

*Arthur Garratt Dorland*

## DeVALERA: THE NEW COMMONWEALTH AND THE MONARCHY

IRISH AFFAIRS HAVE INFLUENCED the development of the British Commonwealth in two important ways: by weakening the old concept of dominion status, based on an earlier and out-moded imperial-colonial relationship; and by emphasizing the democratic, multi-national character of the Commonwealth as a voluntary association of sovereign states, such as the New Commonwealth is in essence today. Sharing in this evolutionary process, the symbolism of monarchy also underwent certain changes.

In this development, Mr. Eamon deValera played a notable part which is often misunderstood. This former rebel, under suspended sentence of death for his part in the 1916 Easter Rebellion, was usually viewed in a sinister light as the arch-enemy of Britain and of the Commonwealth, particularly in connection with his rejection of the 1921 Treaty which conferred dominion status on the Irish Free State and prevented the renewal of the Anglo-Irish War. The generally accepted view in most Commonwealth countries was that Southern Ireland should have acceded gratefully to dominion status under the Crown, and that deValera's stubborn opposition to the Treaty settlement was inspired by a compound of fanatical republicanism and a hatred of everything British.

This generally accepted view of deValera's involvement in the Irish situation in 1921 was both mistaken and short-sighted. It lacked historical perspective by leaving out of account the most important factor in the whole situation—namely the development of Irish nationalism. From the time of Wolfe Tone and Robert Emmett, every Irish nationalist believed in the inalienable right of Ireland not only to choose for herself her own form of government, but also to decide when and how far she was willing to act either as a subordinate of Britain or in association with Britain. Over the years, therefore, Irish nationalism was gradually moving in the direction of deValera's "associated republic" of a later day. This historic development inspired deValera with a profound—almost mystical—belief in Ireland's destiny

as a Gaelic, sovereign nation-state; and while the pursuit of this ideal inevitably brought him into opposition to Britain, he was anti-British only to the extent that he opposed what he considered to be anti-Irish.

Moreover, Ireland—unlike the predominantly English-speaking dominions—had never been a British colony which had gradually grown up to the stature of independent nationhood under the beneficent symbol of the British Crown. For, with the exception of four or five counties in Ulster, Ireland was never a colony of Britain settled largely by people of British extraction. Nor was she simply an extension of the British Motherland as most Englishmen and a small minority of Anglo-Irish landowners liked to believe. Ireland was herself a Mother Country with her own language, culture, and peculiar traditions, and consequently she claimed the right to choose her own form of government and to assert her national separateness. What might be regarded as a generous gesture to a former colony was, therefore, unacceptable to a proud and ancient people who demanded as a right what England in 1921 would only grant as a privilege under symbols of monarchy which seemed a denial of Irish sovereignty. To call Southern Ireland a Free State possessing dominion status did not make Ireland free in the sense that Nationalist Ireland desired. Moreover, the legend of the Crown as a beneficent symbol had been forever killed for Southern Ireland by the notorious “Black and Tans” during the Anglo-Irish war when—in addition to the many casualties—malicious damage to the extent of over four million pounds sterling was done in a single year by the Crown forces in the name of law and order.

Specifically, deValera rejected the 1921 Treaty for two reasons: first, the exclusion of Ulster by the Treaty accepted the principle of partition and so might postpone indefinitely the unification of Ireland; and secondly, the acceptance of the Crown and the oath of allegiance were symbols of submission that were believed to be inconsistent with the national independence of Ireland. From these two main positions deValera never retreated. On the other hand, he appreciated the benefits of Ireland's association with Great Britain and the Commonwealth. He therefore favoured the idea advanced originally by John Chartres—a member of the Irish delegation to England in 1921—that recognition of the Crown might be accepted within the framework of a looser tie with Great Britain and the Commonwealth by some form of *external association*: that is to say, Ireland would consult Great Britain and the Dominions on matters of common concern that would imply recognition of the Crown only as the head of an association of sovereign states. This was essentially a compromise which, while preserving for Ireland the form of a republic by excluding the Crown from all matters of *internal* concern, would not completely sever her

connection with Great Britain and the other members of the Commonwealth in what would then be a voluntary association of sovereign states, with the Crown as a symbolic link. But the hour had not yet struck for this concept, which twenty-eight years later was to become the accepted pattern for the new Commonwealth.

DeValera's compromise formula of an externally associated republic was completely unacceptable to the leaders of the Irish Republican Army and to a hard core within the Sinn Fein party who held tenaciously to the ideal of an independent and completely isolated republic. On the other hand, Griffith, Collins, and Cosgrave had decided that, rather than take the responsibility of renewing the Anglo-Irish war which Lloyd George had threatened if they refused to accept the Crown, and Dominion status, they would accept the provisions of the Treaty and try to carry the country along with them. After a fortnight of bitter debate, they secured ratification of the Treaty in a newly elected Dail, but only by a slim majority of seven votes. Thus, for vastly different reasons, none of deValera's republican supporters, the pro-Treaty party, or the British government would accept the compromise formula which, for the time being, he was compelled to abandon. He was therefore obliged to fall back on his old comrades in the I.R.A. who still supported him as President of the Provisional Republic, first declared by Pearse at the time of the Easter Rising in 1916.

Southern Ireland was now rent by a fratricidal civil war with all its attendant horrors of arson and assassination as deValera and his followers resisted the authority of the new Free State government which—while undeniably Irish—still derived its authority from a foreign source and included symbols of submission repugnant to most Nationalists. By 1923, with deValera in prison and both sides sick of the whole ghastly business, a cease fire was agreed upon and a general amnesty proclaimed. But deValera emerged from the dark portals of the Arbour Hill Barracks where he had been imprisoned for the past eleven months more determined than ever to overthrow the pro-Treaty Cosgrave government, not however by force of arms but by constitutional means in the political arena. But since he could only get into the Dail by taking the oath of allegiance to the Crown, he subscribed to the oath, protesting meanwhile that its only significance for him was as a means of bringing his Fianna Fail party into the Dail as the principal opposition to the Cosgrave government.

With every election after 1923 republican sentiment became stronger in spite of determined efforts by the Cosgrave government to suppress it, since the feeling persisted "that the Free State was bound spiritually and politically to those alien influences from which it was supposed to be severed." In the face of strong pressure from his supporters in the I.R.A., deValera made it a point of honour to observe the cease fire and to refrain from all acts of violence. He was determined to take the gun out

of Irish politics; and later when he gained control of the government he felt obliged to repress the same Republican extremists who had formerly supported him.

Though the Cosgrave administration gave Southern Ireland what was probably ten years of the best government within the memory of living Irishmen, it failed to express the ideals of a Gaelic nation-state for which the Fianna Fail party under deValera consistently stood. Economic difficulties also contributed to its growing unpopularity. With the assistance of Labour, deValera finally defeated the Cosgrave administration in 1932 to become Prime Minister and constitutional leader of a majority bloc which now controlled the government of the country.

In his pre-election campaign deValera had asked for only a mandate limited to two objectives: to keep the land annuities at home, and to abolish the oath to the King. The road to securing the second of these main objectives had already been cleared for deValera by the Statute of Westminster passed in 1931 by a so-called National but predominantly conservative government under Ramsay MacDonald. As a consequence of this Statute, which was an important landmark in the evolution of the New Commonwealth, each dominion was now free to determine its connection with the Crown, and the assent of the dominions was to be required in the event of succession to the throne. One of the first acts of deValera when he became Prime Minister of the Irish Free State was, therefore, to remove the oath from the constitution as he was now legally entitled to do.

In the same year that deValera became Prime Minister of the Irish Free State, he was also chosen as President of the Assembly of the League of Nations then meeting in Geneva. His assessment of the international situation was realistic, for he was under no illusion regarding the danger of a second world war. In sombre, almost prophetic words he warned the assembled delegates that the very existence of the League was at stake if the Great Powers in particular refused to enforce a system of collective security against open aggression. He also foresaw at this time the necessity of keeping Ireland from being drawn into the inevitable maelstrom. By 1936, he even considered withdrawing from the League altogether when the aggression of Japan in China and of Italy in Ethiopia went on unchecked, and a re-armed militant Germany was already casting its dark shadow over Europe.

Meanwhile, as deValera was working on a new constitution, a totally unexpected turn of events in Great Britain caused by the abdication of King Edward VIII, presented to deValera the opportunity of removing the Crown completely from the government of the Free State, and at the same time of recognizing the new King on Ireland's own terms. The Executive Authority Bill of 1936 by which this was accomplished was not a constitutional amendment but a Free State statute

which recognized George VI as successor to Edward VIII and authorized the new King to act on the advice of the Irish government only in external affairs, that is to say in such matters as appointing diplomatic and consular representatives and concluding international agreements.

At last deValera had secured by legal and constitutional means the consent of the governments of both the Irish Free State and Great Britain to his formula of external association which fifteen years before had met with such bitter opposition. But impressive as was this success, so long as the six counties of Ulster remained partitioned from the twenty-six counties of Southern Ireland he had yet to realize his large vision of an externally associated republic which would include a completely unified Ireland.

When therefore, in 1937, deValera introduced his new constitution for Eire—as the former Free State was now to be known—he deliberately omitted calling it a republic, though it was, in fact, a republic in all but name, since he wished to avoid offending Northern Ireland. And though the King was completely excluded from the government of Eire, he hoped that the retention of the King as a symbol of co-operation with Britain and the other members of the Commonwealth would be regarded by both North and South as a conciliatory gesture and would serve, to use his own words, “as a bridge across which their hands could touch”. He also repeatedly stated that in no circumstance would his government permit the use of Irish territory as the base of hostile operations against England. And subsequent events were to prove him as good as his word.

Towards ending partition, deValera’s conciliatory gesture accomplished nothing. The British government avoided any formal pronouncement at this time, but made it clear that recognition of Eire would not in any way alter the present position of Northern Ireland, and that any change in the future must be only with the consent of the Belfast government. Though deValera’s dream of integrating the national territory was apparently to be postponed indefinitely, Irish Nationalists refused to accept as final the arbitrary partition of their country which they believed history and geography had marked out as their own. Accordingly, sporadic raids across the border continued, as evidence of Nationalist determination to settle the issue by force. Both deValera and succeeding Prime Ministers denounced these lawless methods and publicly stated that any change in the existing situation must be by mutual concession and agreement.

To deValera’s disappointment the new constitution of Eire, on which he had been labouring for several years, was greeted without enthusiasm despite his assurance that it was to be “Irish from top to bottom”. This extraordinary document

reflected many facets of its author's character and political philosophy. But it was too technical and was couched in language not easily understood by the mass of the people, who were looking for immediate solutions to the things that worried them most, such as partition, high prices and shortages, the trade war with England and the evacuation of the Irish ports. The last two of these vexing problems were amicably settled largely because of the conciliatory attitude of Neville Chamberlain, then Prime Minister of Great Britain.

Having successfully negotiated these two troublesome matters with Great Britain on equal and friendly terms, deValera hoped that the extreme Republicans would at last accept external association as an accomplished fact and so enable him to pursue, unhampered by internal discord, his grand design for the peaceful reunification of Ireland. He planned to mobilize international opinion on behalf of Irish reunification through the good offices of the League of Nations. He also planned an extensive speaking tour throughout the United States, where he hoped that he might obtain sufficient public backing to compel the American government to take in behalf of a unified Ireland some stand that in turn would influence Great Britain. But again he was disappointed when the extreme Republicans refused to cooperate and only intensified their campaign of violence. When their activities were extended to England by a series of explosions in hotels, cathedrals, and railway terminals, deValera outlawed the I.R.A. and imprisoned several of its leaders.

All deValera's hopes and plans for the future were again brought to nothing by the outbreak of violence in another quarter far removed from the Irish scene, when Hitler's armies over-ran Poland. DeValera had long foreseen the likelihood of a second world war more devastating than the first, and he had already made up his mind that the only possible course for Eire to follow in such an emergency was one of complete neutrality. No one knew better than he that the slightest hint of taking England's part would immediately plunge Ireland into another disastrous civil war which would divide the nations more deeply than ever. Involved in this decision were many other considerations that cannot be dealt with here. Suffice it to say, that any objective judgment of Eire's neutrality at this time must be in the light of her past history and by the same standards as underlie the policy of every nation, that is, self interest.

When World War II ended, Eire showed little gratitude to deValera for holding the nation together during the preceding critical period. Instead there was criticism in the Dail for his harsh treatment of Republican extremists whom he had restrained from their calculated folly and violence. His consistent refusal to take advantage of England's difficulties during the war, by forcing the partition issue and

proclaiming a completely isolated republic, also caused his critics to charge him with being pro-British. This was nearer the truth than deValera himself for reasons of policy would have admitted. Even his former admirers and supporters in America turned against him for pursuing the same policy of neutrality which their government had adopted, until they had been swept into the war by circumstances not of their own choosing when Japan attacked Pearl Harbour.

As the result of mounting criticism, deValera called a general election early in 1948; but failing to secure a sufficient majority over the opposing parties in the Dail, he resigned after sixteen years in office. Mr. John Costello, leader of Fine Gael, now succeeded him as Taoiseach and head of an inter-party government in the Dail. In the preceding election campaign Costello had gone on record as favouring the retention of external association with the Commonwealth. But pressure from within his rather shaky coalition caused him suddenly to reverse his position, when in September of the same year he announced the intention of his government to sever the last link with the Crown by repealing the External Relations Act of 1936 and proclaiming a republic. The bill giving legal form to this intention—The Republic of Ireland Act—was passed by the Dail, November 27, 1948. It was no coincidence, however, that the Republic of Ireland was not formally proclaimed until the Easter Monday of the following April, 1949, at the General Post Office in Dublin, at the same time and place as the first Provisional Republic had been proclaimed by Pearse just thirty-three years before.

By seceding from the Commonwealth and declaring itself a republic, Southern Ireland had banished its last connection with the British Crown. But recalling deValera's benevolent neutrality which had permitted the flow of men and food to England during the dark days of the war, King George VI in a good-will message to President O'Kelly of the new Irish republic recalled "in grateful memory the services and sacrifices of the men and women of your country who rendered gallant assistance to our cause." The King also recalled "the neighbourly links which hold the people of the Republic of Ireland in close association with my subjects of the United Kingdom." In spite of serious differences, neither country wished to see these "neighbourly links" destroyed. As a consequence, it was mutually agreed that the citizens of the Republic of Ireland and of Britain and the other Commonwealth countries were not to be regarded as foreigners. At the same time certain reciprocal trade preferences were also agreed upon between the United Kingdom and Ireland.

Meanwhile, Mr. Clement Attlee, head of a British Labour government since 1945, had been giving serious thought to the whole structure of the Commonwealth. The sovereign powers now enjoyed by the Dominions, their growing economic

strength and sense of national importance, the rising tide of nationalism in Asia and Africa, all indicated the need for recognizing the multi-national character of the Commonwealth and for a new approach to the old concept of dominion status based on an earlier imperial-colonial relationship to the Crown. Both Burma and Eire had rejected dominion status, and both had become republics and left the Commonwealth, and there was a strong probability that India would follow the same course. After labouring for some time with the many complicated constitutional problems involved, Mr. Attlee held a Conference of Commonwealth Prime Ministers in London, in 1949, to consider certain tentative proposals. The results of their deliberations were embodied in a Declaration which remodelled the whole structure of the Commonwealth and also designated a new title for the King. These changes were of such a fundamental character as to justify the use of the term New Commonwealth.

The crux of the problem facing the Conference of Commonwealth Prime Ministers was to discover a constitutional formula which—while permitting the status of a sovereign republic—would at the same time keep India within the Commonwealth. Hitherto, according to the Balfour Declaration of 1926 and the later Statute of Westminster, allegiance to the Crown had been a prerequisite of Commonwealth membership. But since this relationship implied recognition of the King in the internal affairs of the state, it was incompatible with the ideal of a sovereign republic such as India desired. On the other hand, the discussions with Mr. Nehru revealed that India was willing to recognize the King as head of the Commonwealth and thus as a symbol of India's membership in the Commonwealth along with the other member nations which, like India, would be sovereign states with equal status. The acceptance of this formula made necessary a change in the Royal title of the King in conformity with the new relationship, but since the required processes of legislation were not completed before the death of George VI in 1952, Elizabeth II at the time of her accession was the first British sovereign to be proclaimed "Head of the Commonwealth". The omission of "British" from the name of the new Commonwealth was recognition of its multi-national character, since a majority of its member nations were not of British origin, but belonged to the dark-skinned peoples of the world.

Just as the American Revolution in the eighteenth century had compelled British statesmen to rethink many aspects of Imperial relations, so deValera's successful defiance of Great Britain in the twentieth century had compelled recognition of Ireland's non-British, indigenous character, as well as of her sovereign rights as a nation, thereby creating precedents which brought about the transformation of the British Empire-Commonwealth into the new Commonwealth of today. It is significant



that the Declaration of Commonwealth Prime Ministers of 1950 which set forth the new basis of Commonwealth relations was practically the same formula of "external association" that deValera had first expounded to Lloyd George when the terms of the 1921 Treaty were under discussion. DeValera might, therefore, be called the progenitor of the new Commonwealth, since he anticipated the compromise formula by which a sovereign, non-British republic might also be a member of the Commonwealth with the Crown only as a connecting link.

In conclusion, something remains to be said concerning deValera's attitude toward the monarchy and the reasons for his republicanism. Though deValera stated on more than one occasion that he was not a "doctrinaire republican", he was austere democratic in his outlook and way of life. This was largely the result of his early boyhood days on a small farm in County Limerick where from the tender age of two and a half years until early manhood, he had lived first with his Gaelic-speaking grandmother and then with an uncle, both of whom exercised a strong influence over him. Like most Irish Nationalists at this time, deValera regarded the monarchy as a survival of an aristocratic and alien society which had no place on Irish soil. The Anglo-Irish aristocracy and big landowners, who in the first instance had obtained their lands from the Crown, were naturally its staunch supporters. But to the dispossessed, land-hungry Irish tenantry who constituted the majority of the people, the monarchy came to symbolize a system of alien rule and exploitation. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century English statesmen—notably the great liberal leader, Mr. Gladstone—had realized the need for reforming the antiquated Irish land system. Some reforms were made, but by this time it was too late to win the loyalty and affection of a people who had been alienated by years of neglect rather than by systematic oppression. Because of his early boyhood experiences, deValera well understood, and in many ways shared, the outlook of the Irish tenantry and small farmer class; and it was from this element which predominated in the West and South of Ireland that he derived his principal support throughout his political career.

Except among the Anglo-Irish and Scots-Irish, there was among the vast majority of the Irish people no tradition of loyalty to the British Monarchy. Traditions are like plants: to flourish they must have a favourable climate and constant nourishment and support; but in Ireland the monarchist tradition was allowed to wither away, partly by neglect and partly because growing nationalist and republican feeling did not create a congenial atmosphere. A wise and conciliatory policy over the years might have changed the climate of opinion in Ireland generally. But in contrast to Scotland, few attempts were made to cultivate a feeling of loyalty to the

monarchy. The shrewd Prime Minister of England, Disraeli, realized that this was a serious mistake. He warned Queen Victoria that the Monarchy in Ireland had been dangerously weakened by neglect, and he reminded the Queen that for two centuries the British sovereigns had spent only twenty-one days among their Irish subjects. Queen Victoria did little to repair the damage, for during her long reign of sixty-five years she spent altogether thirty-five days in Ireland. Disraeli also advised the Queen that a royal residence should be established in Ireland, and he also suggested that Edward, Prince of Wales, should take up his residence there and perhaps act as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. But Queen Victoria was willing to do no more than to confer on the Prince of Wales the title of Duke of Dublin. The title was never used; few people are aware that such a title ever existed, or that it was conferred on the heir to the British throne.

The reasons for the marked contrast between the Irish and Scottish attitude toward the monarchy are matters of history. The Scottish people had a family interest in the monarchy. Long before the legislative union of Scotland and England, the two countries had been united under the same king, when in 1603, James VI of Scotland became James I of England. Queen Anne was the sixth Stuart ruler when the two kingdoms were united under one parliament in 1707. But the Scottish people kept unchanged their legal system, their own law courts, and their national church—the Presbyterian Church of Scotland. They also received full free trade with England and her colonies, and so shared in English enterprise and prosperity throughout the world. In short, it was a union of equals, carried out in good faith, and without loss of national pride. The Union of England and Ireland in 1801 was the complete antithesis of the above conditions. Moreover, since the time of George IV, British monarchs were anxious to minimize their Hanoverian-German background and to play up their Scottish origin. When George IV visited Edinburgh in 1820, he appeared in a kilt to the delight of his Scottish subjects, for this was probably the first time for over two centuries that the Kings of England had worn the Scottish national dress. About two decades later, Queen Victoria established her holiday home at Balmoral Castle and spent many years of her long reign among her loyal subjects in the Highlands.

On the other hand, the indifference displayed by British sovereigns to their Irish subjects only reinforced the latent republicanism which was a direct inheritance from the American and French Revolutions. When to this was added the yeasty spirit of Irish nationalism, the combination was irresistible. DeValera was a product of these historic influences. He expressed for a majority of the Irish people their feeling of a distinct national identity, their desire to control their own land and

resources, and to determine their own course of action. From these historic forces emerged today's Republic of Ireland.

As President of the Republic and titular head of the nation, de Valera stands today above party conflicts. But he still personifies the spirit of Irish nationalism which under his leadership has contributed a new concept of Commonwealth relations and of monarchical symbolism. But though as a sovereign republic Ireland today recognizes neither the Monarchy nor Commonwealth ties, it is unfortunately a mutilated republic since the six North-Eastern counties of Ulster are still separated from the rest of the country. Thus Ireland remains divided by the mistakes and wrongs of the past, and deValera's larger vision of a completely unified, sovereign nation associated with the Commonwealth remains yet to be fulfilled.

## IRRESPONSIVE

*Geoffrey Johnson*

No, not a drop of dew, of rain or sea  
Dances the more because my heart is glad;  
Not even a hair's division of degree  
Is the sun dimmed because my heart is sad.

If I could oversoar the skylark choir,  
Outweep the willow by the flooded grange,  
Were pulverized in ice or fused in fire,  
No star would flutter an eyelid at the change.

And though the heart, still longing for response  
From Nature, fancies it in sounds and shows,  
In April dawns or autumn-homing swans,  
The reason at the core of quiet knows

There can be none: Nature has us in bond.  
The nestling whom her thrust compels to fly,  
The soul set winging out to shores beyond  
Must learn to endure her hard, inhuman sky.