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Ireland, 1916--And Beyond

by Henry W. Massingham

"They that have red cheeks will have pale cheeks for my sake, and for all that, they will think they are well paid."--
The Old Woman, in *Cathleen-Ni-Houlihan*.

In more than one period of the Anglo-Irish association it has been the misfortune of England to forget Ireland at the moment when the relationship of the two countries should have been closer and more sympathetic than usual. She forgot her after the famine, and she forgot her when the great war broke out. She had her excuse. The war had obliterated the whole field of her domestic politics and destroyed or suspended her party system. But even then her statesmen would have done well to remember that July, 1914, had been a time of crisis for Ireland, no less than for her. She had watched the enlistment of at least one hundred thousand Irishmen, answering to the ominous title of 'Volunteers.' She had found herself unable to fulfill her pledge of Home Rule save under conditions which Catholic and Nationalist Ireland would not accept, or which Protestant Ireland would resist by force. Her experience of Ireland should have taught her the desperate seriousness of this sudden reincarnation of the spirit of force. The Ulstermen had got their arms, and one of their prelates had acclaimed the merciful Providence under which the gun-running vessel, the *Fanny*, had reached her destination 'guided' by 'God's hand' and 'shielded by his fogs.' Ulster was ready, or affected to be ready, to put all to the test of force.

"We envy not the sluggard's peace,

We grasp our trusty sword,"

sang one of the bards of Belfast of the incipient revolution.

The thunder was not all of the stage. Ulster's threat had all but demoralized the British army, and it was at least an important element in the German calculation of the part that England was likely to play in a European struggle. In July, 1914, there was well-founded belief in the imminence of at least a local civil war. In August, 1914, the smaller disturbance had been swallowed up in the conflagration of the world. But the Irish problem remained, subject to three new and serious aggravations.

The first was the postponement of Home Rule. The second was the weakening of the Irish Parliamentary party. The third was the growth of Sinn Fein. All three causes were connected. If Mr. Redmond's following had been a little stronger and younger, he might have wrested from England a definite concession for Home Rule in return for his rally to the war. This in turn would have drawn the vitality out of the growing movement of revolt and turned its energies inward and to constitutional lines. Mr. Redmond, never, like Parnell, a great personal force in Ireland, committed the generous error of leaning too heavily on English opinion in face of an uncompleted treaty of reconciliation with Ireland.

Nationalist Ireland was not unregardful of the cause of liberty in Europe; but she was hardly prepared to stand in a body by England's side in a great war. Nor was Mr. Redmond able to secure for her the romantic and individual share in the campaign at which he aimed. He hoped for an Irish Brigade, commanded by Irish officers. The brigade was never formed. Military etiquette stood in the way, and the delicate task of recruiting for the volunteer armies was not always intrusted to men who knew how to attract the political and religious sympathies of the towns and countryside of the West and the South. Nor was pro-Germanism quite absent. A section of the higher clergy, and some of the parish priests, were friendly to Austria as the great conservative Catholic power in Europe; a smaller section professed to find in Germany the champion of the principle of authority in the State, as against French skepticism and separatism. In a word, war distracted Ireland while it united England. The latter was caught up in the whirlwind, while she was in the middle of a slow and much-impered bit of political evolution of her own. Events marched too quickly for her.

Above all, the Ireland of the last ten years was herself the centre of an attractive and disturbing intellectual movement of her own. The Victorian revival of letters had died away. But Irish genius had rarely shone more brightly. Shaw, Wilde, Yeats, Synge, Moore, George Russell, and Lady Gregory were acknowledged stars of literature and journalism. Behind them ranged a peculiarly native and original flight of poetry and inspiration. The scholars of the Gaelic League, and the younger poets who sprang from its revival of the Irish tongue, owed nothing to English influences and traditions. Like so much of Yeats and Synge, they were pure Celt. And they stood apart from Irish parliamentary politics and in real, though not always avowed, hostility to it. What was Westminster to them? The homes of their thought lay amid the heather and cabins of Connemara and the rock-islands of the Atlantic coast, where the old language and the old folk of Ireland lingered. These wastes they re-peopled with the delicate forms born of a half-tender, half-ironical and critical spirit. But they could not banish the present. The new Irish poetic drama was divided between the tendency to rebuke the

romanticism of the national movement and the impulse to invest it with a fresh apparel of beauty, woven of poetry and legend. Who can say which was the stronger? The mockery of *John Bull's Other Island*, the more savage satire of *The Playboy of the Western World* condemned the revolutionary strain in Irish politics. 'Forget and work.- Learn and adapt. --Go back to business and good sense,' was their message. But neither could exorcise the idealism that looks through Irish poverty by the windows of the soul. In *Cathleen-Ni-Houlihan* the idealism is undisguised. The Sinn Fein rising yields no surprise in the light of that slight but wonderful vision of the unreconciled Irish spirit. When the 'ships are in the bay' the Irish boy is still minded to leave home and sweet-heart, as he left them in the spring of 1916.

But it would be excessive to attribute Sinn Fein merely to the restless memories of the past which flit through the Irish mind, in the vacancy of unemployment and half-employment. Ireland, indeed, is still idle so far as her intellectual life is concerned, and will be so until Home Rule, an organized civil service, and a congenial educational system have filled the blank spaces of her energies. But she might have settled down to wait for the Home Rule bill to become a law but for the immense disturbance of the war. That brought with it two evils, the Coalition and Conscription. The first largely overthrew the Irish power in Parliament. When the two main British parties came into union, the Irish control of our politics ceased to exist. Liberalism, the friend of Nationalism, had fallen--or had apparently made friends with Unionism, its enemy, Conscription, again, set up a strong belief in the intention of the mixed government to draft the young Irish nation into the armies before it had settled in its mind whether it would accept a treaty of peace with its old master. Sinn Fein worked on this suspicion. The volunteers who broke away from Mr. Redmond's control--and the majority seceded--were diligently practiced in tactics designed to resist a house-to-house visitation of the recruiting sergeants. Impatient Ireland was told that conscription had been decided on in the secret session. In any case, with the postponement of Home Rule and the certainty that either four or six Ulster counties would be excluded, the fixed points of hope or calculation in Irish politics seemed to disappear. What could the Home Rule bill set up? 'No real power of self-government; only a derived and enfeebled assembly, subject to the concurrent legislation of England and to concurrent taxation,' [The Sinn Fein Constitution] said the extremists. To this Sinn Fein opposed the idea of Grattan's Parliament--the claim, namely, of the people of Ireland 'to be bound only by laws enacted by his Majesty and the Parliament of the Kingdom.' Given a coordinate parliament in Dublin, the Sinn Feiners would have been content. McDonagh, one of the executed leaders, was in the habit of declaring he would make peace with England on the day after the King had been crowned in Ireland. The wilder spirits of the Irish

Republican Brotherhood, the evil genius of Sinn Fein, saw such an independent Ireland arise from a German victory, and looked to a volunteer Irish army to guard and guarantee it.

But the Nationalist Volunteer movement did not arise from the war; it was an answer to the Ulster organization and was a more democratic copy of its method and spirit. Under the scheme of partition, Nationalist Ireland saw the flower of Irish Nationalism plucked away from the parent stem. Who was to look after the rights and liberties of Catholic Ulster under an Orange administration? The Nationalist Volunteers decided that they would. Who would keep the tender plant of Home Rule in being? That, again, should be their care. The danger of surrounding Mr. Redmond, Prime Minister of Ireland, with this unasked-for bodyguard was obvious; he had not created it, but neither could he disband it. Down came the European storm, blowing away the Ulster revolt and the threatened schism in the army, but leaving the Nationalist Volunteers in the field.

Had time marched a little slower, had Anglo-Irish reconciliation gone a little further, all might have been well, for Unionism was slowly edging toward an acceptance of Home Rule. But there were violently hostile elements. Orange Ulster had gone back to its drum-beating. Brought sharply face to face with a parliament for all Ireland sitting in Dublin, it would not allow that so bad a thing as Catholicism could turn out good men of business, fit to govern Ireland and be put over the heads of the merchants and manufacturers of Belfast, the inspirers and directors of the immense activity and success of the Northern industries. Pride of wealth, of race, and religion made it at once skeptical and intolerant of Home Rule. Nor, in spite of the secession of Sir Edward Carson from the extreme tenets of Irish Unionism, has it to this day taken one practical step toward conversion. It notoriously rebuffed Mr. Asquith on his visit to Belfast. It is not at all certain that it will consent to follow Sir Edward.

Yet the Ulster revolt aroused a deeper resentment in Liberal England than in Nationalist Ireland. Looking backward, the more extreme Irish Nationalist may have seen in it the rewriting of a famous page in Irish history, when the Protestant North led in the battle of liberty and it was a not unnatural instinct for Mr. Redmond and his colleagues to counsel tenderness in dealing with it. They did not want to be responsible for coercing Irishmen, whether the color they wore was green or orange. But the ominous fact was, not only that Irishmen of all colors were getting in rifles, and that the country was beginning to look like an armed camp, but that the Parliamentary party was losing control of the situation. In the mere course of nature its strength had passed its meridian. Its leaders were growing old, tired, and--in the view of an intensely Irish Ireland--over-Anglicized. Westminster had worn them out.

A great Parliamentary figure, Mr. Redmond was never known and followed in Ireland as Parnell was known and followed. With the organization of the transport-workers, new economic questions had arisen in urban centres, with which he was unfamiliar; and new leaders, hot and impatient men like Larkin and Connolly, had arisen, to control or be controlled by them.

Mr. Dillon maintained a closer and firmer touch with the country, but he was unsympathetic to the cooperative movement and the new scientific spirit in agriculture, linked as they were, through the personalities of Sir Horace Plunkett and Mr. George Russell, to the literary revival and to the more temperate spirit and the moral teaching of the earlier Sinn Fein. Ireland began to want a different kind of parliament from that provided by the Home Rule bill, and different men to lead it. The Sinn Feiners themselves called for a federation of county councils. Pearse, the most idealistic of their leaders, was one of the few Irishmen who welcomed Mr. Birrell's Councils bill as a step in this direction. New ideas and possibilities for Irish education, the vision of a trained and organized race of farmers, were in their minds. The Parliamentarians were forgetting Ireland at the critical hour, and to her great misfortune Ireland forgot them.

Nor was Mr. Birrell, the Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant and the real governor of Ireland, the man to piece together the sundering elements in Irish political society. After years of office Ireland had tired him out. He had done two great things for her. He had carried a Home Rule bill, and he had settled the great problem of higher education, before which the leaders of the two opposing schools of British policy in Ireland, Gladstone and Balfour, had equally recoiled. That was enough work for his unambitious, literary, and pessimistic temperament. The task of seeing Ireland through the interim period, during which the Home Rule bill would become a law, was distasteful and difficult. Distasteful, because it involved a series of small compromises in Nationalist administration, and difficult because of the growing Orange revolt and the unrest provoked by the war. It was necessary to govern to some extent with Mr. Redmond, and yet how could there be true partisanship between him and Dublin Castle? Some show of patronage Nationalism must claim, in view of the coming of the new order, but not without weakening its public spirit and popular appeal. Moreover Mr. Birrell felt that the half-acquiescence of the Executive in the incipient Ulster rebellion had disarmed it for a ruthless dealing with the Nationalist Volunteers. The Sinn Feiners were clever. They were careful to follow their illustrious model. The gun-running at Howth was a close copy of the Orangeman's exploit at Larne. Germany was the impartial provider of both these highly providential gifts. A Liberal statesman was in a dilemma. How crush a movement which its promoters identified with the law that was to be-- that is, Home Rule--after half-condoning a movement

directed avowedly both against the law that was and the law that was to come?

It would seem therefore as if Ireland, at the moment when she most wanted government, was most lacking in its means and instruments. British rule was gone or was going. Irish self-government, its inevitable substitute, had not arrived. Even if the path to it had been a smoother one, it was doubtful if the Home Rule bill was a vessel into which could be poured the ripening energies of the people. Save in the towns, the standard of life was rising fast. No visitor to the West could fail to be struck with the social changes wrought by Land Purchase and Land Distribution, by the rehousing work of the Land Commission and the Congested Districts Board, and the application of Old-Age pensions on the English scale to a countryside where a flow of silver money was almost as rare a thing as boots on the children's feet. The people began to feel a new pride in themselves, and also to realize how narrow a life theirs must be so long as Ireland remained at once poor and dependent. Had Sinn Fein been in wiser hands, had there been no war and no Dublin strikes, had capital in the South been led by a statesman rather than by a man of hard and despotic temper, and had Mr. Redmond been able to add the flower of the new Irishmen to the little band of intellectuals he had actually recruited; had Britain been quicker and more generous, and Ulster less bigoted and self-sufficient,--in a word, had time and tide been for the most unlucky of countries instead of against her,--there might have been a promising start for Home Rule. The worst did not indeed happen. The country districts refused to join the towns, even in the one southern county where a rebellion was most to be dreaded; and the crushing of the weak and divided rising was certain when the formidable ranks of Volunteers shrank to the measure of a couple of thousand men and boys [I should say that half the prisoners I saw in Kilmainham were under 20--THE AUTHOR], and a short-lived strategy of street-fighting. Again England had her chance in Ireland, and it is not certain that she has lost it.

The first steps were mistaken ones, for England failed to realize how completely the rising was broken and how important it was for the main body of Irish Nationalism to hold it in due perspective. Its extraordinary folly and impatience, the inconsequence of its leadership, the evil of the German association, were evident. But it had features bound to endear it to the Irish man and woman who read the history of their country less in sequence than in the flashlight of its romantic episodes. The Sinn Fein leaders were men of piety and singleness of character. I have heard the story of their deaths from an eye-witness: it was a study in unaffected courage and nobility of bearing. Ireland heard of it almost before the echoes of the firing party's rifles had died away; and the Catholic Church, faithful to her sons, has given it a canonization of pity and sympathy. Had the dribble of executions been avoided, or

had it been stayed after the death of the signatories to the revolutionary manifesto, Ireland's first impulse of repudiation would, I think, have remained with her. If it changed to sorrow and anger, we must blame our want of magnanimity, and see how the break in the reconciling policy can be mended once more.

To this amending policy there are, I think, two main clues. The first is the break up of the solid Unionism which had never advanced since 1886, when its highest point was Mr. Chamberlain's conception of a grant of Home Rule based on the relationship of a colonial provincial legislature to a Dominion or Commonwealth parliament. There is again a Unionist Secretary for Ireland. But it is known that Mr. Duke has gone to Dublin to promote a settlement of the two inseparable questions of social order and self-government. His success with Southern Unionism can hardly be doubted; three figures of the quality of the Archbishop of Dublin, Sir Horace Plunkett, and Lord Monteagle could make a treaty with Nationalist Ireland on a basis that would give the South and West a conservative, but a fairly enlightened and representative, government. Ulster remains; the wall of her local separatism is unbroken. Not so her old, fast alliance with British Unionism. Whether Sir Edward Carson's understanding with Mr. Redmond holds or no, the British Unionist party is under an unwritten but ineluctable compact with the Nationalist leader to give him the full equivalent of his support of the war and his tender of Nationalist aid for it. There is only one limit. A Parliament for all Ireland will now, it is clear, have to come through Ulster's disillusionment with partition, but also after fair trial of that experiment. What she wants is to realize once for all that the trial will be made, that is, that direct British government over two thirds of the Irish people will soon determine, and that her choice will then lie between acceptance of her lot in Ireland and a cramped and expensive life as an annexe of Downing Street. This is the point which will test the statesmanship of her leaders. Hitherto they have hardly been tried, for British Unionism has stood between them and true responsibility. The time is coming when they will stand alone.

The second clue to the future of Irish government is that which the rebellion itself has afforded. Strategically the Dublin rising was based on a clever plan of resistance to everything that a regular army could bring against the method of the barricades--except artillery. The moment this was brought to bear on the rebel lines by land and water, the fighting was at an end. The original political miscalculation--for there was no inherent connection between Sinn Fein and rebellion, and in its earlier stages the movement was both ethical and political--was still more vital. I have suggested that the Sinn Feiners had not entirely misread the Irish situation. Absolute separation was not their real goal, but rather the organization of an Ireland cut away from the blight of Anglicanism and 'West

Britonism.' And they achieved one true point of criticism. They saw that Ireland wanted something at once more practical and more ideal than the kind of parliament that the Home Rule bill, both in its first and in its amended form, could give her. The blunder of Sinn Fein was to think it possible that two virtually coordinate parliaments could exist (in dissension with each other) in London and Dublin. Obviously the disparity of wealth, of power, would be too great. A self-governed Ireland could always embarrass England. But England in isolation from Ireland or in hostility to her could ruin her economically and politically so long as the British Empire existed and we remained at the head of it.

The question is whether another and a better way is not open for the greater and lesser unit, to walk together. Such a way has been opened by the suggestion that a final settlement should come after the war, through the intervention of the over-seas Dominions, and as part of a new Imperial constitution. Some such work of federation is overdue, for the British Empire has clearly outgrown its one sovereign Parliament on the banks of the Thames. That idea is the one survival of Mr. Lloyd George's abortive scheme of partition. It implies something more than a system of delegation from the Imperial Parliament, with local assemblies sitting, say at Edinburgh, Dublin, and Cardiff. Our Imperial constitution must assume Ireland to be a unit in the Empire, and give her both a local representation and a share in the Imperial government. Her resulting liberties would then come, not as a gift from the nation that broke Ireland's Parliament, but from the union of states on which the stamp of her own exiled genius is visibly laid.

But before the Empire takes on so great a responsibility, there is a question which she must ask Ireland, and which Ireland must ask herself once and for all--will she accept British citizenship? Why not? Even the Sinn Fein constitution does not prohibit a free union with her old suzerain. Nor with the defeat of Germany does any other possible future open up to her. Absolute independence is a dream. But independence on the scale or after the likeness of Canada, or New Zealand, in which thousands of Irishmen have a share, is no dream, but a possible, and even a near, reality. Only in this way do we attain a solution of the mixed problem of nationality and empire, which neither the Home Rule bill, nor Mr. Chamberlain's plan of provincial self-government, nor the Sinn Fein propaganda could yield. The existing deadlock in Anglo-Irish politics might seem to forbid such an issue. But the entanglement, like the blazing forest that lay in Siegfried's path to Brunnhilde, is more apparent than real. Nationalists cannot force Home Rule against Ulster. But neither, in face of Mr. Redmond's lavish gift of Irish youth for a British war, can Ulster stop Home Rule. Is it in her interest to try? Ulster is Irish, not English. Her trade looks on two great markets. The road to neither is in her hands or in those of

Ireland. For the day after the partition to which she is in effect a consenting party, the Ulster commercial--who is a debtor to the Irish peasant-farmer--must ask himself whether he really wishes to see his creditor sole master of the finance and the administration of the West, the Centre, and the South. His answer may not be immediate, but it is not doubtful. When it is given, the story of old Ireland comes to an end and that of new Ireland begins.

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