

IRELAND UP TO DATE

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A COUNTRYMAN said to me, in the middle of this cheerless May, that there was talk of an old prophecy coming true; how "the Irish would dig an Englishman out of his grave, not for the love they had to him, but for the good law he gave". I never heard of the prophecy, but the picture of Ireland's mind is just. Our mood is disillusionment, bitter disgust with our own selves. It is not the wholesome humility of self-knowledge; that will come later. What rules the hour is a perverse sense that we are, after all, an exceptional people,—not in the virtuous and admirable way that we might have preferred, but at any rate exceptional, a people who will not submit to be governed. Some day we shall discover that we are ordinary western Europeans of a mixed stock, who have by a queer unhappy past been too long divorced from civic responsibility, and who in consequence shape awkwardly at the businesses which for our neighbours have become second nature.

How long is it going to take before the Irish master the work of self-government, with all that it implies of compromise, give and take, mutual accommodation and recognition that we are not alone in the world? I can give no guess. All I know is that Ireland just now is going painfully to school, and that progress of education has been interrupted by what was not very much more sensible than a schoolboy "barring-out". Yet the metaphor is misleading, for the school itself has had to cope with the schoolboy mutiny. Immense material damage has been done to the actual fabric of our civilization. Much is gone that will be costly to replace, and some things have gone that are irreplaceable. There has also been loss of life, though not on a scale that counts, by recent European standards: one day on the Somme often cost the British alone more casualties than all the bickering in Ireland from 1916 to 1923. What *does* count is the cynical indifference to killing which has grown up, when killing took place incessantly in the midst of ordinary civic existence. But, at any rate, we have got certain lessons. Phrases have no longer their old dominance. It is no longer taken as proven that a man must be a hero who is willing to kill or be killed for a phrase. Facts assert their

natural ascendancy. The first fact which Ireland has needed to assimilate is the extraordinary inconvenience of trying to do without law. Just now we in what is called "Southern Ireland" have to face the admission that Ulster has established law in its allotted six counties, and we are not far from admitting also that the end has in this case justified the means by which it was accomplished. We have not yet chosen, perhaps have not decided, to imitate those methods. But we are learning to admire them.

It is easier to begin by discussing Ulster, because matters there have got a stage or two further on, and also because Ulster has been—and continues to be—the key to the Irish situation. Self-government in Ulster dates from the spring of 1921. The King's speech, when he opened the Parliament at Belfast, gave a first impulse to the movement to call off war between the British forces and what was then the Republican army. But before self-government started, the lawless forces of Protestantism had driven all Catholics out of the Belfast shipyards, and out of many other places of work. This established an open sore, and the irritation of it tended to drive constitutional Nationalists into the same camp with Republican Sinn Feiners. At the election of the first Northern Parliament these two groups, putting up separate candidates, agreed that none of their nominees if elected should take their seats. The view was very widely held that the Parliament and Government, thus boycotted by one-third of the total population, could never work. Even Unionists were not confident. When the period of negotiation at Westminster ended, and Irish representatives accepted the Treaty of December 6th, 1921, there was a strong feeling among Ulster business men that Ulster had no choice but to stand in with the rest of Ireland, making the best terms she could to secure her special interests. The idea of partition and an artificial barrier across so small an island was repugnant to common sense. But then came the prolonged wrangle in the Dail at Dublin as to acceptance of the Treaty, and the repeated assertion on all sides in that debate that the Treaty would be accepted only as a stepping-stone to complete separation. Nothing could have been invented more certain to alienate Ulster, and opinion hardened against having anything to do with the South. A good many speeches were made also as to the prospect of forcing the North in. Then began the mutiny in the Irish army, and Rory O'Connor—with the wild men who desired to unite Ireland by reviving war with England—had also the brilliant idea of stirring up trouble in the North. Things already were bad enough in Belfast. Murder and counter-murder followed each other with

terrible rapidity, and in the spring of 1922 emissaries were sent up from the South to start a campaign of burning houses. Terrible as the provocation was on both sides, it could not excuse what followed. No civilized city has had a more disgraceful history than Belfast in the first half of last year. The Northern Government was powerless to establish order. What they did largely succeed in effecting was to arm and organize the Protestants of the six counties. Over and above the regular police, whom they had taken over largely from the Royal Irish Constabulary, there were the "B" police, local bands—paid for their services—whose duty was to patrol in their own localities. Further, there was the "C" police, a body liable to be called up when needed, authorized to possess arms, and bound to assemble in large bodies for a period of training each year. This was virtually a militia. Many very undesirable persons were admitted into the forces, especially into the B group, and much wrong was done, while confusion reigned, and while the six counties were genuinely alarmed by the prospect of attack from the South. Large numbers of Catholics had to cross the border.

Then came the attack on the Dublin Four Courts, and civil war in the South. Immediately the O'Connor partizans were withdrawn North, and there they had plenty to occupy them. As trouble increased in Dublin, it slacked down in Belfast. It is generally admitted that the Northern Government, as soon as it got respite, set itself resolutely to preserve the peace and executed justice drastically against those convicted of violent crimes, without regard to their politics or religion. The police were cleared of undesirables, and the B men carried out their patrolling in a fair spirit. By the end of 1922 the six counties had peace, while train-wrecking, ambushes, and other forms of Republican warfare were in full swing throughout the twenty-six. This April, when budget statements had to be made, the Finance Minister for Northern Ireland could show a modest surplus: Mr. Cosgrave in Dublin indicated a deficit of at least twelve millions, which might easily swell to twenty. Further, in Belfast important legislation was introduced. Lord Londonderry's Education Bill dealt with a subject in which all agreed that Ireland had fallen far behind; and the measure was hailed by the organization of teachers, Catholic as well as Protestant, with something near enthusiasm. The Catholic bishops resented it; yet by the decision to abstain from attendance in the Parliament, for which Catholic bishops had been largely responsible, the Catholic members—some thirty per cent. of the Northern assembly—could take no part in the debates.

It was perfectly plain that the Northern Government was not merely going to exist; it was doing things; it was a reality. On the top of this came another measure, a Licensing Bill. In Belfast, Protestants drink just as freely as Catholics, but it is "ill seen" for a Protestant to be in the trade of retailing liquor,—though brewing and distilling are perfectly respectable and respected. This Bill affects the whole of a business which is mainly in Catholic hands, and here again Catholic interests have no spokesman to defend them. Here, too, as in Education, the Catholic group if dexterously led (and Mr. Devlin, the leading Nationalist, was one of the most effective parliamentarians at Westminster) could easily find other elements to combine with on points of moment. Opinion has gone clean round against abstention, and it is now only a question whether the Northern Catholics will enter the Belfast Parliament after the next election or in the duration of the present assembly.

This does not mean that Catholics or Nationalists or Sinn Feiners have abandoned their antagonism to partition. But they recognize quite clearly that, by the Treaty, Ulster was given the right to vote itself out of the control of the Dublin Parliament; and when, last December, the Constitution implementing the Treaty was passed through the assemblies in Dublin and at Westminster, nobody was surprised that Ulster instantly took this step. Every Irishman knew that, with civil war in the twenty-six counties, the six naturally did not choose to come in, and could not reasonably be expected to do so. There was, however, a trouble about the boundary question. The Treaty laid it down that, if Ulster exercised this right, a commission should be set up to modify the boundary "in accordance with the wishes of the inhabitants". In two of the six counties—Tyrone and Fermanagh—on the border, there is a majority of Catholics; there is such a majority, too, in the city of Londonderry, also on the border. Ulster, with Tyrone and Fermanagh and Londonderry City taken out, would be shorn indeed. But once again the extremists in Southern Ireland played Ulster's game. Mr. Cosgrave's Government virtually refused to raise this question while they had civil war on their hands. They abate nothing of their claim under this clause. On the other hand, Ulster has declared loudly by her Prime Minister, Sir James Craig, that she will not consent to lose one loyal man. Words, perhaps, do not greatly matter. But the fact is that meantime Catholics in the six counties have enjoyed security, while neither life nor property was safe just across the border. And since the new budget was introduced at Westminster, Ulster—which has its

taxes fixed by the Imperial Parliament—pays sixpence in the pound less income tax than the rest of Ireland, while the man in Tyrone can send a letter for three halfpence, though his neighbour in Donegal must pay twopence. In short, it is clear that the Irish Government will not be hard pressed by Northern Catholics to raise this "question": and without that pressure it is probable that they will wait in hopes of a general understanding. For they are aware that Ulster, if forced to defend her claims on this point, will be further than ever from consenting to become part of a united Ireland.

Yet the best Protestant and Unionist brains in Belfast realize thoroughly that it is in the interest of all Ireland to be a unity, not a divided country; that is, provided the affairs of a united Ireland are reasonably managed. Up to the present, Ulster has no ground for assurance that there will be this reasonable conduct of affairs. Our first steps in self-government at Dublin have not inspired confidence among ourselves. What is likely to be thought of them by unfriendly critics?

It would be uncandid and unintelligent to deny that this extraordinary situation has produced men of ability. The section—for it is a section—which undertook the task of carrying out the Treaty, lost within the first few weeks of civil war its two outstanding personalities. Mr. Griffith was a great writer, perhaps the most powerful journalist of his time, if journalism may be taken to mean the popularization and dissemination of a political creed. More than this,—he showed statesmanship in his determination to grasp the essential when it was attainable, and in his dealing with Englishmen or with the representatives of Irish Unionism he was able to divest himself of the rancour which had been his besetting fault. Like the rest of his section, he showed a constant will to exclude from all participation in responsibility the leaders of the constitutional Nationalists, whose adherents he well knew to be fully equal in numbers to his own. But it is only fair to say that he was supported in this course by the resolve of Nationalist leaders to leave Sinn Fein in sole charge of the situation which Sinn Fein had created. General Michael Collins was in many ways a necessary complement to Griffith. He had in abundance the personal magnetism which Griffith lacked. He had not only immense energy, but the power in some measure of inspiring it. He was that rare thing,—an Irishman who gets up early in the morning, and he might have given the National army an impetus which it badly needed. It is futile to speculate upon what might have been, had he escaped the bullet. He succeeded in inducing the I.R.B.—a

Fenian Brotherhood—to accept the Treaty, and the influence of that organization probably remains paramount in Irish affairs. Yet there are two currents. Griffith, who was at one time a Fenian, severed his connection, as he desired more personal freedom of action than was possible in a secret society; and when Griffith died, the leadership fell to the man whom he had appointed as his deputy during absence in London. Mr. Cosgrave does not stand for the Fenian tradition. Choice of him was determined by the fact that he alone of those available had any considerable experience of public affairs. He had been for a number of years prominent in the work of the Dublin Corporation, especially on its Finance side. He was, and is, a man of no exceptional intellect, yet bringing to public life a clear mind, a fair mind, good temper, a touch of humour, and complete civic courage. With him, representing somewhat the same standpoint, was Professor Eòin MacNeill, a man of great intellectual distinction, lucid and generous in thought and speech, but unfortunately slow and ineffectual in action. In the course of events, power has gone to those capable of it, notably to a group of three quite young men,—Mr. Kevin O’Higgins, Minister for Home Affairs; Mr. Blythe, Minister for Local Government; and Mr. Hogan, Minister for Agriculture. These three, under Mr. Cosgrave’s direction, were prominent in the work of carrying through the Constitution,—which had to be done in autumn, while civil war was passing from open fighting to the much more difficult phase of guerilla activities. During that period another Minister who counts was little heard of. Mr. Magrath was employed on the staff. But General Mulcahy, at once Minister for Defence and Commander-in-Chief, was fully in the public gaze.

I have no doubt that the war would have been much more quickly ended had General Mulcahy been willing to use the services—which were offered to him—of Irish officers having large professional experience. The line taken was to exclude all influence that came “from the East”. Many men from the ranks of Irish regiments in the British army were accepted as recruits. A few company commanders, who had joined the Irish Republicans in 1920-21, were promoted to high commands. Over and above these, one officer who joined the British army as a subaltern in 1914 and rose to command a brigade, at least temporarily, before the war ended, was also employed in 1922, and pulled the labouring oar in West Munster where the greatest strength of the Irregulars lay. Major-General Murphy is now out of the army, and has command of the Dublin Metropolitan Police, but he is chiefly responsible

for having converted the National Army into a disciplined and effective force. The fact that his services were so transferred is the best proof that Republican opposition was no longer considered serious in a military sense.

Yet it cannot be said that peace is established.* About the end of April, Mr. de Valera and the Republican Chief-of-Staff proclaimed a truce in order that negotiations might go forward. The Government allowed negotiations to take place, but refused to suspend their own operations of capturing irregulars and their armament. There have been small hostilities all the time, and on the night of May 18th a combined attack on various barracks in Dublin may be taken to demonstrate that the truce is off. What is called an "attack" means that one or two snipers establish themselves in a safe position and fire a few shots at the barrack windows. This sort of thing may go on almost for ever, unless the citizens as a whole exert themselves to stop it by taking risks, for instance, in giving information to the military. So far, the citizens have shown no disposition to do this. That is the less surprising because the Government has sedulously kept them unarmed. Recently, however, a notice was issued that suitable persons on applying should be trusted with revolvers. Nothing has yet come of my own application. But the public are beginning gradually to understand that peace and order have been established in Ulster because a very large body of the citizens have taken on themselves laborious duties to enforce this.

Nevertheless, order has been in some measure restored by the use of an army which numbers at least 50,000, and is probably nearer 70,000, but we do not know. Government is carried on by a junta over which the public and the Parliament have little real control. We know only that the army is very expensive, and that it is several times as big as the force to which we are entitled under the Treaty. But the British Government have raised no objection to our maintaining a force much larger in proportion to our population than Great Britain is paying to-day. In this matter Westminster has shown itself perfectly willing to interpret the Treaty by the spirit, not by the letter. British Ministers have indeed gone beyond the law in their anxiety to assist the Irish in their difficulties. Generally, it is recognized that Mr. Bonar Law's Government as well as its predecessor has acted with entire loyalty to the new State, and has totally disregarded all the protestations that we are simply establishing a ground for another leap which will carry us wholly out of the British connection.

I do not believe that there is in Ireland any general desire

for such a break with the past. We want peace. At present we are thankful because railway trains can run without interruption on almost all the Irish railways, because the Courts can sit and transact business in almost any centre, and because the new unarmed police—the Civic Guard—are taking up their functions in almost every town of two or three hundred houses. But we are uneasy, because the whole fabric of civilization has been disturbed. In that disturbance thousands of individuals have seized the chance to avoid payment of their just debts to the State (which has three millions of arrears in income tax to collect), to the local rates, and to private citizens. In particular, there has been organized refusal to pay rents. It is recognized that a general scheme to complete land purchase is needed, but no agreement seems possible between the two interests involved. Tenants are insisting on terms which would spell confiscation. The Government has shown itself desirous to conciliate the old landed gentry; Mr. Cosgrave nominated several of the best representatives of this class to the first Senate. He recognizes that the very considerable exodus of this element is a thing to check, not to precipitate. Yet the greed for land which is universal among Irish farmers (the majority of the nation) finds a sanction for cupidity in old prejudices against the landlord class. Already the Government has been obliged to use its soldiers to confiscate cattle on land which had been grabbed by sheer force. Landlords may hope to obtain protection against such naked lawlessness, but they have a reasoned apprehension of spoliation by process of law.

Further, for everybody there is the question—how can we pay? The damage that has directly to be made good and paid for by compensation is certainly equivalent to not less than a year's revenue, even at war time standards of taxation, and the mere fact of this damage having been made injures Ireland's credit, as it has also alienated in disgust much influence that might have been serviceable. Fortunately, however, the wealth of a country of peasant proprietors is hard to destroy, and Ireland keeps still much of her very large and widely distributed war time accumulations. It is probable that our money outlook may turn out to be the least gloomy feature in the landscape.

The political horizon is very obscure. We shall have an election some time this year, on a new register including virtually every man and woman over twenty-one. Will it be free of intimidation? Neither in 1918 nor in 1922 could this be affirmed. It certainly will not be free of the fear of violence. Further, what will be the parties? Labour is organized and has a programme,—but a pro-

gramme wholly alien to the ideas of a Catholic country of small landed proprietors. The Government, as a Government, will control some organization, and so will the Republican party. I do not myself believe that the Republicans would in a fair field get one vote in twenty-six throughout the twenty-six counties. But they have an organization, and they have acting for them the dislike which every new Government necessarily creates. This Government has been driven to execute some seventy persons, and to imprison some 15,000. It has necessarily refused many applicants for jobs. And it has no hold on the affections of the very numerous old Nationalist party. The farmers' organization, which already has a group of half a dozen members in the present assembly, lacks a programme, and—worse—lacks a leader. The independents have no organization and no funds. It is impossible to say what sort of an assembly will come out. My hope is that the election will alter the composition in such a way that Mr. Cosgrave, while remaining in office, will be forced to include in his Ministry some men with a definite outlook and with more experience of affairs. In Belfast the Ministry consists either of business men or of trained politicians, like Sir James Craig and Lord Londonderry. In Dublin these elements are wholly lacking.

A grave factor in the situation is probably Mr. Cosgrave's personal health. The strain of these months has been tremendous, and work has been coupled with the danger of assassination so constant that he and his colleagues have had to live within the Government buildings as in a fortress. Unless upon a formal conclusion of peace with the Irregulars this menace must continue; and even if peace were formally concluded, it is doubtful whether the tension would be removed from Mr. Cosgrave himself, and more particularly from Mr. O'Higgins, who as Home Secretary has had a special responsibility. Both these men have lost near relatives; Mr. Cosgrave his father's brother, Mr. O'Higgins his father, both murdered while courageously offering resistance unarmed to armed bandits. Naturally, both men have said bitter words, and a desire for revenge has naturally been read into their actions.

The Irish situation was summed up to my mind by a charcoal drawing which Paul Henry did of Mr. Cosgrave for the *Manchester Guardian*:—an absolutely exact likeness, the drawing showed a sick man's countenance without force, and in a sense without distinction, yet reaching a tragic dignity through the eyes, which seemed to look without flinching, yet in despair, upon a task that could break a giant's heart.