movement towards the widest national union upon Mr Dillon and those who joined him in his “determined” and tragically foolish campaign. As a humble participator in the activities of the period, I dare say it is not quite possible for me to divest myself of a certain bias, but I cannot help saying that I am confirmed in the opinion that in addition to being the most melancholy figure in his generation Mr John Dillon was also the most malignant in that at every stage of his career, when decisive action had to be taken his judgment invariably led him to take the course which brought most misfortune upon his country and upon the hopes of its people.

Attacked on front and flank, assailed by Sir Edward Carson and his gang and denounced by Mr Dillon and his faithful henchmen, deserted by Mr Balfour at the moment when his support was vital, Mr Wyndham weakly allowed himself to be badgered into disowning Home Rule, thus sealing his doom as a statesman and as potential leader of his own party. The secret history of this time when it is made public will disclose a pitiful story of base intrigue and baser desertion and of a great and chivalrous spirit stretched on the rack of Ireland’s ill-starred destiny. I do not think it is any exaggeration of the facts to say that Wyndham was done to death, physically as well as politically, in those evil days. Driven from office, with the ruin of all his high hopes in shattered disorder around him, his proud soul was never able to recover itself, and he drifted out of politics and into the greater void without—so fine a gentleman in such utter disarray that the angels must have wept his fall.

That Mr William O’Brien did not meet a similar fate was due only to the fact that he was made of sterner fighting stuff—that he possessed a more intrepid spirit and a more indomitable will. But the base weapons of calumny and of viler innuendo were employed to injure him in the eyes of his fellow-countrymen, to whom he had devoted, in a manner never surely equalled or surpassed before, a life of service and sacrifice. *The Freeman’s Journal*, whilst suppressing Mr O’Brien’s speeches and arguments, threw its columns open to ruffianly attacks which no paper knowing his record should have published. In



Page 62

one of these he was charged with “unnatural services to insatiable landlordism.” He was charged by Mr Dillon and the *Freeman* with being actively engaged with Mr Wyndham, Sir Antony MacDonnell and Lord Dunraven in a plot to break up the Irish Party, and to construct a new Moderate Centre Party by selling eighteen Nationalist seats in Parliament to Lord Dunraven and his friends, and he was further charged with being concerned in a conspiracy having for its object the denationalisation of the *Freeman*. There were six libels in all, of so gross a character that Mr O’Brien, since reports of his speeches were systematically suppressed in every newspaper outside of Munster, was obliged to take his libellers into court and, before a jury of their fellow-countrymen at Limerick, to convict them of uttering six false, malicious and defamatory libels, and thus bring to the public knowledge the guilt of his accusers. Asked what his “unnatural services to insatiable landlordism” were, Mr O’Brien made this memorable reply: “To abolish it! All the Irish tenants had gained by the land agitation of the previous twenty years was a reduction of twenty per cent. My unnatural services under the Land Conference Agreement was to give them a reduction of *forty per cent.* more right away and the ownership of the soil of Ireland thrown in.”

Lord Dunraven on his own part took Mr Dillon publicly to task for his misrepresentations of him. He said that Mr Dillon “mentioned him as being more or less connected with a great variety of conspiracies and plots and with general clandestine arrangements.... He and George Wyndham were said to have been constantly plotting for the purpose of driving a wedge into the midst of the Nationalist Party. Well, as far as he was concerned, all these deals and all these conspiracies existed only in Mr Dillon’s fervid imagination.” And Lord Dunraven went on to express his sorrow that a man in Mr Dillon’s position should have taken up so unworthy a line.

Mr Dillon, when he had the opportunity of appearing before the Limerick jury, to justify himself, if he could, never did so. And he never expressed regret for having defamed his former friend and colleague and for having vilified honourable men, honourably seeking Ireland’s welfare. Upon which I must content myself with saying that history will pass its own verdict on Mr Dillon’s conduct.

CHAPTER XII

THE LATER IRISH PARTY—ITS CHARACTER AND COMPOSITION

To enable our readers to have a clearer understanding of all that has gone before and all that is to follow, I think it well at this stage to give a just impression of the Party, of its personnel, its method of working and its general character and composition.

Page 63

The Irish Party, as we know it, was originally the creation of Parnell, and was, perhaps, his most signal achievement. It became, under the genius of his leadership, a mighty constitutional force—disciplined, united, efficient and vigilant. It had the merit of knowing its own mind. It kept aloof from British Party entanglements. It was pledged to sit, act and vote together, and its members loyally observed the pledge both in the spirit and the letter, and did not claim the right to place their own individual interpretation upon it. Furthermore, it was a cardinal article of honour that members of the Party were to seek no favours from British Ministers, because it needs no argument to demonstrate that the Member of Parliament who pleads for favours for himself or preferment for his friends can possess no individual independence. He is shackled in slavery to the Minister to whom his importunities are addressed. He is simply a patriot on the make, despised by himself and despised by those to whom he addresses his subservient appeals. There was no place for such a one in Parnell's Irish Party, which embodied as nearly as possible that perfect political cohesion which is the dream of all great leaders. There were men of varying capacity and, no doubt, of differing thought in Parnell's Party, but where Ireland's national interests were concerned it was a united body, an undivided phalanx which faced the foe. And by the very boldness and directness of Parnell's policy, he won to his side in the country, not only all the moral and constitutional forces making for Nationalism, but the revolutionary forces—who yearned for an Irish Republic—as well. He was, therefore, not only the leader of a Party; he was much more—he was the leader of a United Irish nation. His aim was eminently sane and practical—to obtain the largest possible measure of national autonomy, and he did not care very much what it was called. But he made it clear that whatever he might accept in his time and generation was not to be the last word on the Irish Question. He fought with the weapons that came to his hand—and he used them with incomparable skill and judgment—with popular agitation in Ireland, with “direct action” of a most forcible and audacious kind in Parliament. A great leader has always the capacity for attracting capable lieutenants to his side. We need only refer to the example of Napoleon as overwhelming proof of this. And so out of what would ordinarily seem humble and unpromising material Parnell brought to his banner a band of young colleagues who have since imperishably fixed their place in Irish history. I am not writing the life-story of the members of Parnell's Party, but if I were it would be easy to show that most of the colleagues who have come to any measure of greatness since were men of no antecedent notoriety (I use the word in its better application), with possibly one exception, and it is somewhat remarkable that the son of John Blake Dillon, who owed perhaps



Page 64

not a little to the fact that he was his father's son, should have been the one who first showed signs of recalcitrancy against Party rule and discipline when he inveighed against the Land Act of 1881 and betook himself abroad for three years during the time when the national movement was locked in bitterest conflict with the Spencer Coercionist regime. Let it be at once conceded that Parnell's lieutenants were men whose gifts and talents would have in any circumstances carried them to eminent heights, but it might be said also they lost nothing from their early association with so great a personality and from the fact that he brought them into the gladiatorial arena, where their mental muscles were, so to speak, trained and tested and extended in combat with some of the finest minds of the age.

In the days when the later Irish Party had entered upon its decrepitude some of its leaders sought to maintain a sorry unity by shouting incessantly from the house-tops, as if it were some sacred formula which none but the unholy or those predestined to political damnation dare dispute: "Majority Rule." And a country which they had reduced to the somnambulistic state by the constant reiteration of this phrase unfortunately submitted to their quackery, and have had grave reason to regret it ever since. Parnell had very little respect for shams—whether they were sham phrases or sham politicians. He was a member of Butt's Home Rule Party but he was not to be intimidated from pursuing the course he had mapped out for himself by any foolish taunts about his "Policy of Exasperation"; he was a flagrant sinner against the principle of "majority rule," but time has proved him to be a sinner who was very much in the right. Mr Dillon used to hurl another name of anathema at our heads—the heads of those of us who were associated with Mr O'Brien in his policy of national reconciliation—he used to dub us "Factionists." It was not fair fighting, nor honest warfare, nor decent politics. It was the base weapon of a man who had no arguments of reason by which he could overwhelm an opponent, but who snatched a bludgeon from an armoury of certain evil associations which he knew would prevail where more legitimate methods could not.

I entered the Party in May 1901, having defeated their official candidate at a United Irish League Convention for the selection of a Parliamentary candidate for Mid-Cork on the death of Dr Tanner. In those days I was not much of a politician. My heart was with the neglected labourer and I stood, accordingly, as a Labour candidate, my programme being the social elevation of the masses, particularly in the vital matters of housing, employment and wages. I was not even a member of the United Irish League, being wholly concerned in building up the Irish Land and Labour Association, which was mainly an organisation for the benefit, protection and the education in social and citizen duty of the rural workers. Mr Joseph



Page 65

Devlin was sent down to the Convention to represent the Party and the League. It was sought to exclude a considerable number of properly accredited Labour delegates from the Convention, but after a stiff fight my friends and myself compelled the admission of a number just barely sufficient to secure me a majority. This was heralded as a tremendous triumph for the Labour movement, and it spoke something for the democratic constitution of the United Irish League, as drafted by Mr O'Brien, that it was possible for an outsider to beat its official nominee and thereby to become the officially adopted candidate of the League himself. In due course I entered the portals of the Irish Party, but though in it was, to a certain extent, not of it, in that I was more an observer of its proceedings than an active participant in its work. My supreme purpose in public life was to make existence tolerable for a class who had few to espouse their claims and who were in the deepest depths of poverty, distress and neglect. Hence, except where Labour questions and the general interests of my constituents were concerned, I stood more or less aloof from the active labours of the Party. I was in the position of a looker-on and a critic, and I saw many things that did not impress me at all too favourably.

In the years immediately following the General Election of 1900 the Party had a splendid solidarity and a fine enthusiasm. There had been just sufficient new blood infused into it to counteract the jealous humours and to minimise the weariness of spirit of those older members who had served in the halcyon days of Parnell and had gone through all the squalidness and impotence of the years of the Split. Had the Party been rightly handled, and led by a man of strong will and inflexible character, it could have been made the mightiest constitutional power for Ireland's emancipation. Unfortunately Mr John Redmond was not a strong leader. He unquestionably possessed many of the attributes of leadership—a dignified presence, distinguished deportment, a wide knowledge of affairs, a magnificent mastery of the forms and rules of the House of Commons, a noble eloquence and a sincere manner, but he lacked the vital quality of strength of character and energetic resolve. He was not, as Parnell was, strong enough to impose his will on others if he found it easier to give way himself. And thus from the very outset of his career as leader of the reunited Party he allowed his conduct to be influenced by others—very often, let it be said, against his own better judgment. Mr Redmond had a matchless faculty for stating the case of Ireland in sonorous sentences, but too often he was content to take his marching orders from those powers behind the throne who were the real manipulators of what passed for an Irish policy. In the shaping of this policy and in the general ordering of affairs, the rank and file of the members had very little say—they were hopelessly invertebrate and pusillanimous.

Page 66

The majority of them were mere automatons—very honest, very patriotic, exceedingly respectable, good, ordinary, decent and fairly intelligent Irishmen, but as Parliamentarians their only utility consisted in their capacity to find their way into the voting Lobby as they were ordered. To their meek submission, and to their rather selfish fear of losing their seats if they asserted an independent opinion, I trace many if not all of the catastrophes and failures that overtook the Party in later years. Needless to say, neither the country nor the other parties in Parliament had the least understanding of the real character and composition of the Nationalist Party. It had always a dozen or more capable men who could dress the ranks and hold their own “on the floor of the House” as against the best intellects and debating power of either British party. Irish readiness and repartee made question time an overwhelmingly Irish *divertissement*. Our members had a unique faculty for bringing about spectacular scenes that read very well in the newspapers and made the people at home think what fine fellows they had representing them! All this might be very good business in its way if it had any special meaning, but I could never for the life of me see how taking the Sultanate of Morocco under our wing could by any stretch of the imagination help forward the cause of Ireland.

The policy of the Party, in the ultimate resort, was supposed to be controlled by the United Irish League acting through its branches in Convention assembled. Inasmuch as the Party derived whatever strength it possessed in Parliament from the virility and force of the agitation in Ireland, it was in the fitness of things that the country should have the right of ordering the tune. When he founded the United Irish League Mr O'Brien unquestionably intended that this should be the case—that the country should be the master of its own fate and that the constituencies should be in the position of exercising a wholesome check on the conduct of their Parliamentary representatives, who, in addition to the pledge to sit, act and vote with the Party, also entered into an equally binding undertaking to accept neither favour nor office from the Government. As the Party was for the greater part made up of poor men or men of moderate means, members received an indemnity from a special fund called “The Parliamentary Fund,” which was administered by three trustees. This fund was specially collected each year, and in principle, if the subscriptions came from Ireland alone, was an excellent method of making members of the Party obey the mandate of the people, under the penalty of forfeiting their allowance. But in practice, most of the subscriptions were collected in America, and we had in effect the extraordinary situation of Irish representatives being maintained in Parliament by the moneys of their American kith and kin. And the situation after 1903 was rendered the more ludicrous

Page 67

by reason of the fact that the Party could never have dragged along its existence if it had been dependent upon Irish contributions to its funds. These were largely withdrawn because the Party was delinquent in adhering to the policy of Conciliation. It is a phenomenon worth remarking that the Irish people never failed to contribute generously what Parnell had termed “the sinews of war” so long as the members of the Party deserved it of them. But when symptoms of demoralisation set in, or when contentions distracted their energies, the people cut off the supplies. This would undoubtedly have been an effective means of control in normal circumstances, but when the Party, of its own volition, was able to send “missions” to America and Australia to collect funds, it was no longer dependent on the popular will, as expressed in terms of material support, and it became the masters of the people instead of their servants.

Not that I want for one moment unnecessarily to disparage the personnel of the Party—it was probably the best that Ireland could have got in the circumstances—nor do I seek to diminish its undoubtedly great services to Ireland in the days of Parnell and during the period that it loyally adopted the policy of Conciliation. But what I do deplore is that a few men in the Party—not more than three or four all told—were able, by getting control of “the machine,” to destroy the fairest chance that Ireland ever had of gaining a large measure of self-government. Knowing all that happened within the Party in the years of which I am writing, knowing the methods that were employed, rather unscrupulously and with every circumstance of pettiness, to bear down any member who showed the least disposition to exercise legitimately an independent judgment—knowing how the paid organisers of the League were at once dispatched to his constituency to intrigue against him and to work up local enmities, I am not, and never was, surprised at the compelled submission of the body of the members to the decrees of the secret Cabinet who controlled policy and directed affairs with an absolute autocracy that few dared question. One member more courageous than his fellows, Mr Thomas O'Donnell, B.L., did come upon the platform with Mr Wm. O'Brien at Tralee, in his own constituency and had the manliness to declare in favour of the policy of Conciliation, but the tragic confession was wrung from him: “I know I shall suffer for it.” And he did!

I mention these matters to explain what would otherwise be inexplicable—how it came to pass that a policy solemnly ratified by the Party, by the Directory of the League, and by a National Convention was subsequently repudiated. Whilst Mr O'Brien remained in the Party there was no question of the allegiance of these men to correct principle. Mr Joseph Devlin, who later was far and away the most powerful man in the Party, had not yet “arrived.” (It was the retirement of Mr O'Brien from public life



Page 68

and the resignation of Mr John O'Donnell from the secretaryship of the United Irish League—under circumstances which Mr Devlin's admirers will scarcely care to recall—which gave him his chance.) Mr Dillon was a more or less negligible figure until Mr O'Brien made way for him by his retirement. Right up to this there was only one man for the Party and the country, and that man was William O'Brien. Let me say at once that in those days I had no attachments and no personal predilections. John Redmond, William O'Brien and John Dillon were all, as we say in Ireland, "one and the same to me." If anything, because of my Parnellite proclivities, I rather leaned to Mr Redmond's side, and his chairmanship of the Party had certainly my most loyal adherence. Otherwise I was positively indifferent to personalities, and to a great extent also to policies, since I was in the Party for one purpose, and one alone, of pushing the labourers' claims upon the notice of the leaders and of ventilating their grievances in the House of Commons whenever occasion offered. Furthermore, I do not think I ever spoke to Mr O'Brien until after the Cork election in 1904, when, convinced of the rectitude of his policy and principles, I stood upon his platform to give such humble support as I could to the cause he advocated, and thereafter, I am proud to say, never once turned aside, either in thought or action, from the thorny and difficult path I had chosen to travel. I take no credit to myself for having taken my stand on behalf of Mr O'Brien's policy. I knew him in all essential things, both then and thereafter, to be absolutely in the right. I was aware that, had he so minded, in 1903, when he was easily the most powerful man in the Party and the most popular in Ireland, he could have smashed at one onslaught the conspiracy of "the determined campaigners" and driven its authors to a well-deserved doom. But the mistake he made then, as mistake I believe it to be, was that he left the field to those men, who had no alternative policy of their own to offer to the country, and who, instead of consolidating the national organisation for the assertion of Irish right, consolidated it rather in the interests of their own power and personal position. Thus it happened that a movement conceived and intended as the adequate expression of the people's will became, in the course of a short twelve months, everywhere outside of Munster, a mere machine for registering the decrees of Mr Dillon and his co-conspirators.

I do not think, if Mr T.M. Healy had been a member of the Party then, that Mr Dillon would have been able so successfully to entrench himself in power as he did. Mr Healy knew Mr Dillon inside out and he had little respect for his qualities. He knew him to be vain, intractable, small-minded and abnormally ambitious of power. Parnell once said of him: "Dillon is as vain as a peacock and as jealous as a schoolgirl." And when he was not included as a member of the Land Conference



Page 69

I am sure it does him no wrong to say that he made up his mind that somebody should suffer for the affront put upon him. It is ever thus. Even the greatest men are human, with human emotions, feelings, likes and dislikes. And though it is far from my intention to robe Mr Dillon in any garment of greatness, he was, unfortunately, put in a position to do irreparable mischief to great principles, as I conceive, through motives of petty spite. Even if Mr Dillon had stood alone I do not think he would have counted for very much, supported though he was by the suave personality of Mr T.P. O'Connor. But he had won to his side, in the person of Mr Devlin, one of great organising gifts and considerable eloquence, who had now obtained control of the United Irish League and all its machinery and who knew how to manipulate it as no other living person could. Without Mr Devlin's uncanny genius for organisation Mr Dillon's idiosyncrasies could have been easily combated. Mr Dillon's diatribes against "the black-blooded Cromwellians" at a time when the best of the landlord class were steadily veering in the Nationalist direction, I could never understand. Mr Devlin's detestation of the implacable spirit of Ulster Orangemen was a far more comprehensible feeling, but the years have shown only too thoroughly that both passions, and the pursuit of them, have had the most disastrous consequences.

Even when Mr Dillon was most powerful in the Party there were many men in it, to my knowledge, who secretly sympathised with the policy of Conciliation but who had not sufficient moral courage to come out in the open in support of it, knowing that if they did they would be marked down for destruction at the next General Election. It is evident that from a Party thus dominated and dragooned, and an organisation which had its resolutions manufactured for it in the League offices in Dublin, no good fruit could come.

Mr Redmond's position was pitiful in the extreme. Neither his judgment nor his sense of statesmanship could approve the departure which Mr Dillon and his accomplices had initiated. He avowed again and again, publicly to the country and privately in the Party, that he was in entire agreement with Mr O'Brien up to the date of his resignation; and it is as morally certain as anything can be in this world that if he had not crippled his initiative by sanctioning, under his own hand, the announcement of the 24-1/2 years' purchase terms for his estate, he would never have allowed himself to be associated with what he rather wearily and shamefacedly described as "a short-sighted and unwise policy."

Page 70

From the time that Mr Dillon and his friends got control of the Party and the national organisation the country was never allowed to exercise an independent judgment of its own, for the simple reason that the facts were carefully kept from its knowledge by a Press boycott unparalleled in the history of any other nation. Under this tyranny all independence and honest conviction were sapped. And with a brutal irony, which must compel a certain amazed admiration on the part of the disinterested inquirer after truth, the men who set the Party pledge at defiance, who set themselves to destroy Party unity and to scoff at majority rule, were the men who at a later date, when it suited their malevolent purpose, used the catch-cries of "Unity," "Majority Rule" and "Factionists" with all their evil memories of the nine years of the Split to intimidate the people from listening to the arguments and reasonings of Mr O'Brien and his friends. And when their kept Press and their subservient Parliamentarians did not prevail, they did not hesitate to use hired revolver gangs and to employ paid emissaries to prevent the gospel of Conciliation from being preached to the people.

With the entrance of false principles and the employment of pernicious and demoralising influences the *moral* of the Party began to be at first vitiated and then utterly destroyed. It lost its independent character and cohesive force. To a certain extent it became a party of petty tale-bearers. The men most in favour with the secret Cabinet were the men who kept them informed of the sayings and doings of their fellows.

The members of lesser note simply dare not be seen speaking to anyone suspected of a friendly feeling to Mr O'Brien or his policy. Woe to them if they were! In the expressive phrase of Mr O'Donnell, they were "made to suffer for it."

The proud independence and incorruptibility which the Party boasted in Parnell's day of power now also began to give way. With the accession of the Liberal Party to office in 1906 the Nationalist members began to beseech favours. It may be it was only in the first instance that they sought J.P.-ships for their leading friends and supporters in their several constituencies. But we all know how the temptation of patronage grows: it is so fine a thing to be able to do "a good turn" for one's friend or neighbour by merely inditing a letter to some condescending Minister. And now, particularly since there was no censure to be dreaded, it became one of the ordinary functions of the Nationalist M.P.'s life. It was no secret that prominent leaders were exercising a similar privilege, and the rank and file saw no reason why they should not imitate so seductive an example.



Page 71

I once heard a keen student of personalities in Parliament observe that Mr Dillon and Mr T.P. O'Connor always appeared to him to be sounder and more sincere Liberals than they were Irish Nationalists. I agree, and no doubt much of Ireland's later misfortunes sprang from this circumstance. I confess I have always thought of Mr Dillon, in my own mind, as an English Radical first and an Irish Nationalist afterwards. I believe he was temperamentally incapable of adopting Parnell's position of independence of either British Party and of supporting only that Party which undertook to do most for Ireland. Then, again, Mr Dillon was more of an Internationalist than a Nationalist. He delighted in mixing himself up in foreign affairs, and I am much mistaken if he did not take more pride in being regarded as an authority on the Egyptian rather than on the Irish question. Mr T.P. O'Connor was so long out of Ireland, and had so completely lost touch with genuine Irish opinion that much might be forgiven to him. His ties with Liberalism were the outgrowth of years spent in connection with the Liberal Press of London and of social associations which had their natural and inevitable influence on his political actions.

With Messrs Dillon and O'Connor and—at this time, probably, in a more secondary sense—Mr Devlin, in control of the Party, it can be well understood how easy was the descent from an independence of all parties to an alliance with one. I believe that in all these things Mr Redmond's judgment was overborne by his more resolute colleagues. I believe also, as I have already said, that the weakness of his position was engendered by the unforgettable mistake he made in regard to the sale of his estate—that he felt this was held over him as a sword of Damocles, and that he was never able to get away from its haunting shadow sufficiently to assert his own authority in the manner of an independent and resolute leader.

I am at pains to set forth these matters to justify the living and, in some measure, to absolve the dead. I want to place the responsibility for grievous failures and criminal blunders on the right shoulders. I seek to make it plain how the country was bamboozled and betrayed by Party machinations such as have not had their parallel in any other period of Irish history. I state nothing in malice or for any ulterior motive, since I have none. But I think it just and right that the chief events of the past twenty years should be set forth in their true character so that impartial inquirers may know to what causes can be traced the overwhelming tragedies of recent times.

CHAPTER XIII

A TALE OF BAD LEADERSHIP AND BAD FAITH



Page 72

It became a habit of the Irish Party, in its more decadent days, to spout out long litanies of its achievements and to claim credit, as a sort of hereditament no doubt, for the reforms won under the leadership of Parnell. It was, when one comes to analyse it, a sorry method of appealing for public confidence—a sort of apology for present failures on the score of past successes. It was as if they said: “We may not be doing very well now, but think of what we did and trust us.” And the time actually arrived when “Trust us” was the leading watchword of Mr Redmond and his Party. How little they deserved that trust in regard to some important concerns I will proceed to explain. I have shown how they dished Devolution and drove Mr Wyndham from office when he was feeling his way towards the concession of Home Rule—or equivalent proposals under another name; and how they thus destroyed in their generation the last hope of a settlement by Consent of the Irish Question—although a settlement along these lines was what Gladstone most desired. Writing to Mr Balfour, so long ago as 20th December 1885, he thus expressed himself:

“On reflection I think what I said to you in our conversation at Eaton may have amounted to the conveyance of a hope that the Government would take a strong and early decision on the Irish Question. This being so, I wish, under the very peculiar circumstances of the case, to go a step further and say that I think it will be a public calamity if this great subject should fall into the lines of Party conflict. I feel sure that the question can only be dealt with by a Government, and I desire especially on grounds of public policy that it should be dealt with by the present Government. If, therefore, they bring in a proposal after settling the whole question of the future government of Ireland my desire will be, reserving, of course, necessary freedom, to treat it in the same spirit in which I have endeavoured to proceed in respect to Afghanistan and with respect to the Balkan Peninsula.”

To this statesmanlike offer Mr Balfour immediately replied:

“I have had as yet no opportunity of showing your letter to Lord Salisbury or of consulting him as to its contents, but I am sure he will receive without any surprise the statement of your earnest hope that the Irish Question should not fall into the lines of Party conflict. If the ingenuity of any Ministry is sufficient to devise some adequate and lasting remedy for the chronic ills of Ireland, I am certain it will be the wish of the leaders of the Opposition, to whatever side they may belong, to treat the question as a national and not as a Party one.”

And not less clear or emphatic were the views of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, spoken on 23rd December 1885, as to the feasibility of settling the Irish problem by Consent:

“On one point I may state my views with tolerable clearness. In my opinion the best plan of dealing with the Irish Question would be for the leaders of the two great parties

to confer together for the purpose of ascertaining whether some *modus vivendi* could not be arrived at by which the matter would be raised out of the area of party strife.”

Page 73

It will thus be seen that at a very early stage indeed of the discussions on Home Rule, distinguished statesmen were agreed that the ideal way of settling the Irish Question was by an arrangement or understanding between the two great British parties—otherwise by those methods of Conference, Conciliation and Consent which Mr William O'Brien and Lord Dunraven were so violently and irrationally assailed by Mr Dillon and his supporters for advocating. The great land pact was arranged by those methods of common agreement between all parties in Parliament—it could never have been reached otherwise. And, as these pages will conclusively show, the “factionism” of Mr O'Brien and those associated with him consisted in pressing a settlement by Conference methods consistently on the notice of the leaders of all parties. But Mr Wyndham was treated by the Dillonite section as “a prisoner in a condemned cell”—to use their own elegant metaphor—because he showed a disposition to secure a settlement of the Irish difficulty on a non-party basis. He was ruthlessly exiled from office by methods which confer no credit on their authors, and the Unionist Party retired at the close of the year 1905 with nothing accomplished on the Home Rule issue.

When the Liberals came back to power with an irresistible majority Ireland rang from end to end with glad promises of a great, a glorious and a golden future. The Liberals had the reins of government in their hands, and the tears were going to be wiped from the face of dark Rosaleen. Never again was she to know the bitterness of sorrow or that hope of freedom so long deferred which maketh the heart sick. Mr T.P. O'Connor wrote to his American news agency that Home Rule was coming at a “not far distant date.” It was a fair hope, but the men who gambled on it did not take the House of Lords sufficiently into their calculations. And they forgot also that Home Rule was not a concrete and definite issue before the country at the General Election. The Liberal Party in 1906 had no Home Rule mandate. Its leaders were avowedly in favour of what was known as “the step-by-step” programme. This policy was less than Lord Dunraven's scheme of Devolution, but because it was the Liberal plan it came in for no stern denunciations from either Mr Dillon or Mr T.P. O'Connor. Even so staunch a Home Ruler as Mr John Morley insisted that Mr Redmond's Home Rule Amendment to the Address should contain this important addendum: “subject to the supreme authority of the Imperial Parliament.” The men who shouted in Ireland: “No compromise,” who were clamant in their demand that there “should be no hauling down of the flag,” and who asked the country to go “back to the old methods” (though they made it clear they were not going to lead them if they did), showed no disinclination to have their own private negotiations with the Liberal leaders on a much narrower programme.

Mr T.P. O'Connor, in his *Life of Sir H. Campbell-Bannerman, M.P.*, tells us exactly what happened, in the following words:—



Page 74

“The Irish Nationalists had already become restive, for, while not openly repudiating Home Rule as an ultimate solution, several of the friends and adherents of Lord Rosebery among the leaders of the Liberal Party had proclaimed that they would not only not support, but would resist any attempt to introduce a Home Rule measure in a Parliament that was about to be elected. It was under these circumstances that I had an interview of any length with Campbell-Bannerman for the last time. He invited a friend and me to breakfast with him.... This exchange of views was brief, for there was complete agreement as to both policy and tactics.... It was shortly after this that he made his historic speech in Stirling. That was the speech in which he laid down the policy that while Ireland might not expect to get at once a measure of complete Home Rule, any measure brought in should be consistent with and leading up to a larger policy. Such a declaration was all that the Irish Nationalist Party could have expected at that moment and it enabled them to give their full support at the elections to the Liberal Party.”

This is a very notable statement, because it shows that the Nationalists, who poured out their vials of vituperation upon Lord Dunraven and the Irish Reform Association, were now eager to accept an infinitely lesser instalment of Home Rule from their own Liberal friends. And it also demonstrates that for a very meagre modicum of the Irish birth-right they were willing to sacrifice the position of Parliamentary independence, which was one of the greatest assets of the Party, and to enter into a formal alliance with the Liberals on a mere contingent declaration that “any measure brought in” should be “consistent with and leading up to a larger policy.” Note, there was no guarantee, no positive statement, that a measure would be brought in, yet Mr T.P. O’Connor tells us that this declaration was “all that the Irish Nationalist Party could have expected,” and that it enabled them “to give their full support at the elections to the Liberal Party.” I wonder what Parnell, had he been alive, would have thought of this offer of the Liberals and whether he would in return for it make such an easy surrender of a nation’s claims. And I wonder also whether a paltrier bargain was ever made in the whole history of political alliances. It does not require any special gift of vision to divine who was “the friend” who went with Mr O’Connor to Sir H. Campbell-Bannerman’s breakfast-party and who was in “complete agreement as to both policy and tactics.” They were good Liberals both of them, and for my own part I would find no fault with them for this, if only they had been better Nationalists.



Page 75

Mr Redmond publicly ratified the new policy—or rather, treaty, as it now practically was—of Home Rule by instalments in a speech at Motherwell, in which he announced his readiness to accept any concession “which would shorten and smoothen the road to Home Rule.” But it is significant that although Mr Dillon was in complete agreement with the Liberals “as to both policy and tactics,” yet he devoted, with a rather supercilious levity, his speeches in Ireland to a demand for “Boer Home Rule as a minimum.” This was the way in which the country was scandalously hoodwinked as to the real relations which existed between the Liberals and Nationalists.

Mr O’Brien had at this time gone abroad and left the stage completely to Mr Dillon and his friends, having, however, made it clear that he was in favour of the Council Bill and suggested certain improvements, which the Government agreed to. His temporary withdrawal from the scene was dictated solely by the desire to give the utmost freedom of action to the Irish Party, seeing that they were acting in conformity with the best national interests in the special circumstances of the moment. He was also aware that Mr Birrell, who had now accepted office as Chief Secretary, was particularly acceptable to the Nationalist leaders and that they were in constant communication with him on details of the Bill, the safety of which seemed to be assured. Indeed, when it was introduced into Parliament, Mr Redmond spoke in appreciation of it, reserved in statement, no doubt, as befitting a leader who had yet to see the measure in print, but there is not a shadow of doubt that Messrs Redmond, Dillon and O’Connor were practically pledged to the support of the principle of the Bill before ever it was submitted to Parliament.

When, however, they summoned a National Convention to consider the Bill, to which they were committed by every principle of honour which could bind self-respecting men, to the amazement of everybody not behind the scenes, the very men who had crossed over from Westminster to recommend the acceptance of the measure were the first to move its rejection. A more unworthy and degrading performance it is not possible to imagine. It was an arrant piece of cowardice on the part of “the leaders,” who failed to lead and who shamefully broke faith with Mr Birrell and their Liberal allies. True, the Irish Council Bill was not a very great or strikingly generous measure. It had serious defects, but these might be remedied in Committee, and it had this merit, at least, that it did carry out the Liberal promise of being “consistent with and leading up to a larger policy.” Its purpose, broadly stated, was to consolidate Irish administration under the control of an Irish Council, which would be elected on the popular franchise. It contained no provision for a Statutory Legislative body. It was to confine itself to the purely administrative side of Government. The various Irish administrative departments were to be regrouped,

Page 76

with a Minister (to be called Chairman) at the head of each, who would be responsible to the elected representatives of the people. The Council was to be provided with the full Imperial costs (the dearest in the world) of the departments they were to administer, and they were to receive in addition an additional yearly subsidy of £600,000 to spend, with any savings they might effect on the administrative side on the development of Irish resources. Finally, this limited incursion into the field of administrative self-government was to last only for five years. Appeals to ignorant prejudice were long made by misquoting the title of the Irish Council Bill as “The Irish *Councils* Bill”—quite falsely, for one of its main recommendations was that the Bill created *one* national assembly for all Ireland, including the Six Counties which the Party subsequently ceded to Carson. Do not these proposals justify the comment of Mr O’Brien on them?—“If the experiment had been proved to work with the harmony of classes and the broad-mindedness of patriotism, of which the Land Conference had set the example, the end of the quinquennial period would have found all Ireland and all England ready with a heart and a half for ‘the larger policy.’ There would even have been advantages which no thoughtful Irish Nationalist will ignore, in accustoming our people to habits of self-government by a probationary period of smaller powers and of substantial premiums upon self-restraint.”

Unfortunately, in addition to having no legislative functions, Mr Birrell’s Bill contained one other proposal which damned it from the outset with a very powerful body of Irish thought and influence—it proposed to transfer the control of education to a Committee preponderatingly composed of laymen. When dropping the Bill later Sir H. Campbell-Bannerman declared: “We took what steps we could to ascertain Irish feelings and we had good reason to believe that the Bill would receive the most favourable reception.” One would like to know how far the leaders of the Irish Party who were taken into the confidence of the Government regarding the provisions of the Bill concurred in this clause. To anyone acquainted with clerical feeling in Ireland, whether Catholic or Protestant, it should be known that such a proposal would be utterly inadmissible. But apparently the Government were not warned, although it is a matter of history that the Irish Party entertained Mr Birrell to a banquet in London the night before they went over to Ireland for the National Convention, and it is equally well known, on the admissions of Mr Redmond, Mr O’Connor and others, that they crossed with the express determination to support the Irish Council Bill and in the full expectation that they would carry it.



Page 77

But they had not reckoned on Mr Devlin and on the younger priests, who had now begun to assert themselves vigorously in politics. Mr Devlin, in addition to being Secretary of the United Irish League, had also obtained a position of dominating control in the Ancient Order of Hibernians (Board of Erin section), a secret and sectarian organisation of which I will have much to say anon. For some inscrutable reason Mr Devlin set himself at the head of his delegates to intrigue with the young and ardent priesthood against the Bill. Mr Redmond, Mr T.P. O'Connor and their friends got to hear of the tempest that was brewing when they reached Dublin. Mr Dillon, unfortunately, was suffering from a grievous domestic bereavement at the time, and was naturally unable to attend the Convention. The others, instead of standing to their guns like men and courageously facing the opposition which unexpectedly confronted them, and which was largely founded on misunderstandings, basely ran away from all their honourable obligations—from what they owed in good faith to the Liberal Party, as a duty to their country, and as a matter of self-respect to their own good name—and instead of standing by the Bill, defending it and explaining whatever was not quite clear in its proposals, forestalled all criticism by putting up Mr Redmond to move its rejection. A more humiliating attitude, a more callous betrayal, a more sorry performance the whole history of political baseness and political ineptitude cannot produce. The feeling that swept through Ireland on the morrow of this Convention was one of disgust and shame, yet the people were so firmly shackled in the bonds of the Party that they still sullenly submitted to their chains. And the worst of this bitter business is that the shameful thing need never have occurred. If Mr Redmond had boldly advocated the adoption of the measure instead of moving its rejection in a state of cowardly panic, there is incontestable evidence he would have carried the overwhelming majority of the Convention with him.

The truth is that the members of his Party had no love for the Bill. Sensible of their own imperfections, as many of them were, and well aware that, whilst considered good enough by their constituents for service at Westminster, it was quite possible they would not come up to the standard which national duty at home would set up, they were naturally not very enthusiastic about any measure which would threaten their vested interests. It may appear an extraordinary statement to make to those who do not know their Ireland very well that the members of the Party were not the best that could be got, the best that would be got, under other conditions to serve in a representative capacity. But it is nevertheless true that the conditions of service at Westminster were not such as to tempt or induce the best men to leave their professions or their interests for seven or eight months of the year, whereas it was and is to be hoped that when the time comes the cream of Irish intellect, ability and character will seek the honourable duty of building up Irish destinies in Ireland. In justice to those who did serve at Westminster let it be, however, said that it invariably entailed loss and sacrifice even to the very least of them, and to very many, indeed, it meant ruined careers and broken lives.



Page 78

This apart. The Irish Council Bill was lost because of bad leadership and bad faith, and the Irish Party continued to travel stumblingly along its pathway of disaster and disgrace.

CHAPTER XIV

LAND AND LABOUR

The fortunes of every country, when one comes seriously to reflect on it, are to a great extent dependent on these two vital factors—Land and Labour. In a country so circumstanced as Ireland, practically bereft of industries and manufactures, land and labour—and more especially the labour which is put into land—are the foundation of its very being. They mean everything to it—whether its people be well or ill off, whether its trade is good, its towns prosperous, its national economy secure.

The history of Ireland, ever since the first Englishman set foot on it with the eye of conquest, centres to a more or less degree around the land. We know how the ancient clans tenaciously clung to their heritage and how ruthlessly they were deprived of it by the Plantations and the Penal Laws and by a series of confiscations, the memory of which even still chills the blood. Conquest, confiscation, eviction, persecution—this was the terrible story of Ireland for seven centuries—and the past century worst of all. At the commencement of the nineteenth century Ireland was extensively cultivated. The land had been parcelled out amongst the people; holdings were multiplied and tenancies for life increased amazingly because it meant a larger rent-roll for the landlord and a great increase in the voting power of his serfs. But there came the Corn Laws, making cultivation unprofitable, and earlier the law of Catholic Emancipation, withdrawing the right of voting from the forty-shilling freeholders, and the crisis was reached when the Great Famine appeared and was followed by the Great Clearances. The Famine lasted for three years, the Clearances endured for over thirty. Houses were demolished, fences levelled, the peasants swept out and the notices to quit kept falling, as the well-known saying of Gladstone expressed it, as thick as snowflakes. Between 1849 and 1860, according to Mulhall, 373,000 Irish families were evicted, numbering just about 2,000,000 in all. "I do not think the records of any country, civilised or barbarian," said Sir Robert Peel, "ever presented such scenes of horror."

Legislation became necessary to counteract the appalling evils arising from such a state of things. It went on through the years with varying fortune, never providing any real solution of the intolerable relations between landlord and tenant, until the blessed Land Conference pact was sealed and signed and the country finally delivered from the haunting terror of landlordism. Now although the entire population may be said in Ireland to be either directly or indirectly dependent on the land, two classes were absolutely dependent on it for their very livelihood—namely,



Page 79

the farmers and the agricultural labourers. And through all the various agrarian agitations they made united cause against their common enemy, the landlord. There was also in the days of my boyhood a far friendlier relation between the farmers and labourers than unhappily exists at present. Their joint heritage of suffering and hardship had drawn them together in bonds of sympathy and friendship. The farmer often shared, in the bitterness of the winter months, something out of his own stock of necessities with his less fortunate labourer. And before the arrival of the Creameries the daily allowance of the gallon of "skimmed" milk was made to almost every labourer's family in the country by kind-hearted neighbouring farmers. In addition, in a land where few were rich, the ancient proverb held good: "The poor always help one another." And it is true that, in the darkest days of their suffering, the farmers and labourers shouldered their troubles and their sorrows in a community of sympathy, which at least lessened their intensity. It is only with the growth of a greater independence among either class that the old friendly bonds and relationships have shown a loosening, and newer and more personal interests have tended to divide them into distinctive bodies, with separate class interests and class programmes.

As a very little boy I remember trudging my way to school with children who knew not what the comfort of boots and stockings was on the coldest winter's day; who shivered in insufficient rags and whose gaunt bodies never knew any nourishment save what could be got from "Indian meal stir-about" (a kind of weak and watery porridge made from maize). And it was not the children of the labourers alone who endured this bleak and starved and sunless childhood; the offspring of the smaller struggling farmers were often as badly off—they were all the progeny of the poor, kept poor and impoverished by landlordism. This further bond of blood and even class relationship also bound the farmers and labourers together—the labourers of to-day were, in countless cases, the farmers of yesterday, whom the Great Clearances had reduced to the lowest form of servitude and who dragged out an existence of appalling wretchedness in sight of their former homes, now, alas, razed to the ground. My mind carries me back to the time when the agricultural labourer in Munster was working for four shillings a week, and trying to rear a family on it! I vowed then that if God ever gave me the chance to do anything for this woe-stricken class I would strive for their betterment, according to the measure of my opportunity. And it happened, in the mysterious workings of Providence, that I was able to battle and plan and accomplish solid work for the amelioration of the labourers' lot.



Page 80

When Mr William O'Brien was labouring for the wretched "congests" in the West and founding the United Irish League to make the great final onslaught on the ramparts of landlordism, a few of us in the South were engaged unpretentiously but earnestly to get houses and allotments for the agricultural labourers, and to provide them with work on the roads during the winter months when they could not labour on the land. Ten years previously we had laid the foundations of what we hoped would be a widespread national movement for the regeneration of the working classes. The founder of that movement was the late Mr P.J. Neilan, of Kanturk, a man of eminent talent and of a great heart that throbbed with sympathy for the sufferings of the workers. I was then a schoolboy, with a youthful yearning of my own towards the poor and the needy, and I joined the new movement. Two others—the one John D. O'Shea, a local painter, and the other John L. O'Shea, a carman (the similarity of their names often led to amusing mistakes)—with some humble town workers, formed the working vanguard of the new movement, what I might term a sort of apostolate of rural democracy. Our organisation was first known as the Kanturk Trade and Labour Association. As we carried our flag, audaciously enough, as it seemed in those days, to neighbouring villages and towns, we enlarged our title, and now came to be known as "the Duhallow Trade and Labour Association." I was then trying some 'prentice flights in journalism and I managed to get reports of our meetings into the Cork Press, with the result that demands for our evangelistic services began to flow in upon us from Kerry and Limerick and Tipperary. But, even as we grew and waxed stronger we still, with rather jealous exclusiveness, called ourselves "the parent branch" in Kanturk. We are, by the way, a very proud people down there, proud of our old town and our old barony, which has produced some names distinguished in Irish history, such as John Philpot Curran, Barry Yelverton and the adored *fiancee* of Robert Emmet.

In time we interested Michael Davitt in our movement, and we achieved the glorious summit of our ambitions when we got him to preside at a great Convention of our Labour branches in Cork, where we formally launched the movement on a national basis under the title of the Irish Democratic Trade and Labour Federation. The credit of this achievement was altogether and entirely due to Mr Neilan, who had founded the movement, watched over its progress, addressed its meetings, framed its programme and carried it triumphantly to this stage of success. Unfortunately, when all seemed favourable for the spread of the movement, though not in opposition to the National League but as a sort of auxiliary force, moving in step with it, the disastrous Split occurred. It spelt ruin for our organisation because I think it will not be denied that the workers are the most vehement and vital elements in the national life, and they took sides

Page 81

more violently than any other section of the population. After trying for a little while to steer the Democratic Trade and Labour Federation clear of the shoals of disunion, and having failed, Mr Neilan and his friends gave up the task in despair. Meanwhile, however, Mr Michael Austin of the Cork United Trades, who was joint-secretary, with Mr Neilan, of the Federation, succeeded in getting himself absorbed into the Irish Party, and, having got the magic letters of M.P. after his name, not very much was ever heard of him in the Labour movement afterwards.

In the pursuit of journalistic experience I left Ireland for a few years, and on my return I found that a new Labour movement had been founded on the ruins of the old, under the title of the Irish Land and Labour Association. Mr James J. O'Shee, a young Carrick-on-Suir solicitor, was the secretary and moving spirit in this—a man of advanced views, of intense sympathy with the labourer's position, and of a most earnest desire to improve their wretched lot. I obtained an editorial position in West Cork which left me free to devote my spare time to the Labour cause, which I again enthusiastically espoused, having as colleagues in County Cork Mr Cornelius Buckley, of Blarney, another of exactly the same name in Cork, my old friend Mr John L. O'Shea, of Kanturk, and Mr William Murphy, of Macroom—men whose names deserve to be for ever honourably associated with the movement which did as much in its own way for the emancipation and independence of the labourers as the National organisations did for the farmers.

It is not my purpose here to recount the fierce opposition that was given to the labourer's programme. It had at first no friends either in the Party or in the Press. I verily believe that there were otherwise good and honest men who thought the labourers had no citizen rights and that it was the height of conscious daring for anybody to lift either hand or voice on their behalf. But those of us who had taken up the labourer's cause were well aware of all the difficulties and obstacles that would confront us; and we knew that worst of all we had to battle with the deadly torpor of the labourers themselves, who were trained to shout all right for "the Land for the People" but who had possibly no conception of their own divine right to an inheritance in that selfsame land. Furthermore, since the Land and Labour Association was an organisation entirely apart from the Trade and Labour movement of the cities and larger corporate towns we received little support or assistance from what I may term, without offence, the aristocracy of labour. We nevertheless simply went our way, building up our branches, extending knowledge of the labourers' claims, educating these humble folk into a sense of their civic rights and citizen responsibilities and making thinking men out of what were previously little better than soulless serfs. It was all desperately hard, uphill work, with little to encourage and no reward beyond the

Page 82

consciousness that one was reaching out a helping hand to the most neglected, despised, and unregarded class in the community. The passage of the Local Government Act of 1898 was that which gave power and importance to our movement. The labourers were granted votes for the new County and District Councils and Poor Law Guardians as well as for Members of parliament. They were no longer a people to be kicked and cuffed and ordered about by the shoneens and squireens of the district: they became a very worthy class, indeed, to be courted and flattered at election times and wheedled with all sorts of fair promises of what would be done for them. The grant of Local Government enabled the labourers to take a mighty stride in the assertion of their independent claims to a better social position and more constant and remunerative employment. The programme that we put forward on their behalf was a modest one. It was our aim to keep within the immediately practical and attainable and the plainly justifiable and reasonable. In the towns and in the country they had to live in hovels and mud-wall cabins which bred death and disease and all the woeful miseries of mankind. One would not kennel a dog or house any of the lower animals in the vile abominations called human dwellings in which tens of thousands of God's comfortless creatures were huddled together in indiscriminate wretchedness. Added to that, most of them had not a "haggart" (a few perches of garden) on which to grow any household vegetables. They were landless and starving, the last word in pitiful rags and bare bones. They were in a far greater and more intense degree than the farmers the victims of capricious harvests, whilst their winters were recurrent periods of the most awful and unbelievable distress and hunger and want. The first man to notice their degraded position was Parnell, who, early in the eighties, got a Labourers' Act passed for the provision of houses and half-acre allotments of land. But as the administration of this Act was entrusted to the Poor Law Boards, as it imposed a tax upon the ratepayers, and as the labourers had then no votes and could secure no consideration for their demands, needless to say, very few cottages were built. With the advent of the Local Government Act and the extension of the franchise, the labourer was now able to insist on a speeding-up of building operations. But the Labourers' Act needed many amendments, a simplification and cheapening of procedure, an extension of taxing powers, an enlargement of the allotment up to an acre and, where the existing abode of the labourers was insanitary, an undeniable claim to a new home. Moderate and just and necessary to the national welfare as these claims were, it took us years of unwearied agitation before we were able to get them legislatively recognised. What we did, however, more promptly achieve was the smashing of the contract system by which the roads of the country were farmed out to contractors, mostly drawn from



Page 83

the big farming and grazier classes who, by devious dodges, known to all, were able to make very comfortable incomes out of them. We insisted—and after some exemplary displays of a resolute physical force we carried our point—that in the case of the main roads, particularly, these should be worked under the system known as “direct labour”—that is, by the county and deputy surveyors directly employing the labourers on them and paying them a decent living wage. In this way we removed at one stroke the black shadow of want that troubled their winters and made these dark months a horror for them and their families. But we had still to remove the mud-wall cabins and the foetid dens in the villages and towns in which families were huddled together anyhow, and in our effort to bring about this most necessary of social reforms we received little or no assistance from public men or popular movements. We were left to our own unaided resources and our own persistent agitation. As I have already stated, I was elected Member of Parliament for Mid-Cork on the death of Dr Tanner in 1901, and Mr O’Shee had been previously elected for West Waterford, but not strictly on the Land and Labour platform as I was. Nevertheless, we heartily co-operated in and out of Parliament in making the Labour organisation a real and vital force, and our relations for many useful years, as I am happy to think, were of the most cordial and kindly character.

In the Land Purchase Act of 1903 Mr Wyndham included a few insignificant clauses bearing on the labourer’s grievances, but dropped them on the suggestion of Mr O’Brien, to whom he gave an undertaking at the same time to bring in a comprehensive Labourers’ Bill in the succeeding session. When that session came Mr Wyndham had, however, other fish to fry. The Irish Party and the Orange gang were howling for his head, and his days of useful service in Ireland were reduced to nothingness. Meanwhile we kept pressing our demands as energetically as we could on the public notice, but we were systematically boycotted in the Press and by the Nationalist leaders until a happy circumstance changed the whole outlook for us. It was our custom to invite to all our great Labour demonstrations the various Nationalist leaders, without any regard to their differences of opinion on the main national issue. The way we looked at it was this—that we wanted the support of all parties in Ireland, Unionist as well as Nationalist, for our programme, which was of a purely non-partisan character, and we were ready to welcome support from any quarter whence it came.

Our invitations were, however, sent out in vain until, on Mr O’Brien’s re-election for Cork in October 1904, a delegation from the Land and Labour Association approached him and requested him to come upon our platform and to specifically advocate the labourers’ claims, now long overdue. Without any hesitation, nay, even with a readiness which made his acceptance of our request doubly gracious, Mr O’Brien replied that now that the tenants’ question was on the high road to a settlement he considered that the labourers had next call on the national energies and that, for his part, he would hold himself at our disposal.



Page 84

What followed is so faithfully and impartially related in Mr O'Brien's book, *An Olive Branch in Ireland*, that I reproduce it:

“One of our first cares on my return to Cork was to restore vitality to the labourer's cause, and formulate for the first time a precise legislative scheme on which they might take their stand as their charter. This scheme was placed before the country at a memorable meeting in Macroom on December 10, 1904, and whoever will take the trouble of reading it will find therein all the main principles and even details of the great measure subsequently carried into law in 1906. The Irish Land and Labour Association, which was the organisation of the labourers, unanimously adopted the scheme, and commissioned their Secretary, Mr J.J. Shee, M.P., in their name, to solicit the co-operation of the Directory of the United Irish League in convening a friendly Conference of all Irish parties and sections for the purpose of securing the enactment of a Labourers' Bill on these lines as a non-contentious measure. If common ground was to be found anywhere on which all Irishmen, or at the worst all Nationalists, might safely grasp hands, and with a most noble aim, it was surely here. But once more Mr Dillon scented some new plot against the unity and authority of the Irish Party, and at the Directory meeting of the secretary of the Land and Labour Association was induced without any authority from his principals to abandon their invitation, and thus take the first step to the disruption of his own association.

“I bowed and held my peace, to see what another year might bring forth through the efforts of those who had made a national agreement upon the subject impracticable. Another year dragged along without a Labourers' Bill, or any effort of the Irish Party to bring it within the domain of practical politics. The Land and Labour Association determined to rouse the Government and the country to the urgency of the question by an agitation of an unmistakable character. Mr Redmond, Mr Dillon and all their chief supporters were invariably invited to these demonstrations; but the moment they learned that Mr Harrington, Mr Healy and myself had been invited as well, a rigorous decree of boycott went forth against the Labour demonstrations, and as a matter of fact no representative of the Irish Party figured on the Labourers' platform throughout the agitation. This, unfortunately, was not the most inexcusable of their services to the Labourers' cause. When the Land and Labour Association held their annual Convention, the secretary, who had infringed their instructions at the Directory meeting, finding himself hopelessly outnumbered, seceded from the organisation and formed a rival association of his own; and sad and even shocking though the fact is, it is beyond dispute that this split in the ranks of the unhappy labourers, in the very crisis of their cause, was organised with the aid of the moneys of the National Organisation administered by the men who were at that very moment deafening the country with their indignation against dissension-mongers and their zeal for majority rule.



Page 85

“It was all over again the dog-in-the-manger policy which had already kept the evicted tenants for years out in the cold. They would neither stand on a non-contentious platform with myself nor organise a single Labourers’ demonstration of their own. It has been repeatedly stated by members who were constant attendants at the meetings of the Irish Party that the subject of the Labourers’ grievances was never once discussed at any meeting of the party until the agitation in Ireland had first compelled the introduction of Mr Bryce’s Bill. Then, indeed, when the battle was won, and there was only question of the booty, Mr Redmond made the public boast that he and Mr Dillon “were in almost daily communications with Mr Bryce upon the subject.” The excuse was as unavailing as his plea that the finally revised terms of sale of his Wexford estate left him without a penny of profit. What concerned the country was the first announcement of 24-1/2 years’ purchase authorised under his own hand which had ‘given a headline’ to every landlord in the country. In the same way, whatever obsequious attendance he might dance on Mr Bryce, when the die was cast and the Bill safe, the ineffaceable facts remain that neither he nor anybody in his party whom he could influence had stood on a Labour platform, or touched upon the subject at the party meeting, while the intentions of the Government were, as we shall see in a moment, undecided in the extreme, but on the contrary were (it may be hoped unconscious but none the less indispensable) parties to an organised effort to split the Labourers’ Association asunder while their fate was trembling in the balance.

“Their war upon the Land and Labour Association was all the more wanton, because Mr Dillon’s persuasion, which gave rise to it that the Association had been brigaded into my secret service for some nefarious purpose of my own, was as absurdly astray as all the rest of his troubled dreams of my Machiavellian ambitions. To avoid giving any pretext for such a suspicion, I declined to accept any office or honour or even to become a member of the Land and Labour Association, attended no meeting to which Mr Redmond and Mr Dillon were not invited as well as I; and beyond my speeches at those meetings, never in the remotest degree interfered in the business or counsels of the Association. A number of men on the governing council of the Association were to my knowledge, and continued to be, sympathisers with my critics. Beyond the fact that their president, Mr Sheehan, M.P., happened to be the most successful practiser of my Land Purchase plans in the county of Cork, as well as by far the ablest advocate the Labourers’ agitation had called into action, I know of no shadow of excuse for the extraordinary folly which led responsible Irishmen, with the cry of ‘Unity’ on their lips, not only to decline to meet me on a common platform, but to make tens of thousands of absolutely unoffending labourers the victims of their differences with me.



Page 86

“Despite their aloofness and their attempts to divide the Labourers’ body, the agitation swept throughout the south of Ireland with an intensity which nothing could withstand. Demonstrations of amazing extent and still more remarkable resoluteness of spirit were addressed by my friends and myself in Charleville and Macroom, County Cork; Kilfinane and Drumcolliher, County Limerick; Tralee and Castle Island, County Kerry; Scariff, County Clare; Goolds Cross, County Tipperary; and Ballycullane, County Wexford; and by the time they were over, the field was fought and won. One last difficulty remained; but it was a formidable difficulty. So far from Mr Redmond’s ‘almost daily communications with Mr Bryce’ reaching back to the critical days of the problem, we were already in the first days of summer in the session of 1906 when a communication was made to me from a high official quarter that the Irish Government were so deeply immersed in the Irish Council Bill of the following year that they shrank from the labour and the financial difficulties of a Labourers’ Bill in the current session, and an appeal was diplomatically hinted as to whether there was any possibility of slowing down the Labourers’ agitation so as to make a postponement to the following session practicable. My reply was undiplomatically clear:—that, if the Government wanted to deprive the Irish Council Bill of all chance of a hearing, they could not take a better means of making the country too hot for themselves than by proposing to fob off the labourers for another year, and that not only would I not, if I could, but could not if I would, moderate their insistence upon immediate redress.

“A short time afterwards, I met Sir Antony MacDonnell in the House of Commons, and he asked ‘What is your labourers’ minimum?’ I gave him a brief outline of the Macroom programme. ‘No rational being could object,’ he said, ‘but what does it mean in hard cash?’ I replied, ‘Roughly, four millions.’ And the great Irishman—‘the worst enemy that ever came to Ireland’ of Mr Dillon’s nightmare hours—ended the interview with these laconic words: ‘The thing ought to be done and I think can be.’ At the period of the session at which the Bill was introduced, the opposition of even half-a-dozen determined men could have at any stage achieved its ruin. Thanks, however, to the good feeling the precedent of the Act of 1903 and the admirably conciliatory temper displayed by the labourers themselves in their agitation had engendered, the Bill went triumphantly through and has been crowned with glory in its practical application. I never pass through any of the southern counties now and feast my eyes on the labourers’ cottages which dot the landscape—prettier than the farmers’ own homes—honeysuckles or jasmynes generally trailing around the portico—an acre of potato ground sufficient to be a sempiternal insurance against starvation, stretching out behind—the pig and the poultry—perhaps a plot of snowdrops or daffodils for the English market, certainly a bunch of roses in the cheeks of the children clustering about the doorsteps—without thankfully acknowledging that Cork was right in thinking such conquests were worth a great deal of evil speech from angry politicians.”



Page 87

CHAPTER XV

SOME FURTHER SALVAGE FROM THE WRECKAGE

When Mr O'Brien retired in 1903 the majority of the members of the Party scarcely knew what to make of it, and I have to confess myself among those who were lost in wonder and amazement at the suddenness of the event and the reasons that caused it. This knowledge came later, but until I got to a comprehension of the entire facts I refused to mix myself up with either side. When, however, Mr O'Brien returned to public life in 1904, I saw my way clear to associate myself with his policy and to give it such humble and independent support as I could. It will be remembered that one of Mr O'Brien's proposals for testing the Purchase Act was to select suitable estates, parish by parish, where for one reason or another the landlords could be induced to agree to a reasonable number of years' purchase and thus to set up a standard which, with the strength of the National organisation to back it up, could be enforced all over the country. The "determined campaigners" defeated this plan but failed to provide any machinery of their own to protect the tenant purchasers or to assist them in their negotiations. On Mr O'Brien's re-election he took immediate steps to form an Advisory Committee composed of delegates from the eight divisional executives of the city and county of Cork. This Committee adopted as its watchword, "Conciliation plus Business," and as its honorary secretary I can vouch for it that when the methods of Conciliation failed we were not slow about putting into operation the business side of our programme. Thus the landlord who could not be induced to listen to reason around a table was compelled to come to terms by an agitation which was none the less forceful and effective because it was directed and controlled by men of conciliatory temper whom circumstances obliged to resort to extreme action.

The fruits of the work of the Advisory Committee, ranging over a number of years, are blazoned in the official statistics. They make it clear that if only a similar policy had been working elsewhere the tenant purchasers all over Ireland would have got infinitely better terms than they did. The bare fact is that in County Cork, where we had proportionately the largest number of tenant purchasers (in Mid-Cork, I am glad to say, there was scarcely a tenant who did not purchase, and in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred through my intervention), the prices are, roughly, two years' purchase lower than the average all over the rest of Ireland.

In Cork, where Mr O'Brien's policy prevailed, we had, outside the Congested Districts, from 1st November 1903 to 31st March 1909, a total of 16,159 tenant purchasers, and the amount of the purchase money was L7,994,591; whilst in Mayo, one of whose divisions Mr Dillon represented in Parliament, and where his doctrines held sway, the number of tenant purchasers in the same period was 774, and the amount

Page 88

of the purchase money only L181,256. And be it noted what these unfortunate and misguided Mayo men have to be grateful for: that they have remained for all these years, since the Act of 1903 was placed on the Statute Book, under the old inexorable rent-paying conditions, whilst down in Cork the tenants are almost to a man the proprietors of their own holdings, owning their own improvements, knowing that every year that passes brings the time nearer when their land will be free of annuities, and having all that sweet content and satisfaction that flow from personal ownership. Up in Mayo, in a famous speech delivered at Swinford, 12th September 1906, three years after the Land Purchase Act was passed, Mr Dillon declared:

“Attempts have been made to throw the blame on Michael Davitt, *The Freeman’s Journal* and myself, and it has been said that we have delayed the reinstatement of the evicted tenants and obstructed the smooth working of the Act more than we have done. It has worked too smoothly—far too smoothly, to my mind. Some men have complained within the past year that the Land Act was not working smooth enough. For my part I look upon it as working a great deal too fast. Its pace has been ruinous to the people.”

There, in a nutshell and sufficiently stated, are the two policies. Mr O’Brien wanted to expedite land purchase by every means in his power, but he wished that the tenants should have proper advisers and should act under the skilled guidance of their own organisation, so that they may make no bad bargains. Mr Dillon, on his part, sought to kill land purchase outright, but why he should have had this mad infatuation against the most beneficent Act that was passed for Ireland in our generation, I am at a loss to know, if it is not that he allowed his personal feeling against Mr O’Brien to cloud the operations of his intellect. It is a curious commentary, however, on the good faith of the Party leaders, that whilst Mr Dillon was making the speech I have quoted to his constituents at Swinford, his bosom friend and confidant, Mr T.P. O’Connor, who was seeking the shekels in New York, was telling his audience that “the Irish landlords were on the run, and, if they continued to yield, in fifteen years the very name of landlordism would be unknown. I say to the British power:—after seven centuries we have beaten you; the land belongs now to the Irish; the land is going back to the old race.”

What is one to say of the manhood or honour of the men who spent their days denouncing the policy of Conciliation in Ireland, but who, when they went across the Atlantic, and wanted to coax the money out of the exiles’ pockets, spoke the sort of stuff that Mr O’Connor so soothingly “slithered” out at New York?



Page 89

I say it with full and perfect knowledge of the facts, that it was the dishonest policy of Mr Dillon, Mr T.P. O'Connor and the men who, blindly and weakly, and with an abominable lack of moral courage, followed their leadership, which has kept one hundred thousand tenants still under the heel of landlordism in Ireland. These men, in driving a nail into the policy of Conciliation, drove a nail far more deeply into their own coffin. In burying the Land Act of 1903 they were only opening graves for themselves, but, in the words of Mr Redmond, they were "so short-sighted and unwise" they could not see the inevitable result of their malicious side-stepping.

I know of no greater glory that any man, or Party, or organisation could aspire to than to be, in any way, however humble, associated with the policy which made three hundred thousand of the farmers of Ireland the owners of their own hearths and fields. Where the Land Purchase Act operated it gave birth to a new race of peasant owners, who were frugal, industrious, thrifty, and assiduous in the cultivation and improvement of the soil. In a few years the face of the country was transformed. A new life and energy were springing into being. The old tumble-down farm-houses and out-offices began to be replaced by substantial, comfortable, and commodious buildings. Personal indebtedness became almost a thing of the past, and the gombeen man—one of Ireland's national curses—was fast fading out of sight. The tenant purchasers, against whose solvency the "determined campaigners" issued every form of threat, took a pride in paying their purchase instalments as they fell due. The banks began to swell out into a plethoric affluence on their deposits. And who can estimate the social sweetness that followed on land purchase—the sense of peace and security that it gave to the tenant and his family, the falling from him of the numbing shadows of unrest and discontent? Also with the disappearance of agrarian troubles and the unsettlement that attended them there has been a notable decline in the consumption of alcohol. To reverse an old saying: "Ireland sober is Ireland free"—it may be said that "Ireland free (of landlordism) is Ireland sober." And then the happiness of being the master of one's own homestead! No race in the world clings so lovingly to the soil as the Irish. We have the clan feeling of a personal love and affection for the spot of earth where we were born, and when the shadows of evening begin to fall athwart our lives, do we not wish to lay ourselves down in that hallowed spot where the bones of our forefathers mingle with the dust of ages? Truly we love the land of our birth—every stone of it, every blade of grass that grows in it, its lakes, its valleys, and its streams, each mountain that in rugged grandeur stands sentinel over it, each rivulet that whispers its beautiful story to us—and because we would yet own it for our very own, we grudge not the sacrifices that its final deliverance demands, for it will be all the dearer in that its liberty was dearly purchased with the tears and the blood of our best!

Page 90

The settlement of the Evicted Tenants Question was another of the vital issues salvaged from the wreckage. There were from eight to ten thousand evicted tenants—"the wounded soldiers of the Land War" as they were termed—to whom the Irish Party and the National Organisation were pledged by every tie of honour that could bind all but the basest. The Land Conference Report made an equitable settlement of the Evicted Tenants problem an essential portion of their treaty of peace. But the revival of an evil spirit amongst the worst landlords and the interpretations of hostile law officers reduced the Evicted Tenants clause in the Act of 1903 almost to a nullity. In this extremity the Cork evicted tenants requested the Land Conference to reassemble and specify in precise language the settlement which they regarded as essential. All the representatives of the landlords and of the tenants on the Conference accepted the invitation, with the single exception of Mr Redmond. Eventually, despite these and other discouragements, the Conference met in Dublin in October 1906, sat for three days, and agreed upon lines of settlement which were given effect to in legislation by Mr Bryce the following year. True, the restoration of these unhappy men did not proceed as rapidly as their sacrifices or interests demanded. They were also the victims of the malign opposition extended to the policy of Conciliation, even when it embraced a deed so essentially charitable as the relief of the families who had borne the burden and the heat of the day in the fierce agrarian wars. Lamentable to relate, Mr Dillon tried to intimidate Mr T.W. Russell and Mr Harrington from joining the Conference, and when he failed, publicly denounced their Report. And if there are still some of them "on the roadside," as I regret to think they are, the blame does not lie with the Conciliationists, but with those who persistently opposed their labours.

In the settlement of the University Question Cork also took the lead when its prospects were in a very bad way. This had been for over a century a vexed and perplexing problem. I have dealt cursorily with primary education, which is even still in a deplorably backward state in Ireland. Secondary education has not yet been placed on a scientific basis, and is not that natural stepping-stone between the primary school and the university that it ought to be. There is no intelligent co-ordination of studies in Ireland and we suffer as no other country from ignorantly imposed "systems" which have had for their object, not the development of Irish brains but the Anglicisation of Irish youth, who were drenched with the mire of "foreign" learning when they should have been bathed in the pure stream of Irish thought and culture.



Page 91

It would require a volume in itself to deal with all the evils, not only intellectual and educational, but social, economic and political, which Ireland has suffered owing to the absence of a higher education directed to the development of her special psychological and material needs. It took eighty years of agitation before anything like educational equality in the higher realms of study was established. The Protestants had in Trinity College a university with a noble tradition and a great historic past. The Catholics had only University College and a Royal University, which conferred degrees without compulsion of residence. In hounding Mr Wyndham from office and killing him (in the political sense, though one would be sorely tempted to add, also in the physical sense), the Irish Party also destroyed, amongst other things, the prospects of a University settlement in 1904. A University Bill had, as a matter of fact, been promised as the principal business for that session. The question was in a practically quiescent state, nobody taking any particular interest in it, when the Catholic laity of Cork, supported by the mass of the Protestant laity as well (as was now become the custom on all great questions in the leading Irish county), came together in a mighty and most representative gathering, which instantly impressed statesmen that this educational disability on religious grounds could no longer be tolerated. Mr Birrell, who failed in most other things during his ill-starred Irish administration, was admirably energetic and suave in getting his University proposals through. And it was by employing wisely the methods of conciliation and winning over to his side men of opposite political views, like Mr Balfour, Mr Wyndham, Sir Edward Carson, and Professor Butler that he piloted the Bill safely through its various Parliamentary stages.

With the success of Land Purchase, with the introduction and passage of the Labourers and University Acts, with the settlement of the Evicted Tenants Question, and with the offering of any resistance to the effort made to remove the embargo on Canadian cattle, which would seriously have affected the prospects of the farmers, the Irish Party had exercised no initiative and could not legitimately claim one atom of credit in respect of them. Yet when their Parliamentary prestige began to shake and show unmistakable signs of an approaching collapse, it was ever their habit to group these among their achievements in the same way that they appropriated the fruits of Parnell's genius—it was “the Party” that did everything, and so they demanded that the people should sing eternal Hosannas to its glory.

In justice to the Party, or, more correctly, to Mr J.J. Clancy, M.P., who stood sponsor for the measures and watched over their progress with paternal care, they did get inscribed on the Statute Book two Acts of considerable importance—the Town Tenants Act and the Housing of the Working Classes Act, but beyond these the less said of their Parliamentary conquests from 1903 onward the better. Their achievements were rather of the destructive and mischievous than the constructive and beneficent.



Page 92

CHAPTER XVI

REUNION AND TREACHERY

It may be said that whilst all these things were going on in Ireland and the Party marching with steady purpose to its irretrievable doom, the British people were in the most profound state of ignorance as to what was actually happening. And the same may be said of the Irish in America, Australia, and all the other distant lands to which the missionary Celts have betaken themselves. They were all fed with the same newspaper pap. The various London Correspondents took their cue from Mr T.P. O'Connor and the *Freeman*. These and the Whips kept them supplied with the tit-bits that were in due course served up to their several readers. And thus it never got to be known that it was Mr William O'Brien and his friends who were the true repositories of Party loyalty and discipline, the only men who were faithful to the pledge, who had never departed from the policy of Conference, Conciliation and Consent, upon which the great Land Act of 1903 was based and to which the Party, the United Irish League, and Nationalist opinion stood committed in the most solemn manner.

When the General Election of 1906 took place those of us in County Cork and elsewhere who had taken our stand by Mr O'Brien were marked out for opposition by the Party chiefs. But a truce was arranged through the intervention of Mr George Crosbie, editor of *The Cork Examiner*, who generously sought to avert a fight between brother Nationalists, which, whatever its effects at home, would be bound to have grave results abroad, where the only thing that would be strikingly apparent was that brother Nationalists were at one another's throats. So we all came back, if not exactly a happy family at least outwardly in a certain state of grace.

This state of things was not, however, to last. Without rhyme or reason, without cause stated or charge alleged, with no intimation of any sort or kind that I was acting contrary to any of the Party tenets, I was, so to speak, quietly dropped overboard from the Party ship in November 1906. I did not get any official intimation that I was dismissed the Party or that I had in any way violated my pledge to sit, act and vote with it. I was simply cut off from the Party Whips and the Parliamentary allowance and, without a word spoken or written, thus politely, as it were, told to go about my business. The matter seemed inconceivable and I wrote a firm letter of remonstrance to Mr Redmond. It drew from him merely a formal acknowledgment—an adding of insult to injury. To test the matter I immediately resigned my seat for Mid-Cork, placed the whole facts before my constituents, published my letter and Mr Redmond's acknowledgment and challenged the Party to fight me on the issue they had themselves deliberately raised—namely, as to whether in supporting the policy of Conciliation I was in any way faithless to my pledge. Wise



Page 93

in their generation, the men who were courageous enough to expel me from the Party, to which I belonged by as good a title as they, were not brave enough to meet me in the open in a fair fight and, where there could be no shirking a plain issue, and accordingly I had a bloodless victory. It was satisfactory to know I had the practically unanimous support and confidence of the electors of Mid-Cork. It would have been more satisfactory still if we had the policy of Conciliation affirmed, as we undoubtedly would have, by an overwhelming vote in a genuine trial of strength. There were at this time outside of the Party, besides myself, Mr William O'Brien, Mr T. M. Healy, M.P. for North Louth (who had not been readmitted after 1900), Sir Thomas Esmonde, M.P. for North Wexford, Mr John O'Donnell, M.P. for South Mayo, Mr Charles Dolan, M.P. for South Leitrim, and Mr Augustine Roche (Mr O'Brien's colleague in the representation of Cork).

The Party were now in a rather parlous state. The country was disgusted with their mismanagement of the Irish Council Bill. Branches of the United Irish League had ceased to subscribe to the Party funds and it was evident that a temper distinctly hostile to the Party managers was widely springing up. Furthermore, an irresistible movement of popular opinion set in, demanding that there should be a reunion of all the Nationalist forces and "Unity" demonstrations of huge dimensions were held in Kerry, Limerick, Cork, Clare and Wexford. There was no denying the intensity of the demand that there should be an end of those differences which divided brother Nationalists and dissipated their strength. Finally, at Ballycullane, in Mr Redmond's native constituency, Mr O'Brien formulated proposals for reunion, the first of which is so notable as a declaration of Nationalist principle that I quote it fully:

"No man or party has authority to circumscribe the inalienable right of Ireland to the largest measure of national self-government it may be in her power to obtain."

Further conditions declared that it was the duty of Nationalist representatives to devote themselves honestly to working for every measure of practical amelioration which it may be possible to obtain from "either English Party, or from both," and that the co-operation of Irishmen of all creeds and classes willing to aid in the attainment of any or all of those objects should be cordially welcomed. Within a week Mr Redmond conveyed to Mr O'Brien his desire for a Conference on unity. It was duly held. Mr O'Brien's proposals were substantially agreed to. It will be observed that they were a solemn reiteration of the principles of Conference and Conciliation, which was the bed-rock basis of the Party policy in its most useful and memorable year, 1903. It is possible that if Mr O'Brien's suggestion for a National Convention to give the new Unity an enthusiastic "send-off" had been agreed to, many things might have been different to-day. But Mr Dillon never wanted, in those days, if he could help it, to appear before a great assemblage of his countrymen in company with Mr O'Brien. He knew his own limitations for popular appeal too well to risk comparison with the most persuasive Irish orator since the days of O'Connell.



Page 94

The six of us who rejoined the Party under the foregoing peace treaty were sincerely anxious that the reunion should be cordial and thorough. We saw, however, no manifestations of a similar spirit on the part of Mr Dillon or his special coterie of friends. Mr O'Brien published in his own paper, *The Irish People*, a *communiqué* in which he said:

"I am certain the universal Irish instinct will be, frankly and completely, to drop all disputes as to the past and have no rivalries except as to who shall do most to create good will and a common patriotism among Irishmen of all shades and schools of thought. Let us turn with high hearts from the tragedies of the past to the glorious possibilities of the future."

Our optimism was sadly disappointed when the first occasion came for testing the sincerity of the reunion. A Treasury Report was issued containing proposals for lessening the landlords' bonus under the Purchase Act of 1903 and for increasing the tenants' annuities. (These proposals were later embodied in Mr Birrell's Land Act of 1909 and practically put an end to land purchase and to the beneficent operations of the Act of 1903.) A meeting of the reunited Party was summoned for the Mansion House, Dublin (29th April 1908), to deal with this grave situation, rendered all the more serious by reason of the fact that the Treasury proposals were openly advocated by *The Freeman's Journal*. One of the clauses of the articles of reunion declared that the co-operation of Irishmen of all classes and creeds willing to aid in the attainment of, among other things, "the completion of the abolition of landlordism" is cordially welcomed. When Mr O'Brien moved, in order that the demands of the Treasury should be met with a united and resolute Irish front, that the Party was prepared to appoint representatives to confer with representatives of the landlords, Mr Dillon at once showed that on no account would he agree to any Conference, and he proposed an amendment that the whole matter should be referred to a Committee of the Irish Party exclusively. This was a fatal blow at the principle on which the Party had been reunited. Whilst the controversy raged around the Conference idea, Mr Redmond spoke never a word, though he saw that "the short-sighted and unwise policy" was again getting the upper hand. Mr Dillon carried his amendment by 45 votes to 15, and thus the treaty on which the Party was reunited was practically torn to pieces before the ink was scarce dry on it.

One further effort was made to try to preserve the Act of 1903 from being ham-strung by the Treasury. A short time previously a deputation of the foremost landed men and representative bodies of Cork had saved Ireland from the importation of Canadian cattle into Britain. It was decided to organise now a still more powerful deputation from the province of Munster to warn the Government of the fatal effects of the proposed Birrell Bill. I had a great deal to do

Page 95

with the preliminaries of the meeting at which this deputation was selected, and I can say with all certainty that if we had had only the most moderate display of political wisdom from Mr Dillon and his friends we could have the great mass of the landlords in Ireland agreeing to the full concession of the constitutional demand for Irish liberty. The Cork meeting was beyond all doubt or question the most remarkable held in Ireland for a century. It was summoned by a Joint Committee drawn from the Nationalist and landlord ranks. On its platform were assembled all the men, either on the landlord or the tenant side, who had been the fiercest antagonists in the agrarian wars of the previous twenty-five years—men who had literally taken their lives in their hands in fighting for their respective causes. It is but the barest truth to say that the evictors and the evicted—the leading actors in the most awful of Ireland's tragedies—stood for the first time in Irish history side by side to join hands in a noble effort to obliterate the past and to redeem the future. It was one of the greatest scenes of true emotion and tremendous hope that ever was witnessed in any land or any time. If its brave and joyous spirit could only have been caught up and passed along, we would have seen long before now that vision glorious which inspired the deeds and sacrifices of Tone and Emmet and the other magnificent line of martyrs for Irish liberty—we would have witnessed that brotherhood of class and creed which is Ireland's greatest need, and upon which alone can her eventual happiness and liberty rest. And, most striking incident of all, here had met, in a blessed forgetfulness of past rancours and of fierce blows given and received, the two most redoubtable champions of the landlords and the tenants—Lord Barrymore and Mr William O'Brien, the men whose sword blows upon each other's shields still reverberated in the minds of everyone present. What a study for a painter, or poet, or philosopher! The most dauntless defender of landlordism, in a generous impulse of what I believe to be the most genuine patriotism, stood on a platform with Mr William O'Brien, whom he had fought so resolutely in the Plan of Campaign days, to declare in effect that landlordism could no longer be defended and to agree as to the terms on which it could be ended, with advantage to every section of the Irish nation. It was only magnanimous men—men of fine fibre and a noble moral courage—who could stretch their hands across the yawning chasm of the bad and bitter years, with all their evil memories of hates and wounds and scars and defy the yelpings of the malicious minds who were only too glad to lead on the pack, to shout afterwards at Mr O'Brien: "Barrymore!" when of a truth, of all the achievements of Mr O'Brien's crowded life of effort and accomplishment there is not one that should bring more balm to his soul or consolation to his war-worn heart than that he should have induced the enemy of other days to pay this highest



Page 96

of all tributes to his honesty and worth. He had convinced his enemy of his rectitude, and what greater deed than this! I confess it made my ears tingle with shame when I used to hear unthinking scoundrels, egged on by others who should have known better, shout “Barrymore!” at Mr O’Brien in their attempts to hold him up to public odium for an act which might easily have been made the most benign in his life, as it certainly was one of the most noble.

This memorable meeting of the erstwhile warring hosts agreed absolutely as to the main conditions on which the Land Settlement of 1903 ought to be preserved—viz. that the abolition of landlordism should be completed in the briefest possible time, that the rate of tenant purchasers’ annuity should remain undisturbed, and that the State bonus to the landlords should not be altered. If there were to be losses on the notation of land loans the loss should be borne by the Imperial Treasury for the greatest of all Imperial purposes. A deputation of unequalled strength and unrivalled representative character was appointed to submit these views to the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Chief Secretary for Ireland. But jealous and perverse and, I must add, blindly malignant, influences had been at work, and a deputation which comprised six peers, eleven Members of Parliament, and some of the leading public men in Munster was refused a hearing by Mr Birrell. Though the act was the act of Mr Birrell, all the world knew that the sinister figure in the background was Mr Dillon. And they have both paid the penalty since then of their follies, not to say crimes—though a nation still suffers for them.

CHAPTER XVII

A NEW POWER ARISES IN IRELAND

The Party manipulators had now got their stranglehold on the country. The people, where they were not chloroformed into insensibility, were doped into a state of corrupt acquiescence. All power was in the hands of the Party. The orthodox daily Press was wholly on their side. The British public and the English newspaper writers were impressed only, as always, by the big battalions. The Irish Party had numbers, and numbers count in Parliament as nothing else does. Whatever information went through to the American Press passed through tainted sources. An influential Irish-American priest, Father Eamon Duffy, writing some time since in the great American Catholic magazine, *The Monitor*, said:

“We really never understood the situation in America. Ireland was in the grip of the Party machine and of one great daily paper, and these were our sources of information. It was only the great upheaval that awakened us from our dream and showed us that something had been wrong, and that the Party no longer represented the country.”

Page 97

This is a remarkable admission from an independent and unprejudiced authority. He candidly declares they never understood the situation in America. Neither was it understood in England, and the House of Commons is the last place which tries to understand anything except party or personal interests. There is just about as much freedom of opinion and individual independence in Parliament as there could be in a slave state. In Ireland, as I have said, outside Munster the truth was never allowed to reach the people. Even the great national movement which Mr William O'Brien re-created in the United Irish League had almost ceased to function. It was gradually superseded by a secret sectarian organisation which was the absolute antithesis of all free development of democratic opinion and the complete negation of liberty and fair play.

Up in the north of Ireland there existed an organisation of a secret and sworn character which was an evil inheritance of an evil generation. From the fact that the Ribbonmen used to meet in a shebeen owned by one Molly Maguire, with the Irish adaptability for attaching nicknames to anything short of what is sacred, they became known as "Molly Maguires," or, for short, "the Mollies." In some ill-omened day branches of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, which had seceded from the American order of that name, began to interest themselves in Ulster in political affairs. They called themselves the Board of Erin, but they were, as I have said, more generally known as "the Mollies." They were a narrowly sectarian institution and they had the almost blasphemous rule that nobody but a Catholic frequenting the Sacraments could remain a member. They had their own ritual and initiation ceremony, founded on the Orange and Masonic precedents, and had their secret signs and passwords. It is possible that they were at first intended to be a Catholic protection society in Ulster at the end of the eighteenth century to combat the aggressiveness and the fanatical intolerance of the Orange Order, who sought nothing less than the complete extermination of the Catholic tenantry. A Catholic Defence organisation was a necessity in those circumstances, but when the occasion that gave it justification and sanction had passed it would have been better if it were likewise allowed to pass. Any organisation which fans the flames of sectarianism and feeds the fires of religious bigotry should have no place in a community which claims the sacred right of freedom. It was the endeavour of Mr O'Brien and his friends finally to close this bitter chapter of Irish history by reconciling the ancient differences of the sects and inducing all Irishmen of good intent to meet upon a common platform in which there should be no rivalries except the noble emulations of men seeking the weal of the whole by the combined effort of all.

Page 98

Whatever unfortunate circumstance or combination of circumstances gave impulse to “the Board of Erin,” I know not—whether it arose out of a vainglorious purpose to meet the Orangemen with a weapon of import similar to their own, or whether it was merely the love of young people to have association with the occult, I can merely conjecture—but it was only when Mr Joseph Devlin assumed the leadership of it that it began to acquire an influence in politics which could have no other ending than a disastrous one.

Never before was the cause of Irish liberty associated with sectarianism. Wolfe Tone, Robert Emmet and Thomas Davis are regarded as the most inspired apostles and confessors of Irish nationality. It was a profanation of their memory and an insult to their creed that in the first decade of the twentieth century any man or band of men should have been audacious enough to superimpose upon the structure of the national movement an organisation which in addition to being secret and sectarian was grossly sordid and selfish in its aims.

Stealthily and insidiously “the Board of Erin” got its grip in the United Irish League. It “bossed,” by establishing a superiority of numbers, the Standing Committee. Then by “getting hold” of the officers of Divisional Executives and branches it acquired control over the entire machinery of the movement, and thus, in an amazingly short space of time, it secured an ascendancy of a most deadly and menacing character. Its first overt act of authority was to strangle freedom of speech and to kill land purchase. What Mr John Dillon had been unable to do through his control of the Party and his collusion with *The Freeman’s Journal* the Board of Erin most effectively accomplished by an energetic use of boxwood batons and, at a later time, weapons of a more lethal character.

A National Convention had been summoned to pronounce on the Birrell Land Bill of 1909—a measure which, with incomparable meanness, was designed “to save the Treasury” by ridding it of the honourable obligations imposed by the Wyndham Act of 1903. This Bill, on the ground that the finance of the Act of 1903 had broken down, proposed to increase the rate of interest on land loans from 2-3/4 to 3-1/4 per cent., and to transform the bonus from a free Imperial grant to a Treasury debt against Ireland. Apparently it should require no argument to prove that this was a treacherous repeal of an existing treaty, guaranteed by considered legislative enactment, and that it was a proposal which no Irishman with any sense of the duty he owed his country could for one moment entertain. But it was the unthinkable and the unbelievable thing which happened. Mr Dillon was determined, at all costs—and how heavy these costs were, one hundred thousand unpurchased tenants in Ireland to-day have weighty reason to know—to wreak his spite against the Wyndham Act, which he had over and over again declared was working too smoothly,

Page 99

and prayed that he might have the power to stop it. Mr Redmond I regard in all this wretched business as the unwilling victim of the forces which held him, as a vice in their power. Yet from the sin of a weak compliancy in the unwise decrees of others he cannot be justly acquitted. Although the Party had rejected the proposal for a new Land Conference, and thereby broken the articles of reunion under which Mr O'Brien and his friends re-entered it, we continued to remain within its fold. We could not, for one thing, believe that the country was so steeped in ignorance and blindness that if the facts were once allowed to reach it, or the arguments to be temperately addressed to any free assembly of Irishmen, they would not see where national interests lay. Accordingly Mr O'Brien and his friends determined to submit, in constitutional fashion, the overwhelming objections to Mr Birrell's Bill to the judgment of the National Convention which was to consider whether the Bill would expedite or destroy land purchase. It was conveyed to Mr O'Brien beforehand that it was madness on his part to attempt to get a hearing at the Convention, that this was the last thing "the powers that be" would allow, and that as he valued his own safety it would be better for him to remain away.

Just as he had never submitted to intimidation when it was backed by the whole force of the British Government, Mr O'Brien was equally resolved that the arrogance of the new masters of the Irish democracy was not going to compel him to a mood of easy yielding and he properly decided to submit his arguments to a Convention which, though he was well aware it would be "packed" against him, yet he had hopes might be swayed by the invincibility of his arguments. In the ordinary course the stewards for managing and regulating the Convention would be drawn from Dublin Nationalists. On this occasion, however, they came by special train from Belfast and were marched in military order to the Mansion House, where some sackfuls of policemen's brand-new batons were distributed amongst them. They were the "Special Constables" of the Molly Maguires recruited for the first time by an Irish organisation to kill the right of free speech for which Irishmen had been contending with their lives through the generations. It would be quite a comedy of Irish topsy-turvydom were it not, in fact, such a disastrous tragedy.

The favourite cry of the enemies of Conciliation was that the Purchase Act would bankrupt the Irish ratepayers. By means which it is not necessary to develop or inquire into, the British Treasury was induced on the very eve of the Convention to present to a number of the Irish County Councils claims for thousands of pounds on foot of expenses for the flotation of land loans. A base political trick of this kind is too contemptible for words. It, however, gave Mr Redmond one of the main arguments for impressing the Convention that the Birrell Bill could alone save the ratepayers from



Page 100

the imminence of this burden. It would have been easy to demolish the contention had the reply been allowed to be made. But this was just the one thing “the bosses” were determined not to allow—Mr O’Brien had given notice of an amendment, the justification of which is attested by the facts of the succeeding twelve years. It expressed the view that the Birrell Land Bill would lead to the stoppage of land purchase, that it would impose an intolerable penalty upon the tenant purchasers whose purchase money the Treasury had failed to provide, and that it would postpone for fifty years any complete solution of the problem of the West and of the redistribution of the untenanted grass lands of the country. The moment Mr O’Brien stood up to move this, at a concerted signal, pandemonium was let loose. I was never the witness of a more disgraceful incident—that an Irishman whose life had been given in so full and generous a fashion to the people should, by secret and subsidised arrangement, be howled down by an imported gang and prevented from presenting his views in rational fashion to men the majority of whom at least were present for honest consideration of arguments. It is a thing not easily forgotten or forgiven for the Irishmen who engineered it, that such a ferocious and foolish display of truculent cowardice should have taken place. For an hour Mr O’Brien manfully faced the obscene chorus of cat-cries and disorder. He describes one of the incidents that occurred in the following words:—

“While I was endeavouring, by the aid of a fairly powerful voice, to dominate the air-splitting clamour around me, Mr Crean, M.P., on the suggestion of Father Clancy, attempted to reach me, in order to urge me to give up the unequal struggle. He was no sooner on his legs than he was pounced upon by a group of brawny Belfast Mollies and dragged back by main force, while Mr Devlin, with a face blazing with passion, rushed towards his colleague in the Irish Party, shouting to his lodgemen: ‘Put the fellow out.’ At the same time Father Clancy, Mr Sheehan, M.P., and Mr Gilhooly, M.P., having interposed to remonstrate with Mr Crean’s assailants, found themselves in the midst of a disgraceful melee of curses, blows and uplifted sticks, Mr Sheehan being violently struck in the face, and one of the Molly Maguire batonmen swinging his baton over Mr Gilhooly’s head to a favourite Belfast battle-cry: ‘I’ll slaughter you if you say another word.’”

So does this Convention go down to history as the beginning of an infamous period when the sanctity of free speech was a thing to be ruthlessly smashed by the hireling or misguided mobs of an organisation professing democratic principles. The miracle of the Easter Rising was that it put an end to the rule of the thug and the bludgeonman. But many things were to happen in between.

Certain police court proceedings followed, in which Mr Crean, M.P., was the plaintiff. The only comment on these that need now be made is that Mr Crean’s summons for assault was dismissed, and he was ordered to pay L150 costs or to go to gaol for two

months, whilst the police magistrate who tried the case was shortly afterwards rewarded with the Chief Magistracy of Dublin!



Page 101

The Board of Erin now began to march south of the Boyne and to usurp the functions of the United Irish League wherever it got a footing. It was frankly out for jobs, preferments and patronage of all kinds, so that even the dirty crew of place-hunting lawyers which Dublin Castle had plentifully spoon-fed for over a century became its leaders and gossellers, seeing that through it alone could they carve their way to those goodly plums that maketh easy the path of the unctuous crawlers in life—the creed of the Mollies, and it gained them followers galore, being that nobody who was not a member of “the Ancient Order” was eligible for even the meanest public office in the gift of the Government or the elected of the people. Even a Crown Prosecutor, one of the Castle “Cawtholic” tribe whose record of life-long antipathy to the vital creed of Irish Nationality was notorious, now became a pious follower of the new Order and was in due course “saved” by receiving an exalted position in the judicial establishment of the country, which owed nothing to his honour or his honesty. Under the auspices of the Board of Erin “the shoneen”—the most contemptible of all our Irish types—began to flourish amain. It was a great thing to be a “Jay Pay” in the Irish country-side. It added inches to one’s girth and one’s stature, and to the importance of one’s “lady.” It was greatly coveted by the thousands who always pine to swagger in a little brief authority, and thus the Board of Erin drew its adherents from every low fellow who had an interest to serve, a dirty ambition to satisfy, an office to gain or probably even a petty score to pay off. No doubt there were many sincere and honest and enthusiastic young men attracted to it by the charm of the secret sign and password, and others who believed that its Catholic pomp and parade made for the religious uplift of the people. But taken all in all, it was unquestionably an evil influence in the lives of the people and it degraded the fine inspiration of Nationality to a base sectarian scramble for place and power.

Gone were the glorious ideals of a nobler day wherever it pushed out its pernicious grip. Surrendered were the sterner principles which instructed and enacted that the man who sought office or preferment from a British Minister unfitted himself as a standard-bearer or even a raw recruit in the ranks of Irish Nationality. The Irish birth-right was bartered for a mess of pottage and, worst of all, the fine instincts of Ireland’s glorious youth were being corrupted and perverted. The cry of “Up the Mollies!” became the watchword of the new movement and the creed of selfishness and sectarianism supplanted the evangel of self-denial and self-sacrifice. It was a time when clear-sighted and earnest men almost lost hope, if they did not lose faith. To be held in subjection by the tyranny of a stronger power was a calamity of destiny to be resisted, but that the people should themselves bind the chains of a more sordid tyranny of selfishness around their spirits was wholly damnable and heart-breaking.



Page 102

It was to fight this thing that Mr William O'Brien proposed yet another crusade of light and liberty. As he founded the United Irish League when the country was sunk in the uttermost depths of despair and indifference, he now made a first gallant effort to establish a new national organisation to preach a nobler creed of brotherhood and reconciliation among all Irishmen, and to this he gave the appropriate title of the All-for-Ireland League. The city and county of Cork rallied to his side, with all the old-time fervour of Rebel Cork. The inaugural meeting of the League was held in my native town, Kanturk, and was splendidly attended by as gallant a body of Irishmen as could be found in all Ireland—men who knew, as none others better, how to fight, when fighting was the right policy, but who knew also, in its proper season, when it was good to make peace. The Press, however, shut its pages to the new movement and a complaisant Irish Party, now utterly at the mercy of the Board of Erin, at a meeting specially summoned for the purpose, passed a resolution of excommunication against the new League and against every Member of Parliament who should venture upon its platform, on the ground that it was usurping the functions and authority of the United Irish League, which was now nothing more than a cloak for the operations of the Board of Erin.

No human being could struggle under the mountain weight of responsibility that now rested on the shoulders of Mr O'Brien. Wearied by the monstrous labours and fights of many years, deserted by his own colleague in the representation of Cork City, with the Nationalist Press engaged in a policy of suppression and a system of secret intimidation springing up all over the country, it would have been madness for him to attempt to continue.

Accordingly he decided to quit the field again and to leave the clever political manipulators in possession. After he had sent in his application for the Chiltern Hundreds I came across specially from Ireland to meet him at the Westminster Palace Hotel. It were meet not to dwell upon our interview, for there are some things too sacred for words. I know that he had then no intention of ever returning to public life, and though he was obviously a man very, very ill, in the physical sense, yet I could see it was the deeper wounds of the soul that really mattered.

I have had sorrows in my life and deep afflictions, the scars of which nothing on this earth can cure, yet I can say I never felt parting so poignantly as with this friend, whom I loved most and venerated most on earth. I returned to Ireland that night, not knowing whether I should ever see the well-beloved face again. He went to Italy on the morrow to seek peace and healing, away from the land to which he had given more than a life's labour and devotion. He enjoined his friends not to communicate with him, but he promised to watch from a distance, and that if the occasion ever arose he would not see them cast to destruction without effort of his duty made.



Page 103

How well and generously he kept that promise these pages will show.

CHAPTER XVIII

A CAMPAIGN OF EXTERMINATION AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Mr O'Brien went abroad in March 1909, leaving his friends in membership of the Irish Party. His last injunction to us was that we should do nothing unnecessarily to draw down the wrath of "the bosses" upon us and to work as well as we might in the circumstances conscientiously for the Irish cause. I had some reputation, whether deserved or otherwise, as a successful organiser, and I wrote to Mr Redmond offering my services to re-establish the United Irish League in my own constituency or in any other place where it was practically moribund. I received a formal note of acknowledgment and heard not a word more, nor was my offer ever availed of. On the contrary, the fiat went forth that the constituencies of those who had for five years remained staunch and steadfast to the policy of Conciliation should be organised against them and that not a friend of Mr O'Brien should be allowed to remain in public life. We were not yet actually cut off from the Party or its financial perquisites, but in all other ways we were treated as political pariahs and outcasts and made to feel that there was a rod in pickle for us.

In the autumn of 1909 I was attending my law lectures in Dublin when it was conveyed to me that a raid on my constituency was contemplated, that the officials at the League headquarters in Dublin were, without rhyme or reason, returning the affiliation fees of branches which were known to be friendly to me, and that a Divisional Conference of my enemies was summoned for the purpose of "organising" me out of Mid-Cork. I immediately resolved that if the issue were to be knit at all the sooner the better, and I took my own steps to circumvent the machinations of those who were out, so to speak, for my blood. Hence when the bogus delegates were brought together in Macroom one Saturday afternoon a little surprise awaited them, for as they proceeded to the Town Hall to deliberate their plans for my overthrow, another and a more determined militant body, with myself at their head, also marched on the same venue. There was a short and sharp encounter for possession of the hall: the plotters put up a sorry fight; they were soon routed, and my friends and myself held our meeting on the chosen ground of our opponents. Moreover, Mr Denis Johnston, the Chief Organiser of the League, who had come down from Dublin with all his plans for my extermination cut and dried, dared not take the train that evening in the ordinary course from the Macroom station, but, like a thief in the night, stole out of the town in a covered car and drove to a station farther on.



Page 104

Thus began the foul attempt to exterminate Mr O'Brien's friends, who, be it noted, were still members of the Irish Party, against whom no crime was alleged or any charge of Party disloyalty preferred. The funds of the League, its organisers and its executive machinery, instead of being used for the advancement of the Irish movement along constitutional lines, were brutally directed to the political execution of Mr O'Brien's friends, who, now that he had gone for good, and was reported to be in that state of physical breakdown which would prevent him from ever again taking an active part in Irish affairs, were supposed to be at the mercy of the big "pots" and their big battalions.

Mr Maurice Healy, who had been elected for Cork City by an overwhelming majority over the nominee of "the leaders" after Mr O'Brien's retirement, was unconstitutionally and improperly refused admission to the Party, although he was quite prepared to sign the pledge to sit, act, and vote with it. There was scarcely a thing wrong they could do which these blind leaders of the blind did not clumsily attempt at this juncture. They might have shown us, whose only crime was loyalty to principle and to a policy which had been signally ratified by the repeated mandates of the people, a reasonable measure of generosity and a frank fellowship and all would be well.

But no; we had committed the cardinal offence of preferring a policy to a personality and, in famous phrase, we were marked down to "suffer for it." Hordes of organisers were dispatched to our constituencies to "pull the strings" against us. I can aver, with a certain malicious satisfaction, that wherever they made their appearance in Cork, we met them and we routed them. This may appear an ill way to conduct a political campaign, but be it remembered that we were fighting for our lives, almost resourceless, and that the aggressors had practically limitless powers, financially and otherwise. I will mention one incident to explain many. It was announced that Mr Redmond was to speak at Banteer, on the borders of my constituency. I could not allow that challenge to pass unnoticed without surrendering ground which it would be impossible to recover; and so I took the earliest opportunity of proclaiming that if Mr Redmond came to Banteer my friends and I would be there to meet him. He never came! Meanwhile through a private source—for none of his colleagues were in communication with him—Mr O'Brien heard of the nefarious attempts that were being made to exterminate his friends and he broke silence for the first time since his retirement by despatching the following message to the Press Association:—

"If these people are wise they will drop their campaign of vengeance against my friends."



Page 105

Doubtless “these people” thought this the threat of a man helpless through illness, and not to be seriously noticed, for they went on with their preparations, surreptitious and otherwise, for our destruction, in suitable time and form. I will ever remember it with pride and gratitude that the labourers of the south, the President of whose Association I was, were gloriously staunch and loyal and that there never was a demand I made upon them for support and encouragement they did not magnificently respond to. They gave repayment, in full measure and flowing over, for whatever little I was able to accomplish in my lifetime for the alleviation of their lot and the brightening of their lives.

Meanwhile the Party had matters all their own way, yet their only “great” achievement was to get the Birrell Land Bill passed into law and to put an end to the operations of the Purchase Act of 1903 which was so rapidly transforming the face of the country. They also passed for Mr Lloyd George what Mr Dillon termed “the great and good” Budget, but which really added enormously to the direct taxation of Ireland—imposing an additional burden of something not far from three millions sterling on the backs of an already overtaxed country. But if the people were plundered the place-hunters were placated. The Irish Party had now become little better than an annexe of Liberalism. They sat in Opposition because it was the tradition to do so, but in reality they were the obsequious followers of a British Party and browsing on its pasturage in the hope of better things to come.

Not far off were heard the rumblings of an approaching General Election. There were the usual flutterings of the “ins” who wanted to remain in, and of the “outs” who were anxious to taste the social sweets and the personal pomp of the successful politician, who had got the magic letters “M.P.” to his name. It is wonderful what an appeal it makes to the man who has made his “pile” somehow or anyhow (or who wants to make it) to have the right to enter the sacred portals of Westminster, but it is more wonderful still to see him when he gets there become the mere puppet of the Party Whips, without an atom of individual independence or a grain of useful initiative. The system absorbs them and they become cogs in a machine, whose movements they have little power of controlling or directing.

It was pretended by the leaders of the Nationalists that their subservient surrender to the Liberal Party was a far-sighted move to compel Mr Asquith and his friends to make Home Rule “the dominant issue,” as they termed it, at the General Election. The veto of the House of Lords, the hitherto one intractable element of opposition to Home Rule, was to go before long and the House of Commons, within certain limits, would be in a position to impose its will as the sovereign authority in the State. Yet it is the scarcely believable fact that in all these precious months,



Page 106

and after all the servile sycophancy they had given to the Liberals, neither Mr Redmond nor those true-blue Liberals, Mr Dillon and Mr O'Connor, had ever sought to extract from Mr Asquith an irrefragable statement of his intentions regarding the Irish Question, or whether he and his Government intended to make it a prime plank in the Liberal platform at the polls. The rejection of the Budget by the Lords was made the real issue before the electors, and little was heard of Home Rule, either on the platform or in the Press. True, Mr Asquith made a vague and non-committal reference to it at the Albert Hall on the eve of the election, but the Liberal candidates, with extraordinary unanimity, fought shy of it in every constituency, except where there was a considerable Irish vote to be played up to, and one of the Liberal Party Whips even went so far as to declare there was no Home Rule engagement at all. Far different was it in other days, when Parnell was in power. He would have pinned the Party to whom he was giving his support down to a written compact, which could not be broken without dishonour, and he would leave nothing to the mere emergencies and expediencies of politics, which are only the gambler's dice in a devil's game.

But the men of lesser calibre who had now the destiny of a nation in their hands "trusted" in the good faith of the Liberals and in return asked the country to "trust" them. There never was such a puckish game played in history. Criticism was stifled and the people were told, and no doubt in their innocence believed it, that Home Rule was already as good as carried and that the dream of all the years was come true. Mr Dillon was audaciously flying the flag of "Boer Home Rule as a minimum," although he had not a scrap of authority or a line of sanction for his pronouncements.

It seemed as if every friend of Mr O'Brien was to go under in the campaign of opposition that was being elaborately carried out against them. Our constituencies were swarming with paid organisers and men and money galore were pouring in from outside, so that our downfall and defeat should be made an absolute certainty.

It was in this crisis that the generous spirit of Mr O'Brien impelled him to come to our assistance. For my own part I never had a doubt that when the hour struck the champion of so many noble causes would be found once again stoutly defending the men who had staked all for the sake of principle, but who, without his aid, must be mercilessly thrown to the wolves. We were in a most benighted state, without any trace of organisation of our own (except that I had the Land and Labour Association unflinchingly on my side), without any newspaper to report our speeches, and with only the bravest of the brave to come upon our platforms and say a good word for us. The outlook was as bleak as it well could be, when suddenly, towards the end of December 1909, the joyous news reached us that "the hero of a hundred fights" was about to throw himself into the breach on our behalf. Our enemies laughed the rumour to scorn, but we knew better and we bided in patience the coming of our man.



Page 107

One stipulation, indeed, Mr O'Brien did make, that in coming to our assistance it was not implied that he was to be a candidate himself and that he was merely to deliver three speeches in Cork City to put the issue clearly before the people. Matters had now reached so grave a pitch that not only were Mr O'Brien's own friends to be attacked by the "Board of Erin," which was now in complete control of the machinery of the national organisation, but that every other Member of Parliament who had not bent the knee to its occult omnipotence was to be run out of public life without cause assigned. All this while there was rumour and counter-rumour about Mr O'Brien's return. The Dillonites up to the last moment believed we were playing a game of bluff and went on right merrily with their preparations for making a clean sweep of every man who was "suspect" of possessing an independent mind. Then on one winter's night, shortly before the election writs were issued, the doubters and the scoffers were once and for all confounded. Mr O'Brien arrived in the city which was always proud to do him honour, but which never more proudly did him honour than on this occasion, when they mustered in their thousands at the station and lined the streets, a frantic, cheering, enthusiastic and madly joyous people, to see him back amongst them once again, neither bent nor broken nor physically spent, but gloriously erect, acknowledging the thunderous salutations of the tens of thousands who loved him, even to the little children, with a love which was surely compensation for many a bitter wound of injustice and ingratitude.

CHAPTER XIX

A GENERAL ELECTION THAT LEADS TO A "HOME RULE" BILL!

It boots not to dwell at any great length on the contests that followed. Suffice it to say that Irish manhood and Irish honesty magnificently asserted itself against the audacious and unscrupulous tactics of the Party plotters. Mr O'Brien, by a destiny there was no resisting, was forced into the fight in Cork City and emerged victoriously from the ordeal, as well as winning also in North-East Cork. In my own case, except for the splendid and most generous assistance given me by Mr Jeremiah O'Leary, the leading citizen of Macroom, who shared all the labours and all the anxieties of my campaign, I was left to fight my battle almost single-handed, having arrayed against me two canons of my Church and every Catholic clergyman in the constituency, with two or three notable exceptions. The odds seemed hopeless, but the result provides the all-sufficient answer to those who say that the Irish Catholic vote can be controlled under all circumstances by the priests, for I scored a surprising majority of 825 in a total poll of about 4500, and I have good reason for stating that 95 per cent. of the illiterate votes were cast in my favour, although a most powerful personal canvass was made of every vote in the constituency by the clergy.



Page 108

I consider this incident worthy of special emphasis in view of the ignorant and malicious statements of English and Unionist publicists, who make it a stock argument against the grant of independence to Ireland that the Catholics will vote as they are bidden by their priests. I have sufficient experience and knowledge of my countrymen to say that whilst in troublous times the Irish soggarths were the natural leaders and protectors of their flocks, even to the peril of their lives, yet in these times, when other conditions prevail, whilst in religion remaining staunchly loyal to their faith and its teachers, when it comes to a question of political principle there is no man in all the world who can be so independently self-assertive as the Irish Catholic. There is nothing to fear for Ireland, either now or in the future, from what I may term clericalism in politics, whilst on the other hand it is earnestly to be hoped that nothing will ever happen to intrude unnecessarily the question or authority of religion in the domain of more mundane affairs.

Mr O'Brien sums up the result of the General Election briefly thus:

"When the smoke of battle cleared away, nevertheless, every friend of mine, against whom this pitiless cannonade of vengeance had been directed, stood victorious on the field, and it was the conspirators who a few weeks before deemed themselves unshakable in the mastery of Ireland who, to their almost comic bewilderment and dismay, found themselves and their boasts rolled in the dust. Not only did every man for whose destruction they had thrown all prudence to the winds find his way back to Parliament in their despite, but in at least eighteen other constituencies their plots to replace members under any suspicion of independence with reliables absolutely amenable to the signs and passwords of the Order resulted in their being blown sky-high with their own petards.... Messrs Dillon and Devlin led their demoralised forces back, seventy in place of eighty-three, and for the first time since 1885 they went back a minority of the Nationalist votes actually cast as between the policy of Conciliation and the policy of *Vae Victis*."

Mr O'Brien had established a campaign sheet during the election called *The Cork Accent* (as a sort of reminder of the "Baton" Convention, at which the order was given that no one with a "Cork accent" should be allowed near the platform), and surely never did paper render more brilliant service in an exceptional emergency. It was his intention that his attitude in the new Parliament should be one of "patient observation" and of steady but unaggressive allegiance to the principles of national reconciliation. But such a role was rendered impossible by the active hostility of Mr Dillon and his followers. The doors of the Party were shut and banged against every man who was independently elected by the voters. It was proclaimed that we would be helpless in the country without organisation or newspaper to support us and that we would be left even without the means of travelling to London to represent our constituents.



Page 109

We could not sit inactively under this decree of annihilation. It was decided to continue *The Cork Accent* in a permanent form as a daily journal under the title of *The Cork Free Press*, which was founded at a public meeting presided over by the Lord Mayor. The All-for-Ireland League was also established to advocate and expound the principles for which we stood in Irish life. Its purposes are clearly stated in the resolution which gave it birth—viz.:

“That inasmuch as we regard self-Government in purely Irish affairs, the transfer of the soil to the cultivators upon just terms, and the relief of Ireland from intolerable over-taxation as essential conditions of happiness and prosperity for our country, and further inasmuch as we believe the surest means of effecting these objects to be a combination of all the elements of the Irish population in a spirit of mutual tolerance and patriotic good will, such as will guarantee to the Protestant minority of our fellow-countrymen inviolable security for all their rights and liberties and win the friendship of the entire people of Great Britain, this representative meeting of the City and County of Cork hereby establishes an Association to be called the All-for-Ireland League, whose primary object shall be the union and active co-operation in every department of our national life of all Irish men and women who believe in the principle of domestic self-government for Ireland.”

The All-for-Ireland League made memorable progress in a brief space of time. Mr O’Brien’s return to public life was hailed even by the late W.T. Stead in *The Westminster Gazette* as nothing short of a great political resurrection. The noble appeal of the League’s programme to the chivalrous instincts of the race attracted the young men to its side with an enthusiasm amounting to an inspiration. The Protestant minority in Southern Ireland were being gradually won over to a genuine confidence in our motives and generous intentions to safeguard fully their interests and position and to secure them an adequate part in the future government of our common country. Even the great British parties began to see in the new movement hopes of that peace and reconciliation between Great Britain and Ireland which must be the hope of all just and broad-minded statesmanship.

It was in these circumstances that the Party surrendered “at discretion” to the expediencies of Liberalism, abjectly waiving their position as an independent entity in Parliament, with no shadow of the pride and spirit of the Parnell period left, seeming to exist for the favours and bonuses that came their way, and for the rest playing to the gallery in Ireland by telling them that Home Rule was coming “at no far distant date,” and that they had only to trust to Asquith and all would be well. Never had a Party such a combination of favourable circumstances to command success. They possessed a strategical advantage such as Parnell would have given his life



Page 110

for—they held the balance of power and they could order the Government to do their bidding or quit. Yet instead of regarding themselves as the ambassadors of a nation claiming its liberty they seemed to be obsessed with a criminal selfishness passing all possible belief. When it was proposed to make Members of Parliament stipendiaries of the State, they at first protested vehemently against the application of this principle to the Irish representatives, and therein they were right. From a purely democratic standpoint no reasonable objection can be urged against the payment of those who give their time and talent to the public service, but Ireland was in different case. Her representatives were at Westminster unwillingly, not to assist in the government of the Empire with gracious intent, but rather definitely to obstruct, impede and hamper this government until Ireland's inalienable right to self-government was conceded, and therefore it was their clear duty to say that they would accept payment only from the country and the people they served and that they cast back this Treasury bribe in the teeth of those who offered it. But having ostentatiously resolved that they would never accept a Parliamentary stipend, they finally allowed their virtuous resistance to temptation to be overcome and voted for "payment of members," which, without their votes, would never have been adopted by the House of Commons. There were placemen now in Parliament, and place-hunting was no longer a pastime to be proscribed amongst Nationalists. It may be there was no wilful corruption in thus accepting from the common purse of the United Kingdom payment which was made to all Members of Parliament alike, but it deprived the Irish people of control of their representatives and handed them over to the control of the English Treasury, and thus opened the way to the downfall of Parliamentarianism in Ireland that rapidly set in. Abandoned all too lightly was the rigid principle that to accept favours from England was to betray Ireland, and the pursuit of place and patronage was esteemed as not being inconsistent with a pure patriotism.

Furthermore, as if to cap the climax of their imbecilities and blunders, the Irish Party allowed the first precious year of their mastery of Parliament to be devoted to the passage of an Insurance Act which nobody in Ireland outside the job-seekers wanted, which every independent voice in the country, including a unanimous Bench of Bishops, protested against, and whose only recommendation was that it provided a regular deluge of well-paid positions for the votaries of the secret sectarian society that had the country in its vicious grip. Such a debauch of sham Nationalism as now ensued was never paralleled in the worst period of Ireland's history, and that this should be done in the name of patriotism was not its least degrading feature. Nemesis could not fail to overtake this conscious sin against the national ideal. It met with its own condign punishment before many years



Page 111

were over. To show the veritable depths of baseness to which the so-called National Movement had fallen it need only be stated that it was charged against their official organ—*The Freeman's Journal*—that no less than eighteen members of its staff had obtained positions of profit under the Crown, including a Lord Chancellorship, an Under-secretaryship, Judgeships, Crown Prosecutorships, University Professorships, Resident Magistracies, Local Government Inspectorships, *etc.* In this connection it is also worthy of mention that when the premises of this concern were burnt out in the course of the Easter Week Rebellion it was reendowed for “national” purposes, with a Treasury grant of L60,000, being twice the amount which the then directors of the *Freeman* confessed to be the business value of the property.

Thus did the “Board of Erin” attract to its side all the most selfish and disreputable elements in Irish Catholic life, and thus also did it repel and disgust the more broad-minded and tolerant Protestant patriots whom the All-for-Ireland programme, under happier circumstances, would have undoubtedly won over to the side of Home Rule. Much might even yet be forgiven to the men who had the destiny of Ireland in their hands if they had shown any striking capacity to exact a measure of self-government sufficiently big and broad to justify the national demand as then understood. But they showed neither strength nor wisdom, neither courage nor sagacity in their dealings with the English Liberal leaders and old Parliamentary hands against whom they were pitted. They were hopelessly out-manoeuvred and overmatched at every stage of the game. It is but just to state that the members of the Party as a whole had scarcely an atom of responsibility for these miserable failures and defects of policy. They owed their election to “the machine.” They were the complaisant bondsmen of the secret Order. Whatever they felt they dared not utter a word which would bring the wrath of “the Bosses” upon their heads. They were never candidly consulted as to tactics or strategy, or even first principles.

The decisions of the little ring of three or four who dominated the situation within the Party were sometimes, it may be, submitted to them for their formal approval, but more often than otherwise this show of formal courtesy was not shown them. The position of Mr Redmond was most humiliating of all. He did not lack many of the qualities which might have made for greatness in leadership, but he did undoubtedly lack the quality of backbone and that strength of character to assert himself and to maintain his own position without which no man can be truly considered great. Whenever it came to an issue between them it is well known he had to submit his judgment and to bend his will to the decision of the three others—Messrs Dillon, Devlin and T.P. O'Connor—who must historically be held responsible for the mistakes and weaknesses and horrible blunders of those years, which no self-respecting Irishman of the future can ever look back upon without a shudder of horror.



Page 112

The Home Rule Bill, which was the product of those shameful years of debility and disgrace, was so poor and paltry a thing as to be almost an insult to Irish patriotism and intelligence. It proposed to establish merely a nominal Parliament in Dublin. It was financially unsound, besides being a denial of Ireland's right to fix and levy her own taxes. As a matter of fact, the power of taxation was rigorously maintained at Westminster with a reduced Irish representation of two-thirds. And this was the measure which was proclaimed to be greater than Grattan's Parliament or than any of the previous Home Rule Bills! Furthermore, it made no provision for the completion of land purchase, but Mr Asquith was not really to be blamed for this, as Mr Dillon proclaimed that one of the great attractions of the Bill was that it would leave the remnant of the landlords to be dealt with by him and his obedient henchmen. Finally, neither the Liberal Party nor their faithful Irish supporters would hear of any concessions to Ulster.

These people were now so arrogant in the fancied security and strength of their position to do just as they pleased that Mr Redmond rashly undertook "to put down Ulster with the strong hand" and rather prematurely declared: "There is no longer an Ulster difficulty." One further financial infamy the Bill perpetrated. The twenty millions sterling which were, under the Land Purchase Act of 1903, to have been a free Imperial grant to lubricate the wheels of agrarian settlement, was henceforth and by a "Home Rule Government" to be audaciously charged as a debt against Ireland. And this, be it noted, was part of the pact come to with the "Nationalist" leaders at the Downing Street breakfast-table, where Ireland's fate was sealed, and which they joyously supported in the House of Commons against such opposition as the All-for-Ireland minority was allowed to give it by the ruthless application of the guillotine.

The Independent Nationalist members were willing to make the best of a very "bad bargain," if only they could succeed in getting adopted three amendments which they regarded as vital to the success of the measure: (1) A new financial plan; (2) the completion of land purchase, and (3) such concessions as would win the consent of Ulster. But our reward for thus endeavouring to make the Bill adaptable to Irish requirements and acceptable to the whole of Ireland was to be dubbed "factionists" and "traitors" by the official Irish Party, who never once during three years' debates in Parliament made the slightest attempt to amend or improve the Bill, but who remained silent and impotent as graven images on the Irish benches whilst the way was being paved for all the ruin and desolation and accumulated horrors that have since come to Ireland through their compliant and criminal imbecility.

They had a perfect Parliamentary unity; they certainly seemed to have the most perfect understanding with their Liberal friends, but they had no more claim to represent an independent, vigilant, self-respecting nation than they had to represent, say, "Morocco"!



Page 113

CHAPTER XX

THE RISE OF SIR EDWARD CARSON

“The question I put to myself is this: In the years of failure, where have we gone wrong? What are the mistakes we have made? What has been the root cause of our failure? The Lord Chancellor was perfectly frank so far as the Unionists were concerned. He said, indeed, that he was still a Unionist, but he had come to the conclusion that the maintenance of the Union was impossible. What lesson have we who have been Home Rulers to draw from the past? I think the mistake we made in the beginning was that we did not sufficiently realise the absolute necessity of taking into consideration the feeling of Ulster.”

These notable words were spoken by Viscount Grey of Falloden in the debate in the House of Lords on the Partition Bill on 24th November 1920. A more remarkable vindication of All-for-Ireland principles and a more utter condemnation of the egregious folly of our opponents it is not possible to imagine, coming especially from so clear and calm-minded a statesman as the former Liberal Foreign Secretary. The root principles upon which Mr O’Brien and his friends proceeded from the start were that success was to be had by making an Irish settlement depend, in the first place, upon the co-operation of a million of our Protestant countrymen, and next by enlisting the co-operation of both British parties, instead of making the Irish Question the exclusive possession of one English Party. These two principles are now universally acknowledged to be the wise ones, yet when we were urging them in the Home Rule debates we could find no support from the Liberal-Irish cohorts, and although we sedulously devoted ourselves to urging a non-party programme and the conciliation of the Protestant minority—about which all parties are now agreed—we only received vilification and calumny for our portion.

Great play is being made by distinguished converts within the past few years of Dominion Rule as if they were the discoverers of this blessed panacea for Ireland’s ills, but it is proper to recall that the All-for-Ireland Party specifically proposed Dominion Home Rule in a letter to Mr Asquith in 1911 as the wisest of all solutions. Scant attention was paid to our recommendation then and it is not even remembered for us by the protagonists of a later time. In all our efforts to conciliate Ulster and to allay the alarms it undoubtedly felt owing to the growth and aggressiveness of the Catholic Order of Orangeism, we never received encouragement or support from the Government or the Irish Party. On the contrary, they denounced as treason to Ireland the proposal made by us that for an experimental term of five years the Ulster Party, which would remain in the Imperial Parliament, should have the right of appeal as against any Irish Bill of which they did not approve, the decision to be given within one month. This, we held, would have been a more effectual safeguard than any proposed since to satisfy Irish Unionists that legislative oppression would have been impossible.

Page 114

Other proposals of a representation in the Irish Parliament proportioned to their numbers and of guarantees against the establishment of any Tammany system of spoils in favour of the secret sectarian association were also submitted. But all our overtures for a peace based on reasonable concessions were repudiated by the official Party and contemptuously rejected by them and we were held up to public obloquy as proposing to subject Ireland to the veto of fourteen Orangemen.

In the early stages of the opposition to Home Rule, curiously enough Sir Edward Carson did not count as a figure of any particular power or malignancy. True, he had his early period of notoriety in Ireland when he acted as a Crown Prosecutor under the Crimes Act. But when he transferred his legal and political ambition to England it is alleged that he was for a season a member of the National Liberal Club and was thus entitled to be ranked as a Liberal in politics. Whether through conviction or otherwise, his allegiance appears to have been promptly and permanently transferred to the Unionist Party, but even then he was in no sense regarded as an Ulster Member—he is himself a Southern Irishman by birth—and in the House of Commons comported himself as a good Unionist, holding office as such. It was only when the Irish Party set their faces sternly against any concessions to Ulster that Sir Edward Carson stepped into the breach and came to the front as the duly elected leader of the Ulster Party. It is the sheerest nonsense and pure ignorance of the facts to say that Sir Edward Carson created the Ulster difficulty. It was created by the statesmen and politicians who, in the words of Viscount Grey, “did not sufficiently realise the absolute necessity of taking into consideration the feeling of Ulster.” When the full history of this period is written, and when documents at present confidential are available, I believe it will be shown that if the concessions and safeguards suggested by the All-for-Ireland Party had been offered by the Government or the Irish Party in the earlier stages of the Home Rule controversy they would have been, in the main, acceptable to Ulster Unionist opinion. I well remember Mr (now Mr Justice) Moore declaring, from his place on the Ulster benches:

“My friends and myself have always marvelled at the fatuity of the Irish Party in throwing over the member for the City of Cork (Mr William O’Brien) when he had all the cards in his hands.”

Where we preached all reasonable concession and conciliation our opponents proclaimed that Ulster must submit itself unconditionally to the law and that it must content itself in the knowledge that “minorities must suffer.” And all this while the Board of Erin Hibernians were consolidating their position as the ascendant authority in Irish life, from whom the Protestant minority might not, without some reason, in looking back on their own bad past, expect that it would be taken out of them when the Catholics got



Page 115

into power. Thus in very real fear and terror of their disabilities under an Irish Parliament, which would be elected and dominated by a secret sectarian organisation, they entered into the famous Ulster Covenant and solemnly swore to resist Home Rule and to raise a Volunteer Army for the purpose of giving force and effect to their resistance. The visit of Mr Winston Churchill to Belfast early in 1912 to address a Nationalist meeting there was an aggravation of the situation and there was a time during his progress through the city when his motor car was in imminent danger of being upset and when it was surrounded by a howling and enraged mob of Orangemen, who shouted the fiercest curses and threats at him. As a result of this experience Mr Churchill was never afterwards a very enthusiastic supporter of what came to be called "the coercion of Ulster."

Meanwhile Mr Churchill's most ill-advised visit, from the point of view of political tactics, was just the thing required to raise all the worst elements of Orangeism and to give its best fillip to the signing of the Covenant, which proceeded apace, not only in Ulster, but in Great Britain, even to the extent that the army was said to be honey-combed with sworn Covenanters, contrary to all the rules and doctrines of military law and discipline. And in due course, in reply to the challenge of Mr Churchill's visit the leader of the Unionist Party, Mr Bonar Law, visited Balmoral, near Belfast, and reviewed from 80,000 to 100,000 Ulster Volunteers, who marched past him in military order, and saluted. Sir Edward Carson made the meeting repeat after him the pledge: "We will never in any circumstances submit to Home Rule."

The Unionist Party was now solidly and assertively on the side of Ulster in its opposition to Home Rule. They held a demonstration at Blenheim on 27th July 1912, when some three thousand delegates from political associations, invited by the Duke of Marlborough, were present. Mr Bonar Law described the Liberal Ministry as a revolutionary committee which had seized by fraud on despotic power, and declared that the Unionist Party would use whatever means seemed likely to be most effective. He made the declaration that Ireland was two nations, a theory which, strangely enough, Mr Lloyd George, as Coalition Premier, advocated eight years later. He went on to say that the Ulster people would submit to no ascendancy and "he could imagine no lengths of resistance to which they might go in which he would not be ready to support them" and in which they would not be supported by the overwhelming majority of the British people.



Page 116

In Parliament a few weeks later Mr Asquith described Mr Bonar Law's speech as a declaration of war against Constitutional Government, but the Ulstermen went on calmly making their preparations for levying war and Sir Edward Carson and his friends coolly delivered speeches which reeked of sedition and treason against the State. Sir Edward Carson declared (27th July 1912): "We will shortly challenge the Government. They shall us if they like it is treason. We are prepared to take the consequences." And again he said (1st October 1912): "The Attorney-General says that my doctrines and the course I am taking lead to anarchy. Does he not think I know that?" And that fine exemplar of constitutional law, Mr F.E. Smith (now Lord Chancellor of England) said: "Supposing the Government gave such an order the consequences can only be described in the words of Mr Bonar Law when he said: 'If they did so it would not be a matter of argument but the population of London would lynch you on the lamp-posts.'" Ulster scarcely needed these incitements to encourage it in its definite purpose of armed resistance to Home Rule. It began to organise and discipline its army of Volunteers under able military leaders who subsequently demonstrated their capacity in no uncertain fashion, under the tests of actual warfare on many fields of battle. With the knowledge we now possess it seems scarcely believable that Mr Redmond and his friends should have professed to treat what was happening in Ulster as "a gigantic game of bluff." They joked pleasantly over the drilling of the Ulster Volunteers with "wooden guns," and they only asked that the Government should "Let the police and soldiers stand aside and make a ring and you will hear no more of the wooden gunmen." Ribaldry and gibes of this sort in the face of open and avowed treason was but a poor substitute for that firm statesmanship which should have grappled with the Ulster difficulty in either of two ways—to come to terms with it or, in the alternative, beat all unruly opposition to the ground.

Mr Asquith is blamed because he did not put the law in operation against Sir Edward Carson, proclaim his illegal organisation of Volunteers and deal with him and his friends as a people seditious and disaffected towards the State, who, by their acts and conduct, had invited and merited the traitors' doom. But Mr Devlin declared not long after in Parliament that the reason why Mr Asquith did not move was because he and his friends would not allow him. Whence this extraordinary tenderness for the man who was thwarting and defying them at every point, it is not possible to say. No doubt the Ministry knew themselves in the wrong in that they had not considered the position of Ulster and had not attempted to legislate for their just fears. It is beyond question that there were conditions upon which the consent of Ulster could have been secured. If, these conditions being offered, this consent was unreasonably withheld, then the Government would have been absolutely justified in throttling Sir Edward Carson's preparations for rebellion before they had gained any ground or effective shape. But the weakness of the Liberal-Irish position was that they would not bring themselves to admit that the All-for-Ireland policy of Conciliation and a settlement by Conference and Consent was right.



Page 117

Meanwhile, with a weak Irish administration in charge of Mr Birrell as Chief Secretary—most amiable of *litterateurs*, but most imbecile of politicians—the Ulster opposition was allowed to harden into potential violence and civil war. “Engagements” between the Orangemen and the Hibernians began to form a sort of political amusement in the north of Ireland. The cries of religious and race hatred were allowed to devour the sweeter gospel of reconciliation and the recognition of a common country and that communion of right and interest between all classes and creeds which was the evangel of Wolfe Tone and other northern Protestant patriots in sublimer days. Matters were drifting from bad to worse under the fatal weakness and irresolution of the Government. So little fear had Sir Edward Carson of any penal consequences to himself that he declared, on the 7th September 1913:

“We will set up a Government [of their own as provided for in the Ulster Covenant]. I am told it will be illegal. Of course it will. Drilling is illegal. The Government dare not interfere.”

And he was right! It did not interfere. And the Ulster Volunteers began to provide themselves with arms and ammunition and to organise themselves for actual war conditions. There were no more feeble jokes about “wooden guns” and “making a free ring”—as if it were to be only an ordinary pugilistic encounter and of no account. In 1913 the Ulster Volunteer Force was said to be well armed and probably better drilled than the northern regiments at the outbreak of the American War of Secession.

Official nationalism was, though it knew it not, passing through the gates of disaster. It was still able to maintain its hold on the old stagers who were grafted on to it for various reasons, and the Board of Erin was still able to count on the fidelity of those who believed in the secret sign and watchword as the avenue to place and preferment.

The Government of Ireland Bill was merrily pursuing its three years’ course through Parliament—passed by the House of Commons and rejected by the House of Lords after the usual farce and formality of debates which had very little reality in them. What counted was that Ulster was in arms and determined to resist and that “the Home Rule Government” had proved themselves incapable either of conceding or of resisting. Other things began to count also in Ireland. The young manhood of Nationalist Ireland, seeing the liberties of their country menaced by force, decided to organise themselves into a corps of Irish Volunteers to defend these liberties from wanton aggression. The Transport Workers’ Strike in Dublin, in 1913, under Mr James Larkin, also showed the existence of a powerful body of organised opinion, which cared little for ordinary political methods and which was clearly disaffected to the Party leaders. Forces were being loosed that had long been held in check by the power of the place-hunting



Page 118

and sectarian “constitutional” movement asserting and enforcing its authority, through unscrupulous methods already described, to speak and act on behalf of the people. If Sir Edward Carson had risen to power through open and flagrant defiance of all constituted right and authority, there were others who were not slow to copy his methods. The Irish Party may denounce him in Parliament as a disloyal subject of the Crown, but there were young Nationalists in Southern Ireland, aye, even in Rebel Cork, who sincerely raised cheers for him because he had shown them, as they believed, the better way “to save Ireland.” The Government could not make one law for the North and another for the South. If it allowed the Orangemen to drill and arm it could not well interfere with the Nationalists if they took a leaf out of their book and proceeded to act in like manner. And thus are the destinies of people and the fate of nations decided. In preparing for civil war Sir Edward Carson gave that spur of encouragement to Germany that it just needed to rush it into a world war. And for how much else he is responsible in Ireland every faithful student of current history knows!

CHAPTER XXI

SINN FEIN—ITS ORIGINAL MEANING AND PURPOSE

Sinn Fein had a comparatively small and unimportant beginning. It was not heralded into existence by any great flourish of trumpets nor for many years had it any considerable following among the masses of the Nationalists. It is more than doubtful, if there had been normal political progress in Ireland, whether Sinn Fein would ever have made itself into a great movement. It was, in the first instance, the disappointments and humiliations which the debilitated Irish Party had brought to the national movement and the utter disrepute into which Parliamentarianism had fallen as a consequence that moved the thoughts of Ireland’s young manhood to some nobler and better way of serving the Motherland. But it was the rebellion of Easter Week which crystallised and fused all these various thoughts and ideals into one direct channel of action and made Sinn Fein the mightiest national force that has perhaps arisen in Ireland since first the English set foot upon our shores for purposes of conquest.

Sinn Fein, as a political organisation, did not exist until 1905, but the originator of it, Mr Arthur Griffith, had established in Dublin, in 1899, a weekly paper called *The United Irishman*. This was the title of the paper which John Mitchell had founded to advocate the policy of the Young Irelanders and was, therefore, supposed to favour to some extent a movement along those lines. Its appeal was mainly to the young and intellectual and to those extremists who were out of harmony with the moderate demands of the Parliamentary Party. Its first editorial gave an index to its teachings and aims. “There exists,” it declared, “has existed for centuries and will continue to exist in Ireland a



Page 119

conviction hostile to the subjection or dependence of the fortunes of this country to the necessities of any other; we intend to voice that conviction. We bear no ill-will to any section of the Irish political body, whether its flag be green or orange, which holds that tortuous paths are the safest for Irishmen to tread; but knowing we are governed by a nation which religiously adheres to 'the good old rule, the simple plan, that those may take who have the power and those may keep who can,' we, with all respect for our friends who love the devious ways, are convinced that an occasional exhibition of the naked truth will not shock the modesty of Irishmen and that a return to the straight road will not lead us to political destruction.... In these later days we have been diligently taught that, by the law of God, of Nature and of Nations, we are rightfully entitled to the establishment in Dublin of a legislative assembly, with an expunging angel watching over its actions from the Viceregal Lodge. We do not deprecate the institution of any such body, but we do assert that the whole duty of an Irishman is not comprised in utilising all the forces of his nature to procure its inception." It continued: "With the present-day movements outside politics we are in more or less sympathy," and it particularly specified the Financial Reformers and the Gaelic League, adding, however: "We would regret any insistence on a knowledge of Gaelic as a test of patriotism." Finally it said: "Lest there might be any doubt in any mind, we will say that we accept the Nationalism of '98, '48 and '67 as the true Nationalism, and Grattan's cry 'Live Ireland. Perish the Empire' as the watchword of patriotism." Thus its creed was the absolute independence of Ireland, and though it did not advocate the methods of armed revolution, it opened its columns to those Nationalists who did. It preached particularly the doctrine of self-reliance and independence. It attached more importance to moral qualities than to mere political action. It was free in its criticism of persons or parties who it considered were setting up false standards for the guidance of the people. It derided the policy of the Irish Party as "half-bluster and half-whine," and when Mr Redmond spoke rhetorically of "wringing from whatever Government may be in power the full measure of a nation's rights," it bluntly told him he was talking "arrant humbug." It made the development of Irish industries one of the foremost objects of its advocacy. It courageously attacked the Catholic clergy for the faults it saw, or thought it saw, in them. They were told they took no effective steps to arrest emigration—that they next to the British Government were responsible for the depopulation of the country; that they failed to encourage Irish trade and manufactures and that they "made life dull and unendurable for the people." And so on and so forth it continued its criticisms with remarkable candour and consistency.



Page 120

It came early into conflict with the Castle authorities on account of its vigorous propaganda against recruiting for the army and it published the text of an anti-recruiting pamphlet for the distribution of which prosecutions were instituted. It was found difficult, however, to obtain convictions against those who distributed these pamphlets, and even in Belfast a jury refused to bring in a conviction on this charge at the instance of the Crown. *The United Irishman* was seized by the authorities and only got an excellent advertisement into the bargain.

Meanwhile an organisation of Irishmen who shared the views of the paper was being gradually evolved, and in 1900 the first steps were taken in the foundation of Cumann na n Gaedhal. Its objects were to advance the cause of Ireland's national independence by (1) cultivating a fraternal spirit amongst Irishmen; (2) diffusing knowledge of Ireland's resources and supporting Irish industries; (3) the study and teaching of Irish history, literature, language, music and art; (4) the assiduous cultivation and encouragement of Irish games, pastimes and characteristics; (5) the discountenancing of anything tending towards the Anglicisation of Ireland; (6) the physical and intellectual training of the young; (7) the development of an Irish foreign policy; (8) extending to each other friendly advice and aid, socially and politically; (9) the nationalisation of public boards. It was felt, however, that the ends of Cumann na n Gaedhal were remote and that something more was needed to bring the new policy into more intimate connection with political facts. This was supplied by Mr A. Griffith when he outlined, in October, 1902, what came to be known afterwards as the Hungarian policy. This policy was, in effect, a demand that the members of the Irish Parliamentary should abstain from attendance at Westminster, which was declared to be "useless, degrading and demoralising," and should adopt the policy of the Hungarian Deputies of 1861 and, "refusing to attend the British Parliament or to recognise its right to legislate for Ireland, remain at home to help in promoting Ireland's interests and to aid in guarding its national rights."

A pamphlet by Mr Griffith, entitled *The Resurrection of Hungary*, was prepared and published, which expounded the details of the new policy. Mr R.M. Henry, in his admirable book, *The Evolution of Sinn Fein* (to which I express my indebtedness for much of what appears in this chapter), tells us that the pamphlet, as a piece of propaganda, was a failure, and produced no immediate or widespread response. Mr Henry also takes exception to the fact of Mr Griffith putting forward the Hungarian policy as an original idea. "It had," he writes, "been advocated and to a certain extent practised in Ireland long before the Hungarian Deputies adopted it," and he quotes matter to show that Thomas Davis was the real author of the policy of Parliamentary abstention and wonders why the credit was not given to the Irishman instead of the Hungarian Franz Deak.



Page 121

The claim of Mr Griffith at this stage was that the independence of Ireland was to be based not upon force but upon law and the constitution of 1782: "His claim was not a Republic, but a national constitution under an Irish Crown" (Mr R.M. Henry). Finally *Sinn Fein*, which, literally translated, means "Ourselves," was formally inaugurated at a meeting held in Dublin on 28th November 1905, under the chairmanship of Mr Edward Martyn and was defined as: "National self-development through the recognition of the rights and duties of citizenship on the part of the individual and by the aid and support of all movements originating from within Ireland, instinct with national tradition and not looking outside Ireland for the accomplishment of their aims."

Sinn Fein had now formally constituted itself into a distinct Party, with a definite policy of its own, and *The United Irishman* ceasing to exist, a new organ was established, called *Sinn Fein*. But though Mr Griffith may found a Party, he was not so fortunate in getting followers. The Parliamentarians had not yet begun to make that mess of their position which they did so lamentably later. That self-reliant spirit was not abroad which came when a manlier generation arose to take their stand for Ireland.

Canon Hannay paints a peculiarly unpleasant picture of the state of Ireland at this time. "Never," he writes, "in her history was Ireland less inclined to self-reliance. The soul of the country was debauched with doles and charities. An English statesman might quite truthfully have boasted that Ireland would eat out of his hand. The only thing which troubled most of us was that the hand, whether we licked it or snarled at it, was never full enough. The idea of self-help was intensely unpleasant, and as for self-sacrifice!" The note of exclamation sufficiently conveys the writer's meaning.

The Sinn Fein organisation as a national movement made very little progress and exercised no considerable influence in affairs. But its principles undoubtedly spread, particularly among the more earnest and enthusiastic young men in the towns. The one Parliamentary election it contested—that of North Leitrim, where the sitting member, Mr C.J. Dolan, resigned, declared himself a convert to the new movement and offered himself for re-election—proved a costly failure. It established a daily edition of *Sinn Fein*, but this also had no success and had to be dropped. For some following years Sinn Fein could be said merely to exist as a name and nothing more. The country had dangled before it the project of the triumph of Parliamentarianism and it discouraged all criticism of "the Party," no matter how just, honest or well-intended. In April 1910, *Sinn Fein* announced, on behalf of its Party, that Mr John Redmond, having now the chance of a lifetime to obtain Home Rule, "will be given a free hand, without a word said to embarrass him." Sinn Fein took no part in the elections



Page 122

of 1910. "This," says Mr Henry, "was not purely an act of self-sacrifice. In fact, Sinn Fein was never at so low an ebb." Its attitude towards the Home Rule, which now seemed inevitable, was stated as follows:—"No scheme which the English Parliament may pass in the near future will satisfy Sinn Fein—no legislature created in Ireland which is not supreme and absolute will offer a basis for concluding a final settlement with the foreigners who usurp the Government of this country. But any measure which gives genuine, if even partial, control of their own affairs to Irishmen shall meet with no opposition from us and should meet with no opposition from any section of Irishmen."

From now onward until 1914 the Sinn Fein Movement was practically moribund and its name was scarcely heard of. When it appeared again as an active force it was not the old Sinn Fein Movement that was there. As Canon Hannay justly remarks: "It cannot be said with any accuracy that Sinn Fein won Ireland. Ireland took over Sinn Fein. Indeed, Ireland took over very little of Sinn Fein except the name." And this is the literal truth.

CHAPTER XXII

LABOUR BECOMES A POWER IN IRISH LIFE

In the play and interplay of movements and events at this time in Ireland we cannot leave out of account the Labour Movement—that is, the official Trade Union organisation as distinct from the Labourers' Association. Hitherto it had mainly concerned itself with industrial and social questions and had not made politics or nationalism an object of direct activity. The workers had their politics, so to speak, apart from their Trade Unions, and the toilers from Belfast were able to meet the toilers from Cork for the consideration of their common programme and common lot without infringing on the vexed issue of Home Rule, on which they held widely divergent views—often enough without understanding the reason why. They were a good deal concerned about municipal government and how many men they were able to return to the Dublin, Belfast and Cork corporations, but they had not counted highly and, indeed, scarcely at all in the scheme of national affairs. The Parliamentarians were too strong for them. Yet it was the workers who always provided the soundest leaders of nationality and its most incorruptible and self-sacrificing body-guard. The thinkers expressed the ideals of Irish nationhood; they lived them and were even prepared to suffer for them. But the time had come when this parochialism of labour in Ireland was to end. To the enthusiasm and impetuous force of James Larkin and the fine brain of James Connolly Irish labour owes most for its awakening. The rise of Larkin was almost meteoric. He was one day organising the workers of Cork into a Transport Workers Union; almost the next he was marshalling a strike in Dublin, which made him an international democratic figure of extraordinary power. He was



Page 123

a man of amazing personality, who exercised a compelling influence over the workers. He shook them out of their deadly stupor, lectured them in a manner that they were not accustomed to, brow-beat them and, though he made them suffer in body over the weary months of the strike, he infused a spirit into them they had not known before. He made the world ring with the shame of Dublin's slums and he did much to make men of those who were little better than dumb-driven animals. He united the Capitalists of Ireland against him in a powerful organisation, and though they broke his strike they did not break the spirit that was behind it. Some men will say the Rebellion of Easter Week had its beginnings in the Dublin Strike of 1913; others that Carson was the cause of it; whilst many ascribe it to the criminal folly and short-sightedness of Redmond and his followers, who allowed British politicians to bully and betray them at every point and made Parliamentarianism of their type intolerable to the young soul of Ireland. History in due course will assign each its due meed of responsibility, but of this we are certain, that the men who came out in Easter Week and bore arms were largely the men whom Larkin had organised and whom Connolly's doctrine had influenced. From the point of view of mental calibre Connolly was by far the abler man. He was not as well known outside Labour circles in Dublin as he has come to be since his death, but to anyone who has given any thought or study to his life and writings he must appear a person of single-minded purpose, great ability, ordered methods of thought and a fine Nationalism, which was rooted in the principles of Wolfe Tone and the United Irishmen. Connolly preached the gospel of social democracy with a fine and almost inspired fervour. He was an internationalist in the full Socialist sense, but seeing the harrowing sights that beset him every day in the abominable slums of Dublin City he was an Irish Reformer above all else. Mr Robert Lynd writes of him, in his Introduction to Connolly's *Labour in Ireland*:

"To Connolly Dublin was in one respect a vast charnel-house of the poor. He quotes figures showing that in 1908 the death-rate in Dublin City was 23 per 1000 as compared with a mean death-rate of 15.8 in the seventy-six largest English towns. He then quotes other figures, showing that while among the professional and independent classes of Dublin children under five die at a rate of 0.9 per 1000 of the population of the class the rate among the labouring poor is 27.7. To acquiesce in conditions such as are revealed in these figures is to be guilty of something like child murder. We endure such things because it is the tradition of comfortable people to endure them. But it would be impossible for any people that had its social conscience awakened to endure them for a day. Connolly was the pioneer of the social conscience in Ireland."

In the chapter on "Labour in Dublin" Connolly himself thus refers to the Dublin Strike and what it meant:



Page 124

“Out of all this turmoil and fighting the Irish working class movement has evolved, is evolving, amongst its members a higher conception of mutual life, a realisation of their duties to each other and to society at large, and are thus building for the future a way that ought to gladden the hearts of all lovers of the race. In contrast to the narrow, restricted outlook of the Capitalist class and even of certain old-fashioned trade unionists, with their perpetual insistence upon ‘rights,’ it insists, almost fiercely, that there are no rights without duties, and the first duty is to help one another. This is, indeed, revolutionary and disturbing, but not half as much as would be a practical following out of the moral precepts of Christianity.”

Here we get some measure of the man and of his creed. To the part he played in the Easter Week Rebellion I must refer in its own proper place. That the Dublin Strike and its consequences had a profound effect on later events, this quotation from “AE” will show. In a famous “open letter” to the employers he declared:

“The men whose manhood you have broken will loathe you and will be always brooding and scheming to strike a fresh blow. The children will be taught to curse you. The infant being moulded in the womb will have breathed into its starved body the vitality of hate. It is not they—it is you who are blind Samsons pulling down the pillars of the social order.”

The poet oftentimes has the vision to see in clear outline what the politician and the Pharisee cannot even glimpse.

At any rate this may be asserted, that from the year of the Dublin Strike dates the uprising of Labour in Ireland. Connolly became a martyr for his principles, whilst Larkin has been hunted from one end of the world to the other because of his doctrines, undoubtedly of an extremely revolutionary character. But able men have arisen to continue the work they inaugurated and Labour in Ireland has now formally insisted on its right to be a political Party as well as a social organisation. It no longer circumscribes its aspirations to purely industrial issues and social concerns, but it takes its place on the stage of larger happenings and events and is like to play a great part in the moulding of the Ireland that will arise when the old vicious systems and forms are shattered for evermore.

CHAPTER XXIII

CARSON, ULSTER AND OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

With the nearness of the time when Home Rule must automatically become law, unless something happened to interfere, events began to move rapidly. The Tory Party, largely, I believe, through political considerations, had unalterably taken sides with Ulster. The Liberal Party were irresolute, wavering, pusillanimous. Mr Redmond’s followers began

to be uneasy—they commenced to falter in their blind faith that they had only to trust Asquith and all would be well.



Page 125

“In the Ancient Order of Hibernians,” Mr Henry tells us, “all sections of Sinn Fein, as well as the Labour Party, saw a menace to any prospect of an accommodation with Ulster. This strictly sectarian society, as sectarian and often as violent in its methods as the Orange Lodges, evoked their determined hostility.”

“This narrowing down,” wrote *Irish Freedom* (the organ of Mr P. H. Pearse and his friends), “of Nationalism to the members of one creed is the most fatal thing that has taken place in Irish politics since the days of the Pope’s Brass Band,” and the Ancient Order was further referred to as “a job-getting and job-cornering organisation,” as “a silent, practical riveting of sectarianism on the nation.” *The Irish Worker* was equally emphatic. “Were it not for the existence of the Board of Erin the Orange Society would have long since ceased to exist. To Brother Devlin and not to Brother Carson is mainly due the progress of the Covenanters Movement in Ulster.”

Though no doubt in Ireland religion exercises a considerable influence, it is nevertheless a mistake to think that it was purely a question of religion with those redoubtable Northern Unionists whom Sir Edward Carson led. They attached more importance to their political rights and independent commercial position, which they believed to be endangered; corruption in matters of administration was what they were most in dread of. The Irish Party used to point proudly to the number of Protestants who had been elected as members of their Party. The reply of Ulster was that they owed their election to their accommodating spirit in accepting the Parliamentary policy and not because of their rigid adherence to Protestant principles.

Then came the Lame gun-running expedition, when the *Fanny* sailed across from Hamburg, under the noses of English destroyers and men-of-war, and, it is said, with the knowledge and connivance of the officers commanding them, safely landed 50,000 German rifles and several million rounds of ammunition, which were distributed within twenty-four hours to the Covenanters throughout the Province. It is clear that at this time extensive negotiations were going on between Germany and the Ulster extremists. The Ulster Provisional Government were leaving nothing to chance. History is entitled to know the full story of all that happened at this most fateful period—what “discussions” took place between the Ulster leaders and the Kaiser, how far Sir Edward Carson was implicated in these matters and how real and positive is his responsibility for the world war that ensued. And it should be borne in mind that these seditious traffickings with a foreign state were going on at a time when there was no Sinn Fein army in existence, and that the man who first showed a readiness not alone to invoke German aid but actually to avail himself of it, was not any Southern Nationalist rebel leader but Sir Edward Carson, the leader and, as he was called,



Page 126

“the Uncrowned King” of Ulster. When critics condemn the Nationalists of the South for their alleged communications with Germany, let them not, in all fairness, forget Sir Edward Carson was the man who first showed the way. To whom then—if guilt there be—does the greater guilt belong? When the news of this audacious gun-running expedition was published, Ireland waited breathless to know what was going to happen. Warships were posted on the Ulster coast, ostensibly to stop further gun-running, and the Prime Minister announced in the House of Commons that “in view of this grave and unprecedented outrage the Government would take appropriate steps without delay to vindicate the authority of the law.”

But in view of what *The Westminster Gazette* termed “the abject surrender to the Army” of the Government over the Curragh incident, when officers were declared to have refused to serve against Ulster, not much in the way of stern measures was to be expected now. The Government on the occasion of the Curragh incident had declared: “His Majesty’s Government must retain their right to use all the forces of the Crown in Ireland or elsewhere to maintain law and order and to support the civil power in the ordinary execution of its duty. But they have no intention whatever of taking advantage of this right to crush political opposition to the policy or principles of the Home Rule Bill.”

As Mr Balfour was not slow in pointing out, this statement made “it impossible to coerce Ulster.” The officers who had refused to obey orders, including General Gough, were in effect patted on the back, told they were splendid fellows, and that they would not be asked to march against Ulster. It was the same thing over again in the case of the *Fanny* exploit, Sir Edward Carson unblushingly improving the occasion by laying stress on the weakening of Great Britain’s position abroad that followed as a consequence of his own acts. The Irish Party leaders, who had a few months before still persisted in describing the Ulster preparations as “a masquerade” and “a sham,” were now in a state of funk and panic. They found the solid ground they thought they had stood on rapidly slipping from under them. There was to be no prosecution of the Ulster leaders, no proclamation of their organisation, nothing to compel them to surrender the arms they had so brazenly and illegally imported.

Why was not Carson arrested at this crisis, as he surely ought to have been by any Government which respected its constitutional forms and authority, not to speak of its dignity? Captain Wedgwood Benn having in the Parliamentary Session of 1919 taunted Sir Edward Carson with his threat that if Ulster was coerced he intended to break every law that was possible, there followed this interchange:

Sir E. Carson: I agree that these words are perfectly correct.

A Labour Member: Anyone else would have been in prison.

Sir E. Carson: Why was I not put in prison?



Page 127

Mr Devlin: Because I was against it.

Well may Mr Devlin take all the credit that is due to him for preventing Sir Edward Carson's arrest, considering that he and his Order had been mainly the cause of bringing Carson to the verge of rebellion, but that gentleman himself seems to have a different opinion about it if we are to put any credence in the following extract from Colonel Repington's *Diary of the First World War*, under date 19th November 1915:

"Had a talk with Carson about the Ulster business. He was very amusing and outspoken. He told me how near we were to an explosion, that the Government had determined to arrest the chief leaders; that he had arranged to send the one word H.X. over the wire to Belfast and that this was to be the signal for the seizure of the Customs throughout Ulster. He called to see the King and told Stamfordham exactly what was going to happen and the arrest of the leaders was promptly stopped."

Note the scandalous implication here! What does it amount to? That Sir Edward Carson went to Buckingham Palace, held the threat of civil war over the King, and intimidated His Majesty into using his exalted office to screen the Orange leader and his chief advisers from prosecution! If it does not bear this meaning, what other can it bear? And what are we to think of its relation to constitutional authority and right usage?

But this is not the only occasion on which Sir Edward Carson shows up in Colonel Repington's pages. Under date 19th October 1916:

"Carson told me that a man who had been on board the *Fanny* was writing the story of the famous voyage and the gun-running exploit."

We have not got that story yet. When it is published it would be an advantage if we could also have the full account of the circumstances under which Baron von Kuhlman went over to Ireland to prospect as to the imminence of civil war, who it was he saw in Ulster, what arrangements and interviews he had with the Ulster Volunteers and their leaders, who were the other prominent people he met there and, above all, how the *Fanny's* cargo of German rifles was arranged and paid for? Surely these are questions vital to an understanding of the extent of Sir Edward Carson's culpability for the outbreak of war.

Loyalist Ulster—the Ulster of law and order—was now openly defiant of the law. Mr P.H. Pearse summed up the situation rather neatly in an article in *Irish Freedom*:

"One great source of misunderstanding" (he wrote) "has now disappeared; it has become clear within the last few years that the Orangeman is no more loyal to England than we are. He wants the Union because he imagines it secures his prosperity, but he is ready to fire on the Union flag the moment it threatens his prosperity.... The case



might be put thus: Hitherto England has governed Ireland through the Orange Lodges —she now proposes to govern Ireland through the Ancient Order of Hibernians. You object: so do we. Why not unite and get rid of the English? They are the real difficulty; their presence here the real incongruity.”



Page 128

I quote this to show it was not the All-for-Irelanders alone who saw that the Board of Erin was the real stumbling-block in the way of a national settlement. And now when matters were to be put to the test the Government showed a monstrous culpability. It does not avail them to say that the Irish Party had been guilty of treachery to Ireland, that it misled the Ministry as to the extent and depth of Ulster's irreconcilability, and that it had betrayed its own supporters by reposing a childish faith in Liberal promises. The Government must bear their own responsibility for allowing Sir Edward Carson and the Ulster Covenanters to defy and thwart them at every point, for permitting what amounted to a mutiny in the army, for ordering the Channel Fleet and the soldiers to Ulster "to put these grave matters to the test even if the red blood should flow," and then withdrawing them again, for issuing a proclamation forbidding the importation of arms and allowing the Covenanters to spit at it in mockery, and finally for admitting, in the famous Army Order I have quoted, the Right of Rebellion as part of the constitutional machinery of the State.

"The gigantic game of bluff"—as the Ulster preparations were termed—had won outright. The political gamblers, who would not surrender an inch to Ulster when it could be negotiated with, were now willing to surrender everything, including the principle of an indivisible Irish nationhood. "Conversations" between the various leaders went on during the early months of 1914 to arrange a compromise and a settlement, the gigantic crime of Partition as a substitute for Irish Freedom was traitorously perpetrated by Ireland's own "representatives" and by the so-called "Home Rule Government," and Ireland woke up one fine morning to find that the Home Rule Act even when on the Statute Book might as well not be there—all the bonfires that were lighted in Ireland to hail its enactment notwithstanding—that "Dark Rosaleen," the mother that they loved so well, was to be brutally dismembered, and that "A Nation Once Again" was to mean, in the words of Sir Horace Plunkett: "Half Home Rule for three-quarters of Ireland." The Prime Minister had proposed the partition of Ireland—three-fourths to go to the Nationalists and one-fourth to the Orangemen—and the Irish Party had accepted the proposal, nay, more, they summoned a Conference of Northern Nationalists and compelled them to pass a resolution, strongly against their inclination, in favour of the proposal, under threat of the resignation of Messrs Redmond, Dillon and Devlin if the resolution were not adopted.

An Amending Bill was immediately introduced into Parliament (23rd June 1914), which provided for the exclusion of such Ulster counties as might avail themselves of it. This measure was transformed by the House of Lords so as permanently to exclude the whole of Ulster from the operations of the Home Rule Act.



Page 129

By people forgetful of the facts, it is sometimes supposed that the Partition was agreed to by the Irish Party under the pressure of war conditions. This is not so. The Party have not even this poor excuse to justify their betrayal, which was the culminating point in the steep declivity of their downfall. The All-for-Ireland Party resisted with all the strength at their command the violation of Ireland's national unity. We spoke against it, voted against it, did all we could to rouse the conscience of the people as to its unparalleled iniquity. But though a proposal more offensive to every instinct of national feeling could not be submitted, the Irish Party determined to see the thing through—they seemed anxious to catch at any straw that would save them from an irretrievable doom. On account of the deadlock between the Lords and Commons on the question of exclusion, and with a view to the adjustment of differences, it was announced that the King had summoned a Conference of two representatives from each Party—eight in all—to meet at Buckingham Palace. It is believed that this Conference was initiated by His Majesty but taken with the knowledge and consent of the Ministry. Messrs Redmond and Dillon represented the Irish Party, and thus the man (Mr Dillon) who had been for ten years denouncing any Conference with his own countrymen went blithely into a Conference at Buckingham Palace, where the only issue to be discussed was as to whether Sir Edward Carson should have four or six counties for his kingdom in the North. On this point the Conference for the moment disagreed, but nothing can ever undo the fact that a body of Irishmen claiming to be Nationalists had not only ignobly agreed to the Partition of their native land but, after twelve months for deliberation, agreed to surrender six counties, instead of four, to the Covenanters. And the time came when it was remembered for them in an Ireland which had worthier concepts of Nationality than partition and plunder.

CHAPTER XXIV

FORMATION OF IRISH VOLUNTEERS AND OUTBREAK OF WAR

Meanwhile Nationalist Ireland was deep in its heart revolted by the way the Parliamentary Party was managing its affairs. They sought still to delude it with the cry that "the Act" was on the Statute Book and that all would be well. My experience of my own people is that once confidence is yielded to a person or party they are trustful to an amazing degree; let that confidence once be disturbed, then distrust and suspicion are quickly bred—and to anyone who knows the Celtic psychology a suspicious Irishman is not a very pleasant person to deal with. This the Party were to find out in suitable time. Meanwhile the young men of the South saw no reason why, Ulster being armed and insolent, they might not become armed and self-reliant. And accordingly, without any petty distinctions of party, or class, or creed, they decided to band themselves into a body of volunteers and they adopted a title sanctioned in Irish history—namely, the Irish Volunteers.



Page 130

The movement was publicly inaugurated at a meeting held in the Rotunda, Dublin, on 25th November 1913, the leading spirits in the organisation being Captain White, D.S.O., and Sir Roger Casement, a Northern Protestant who, knighted by England for his consular and diplomatic services, was later to meet the death penalty at her hands for his loyalty to his own country. The new body drew its supporters from Parliamentarians, Sinn Feiners, Republicans and every other class of Irish Nationalist. The manifesto it issued stated: "The object proposed for the Irish Volunteers is to secure and maintain the rights and liberties common to all the people of Ireland. Their duties will be defensive and protective and they will not attempt either aggression or domination. Their ranks are open to all able-bodied Irishmen without distinction of creed, politics, or social grade." And then it appealed "in the name of national unity, of national dignity, of national and individual liberty, of manly citizenship to our countrymen to recognise and accept without hesitation the opportunity that has been granted to them to join the ranks of the Irish Volunteers and to make the movement now begun not unworthy of the historic title which it has adopted." The president of the Volunteers was Professor John MacNeill, who had borne an honourable and distinguished part in the Gaelic League Revival. They declared they had nothing to fear from the Ulster Volunteers nor the Ulster Volunteers from them. They acknowledged that the Northern body had opened the way for a National Volunteer movement, but whilst at first they were willing to cheer Sir Edward Carson because he had shown them the way to arm, it was not long before they recognised that whilst extending courtesy to Ulster, their supreme duty was the defence of Irish liberty. For this they drilled and armed in quiet but firm determination. When Partition became part of the policy of the Irish Party, Mr Redmond and his friends had many warnings that the Irish Volunteers were not in existence to support the mutilation of Ireland. They proclaimed their intention originally of placing themselves at the disposal of an Irish Parliament, but not of the kind contemplated by the Home Rule Bill. The Irish Party saw in the Volunteers a formidable menace to their power, if not to their continued existence. They must either control them or suppress them. Mr Redmond demanded the right to nominate a committee of twenty-five "true-blue" supporters of his own policy. The Volunteer Committee had either to declare war on Mr Redmond or submit to his demand. They submitted. The Government, who were supposed to have instigated and inspired Mr Redmond's demand, were satisfied. The reconstituted Committee called the new body the National Volunteers.

But though the Redmondites got control of the Committee they did not succeed in curbing the spirit of the Volunteers. And besides there was in Dublin an independent body of Volunteers entitled the Citizen Army, under the control of Messrs Connolly and Larkin. This was purely drawn from the workers of the metropolis and was fiercely antagonistic to the Ancient Order of Hibernians, which *The Irish Worker* declared to be "the foulest growth that ever cursed this land," and again as "a gang of place-hunters and political thugs."



Page 131

It appears Mr Redmond's nominees gave little assistance in arming the Volunteers, but the original members of the Committee got arms on their own responsibility and, imitating the exploit of the *Fanny*, they ran a cargo of rifles into Howth. The forces of the Crown, which winked at the Larne gun-running, made themselves active at Howth. The Volunteers were intercepted on their way back by a military force, but succeeded in getting away with their rifles. The soldiers, on returning to Dublin, irritated at their failure to get the arms and provoked by a jeering crowd, fired on them, killing three (including one woman) and wounding thirty-two. "It was," writes Mr Robert Lynd, "Sir Edward Carson and Mr Bonar Law who introduced the bloody rule of the revolver into modern Ireland and the first victims were the Dublin citizens shot down in Bachelor's Walk on the eve of the war."

Hardly had the echoes of the Dublin street firing died down before the thunders of war were heard on the Continent. Germany had temporarily cut through the entanglements of the Irish situation, and from the island drama across the Irish Sea the thoughts of all flew to the world tragedy that was commencing with an entire continent for a battlefield.

If the situation created by the war had been properly handled, it could, with the exercise of a little tact and management and, it may be, with the application of a certain pressure upon Ulster, have been turned to magnificent account for the settlement of Ireland's difficulties and disagreements. The Home Rule Bill had not yet passed into law. Anything was possible in regard to it. Again, however—and with the utmost regret it must be set down—the wrong turning was taken.

Confronted with a common peril, all British parties drew together in a united effort to support the war. The Irish Party had to declare themselves. Mr Redmond spoke in Parliament with restraint and qualification, but he made a sensation, at which probably nobody was more surprised than himself, when he said that the Government might withdraw all her troops from Ireland; her coasts would be defended by her armed sons and the National Volunteers would gladly co-operate with those of Ulster in doing so. Mr Redmond might have bargained for the immediate enactment of Home Rule or he might have remained neutral. Instead he gave a half-hearted offer of service at home, "to defend the shores of Ireland," and forthwith Sir Edward Grey proclaimed, with an applauding Empire to support him, that "Ireland was the one bright spot." Yes, but at what a cost to Ireland herself! It is a fallacy, widely believed in, that Mr Redmond proposed a definite war policy. He did not. He did not at first promise a single recruit for the front. He did not put England upon her honour even to grant "full self-government" in return for Irish service. Admitted that the Home Rule Act was on the Statute Book; but it was accompanied by a Suspensory Bill postponing its operation, and the Government likewise gave a guarantee that an Amending Bill would be introduced to make the measure acceptable to Ulster according to the bargain agreed to by the Irish Party surrendering the Six Counties to Carson.



Page 132

The Ulster Party, on the other hand, were determined to extract the last ounce of advantage they could out of the situation. They made no promises and gave no guarantees until they knew where they stood. When it was seen, after the war had been for a month running its untoward course against the Allies, that they had nothing to fear from Home Rule, they told the Ulster Volunteers they were free to enlist.

The official organ of Sinn Fein and *The Irish Worker* were against any Irish offer of service, but the bulk of Nationalist opinion undoubtedly favoured the Allied course on the broad grounds of its justice and righteousness. Mr William O'Brien sought to unite all Irish parties on a definite war policy. He held the view that "however legitimate would have been the policy of compelling England to fulfil her pledges by holding sternly aloof in her hour of necessity, the policy of frank and instant friendship on condition of that fulfilment would have been greatly the more effectual to make Home Rule a necessity that could not be parried, as well as to start it under every condition of cordiality all round."

But Mr Redmond and his friends missed the tide of the war opportunity as they missed all other tides. They were neither one thing nor the other. Mr Redmond spoke in Ireland in halting and hesitating fashion, publicly asking the National Volunteers to stay at home, and again made half-hearted speeches in favour of recruiting. Mr Redmond's supporters in Cork were not, however, as politically obtuse as he appeared to be, or perhaps as his associations with Mr Dillon compelled him to be. Through the writer they asked Mr O'Brien to set forth a plan of united action. Mr O'Brien did so in a memorandum which suggested that Mr Redmond should take the initiative in inviting a Conference with the Irish Unionists to devise a programme of common action for the double purpose of drawing up an agreement for Home Rule on a basis beyond cavil in the matter of generosity to the Irish Unionists, and, on the strength of this agreement, undertaking a joint campaign to raise an Irish Army Corps, with its reserves, which was Mr Asquith's own measure of Ireland's just contribution. Mr O'Brien was in a position to assure Mr Redmond, and did in fact assure him, that if he took the initiative in summoning this Conference, he would have the ready co-operation of some of the most eminent Irish Unionists who followed Lord Midleton three years afterwards. To this Memorandum Mr O'Brien never received any reply, and I have reason to believe that all the reply received by Mr Redmond's own supporters in Cork, who submitted the Memorandum to him with an expression of their own approval of its terms, was a mere formal acknowledgment.

I am confident that Mr Redmond's own judgment favoured this proposal, as it did the policy of Conference and Conciliation in 1909, but that he was overborne by the other bosses, who had him completely at their mercy and who had not the wisdom to see that this gave them a glorious and honourable way out of their manifold difficulties.



Page 133

There were, meanwhile, differences at the headquarters of the National Volunteers over Mr Redmond's offer of their services "for the defence of the shores of Ireland," which was made without their knowledge or consent. They, however, passed a resolution declaring "the complete readiness of the Irish Volunteers to take joint action with the Ulster Volunteer Force for the defence of Ireland." The Prime Minister promised in Parliament that the Secretary for War would "do everything in his power after consultation with gentlemen in Ireland, to arrange for the full equipment and organisation of the Irish Volunteers." But the War Office had other views in the matter, and though a scheme was drawn up by General Sir Arthur Paget, Commanding the Forces in Ireland, "by which the War Office may be supplied from the Irish Volunteers with a force for the defence of Ireland," this scheme was immediately rejected by the War Office authorities who, in their efforts to gain Irish recruits—and I write with perfect knowledge of the facts—were guilty of every imaginable blunder and every possible insult to Irish sentiment and Irish ideals.

The Ulster Volunteers, on the other hand, were allowed to retain their own officers and their own tests of admission, and were taken over, holus-bolus, as they stood; were trained in camps of their own, had their own banners, were kept compactly together and were recognised in every way as a distinct unit of Army organisation. All of these privileges were insolently refused to the Nationalists of the South—they were for a time employed in the paltry duty of minding bridges, but they were withdrawn from even this humiliating performance after a short period.

Meanwhile an Irish Division was called for to be composed of Southern Nationalists, and with the Government guarantee that "it would be manned by Irishmen and officered by Irishmen." I had my own strong and earnest conviction about the war and the justice and righteousness of the Allied cause. I felt, if service was offered at all, it should not be confined to "defence of the shores of Ireland," but should be given abroad where, under battle conditions, the actual issue between right and wrong would be decided. I made my own offer of service in November 1914, and all the claim I make was that I was actuated by one desire and one only—to advance, humbly as may be, in myself the cause of Irish freedom. For the rest, I served and I suffered, and I sacrificed, and if the results were not all that we intended let this credit at least be given to those of us who joined up then, that we enlisted for worthy and honourable motives and that we sought, and sought alone, the ultimate good of Ireland in doing so. Mr Redmond's family bore their own honourable and distinguished part in "The Irish Brigade," as it came to be known, and Major "Willie" Redmond, when he died on the field of France, offered his life as surely for Ireland as any man who ever died for Irish liberty.



Page 134

Faith was not kept with "The Irish Brigade" in either the manning or the officering of it by Irishmen, and the time came when, through failure of reserves, it was Irish more in name than in anything else, and when the gaps caused by casualties had to be filled by English recruits. A disgusted and disappointed country turned its thoughts away from constitutional channels; and the betrayals of Ireland's hopes, and dignity and honour, which had gone on during the years, were fast leading to their natural and inevitable Nemesis.

CHAPTER XXV

THE EASTER WEEK REBELLION AND AFTERWARDS

A world preoccupied with the tremendous movements of mighty armies woke up one morning and rubbed its eyes in amazement to read that a rebellion had broken out in the capital of Ireland. How did it happen? What did it mean? What was the cause of it? These and similar questions were being asked, and those who were ready with an answer were very few indeed. The marvellous thing, a matter almost incredible of belief, is that it caught the Irish Government absolutely unawares. Their Secret Service Department might as well not have been in existence. For the first time probably in Irish history an Irish movement had come into being which had not a single "informer" in its ranks. This in itself was a remarkable thing and to be noted. The leaders and their officers had accomplished the remarkable achievement of discriminating against the Secret Service agent.

Although everything was clouded in a mist of conjecture and obscurity at the time, the causes of the Rebellion of Easter Week are now fairly clear, and may be shortly summarised. From the moment that the Redmondite Party had imposed their conditions on the Committee of the Irish Volunteers the vast bulk of the Volunteers who were not also "Mollies" were thoroughly dissatisfied with the arrangement. This discontent increased when the recruiting campaign in Ireland was conducted with calculated offence to Nationalist sentiment and self-respect, and eventually developed into a split. The members of the original Committee as a result summoned a Volunteer Convention for 25th November 1914, at which it was decided to declare: "That Ireland cannot with honour or safety take part in foreign quarrels otherwise than through the free action of a National Government of her own; and to repudiate the claim of any man to offer up the blood and lives of the sons of Irishmen and Irishwomen to the service of the British Empire while no National Government which could act and speak for the people of Ireland is allowed to exist."



Page 135

The new body, or rather the old, resumed the original title of the Irish Volunteers. There were also a number of other bodies entirely out of harmony with the policy of the Parliamentary Party, such as Sinn Feiners, the Republicans, and the Citizen Army of Dublin's workers organised in connection with Liberty Hall. These were all opposed to recruiting, and the extremists amongst them advocated total separation from England as the cardinal article of their faith. A new Separatist daily newspaper was published in Dublin under the title *Eire—Ireland*. Its attitude towards the war was that Ireland had no cause of quarrel with the German people, or just cause of offence against them; and it was not long before the Irish Volunteers came to be regarded by the British authorities as a "disaffected" organisation. Its organs in the Press were promptly suppressed, only for others as promptly to take their place. Its officers began to be deported without charge preferred or investigation of any sort. Fenian teachings became popular once more and "the Old Guard" of Ireland, who had remained ever loyal to their early Fenian faith, must have felt a pulsing of their veins when they saw the doctrines of their hot youth take shape again. The eyes of a small but resolute minority of Irish Nationalists began to see in red revolution the only hope of Irish freedom. Physical force may appear a hopeless policy but it was at least worth preparing for, and it may be also it would be worth the trial. This was their creed and this the purpose that animated them. There can be no doubt that through the medium of the old Irish Republican Brotherhood, which had never quite died out in Ireland, communications were kept up with the Clan-na-Gael and other extreme organisations in the United States, and through these avenues also probably with Germany. Indeed the German Foreign Office, quite early in the war, at the instigation of Sir Roger Casement had declared formally "that Germany would not invade Ireland with any intentions of conquest or of the destruction of any institutions." If they did land in the course of the war, they would come "inspired by good will towards a land and a people for whom Germany only wishes national prosperity and freedom."

The avowedly revolutionary party gained a great accession of strength when Mr P.H. Pearse and Mr James Connolly composed certain differences and united the workers in the Citizen Army with the Irish Volunteers. Mr Pearse was now the leader of the latter organisation—a man of high intellectual attainments, single-minded purpose, and austere character. "For many years," writes Mr Henry, "his life seems to have been passed in the grave shadow of the sacrifice he felt that he was called upon to make for Ireland. He believed that he was appointed to tread the path that Robert Emmet and Wolfe Tone had trodden before him, and his life was shaped so that it might be worthy of its end."



Page 136

Separation as the only road to independence was the burden of Pearse's teaching. It was his definite purpose to do something which, by the splendour of the sacrifice involved, would rouse Ireland out of its national apathy and national stupor. He and his associates believed, as a writer in *Nationality* declared: "We have the material, the men and stuff of war, the faith and purpose and cause for revolution.... We shall have Ireland illumined with a light before which even the Martyrs' will pale: the light of Freedom, of a deed done and action taken and a blow struck for the Old Land." It was in this faith they went forth to their sacrifice. "On Palm Sunday 1916," writes Mr Henry, "the Union of Irish Labour and Irish Nationality was proclaimed in a striking fashion. In the evening of that day Connolly hoisted over Liberty Hall, the headquarters of the Citizen Army, the Irish tricolour of orange, white, and green, the flag designed by the Young Irelanders in 1848 to symbolise the union of the Orange and Green by the white bond of a common brotherhood. On Easter Monday the Irish Republic was proclaimed in Arms in Dublin."

Now there are many considerations that could be usefully discussed in relation to the Easter Week Rebellion, but this is not the time or place for them. Let it be made clear, however, that the Rising was not the work of Sinn Fein, but of the leaders of the Irish Volunteers and the Citizen Army. It would be a pretty subject of inquiry to know how Sinn Fein got the credit for the Rising and why the title was given to the new movement that came into being afterwards. My own view is that the British journalists who swarmed into Ireland are chiefly responsible for the designation. *Sinn Fein* was a fine mouthful for their British readers to swallow, and so they gave it to them. Be this as it may, the Rebellion came to be referred to as the Sinn Fein Rebellion, and the movement to which it gave birth has ever since assumed the same name. It is not my intention to dwell on the grave incidents that followed, the prolonged agony of "the shootings of the Rebel leaders," the assassination of Mr Sheehy-Skeffington, the indecent scenes in the House of Commons when the Nationalist members behaved themselves with sad lack of restraint—cheering Mr Birrell's prediction that "the Irish people would never regard the Dublin Rebellion with the same feelings with which they regarded previous rebellions," cheering still more loudly when, in response to Sir Edward Carson's invitation to Mr Redmond to join him in "denouncing and putting down those Rebels for evermore," Mr Redmond expressed, to the amazement of all Nationalist Ireland, his "horror and detestation" of Irishmen who, however mistaken they may be—and history has yet to decide this—at least "poured out their blood like heroes—as they believed and as millions of their countrymen now believe for Ireland" (Mr William O'Brien). Mr Dillon, needless to say, flung his leader overboard on this occasion without the slightest truth. He declared he had never stood on a recruiting platform (which was not true!) and that he never would do so, and accused the Government and the soldiers of washing out the life-work of the Nationalists in "a sea of blood."



Page 137

The Government were at their wits' end what to do. Mr Birrell, the amiable and inefficient Chief Secretary, had to go. Mr Asquith went over to Ireland on a tour of investigation and returned to Westminster with two dominant impressions: (1) the breakdown of the existing machinery of Irish Government; (2) the strength and depth, almost the universality, of the feeling in Ireland that there was a unique opportunity for the settlement of outstanding problems and for a combined effort to obtain an agreement as to the way in which the government of Ireland was to be carried on for the future. He announced that Mr Lloyd George had undertaken, at the request of his colleagues, to devote his time and energy to the promotion of an Irish settlement.

Undoubtedly "the machinery of Government had broken down." But the Government of England had taken no account of what was happening in Ireland—of the veritable wave of passion that swept the country after, the "executions" of the Rebel leaders, of the manner in which this passion was fanned and flamed by the arrest and deportation of thousands of young men all over the country, who were believed to be prominently identified with the Volunteer Movement, of the unrest that was caused by the reports that a number of the peaceable citizens of Dublin were deliberately shot without cause by the troops during the military occupation of the city. What wonder that there was a strong and even fierce revulsion of feeling! And this was not reserved altogether for the Government. The Irish Parliamentarians had their own fair share of it. The process of disillusionment now rapidly set in. That portion of the country that had not already completely lost faith in the Party and in Parliamentary methods was fast losing it. It only required that the Party should once again give its unqualified assent, as it did, to Mr Lloyd George's "Headings of Agreement," which provided for the partition of Ireland and the definite exclusion of the six counties of Down, Antrim, Londonderry, Armagh, Monaghan and Tyrone, to send it down into the nethermost depths of popular favour and the whole-hearted contempt of every self-respecting man of the Irish race. The collapse of Parliamentarianism was now complete. There was no Nationalist of independent spirit left in Ireland who would even yield it lip service. Irish public bodies which a year or two previously were the obedient vehicles of Party manipulation were now unanimous in denouncing any form of partition. The proposals for settlement definitely failed, and the machinery of Irish Government which had "broken down" was set up afresh and the discredited administration of Dublin Castle fully restored by the appointment of Mr Duke, a Unionist, as Chief Secretary for Ireland.

The war was not going at all well for the Allies. America was still hesitating on the brink as to whether she would come in or remain steadfastly aloof. The Asquithian Ministry had been manoeuvred out of office under circumstances which it will be the joy of the historian to deal with when all the documents and facts are available. That interesting and candid diarist, Colonel Repington, under date 3rd December 1916, writes:



Page 138

“Last Friday began a great internal crisis, when L.G. [Lloyd George] wrote to the P.M. [Asquith] that he could not go on unless our methods of waging war were speeded up. He proposed a War Council of three, including himself, Bonar Law and Carson. The two latter are with him, which means the Unionists too.”

Asquith resigned, the Coalition Ministry was formed, and it is probably more than a surmise that the part played by Sir Edward Carson in bringing about this result and in elevating Mr Lloyd George into the Premiership explains much of the power he has exercised over him ever since. Mr Redmond and Sir Edward Carson were both invited to join the Coalition. The former declined, the latter accepted, and from his position of power within the Cabinet was able to torpedo Home Rule at will.

And thus came to an end in Ireland as gross a tyranny perpetrated in the sacred name of Nationality as ever disgraced our annals. The Party which had so long held power had destroyed themselves by years of selfish blundering. The country was growing weary of the men who killed land purchase, constituted themselves the mere dependents of an English Party in exchange for boundless jobbery, intensified the alarm of Ulster by transferring all power and patronage to a pseudo-Catholic secret organisation, and crowned their incompetence by accepting a miserably inadequate Home Rule Bill (with Partition twice over thrown in). The country which had been shackled into silence by the terrorist methods of the Board of Erin (which made the right of free meeting impossible by the use of their batons, bludgeons and revolvers) was emancipated by the Dublin Rising. And in the scale of things it must be counted, for the young men who risked their lives in Easter Week, not the least of their performances that they gave back to the people of Ireland the right of thinking and acting for themselves. How well they used this right to exact a full measure of retribution from the Party that had betrayed them the General Election of 1918 abundantly shows.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE IRISH CONVENTION AND THE CONSCRIPTION OF IRELAND

The time had now come when the Irish Party had to taste all the bitterness of actual and anticipated defeat. Several Irish newspapers had gone over to Sinn Fein. *The Irish Independent* had been previously a fearless critic of the Party, and the defeat of the Partition proposals was largely due to the manner in which they had denounced them and exposed their real character.

A bye-election took place in North Roscommon. There was a straight fight between the Parliamentary Party and Sinn Fein and the former were defeated by an overwhelming majority. Another trial of strength came soon afterwards, and the Party again bit the dust. The Coalitionists had now turned a cold shoulder to the Party. They could get



along very well without them. They had got all they could out of them for war purposes. They foresaw their approaching defeat, and they did not, therefore, count on their scheme of things as a force to be conciliated or to be afraid of. And as if to ensure the complete downfall and overthrow of the Party the Government continued their arrests and deportations.

Page 139

The Party had to “demonstrate” in some way and they hit upon the device of withdrawing from Parliament and sending a Manifesto to the United States and the self-governing dominions. But whilst they paid *Sinn Fein* the compliment of adopting their policy of Parliamentary abstention, they neither honestly kept away nor openly remained—asking questions and sending ambassadors from time to time. *Sinn Fein* was not inactive either. It summoned a Convention to meet in Dublin to assert the independence of Ireland, its status as a nation and its right to representation at the Peace Conference.

The Government was still faced with a reluctant and undecided America, and it became essential for “propaganda purposes” to do something of fair seeming on the Irish Question. The Prime Minister accordingly revived the old Partition proposals, but these were now dead and damned by all parties, the Roscommon, Longford and East Clare victories of *Sinn Fein* having brought the Irish Party to disown their twice-repeated bargain for Partition. He then proposed as an alternative that an Irish Convention, composed of representative Irishmen, should assemble to deliberate upon the best means of governing their own country.

The All-for-Ireland Party were asked to nominate representatives to this Convention, as were also *Sinn Fein*. In reply Mr O’Brien stated four essential conditions of success: (1) a Conference of ten or a dozen persons known to intend peace; (2) a prompt agreement, making every conceivable concession to Ulster, with the one reservation that partition in any shape or form was inadmissible and unthinkable; (3) the immediate submission of the agreement to a Referendum of the Irish people (never before consulted upon a definite proposal); (4) if any considerable minority of irreconcilables still uttered threats of an Ulster rebellion a bold appeal of the Government to the British electorate at a General Election to declare once and for all between the claims of reason and justice and the incorrigibility of Ulster.

One panel of names which Mr O’Brien submitted to the Cabinet at their request was: The Lord Mayor of Dublin, the Protestant Primate, the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, the Marquess of Londonderry, the Marquess of Ormonde, General Sir Hubert Gough, Major “Willie” Redmond, M.P., the Earl of Shaftesbury, the Earl of Dunraven, Viscount Northcliffe, Mr William Martin Murphy, Mr Hugh Barrie, M.P., and two representatives of *Sinn Fein*. Mr O’Brien was in a position to guarantee that at a Conference thus constituted *Sinn Fein* would not be unrepresented. Instead of setting up a Conference of this character, which it is now clear would not have separated without coming to an agreement, the proposal was set aside—whether by Mr Lloyd George or by Mr Redmond’s advisers has yet to be revealed—and an Irish Convention composed of nominated representatives was constituted, which had no possibility of agreement except an agreement on the lines of Partition and which was doubtless planned and conceived for the purpose of fooling Ireland and America and keeping the Convention “talking” for nine months until America was wiled into the war.



Page 140

The Convention could by no possibility succeed, and my belief is it was never intended to succeed. It was numerically unwieldy. Nine-tenths of its representation was drawn from the Ulster Party's and the Irish Party's supporters, both of whom were pledged in advance to the Partition settlement, and as far as the Irish Party representation was concerned the last thing that could be said of it was that it was representative. Of the seventy-five Redmondites who composed three-fourths of the Convention only one escaped rejection by his constituents as soon as the electors had their say! The Convention laboured under the still further disadvantage of being at the mercy of an Orange veto, which makes one wonder how it was that Mr Redmond or his party ever submitted to it. The Ulster delegates to the Convention were under the control of an outside body—the Ulster Orange Council. They could decide nothing without reference to this body, and hence the Convention was in the perfectly humiliating position of carrying on its proceedings subject to an outside Orange veto.

Neither the All-for-Ireland Party nor Sinn Fein was represented at the Convention, although Mr Lloyd George made a second appeal to Mr O'Brien to assist in its deliberations. It says something for the wisdom of Mr O'Brien's proposal for a small Conference that after debating the matter for months the Convention decided to transmit their powers to a Committee of Nine to draw up terms of agreement. This Committee did actually reach agreement, only to have it squelched instantly by the veto of the Ulster Council when the Ulster nominees reported the terms of it to them. Lord MacDonnell, in a letter to *The Times*, dated 2nd November 1919, makes the following disclosure regarding Mr Redmond's view of this matter:—

“In regard to this episode I well remember the late Mr Redmond saying in conversation that if he had foreseen the possibility of a proposal made there being submitted for judgment to men who had not participated in the Convention's proceedings, and were removed from its pervading atmosphere of good will, he would never have consented to enter it.”

Mr O'Brien, however, saw this danger in advance and drew public attention to it. In a speech in the House of Commons he also foretold what the failure of the Convention meant: the destruction of the constitutional movement and the setting up of “the right of rebellion, whether from the Covenanters or Sinn Feiners as the only arbiter left in Irish affairs. You will justly make Parliamentary methods more despised and detested than they are at the present moment by the young men of Ireland.”



Page 141

The Convention failed to reach unanimity. It presented various reports, and the Government, glad of so easy a way out, simply did nothing. The Convention served the Ministerial purpose, and there was an end of it. The proceedings were, however, notable for one tragic incident. Mr Redmond sought to rally the majority of the Convention in support of a compromise which, whilst falling short of Dominion Home Rule, avoided partition and would have been acceptable to Southern Unionist opinion. Mr Devlin and the Catholic Bishops opposed Mr Redmond's motion and the Irish leader, feeling himself deserted at the most critical moment, did not move, and withdrew from the Convention to his death, adding another to the long list of tragic figures in Irish history.

The only practical outcome of the Convention was the acceptance of Dominion Home Rule by a minority, which included Mr Devlin. As if to make matters as impracticable as possible for the Parliamentarians, Mr Lloyd George introduced a Bill to conscript Ireland at the very time the Convention proposals were before Parliament. A more callous indifference to Irish psychology could scarcely be imagined. A series of Sinn Fein victories at the polls had decided the fate of Partition once and for all. But the war exigencies of the Government were so great, the military situation on the Continent was so hazardous, they seemed determined to risk even civil war in their resolve to get Irishmen to serve. They must have fighting men at any cost. The menace was very real, and the whole of Nationalist Ireland came together as one man to resist it. The representatives of the Irish Party, of Labour, of Sinn Fein and of the All-for-Irelanders met in Conference at the Mansion House, Dublin, to concert measures of Irish defence. The Mansion House Conference, at its first meeting, on 18th April, issued the following declaration:—

“Taking our stand on Ireland's separate and distinct nationhood, and affirming the principle of liberty, that the Governments of nations derive their just powers from the consent of the governed, we deny the right of the British Government or any external authority to impose compulsory military service in Ireland against the clearly expressed will of the Irish people. The passing of the Conscription Bill by the British House of Commons must be regarded as a declaration of war on the Irish nation. The alternative to accepting it as such is to surrender our liberties and to acknowledge ourselves slaves. It is in direct violation of the rights of small nationalities to self-determination, which even the Prime Minister of England—now preparing to employ naked militarism and force his Act upon Ireland—himself announced as an essential condition for peace at the Peace Congress. The attempt to enforce it is an unwarrantable aggression, which we call upon all Irishmen to resist by the most effective means at their disposal.”

The Irish Catholic Bishops on the same day received a deputation from the Mansion House Conference, and, having heard them, issued a manifesto, in the course of which they said:



Page 142

“In view especially of the historic relations between the two countries from the very beginning up to this moment, we consider that Conscription forced in this way upon Ireland is an oppressive and inhuman law, which the Irish people have a right to resist by every means that are consonant with the law of God.”

The Irish Labour Party called a one-day strike on 23rd April as “a demonstration of fealty to the cause of labour and Ireland.”

The Government went on with its preparations for enforcing Conscription. The Lord-Lieutenant, who was known to be opposed to the policy of the Ministry, was recalled, and Field-Marshal Lord French was put in his place. A “German plot,” which the late Viceroy declared had no existence in fact, was supposed to be discovered, and in connection with it Messrs de Valera and A. Griffith, the two Sinn Fein members of the Mansion House Conference, were arrested and deported. The Sinn Fein, the Gaelic League and allied organisations were declared to be “dangerous associations.” Concerts, hurling matches, *etc.*, were prohibited, and Ireland was frankly treated as an occupied territory. A bye-election occurred in East Cavan and Mr Griffith—England’s prisoner—was returned, defeating a nominee of the Irish Party. This gave the death-blow to Conscription, though Ireland still stood sternly on guard.

The Mansion House Conference during its existence held a position of unique authority in the country. During its sittings a proposal was made to initiate negotiations with a view to combined action between Sinn Fein, the two sections of Parliamentary Nationalists and the Irish Labour bodies, on the basis of the concession of Dominion Home Rule, while the war was still proceeding with the alternative, if the concession were refused, of combined action to enforce the claims of Ireland at the Peace Conference. There was reason to believe Sinn Fein would agree to this proposal, and that the Cabinet would have invited the Dominion Premiers’ Conference to intervene in favour of an Irish settlement, limited only by the formula: “within the Empire.”

Mr Dillon blocked the way with the technical objection that the Conference was called to discuss Conscription alone and that no other topic must be permitted to go further. Could stupid malignancy or blind perversity go further?

This fair chance was lost, with so many others. The war came to an end and a few weeks afterwards the Irish Parliamentary Party, which had so long played shuttlecock with the national destinies of Ireland, went to crashing doom and disaster at the polls. The country had found them out for what they were, and it cast them into that outer darkness from which, for them, there is no returning.

CHAPTER XXVII

“THE TIMES” AND IRISH SETTLEMENT



Page 143

No volume, professing to deal however cursorily with the events of the period, can ignore the profound influence of *The Times* as a factor in promoting an Irish settlement. That this powerful organ of opinion—so long arrayed in deadly hostility to Ireland—should have in recent years given sympathetic ear to her sufferings and disabilities is an event of the most tremendous significance, and it is not improbable that the Irish administration in these troubled years would have been even more deplorably vicious than it has been were it not that *The Times* showed the way to other independent journals in England in vigilant criticism and fearless exposure of official wrongdoing.

When, on St Patrick's Day, 1917, Lord Northcliffe spoke at the Irish Club in London on the urgency of an Irish settlement and on the need for the economic and industrial development of the country, and when he proclaimed himself an Irish-born man with "a strong strain of Irish blood" in him, he did a sounder day's work for Ireland than he imagined, for he shattered a tradition of evil association which for generations had linked the name of a great English newspaper with unrelenting opposition to Ireland's historic claim for independence. If Ireland had been then approached in the generous spirit of Lord Northcliffe's speech, if the investigation into Irish self-government for which he pleaded had then taken place, if British statesmen had made "a supreme effort," as he begged them to do, "to find good government for Ireland," I am convinced that all the horrors and manifold disasters of the past four years would have been avoided, and the Irish people would be at this moment in happiness and contentment administering their own affairs. But the voice of sweet reasonableness and statesmanlike admonition was not hearkened unto. The neglect of Ireland and of her industrial concerns, of which Lord Northcliffe so justly made complaint, continued, and instead of the counsels of peace prevailing all the follies of wrong methods and repressive courses were committed which will leave enduring memories of bitterness and broken faith long after a settlement is reached. Meanwhile *The Times* devoted itself earnestly and assiduously to the cause of peace and justice. It opened its columns to the expression of reasoned opinion on the Irish case. The problem of settlement was admittedly one of extreme difficulty—it welcomed discussion and consideration of every feasible plan in the hope that some *via media* might be found which would constitute a basis of comparative agreement between the various warring factors. It even instituted independent inquiries of its own and gave an exhaustive and splendidly impartial survey of the whole Irish situation and of the various influences, psychological, religious and material, that made the question one of such complexity and so implacably unyielding in many of its features. Its pressure upon the Government was continuous and consistent,

Page 144

but the Government was deaf to wisdom and dumb to a generous importunity. Not content with appeal, remonstrance and exhortation, *The Times*, in the summer of 1919, boldly, and with a courage that was greatly daring in the circumstances of the moment, set forth in all detail, and with a vigorous clearness that was most praiseworthy, its own plan of settlement. As it was upon this model that the Ministry later built its Government of Ireland Act, I think it well to quote *The Times*, own summary of its scheme, though it is but proper to say that whilst the Government adapted the model it discarded everything else that was useful and workmanlike in the structure:

Legislatures

Creation by an Act of Settlement of two State Legislatures for

- (a) The whole of Ulster,
- (b) The rest of Ireland,

with full powers of legislation in all matters affecting the internal affairs of their respective States. In each State there will be a State Executive responsible to the State Legislature.

By the same Act of Settlement, the creation of an All-Ireland Parliament on the basis of equal representation of the two States—*i.e.*, Ulster is to have as many representatives as the rest of Ireland.

The All-Ireland Parliament to be a Single Chamber which may sit alternately at Dublin and Belfast.

Powers

Governing powers not conferred on the State Legislatures will be divided between the All-Ireland and the Imperial Parliament.

The Imperial Parliament will retain such powers as those involving the Crown and the Succession; peace and war; the armed forces.

To the All-Ireland Parliament may be delegated, *inter alia*, the powers involving direct taxation, Customs and Excise, commercial treaties (with possible exceptions), land purchase, and education. The delegation may take place by stages.

Executive



Upon the assumption of the Irish Parliament of any or all of the powers transferred from the Imperial Parliament, an All-Ireland Executive, responsible to the All-Ireland Parliament, will come into being. The Office of Lord Lieutenant, shorn of its political character, will continue. The Lord Lieutenant will have the right of veto on Irish and State legislation, and may be assisted by the Irish Privy Council.

Safeguards

To safeguard the liberties of both States, each State Legislature is to have a permanent veto upon the application of its own State of any legislation passed by an All-Ireland Parliament.

Representation at Westminster

Ireland will be still represented at Westminster by direct election. The number of representatives to the Commons is to be determined on the basis of population relative to that of Great Britain. Irish representative peers will retain their seats in the House of Lords.

Constitutional Disputes



Page 145

Constitutional disputes between the Imperial and Irish Parliament will be decided by the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council; those between the Irish Parliament and State Legislatures by an Irish Supreme Court.

Finance

In the financial section of the scheme, the case for the over-taxation of Ireland is considered, but it is urged that, while due account should be taken of this circumstance in any plan for financial reconstruction, Ireland ought not to be relieved of her proper share of the cost of the war or of liability for her share of the National Debt.

Ireland is to contribute an annual sum to the Imperial Exchequer, calculated on the relative taxable capacity of Ireland. This will cover interest on the Irish share of the National Debt and a contribution to the Sinking Fund, as well as to defence and other Imperial expenditure.

I do not intend to subject the foregoing scheme to any detailed criticism. The method of constituting the All-Ireland Parliament was open to grave objection. It was to be a single chamber legislature and was to be selected or nominated rather than elected. This damned it right away from the democratic standpoint, and the defence of *The Times* that “the system of delegations would probably have the advantage of being the simplest inasmuch as it would avoid complicating the electoral machinery” was not very forceful. The supreme test to be applied to any plan of Irish Government is whether it provides, beyond yea or nay, for the absolute unity of Ireland as one distinct nation. Unless this essential unity is recognised all proposals for settlement, no matter how generous in intent otherwise, must fail. Mr Lloyd George grossly offended Irish sentiment when he flippantly declared that Ireland was not one nation but two nations. This is the kind of foolishness that makes one despair at times of British good sense, not to speak of British statesmanship. Mr Asquith, whatever his political blunderings—and they were many and grievous in the case of Ireland—declared in 1912:—“I have always maintained and I maintain as strongly to-day that Ireland is a nation—not two nations but one nation.” And those Prime Ministers of another day—Mr Gladstone and Mr Disraeli—were equally emphatic in recognising that Ireland was one distinct nation.

The Times itself saw the folly of partition, for it wrote (24th July 1919):

“The burden of finding a solution rests squarely upon the shoulders of the British Government, and they must bear it until at least the beginnings have been found. Some expedients have found favour among those who realise the urgency of an Irish settlement, but have neither opportunity nor inclination closely to study the intricacies of the question. One such expedient is partition in the form of the total exclusion from the operations of any Irish settlement of the whole or a part of Ulster. Far more cogent



Page 146

reasons than any yet adduced, and far more certainty that every other path had been explored to the end, would be needed to render this expedient other than superficially plausible. Politically there are acute differences between Ulster and the rest of Ireland; economically they are closely interwoven. Economic bonds are stronger than constitutional devices. The partition of Ireland would limit the powers of a Southern parliament so severely, and would leave so little room for development, that it would preclude any adequate realisation of Nationalist hopes. For instance, fiscal autonomy for the Southern provinces could be enjoyed at the price of a Customs barrier round the excluded Ulster Counties. Yet to Irish Nationalists fiscal autonomy is the symbol of freedom. However speciously it may be attired, partition offers no hope of a permanent settlement.”

Although *The Times* specifically denounced partition its proposals undoubtedly perpetuated the partition idea and were thus repugnant to national opinion. Its plan also suggested a settlement by process of gradual evolution, but Ireland had progressed far beyond the point when any step-by-step scheme stood the slightest chance of success. Credit must, however, be given to it for its generous intentions, for the magnificent spirit of fair play it has shown ever since towards a sadly stricken land and for what it has done and is still doing to find peace and healing for the wrongs and sufferings of an afflicted race. For all these things Ireland is deeply grateful, with the gratitude that does not readily forget, and it may be that when all this storm and stress, and the turbulent passions of an evil epoch have passed away, it will be remembered then for Englishmen that their greatest organ in the Press maintained a fine tradition of independence, and thus did much to redeem the good name of Britain when “the Black and Tans” were dragging it woefully in the mire.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE ISSUES NOW AT STAKE

And now my appointed task draws to its close. In the pages I have written I have set nothing down in malice nor have I sought otherwise than to make a just presentment of facts as they are within my knowledge. It may be that, being a protagonist of one Party in the struggles and vicissitudes of these years, I may sometimes see things too much from the standpoint of my own preconceived opinions and notions. But on the whole it has been my endeavour to give an honest and fair-minded narrative of the main events and movements of Irish history over a period in which I believe I can claim I am the first explorer. There are some subjects which would come properly within the purview of my title, such as the power, province and influence of clericalism in politics, but I have thought it best at this stage, when so many matters are in process of readjustment in Ireland, and when our people are adapting themselves to a new form of citizen duty and

responsibility, to leave certain aspects of our public life untouched. It may be, however, if this book meets with the success I hope for it, that my researches and labours in this field of enterprise are not at an end.

Page 147

All I have now to do in this my final chapter is to summarise some of the issues that present themselves for our consideration. I do not propose to deal with the activities of Sinn Fein since it won its redoubtable victory over the forces of Parliamentarianism as represented by the Irish Party at the General Election. The country turned to it as its only avenue of salvation from a reign of corruption, incompetence and helplessness unparalleled in history. Mr O'Brien and his friends of the All-for-Ireland League, of their own volition, effaced themselves at the General Election. They had striven through fifteen long years, against overwhelming odds and most unscrupulous and malignant forces, for a policy of reason and for the principles of Conference, Conciliation and Consent, as between all Irish-born men and a combination of all parties, Irish and British, for the purpose of effecting a broad and generous National settlement. Had they received that support which the events of the last two years demonstrates could have been had—had the moderate Irish Unionists, and especially the Southern Irish Unionists, the moral courage to declare their views, temperately but unequivocally, as Lord Midleton and others have recently declared them, the tide might easily have been turned and wiser counsels and policies prevailed.

If the great peace pronouncement of Cork City merchants and professional men, made a few months ago on the initiative of Alderman Beamish, had only been arranged when the All-for-Ireland League was founded; if Lord Bandon had then held the meeting of Deputy-Lieutenants he recently convened to declare for Home Rule; if Lord Shaftesbury, three times Lord Mayor of Belfast, had then made the speech he made at the Dublin Peace Conference last year, nothing could have resisted the triumph of the policy of Conciliation, and Ireland would be now in enjoyment of responsible self-government instead of being ravaged as it is by the savagery of a civil war, in which all the usages of modern warfare have been ruthlessly abandoned. It is also to be deplored that Sir Horace Plunkett, who is now the enthusiastic advocate of Dominion Home Rule (and, indeed, believes himself to be the discoverer of it), did not, during all the years when he could potently influence certain channels of opinion in England, raise his voice either for the agrarian settlement or for Home Rule and refused his support, when he was Chairman of the Irish Convention, to Mr W.M. Murphy's well-meant efforts to get Dominion Home Rule adopted or even discussed by the Convention.

Of course this much must be said for the Unionists who have pronounced in favour of Home Rule within the past few years, that they could plead fairly enough that every man like Lord Dunraven, Mr Moreton Frewen, Lord Rossmore, Colonel Hutcheson-Poe, and Mr Lindsay Crawford, who came upon the All-for-Ireland platform from the first, was foully assailed and traduced and had his motives impugned by the Board of Erin bosses, and other Unionists, more timid, naturally enough, shrank from incurring a similar fate.

Page 148

But these things are of the past, and we would turn our thoughts to the present and the future.

The country, at the General Election of 1918, by a vote so overwhelming as to be practically unanimous, gave the guardianship of its national faith and honour into the keeping of Sinn Fein. This is the dominant fact of the situation from the Irish standpoint. Other considerations there are, but any which leave this out of account fail to grip the vital factor which must influence our march towards a just and durable Irish settlement. Another fact that cannot be lost sight of is that there is a Home Rule Act on the Statute Book. With this Southern Ireland will have nothing to do! Unionists and Nationalists alike condemn it as a mockery of their national rights. But the Orangeman of the Six Counties are first seriously going to work their regional autonomy—they are going to set up their Parliament in Belfast. And once set up it will be a new and vital complication of the situation preceding a settlement which will embrace the whole of Ireland.

So far as Ireland is concerned the public mind is occupied at the moment of my writing with the question of “reprisals.” Various efforts have been made to bring about peace. They have failed because, in my view, they have been reluctant to recognise and make allowance for certain essential facts. The whole blame for the existing state of civil war—for, repudiate it as the Government may, such it undoubtedly is—is thrown on the shoulders of the Irish Republican Army by those who take their ethical standard from Sir Hamar Greenwood. It is forgotten that for two or three years before the attacks on the Royal Irish Constabulary began there were no murders, no assassinations and no civil war in Ireland. There was, however, a campaign of gross provocation by Dublin Castle for two reasons: (1) by way of vengeance for their defeat on the Conscription issue; (2) as a retaliation on Sinn Fein, because it had succeeded in peacefully supplanting English rule by a system of Volunteer Police, Sinn Fein Courts, Sinn Fein Local Government, *etc.* The only pretext on which this provocation was pursued was on account of a mythical “German plot,” which Lord Wimbourne never heard of, which Sir Bryan Mahon, Commander-in-Chief, told Lord French he flatly disbelieved in, and which, when, after more than two years, the documents are produced, proves to be a stale rehash of negotiations before the Easter Week Rising, with some sham “German Irish Society” in Berlin. On this pretext the Sinn Fein leaders, Messrs de Valera and Griffith (whom there is not a shadow of proof to connect with the German plot), were arrested and deported, with many hundreds of the most responsible leaders. Furthermore, an endless series of prosecutions were instituted and savage sentences imposed for the most paltry charges—such as drilling, wearing uniform, singing *The Soldiers’ Song*, having portraits of Rebel leaders, taking part in the Arbitration Courts

Page 149

which had superseded the Petty Sessions Courts, and such like. All this, with suppression of newspapers and of all public meetings, went on for many months before Sinn Fein, deprived of its leaders, was goaded at last into attacking the Royal Irish Constabulary. Whatever the juridical status of the guerrilla warfare thus entered upon (which it is not improbable England would have applauded if employed against any other Empire than her own), it was conducted on honourable lines by the Sinn Feiners. The policemen and soldiers, including General Lewis, who surrendered, were treated with courtesy, and not one of them wounded or insulted. Their wives and children were also carefully preserved from danger until the police “reprisals” in the Thurles neighbourhood—the wrecking of villages and the savage murders of young men—ended by producing equally ruthless “reprisals” on the other side. In Dublin, since the Dublin Metropolitan Police declined to go about armed, not one of them has been fired upon.

The real ferocity on both sides began when the “Black and Tans” were imported to take the place of the R.I.C., who were resigning in batches. It is indisputable—independent investigation by the Committee of the British Labour Party and the daily messages of fearless British journalists, such as Mr Hugh Martin, establish it beyond possibility of contradiction—that when the “Black and Tans” were let loose on the Irish people they began a villainous campaign of cowardly murder, arson, robbery and drunken outrage, which should have made all decent Englishmen and Englishwomen shudder for the deeds committed in their name. Whenever the particulars are fully disclosed they will, I venture to say, horrify every honest man in the Empire. Not the least disgraceful feature of this black business was the manner in which the Chief Secretary sought to brazen things out and the audacious lies that he fathered, such as that Lord Mayor M’Curtain was murdered by the Sinn Feiners, that it was Sinn Feiners who raided the Bishop of Killaloe’s house at midnight and searched for him (unquestionably with intent to shoot him), that it was the Sinn Feiners who burned down the City Hall, Public Library and the principal streets of Cork, *etc.*

And then the utter failure of all this “frightfulness”! Several months ago Sir Hamar Greenwood declared that Sinn Fein was on the run, and the Prime Minister declared they had “murder by the throat,” the fact being that the young men they sought to terrorise were made more resolute in their defiance of the Government. The only people at all terrorised were the invalids, the nuns whose cloisters were violated by night, the women and children whose homes were invaded at night by miscreants masquerading in the British uniform, maddened with drink and uttering the filthiest obscenities. And does England take account of what all this is going to mean to her—that the young generation will grow up with never-to-be-forgotten memories of these atrocities, while the thousands of young men herded together in the internment camps and convict prisons are being manufactured into life-long enemies of the Empire? Might

not Englishmen pause and ask themselves whether it is worth it all, apart from other considerations, to implant this legacy of bitter hatred in Irish breasts?



Page 150

Let it be admitted that since the Government have been shamed into dropping their denials of “reprisals” and taken them in hand themselves the military destruction has at least been carried on with some show of reluctance and humanity by the regular army, but it cannot be too strongly emphasised that the disbandment and deportation of “the Black and Tans” is the first condition of any return to civilised warfare or to any respect for the good name of England or her army.

If I were asked to state some of the essentials of peace I would say it must depend first of all on the re-establishment of a belief in the good faith of England. This belief, and for the reasons which I have attempted to outline in the preceding chapters, has been shattered into fragments. There is a strong feeling in Ireland that the Prime Minister’s recent peace “explorations” are not honestly meant—that they are intended to rouse the “sane and moderate” elements in opposition to Sinn Fein. Whilst this feeling exists no real headway can be made by those who seek a genuine peace along rational and reasoned lines. The Prime Minister must be aware that when he professes his readiness to meet those who can “deliver the goods” he is talking rhetorical rubbish. “Delivering the goods” is not a matter for Irishmen, but for British politicians, who have spent the last twenty years cheating Ireland of the “goods” of Home Rule, which they had solemnly covenanted again and again to “deliver.”

Mr Lloyd George’s conditions for a meeting with “Dail Eireann” are so impossible that one wonders he took the trouble to state them—viz. (1) that “Dail Eireann” must give up to be tried (and we presume hanged) a certain unspecified number of their own colleagues; (2) that they must recant their Republicanism and proclaim their allegiance to the Empire; (3) that negotiations must proceed on the basis of the Partition Act and the surrender of one-fourth of their country to the new Orange ascendancy.

No section of honest Irishmen will dream of negotiating on such a basis, and any attempt to make use of “sane and moderate” elements to divide and discredit the elected representatives of the people will be met by the universal declaration that the “Dail Eireann” alone is entitled to speak for Ireland. Until this primary fact is recognised the fight in Ireland must go on, and many black chapters of its history will have to be written before some British statesman comes along who is prepared to treat with the Irish nation in a spirit of justice and generosity.

Peace is still perfectly possible if right methods are employed to ensure it. It is futile to ask Sinn Fein to lay down arms and to abjure their opinions as a preliminary condition to negotiations. I doubt whether the Sinn Fein leaders could impose such a condition upon their followers, even if they were so inclined—which they are not and never will be. Let there, then, to start with, be no



Page 151

preliminary tying of hands. The initiative must come from the Government. They should announce the largest measure of Home Rule they will pledge themselves to pass. They should accompany this with a public promise to submit it to an immediate plebiscite or referendum of the whole Irish people on the plain issue "Yes" or "No." All they can ask of the Sinn Fein leaders is that they will leave the Irish people absolutely free to record their judgment. I can imagine that, in such circumstances, the attitude of the Sinn Fein leaders would be: "We do not surrender our Republican opinions, but if the Government offer full New Zealand Home Rule (let us say) and pledge themselves to enforce it if Ireland accepts it, Sinn Fein would be justified before all National Republicans in saying: 'This is a prospect so magnificent for our country we shall do nothing in the smallest degree to prejudice the opinion of the people against its acceptance or to fetter the free and honest working of the new institutions.'" Beyond this no person desiring a real peace ought to expect Sinn Fein to go, and I am convinced that if this were the attitude of Sinn Fein and if the offer were made by the Government as suggested, the majority for acceptance, on a plebiscite being taken, would be so great that there would be no further shadow of opposition even in Ulster, where nobody would object that it should have local autonomy in all necessary particulars.

I can conceive only one man standing in the way of a settlement on these lines—a settlement which would be just to Ireland and honourable to Britain. So long as Sir Edward Carson remains the powerful figure he is—dictating and directing the policy of the Cabinet—it is improbable that he will consent to have the opinion of "the six counties" taken by a plebiscite. But if Sir Edward Carson were to quit politics, as one may hope he can see a thousand good reasons for doing, I can well imagine that Mr Lloyd George would be very glad to come to a satisfactory arrangement.

Whatever happens this much is certain, there is only one road to peace in Ireland—the recognition of her nationhood, one and indivisible, and of the right of Irishmen to manage their own affairs in accordance with Irish ideals.

THE END

POSTSCRIPT

Since this book went to press, the appointment of Sir Edward Carson as Lord of Appeal and the interview between Mr de Valera and Sir James Craig are developments of a more hopeful character which, it is devoutly to be hoped, will bring about the longed-for *rapprochement* between the two countries.