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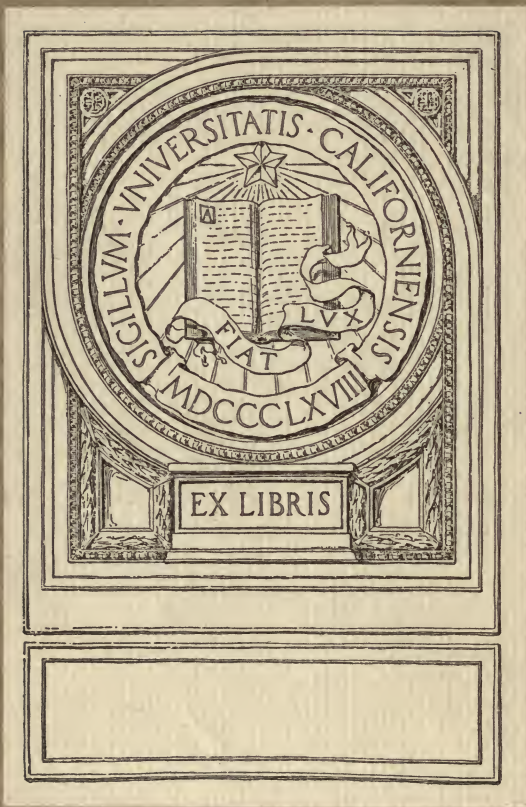
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THE DOWNFALL OF PARLIAMENTARIANISM

A Retrospect for the
Accounting
Day

By WILLIAM O'BRIEN, M.P.

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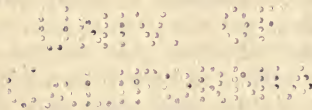
THE DOWNFALL OF PARLIAMENTARIANISM

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A REQUIEM FOR THE REVIVING DAY
BY WILLIAM O'BRIEN, M.P.

THE DOWNFALL OF PARLIAMENTARISM

MAUNSELL & COMPANY, LIMITED
DUBLIN AND LONDON 1912

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**MAUNSEL & COMPANY, LIMITED
DUBLIN AND LONDON. 1918**

THE DOWNFALL OF PARLIAMENTARIANISM

A RETROSPECT FOR THE ACCOUNTING DAY

I.

THE INEVITABLENESS OF FORMER DEFEATS.

When Gladstone was converted to Home Rule, in 1885, one-third of his own Party deserted him, and the country turned him out of Office by a majority of 390 to 280. It was a check, but an inevitable one, upon a first hearing, and there was nobody to blame. The second test came in 1890. England, sickened with five years of squalid and blood-stained Coercion in Ireland, had repented of her "twenty years of Resolute Government" mandate and had come once more under the spell of Gladstone. No Party Whip doubted that, could the General Election have been forced in the early months of that year, Gladstone and Parnell must have come back with a majority that could not be baffled: a Britain with its mind made up that the scandal in Ireland must once for all be made an end of, and an Irish race, united as it was never united before, from the Canadian snows to the Australian goldfields, not only in allegiance to Parnell, but in unfeigned goodwill to England. The great stake was lost by a fatality black enough for a plot by Aeschylus. The two great men who, combined, must have destroyed the last prejudices against Home Rule, destroyed Home Rule instead, and destroyed it in the most tragic of all ways—by destroying one another.

In casting up the final sum of responsibility the simplest of simplists will now own—what a few who knew were

fired at, with equal fury from both sides of the barricade, for suggesting at the time—that the choice of Ireland in 1890 was not that Sunday-school choice between vice and virtue, between the all black and the all white, between shining angel and darkest devil which would make human judgments in great affairs an enviably easy process. There were faults—and, still worse, unpardonable misunderstandings—among both sets of protagonists. The Parnell divorce suit has long assumed an aspect which the Puritans of the first outraged weeks little conceived of. Lord Morley's Autobiography makes the astounding revelation that Gladstone himself would fain have dropped out of his letter the famous threat of throwing up the leadership, and that it was only forced upon him at the last under the pressure of the Party hacks—the threat which alone could have reconciled any considerable section of the Irish race to parting with Parnell. Gladstone's own part in the transaction grows more and more consonant with the breadth as well as suppleness of his statesmanship. His judgment was overborne by the Party politicians, who made him the victim of their own ineffable failure to establish confidential negotiations either with Parnell or with his Party before the blue sky grew black with thunder. On the other hand, the course of events has graven in Irish memory in characters that never can be erased the warnings on which Parnell founded his refusal to be expelled from the leadership by dictation from England. One was his conviction of the danger of any blind dependence upon the Liberal Party—unjustified, indeed, in the unique case of Gladstone himself, but bitterly confirmed throughout the succeeding quarter of a century by a hundred tricks of wily opportunism on the part of his Liberal lieutenants and of their successors. In his other motive for refusing to desert the Irish leadership—his conviction which was unquestionably inspired by knowledge and not by vanity that he was the only Irishman of the moment who could have held the manœuvres of English party politicians in effective check, and, above all, who could hold together an Irish Party who, without him, would be half-a-dozen

able sub-leaders without a leader—time has vindicated his foresight with a deadly accuracy which the heart of Ireland still aches to recall.

The tragedy of 1890, however, was the work of black Erinys rather than a mischance of practical politics. If nobody could have foreseen it, probably nobody could have remedied it until the poison had worked itself out by slow and agonizing degrees. The two magnificent hosts that must have carried Home Rule to victory fell to hacking one another to pieces. The shivering Home Rule majority of 40 which came back in 1893 could only serve as a tantalising proof of what the majority must have been had the banners of Gladstone and Parnell gone into the battle side by side. It served also as a monument to the genius of the marvellous old man who, with Parnell in his grave, with an Irish Party rent into three sections half mad with disappointments and recriminations, and with a powerful section of his own Liberal Party already thinking above all else how they were to be ridded of their Irish *damnosa hereditas* nevertheless with his single arm fought the way of his Home Rule Bill to its last stage in the House of Commons and might quite possibly have rechallenged the opinion of Britain with a better heart, were not his Liberal lieutenants in a scarcely more decent haste to execute Gladstone than they had been to execute Parnell. Lord Morley's amazing autobiography shifts three-fourths of the responsibility from Parnell and Ireland to the shoulders of Gladstone's untrusty subordinates. But, divide the guilt how we may, Destiny decreed the thing was not to be done and there was an end.

II.

THE INEXCUSABLENESS OF THE PRESENT DISASTER.

Far otherwise was it with the *dégringolade* of the Home Rule coalition which the Liberal reaction of 1906 brought

into irresistible power. This time the catastrophe was the product of human feebleness and of the shifty morals of the politicians, reducing to nothingness such a concentration of happy conditions as seemed to defy the power of incapacity, or even perfidy, to forbid success. The joint Liberal-Irish majority was an overwhelming one. The dregs of the old Unionist Party of the Boer War did not seriously count, either in debate or in the voting lobby. Better still, the ancient intransigent solidarity of the Unionists against Home Rule was broken once for all by Mr. George Wyndham's adventurous policy in Ireland. Landlordism, which furnished England with the main guard of her "garrison" in Ireland, and for whose pay the worst of England's governmental crimes against Ireland had to be committed, had miraculously vanished from the scene amidst universal rejoicings, and not the least in the camp of the disbanded "garrison" themselves. The revolution had been planned across a friendly council-table in the Dublin Mansion House by the most authentic Unionist and Nationalist leaders. Nothing on the Irish Unionist side hindered the happy accord on the most intractable of all Irish disorders—the agrarian one—from widening into a concordat of Protestant and Catholic for a Home Rule settlement in the same spirit of sunny toleration among Irishmen which was the glory of Grattan's Parliament and of Wolfe Tone's United Irishmen. It is no longer doubtful that Wyndham himself, in whose veins coursed the generous blood of Lord Edward Fitzgerald, was an active sympathiser with Lord Dunraven's first tentative essays towards Home Rule. That their joint efforts have not long ago reached their efflorescence in a blissful Irish settlement by consent must, unhappily, be laid to the account, not of "Ulster," which, as a fortress of resistance to Home Rule, was non-existent in the Irish life of the time, but of the same knot of narrow Nationalist politicians who were subsequently to emasculate and nullify Liberal Home Rule, and who then conceived they were doing a deed of far-seeing patriotism by blocking every approach to Unionist Home Rule and routing Wyndham out of the Irish Government and into

his grave. But from the point of advance reached by Wyndham and his Lord Lieutenant and his Under Secretary in their hardy adventure, the thin remnants of the Unionist Party in the House of Commons could never recede again. Even "another place"—*spes o fidissima teucràm*, the last fastness of hoary prejudice—was, by the victorious Liberal-Irish host, stricken with impotence by the Act which abolished the veto of the House of Lords. What power remained—assuredly not within the notoriously friendly circle of the Throne—which could forbid that truer and more auspicious union for which the two nations were quite certainly hungering?

Given two men of the stature of Gladstone and Parnell in control of such a situation, nothing could have hindered them from passing a great, a conciliatory, and a satisfying Home Rule Statute with a measure of general consent which nobody in his senses would think of withstanding. They would have been free to put it into force without any danger to the public peace which the police could not adequately cope with. There was unluckily no such Liberal leader and there was no such Irish leader. The years of omnipotence of the Coalition passed in certain beggarly measures of almost purely Party interest for the Liberal Party. They passed without any legislative fruit at all for Ireland except the utter bedevilment of Home Rule by a Parliament specially commissioned by the country to make Home Rule complete and effectual. An Irish Party, united and disciplined to the point at which unity became a disease—a unity which their few critics in the House of Commons consistently refused to ruffle while the Home Rule Bill was in gestation—an Irish Party to which the whole daily Press of Nationalist Ireland paid humble homage, and which commanded unlimited funds and a pathetic allegiance from the Irish race in every quarter of the globe—not only failed to achieve the object for which their omnipotence was entrusted to them. They failed to suggest a generous scheme of Home Rule, failed to amend a line of it in Committee, and failed to extract from the farcical measure "placed on the Statute-Book" any actual result whatsoever

except a half-yearly Order in Council postponing its operation to the Greek Kalends. This would have been a sorry account enough of their stewardship of their tremendous powers. But worse remained behind. They consented twice over, after a long interval for reflection, to a partition of their country, which would have erected six of Ireland's most opulent counties, with one-fourth of her entire population, into a separate State specially delimited with a view of eternising religious and racial antagonisms. Darkest error of all, because the source of all the rest, the representatives of Ireland abdicated their independence, and abdicated it into the hands of the English Party which all the hopes of their country depended upon their being able to keep sternly up to the pledge of "full self-government for Ireland" on which they had come into office, and on the smallest departure from which they could be turned out of office, had not the Irish representatives become their stipendiaries instead of their freeborn equals.

III.

IRISH PATRIOTS AND THE ENGLISH TREASURY.

The acceptance of salaries from the British Treasury, after a faint show of reluctance, will be found to be the *fons et origo* of a catalogue of blunders, indecisions and futilities which, without the explanation of that one capital mistake, would seem to betray in the Irish leaders an incurable incapacity, not to speak of explanations still more uncomplimentary. From the standpoint of the Party Whips Mr. Lloyd George was an excellent opportunist in providing the Labour Party with their £400 a year, by adding a line to his Estimates without any authority from the country, although it may be doubted whether, in the case of the Labour Party also, the Treasury salaries may not have borne evil fruit in the divisions in that Party and the decline of their authority with the workers. In the case of Ireland, it was a

disaster without qualification. It was the surrender of the very citadel of the Parnell movement. It was the wounding of Home Rule in the most vital point of constitutional control—the power of the Purse. The Party of Parnell was the emanation of the Irish people. From them it derived all its powers, all its resources, and all such poor rewards as an unemancipated people can bestow upon their soldiers; and from its absolute independence of any power whatever outside the shores of Ireland, it derived all its terrors in the eyes of English Party managers, and all its opportunities of tempting them, instead of being tempted. For a quarter of a century the Irish people never failed to contribute munificently to the war-chest of their representatives. But that was because they had done well, and only so long as they did well. The moment symptoms of lethargy or demoralization set in the Irish people possessed the remedy in which the Parliament of the Stuarts found salvation—the stoppage of supplies—a power they had exercised with effect in recent years. That power was now gone. Contributions from Ireland, or from America or Australia were no longer indispensable. A cheque from the British Treasury enabled an Irish member to make light of Irish opinion for a whole Parliament, and an expert electioneering machine made him sure of re-election. When Butt and Parnell began their work the acceptance of an office of profit by a solitary Irish member was enough to work the country into a fever of indignation. Now the whole body of Irish representatives, eighty-four strong, became the pensioners of Mr. Lloyd George, by an arrangement which a change of Ministry, or even a change of mind of the existing Minister, might any year put an end to. It was not wilful corruption, but it opened the door to a feebleness of *moral* that, in poor human nature, is too often apt to eventuate in corruption.

It was an astounding change, and all the more dangerous because it was over and done with before the country had any real understanding of what was on foot. Had the proposal been submitted to the people at the polls it would have been rejected with horror. But the adoption of Mr. Lloyd George's modest Estimate was skilfully hushed up

in the Irish Press and every constituency thenceforth lay helpless in the grasp of an organisation which decreed that, now that "the last obstacle to Home Rule was gone," all criticism of the Party would be the act of "factionists" and "traitors" to the country. Success must be at the price of unconditional silence and the complete subjugation of Irish public opinion to the ruling politicians. The complaisance of the members of Parliament in making their means of existence a matter of Treasury bounty had alarming consequences upon the political morals of their followers. The old ideal of Parliamentary service as a career of self-sacrifice and privation was replaced by the vulgar competition for a post glittering with attractions in a poor country. The prize usually fell, after a prodigious deal of canvassing and wire-pulling, to the candidate with the largest family following and the strongest pull with the political Bosses. It fell not unfrequently to some family nominee for the precise reason that he had failed in other walks in life and must be provided for anyhow, if only as a matter of compassion. The rank and file of the existing Party in general were held in discipline by the knowledge that, to be re-elected to their salaries they had to run the gauntlet at Conventions which the Bosses were in a position to trim and pack as they pleased, and that to contest the vote of a majority thus manipulated they would have themselves to supply the expenses of a struggle against an organisation immeasurably superior in wealth as well as physical strength.

IV.

"PUTREFACTION."

And the intrigues of "the four-hundred-pounders" (as they began to be known) for their seats soon came to be only a small rill in the river of competition for jobs, emoluments and honours which overspread the country to such a pitch that a man of Canon Sheehan's gentle temper could find no

less horrible word than "putrefaction" to describe the phenomenon. The first fatal act of compliance on the part of Mr. Lloyd George's pensioners was to squander in passing Mr. Lloyd George's Insurance Act the first year of a new Parliament specially elected to pass Home Rule—the year in which Parliamentary energies are freshest—the year which, as events proved, meant all the difference between ample time to pass and enforce Home Rule before the war was thought of, and the miserable betrayal and paralysis of Home Rule to which the outbreak of the war tempted the Liberal Ministry. The postponement of Home Rule in the Home Rule Parliament for twelve priceless months was all the grosser a fault that the Insurance Act, which was thus forced on Ireland by her own representatives, was condemned by the unanimous voice of the Irish Bishops, with a foresight which nobody will now contest, as an Act totally unfitted and burdensome to Ireland. The Act which thus struck the first blow at the fortunes of Home Rule was, however, an instrument of startling efficacy in extending to the *état majeur* of the reigning political organisation endowments of the same character already accepted by the members of Parliament. A special Irish Insurance Department, staffed for the most part with the nominees of the politicians, was set up in Dublin Castle, and through it an innumerable army of inspectors, lawyers and clerks took possession of the country and rained manna on the true believers. The Local Government machinery, involving a patronage of over £1,000,000 a year, fell to the victors with the rest of the spoils. The smallest office and the highest, from the Chairmanship of the County Councils to the Workhouse porterships, became the exclusive property of candidates with the official stamp of the Hibernian Lodges. The Corporations, Co. Councils, District Councils, Harbour Boards, and so on, were purged not merely of Unionists half converted to Home Rule, but especially of all Nationalists who did not unquestionably bow the knee to the Hiberno-Liberal alliance. Even in districts like Cork, where the advocates of a union of all Parties, Irish and English, for a settlement by consent, were in a considerable majority at

the Parliamentary polls, they were proscribed from the smallest local office or honour in the gift of the Lodges with an intolerance bordering on mania. In the higher range of official patronage, dignities and great offices were dispensed with a lavish hand among the more eminent friends of "the Four-hundred-pounders." Dublin Castle, the Four Courts, the Co. Courts, the Magisterial Bench were flooded with Judges, Crown Prosecutors, Privy Councillors, Knights and Justices of the Peace, speaking with an electro-plated Nationalist accent, and not above lecturing from their superior Nationalist standard the old-fangled patriotism which still held the road to Dublin Castle to be the road to the betrayal and corruption of the Irish cause.

Political intolerance was aggravated by a new form of religious intolerance which, on the Nationalist side, had never been heard of before, and which supplied "Ulster" with its only rational argument by exhibiting in the actual public life of Ireland those very sectarian tests and disabilities which the Orange reactionaries affected to apprehend from a Home Ruled Ireland. Union and affection between Irishmen of all creeds and racial origins was the breath of life of that Irish nationality which was worshipped generation after generation by Grattan's Protestant Volunteers, by Wolfe Tone's United Irishmen, by the heroes of the Young Ireland cycle, and by the Fenian men. The first words of the charter of Wolfe Tone's United Men: "This society is constituted for the purpose of forwarding a brotherhood of affection, a communion of right, and a union of power among Irishmen," were also adopted as the first words of the Constitution of the United Irish League, before that organisation became the prey of the secret Hibernian Lodges. For that healing doctrine—the one safeguard against disintegration in a country with such a history of ethnic and sectarian divisions there was substituted, without the slightest notice to the Irish people, the ascendancy of an occult order, the first condition of admission to whose ranks was that the postulant must be a Catholic and must subject himself to a rigid Catholic test before initiation. Here were two new standards of Irish

nationality and of the most pernicious character—secrecy and religious exclusivism—standards fatal to the creation of a United Ireland—specially planned indeed to prevent it; since the object in view was not freedom for all Irishmen but a monopoly of place and patronage for one particular category of them.

V.

THE NEW ORDER OF PSEUDO CATHOLIC PLACEHUNTERS.

The new Hibernian Order was the revival for place-hunting purposes of a body of Catholic Defenders who, with perfect justice in their day, rose up against a detestable Orange combination for the extermination of the Catholic tenantry of the County of Armagh. There was now no shadow of justification for re-opening that dark and blood-stained chapter. There was not even the excuse of Catholic fanaticism, for "The Board of Erin Hibernians," as they called themselves (whenever they were not glorying in the nick-name of "The Mollies," inherited from an old shebeen-keeper in whose house the leaders of some of the old Ribbon Societies used to meet), were more than once laid under interdict by the Catholic Church for the evil practices of their Organisation and the blasphemous form of their original ceremony of initiation. The object of the present recrudescence and amazing spread of "The Board of Erin" Hibernians was only too mournfully obvious. It was to establish a secret machinery for the distribution of the gigantic patronage, Imperial and local, which the Liberal alliance placed at the disposal of the political leaders, and to repay the political leaders by enrolling in every parish in the country a closely-knit brotherhood, powerful enough to make the electoral interests of the politicians secure, and to stifle any public criticism of their proceedings. Worst of all, the sinister transformation of the historic principles of Irish Nationality had been effected, like the enrolment of the

members of Parliament on the Treasury pay-sheet, before the common people had any real inkling of what had happened. The new Order, with its battalions of office-holders and office-seekers at its beck, had assumed supreme control of the public organization, of its officials and its funds, and during the years while the Home Rule Bill was following its course, the honest Irish citizen was hushed into an almost religious silence by the solemn assurance, from every platform and in every newspaper, that "the last obstacle to Home Rule was gone," if the Irish people would only give an unquestioning allegiance to their leaders, Liberal and Irish. Freedom of opinion, which was crushed by open violence on the platform, was suppressed or garbled by much more dangerous weapons in the Press. The Hibernian propaganda, through the channel of correspondents in the offices of their organs in Dublin, Cork and Belfast, not only gave them a daily monopoly of the Liberal Press of Great Britain as well as Ireland, but enabled them, with an extraordinary success, to permeate the public opinion of America and Australia with their own version of events. There is the simple explanation of the atrophy of Irish public opinion, while the old ideals of Nationality were being exchanged for the greed of the place-hunter, and a far more formidable obstacle to Home Rule than the House of Lords raised up in Ulster by trading the interests of one set of bigots, real or sham, and one description of selfish ascendancy, against another. Without the explanation, freemen might well form a withering verdict as to Ireland's capacity for self-government in face of her silence and helplessness while her liberties and ideals were being thus dishonoured under her eyes. It was a miracle of popular trustfulness, but a miracle only saved from being a crime by the pathos of the poor people's belief that their abject self-effacement was a great deed of Unity for the sake of the National Freedom, which, they were assured, nothing but criticism of the Party could now delay.

VI.

THE CASE OF MR. REDMOND.

The carefully-organized ignorance which can be pleaded for the people cannot with equal truthfulness be pleaded for their titular leader. Mr. Redmond was an Irish gentleman of high personal honour, as well as of uncommon oratorical graces. It would be unjust to his capacity, as well as to his character, to attribute to a mere "easy optimism of incompetence," the extraordinary persistence with which, for five years, he went on repeating with the assuredness of a divine revelation that the battle was over and won—that "there was no longer an Ulster Difficulty"—that the miserable Measure whose passage to the Statute Book was celebrated at the time with Hibernian bonfires and is now spoken of only with the contempt of universal Ireland, was "a better Act than the Bill of 1886 which Mr. Parnell accepted as a settlement and a far better and freer Constitution than Grattan and the Volunteers won in 1782."* and that the actual opening of the Irish Parliament, thus grandiloquently described, was "as certain as the rising of the morrow's sun." His self-deception seemed to betray an incredible want of prescience in a leader of men. But the best defence of Mr. Redmond's leadership really is that he never was the leader. If in the last years he managed to persuade himself that his optimism was not insincere, the true explanation of the almost uninterrupted series of blunders which characterised the course of his nominal leadership is, that he found himself compelled to pursue a programme in which he profoundly disbelieved, carried out by men in whose wisdom he never even pretended to be a believer. Of this, there can be no rational dispute. He himself publicly avowed that he was in substantial agreement on all points with the present writer up to the moment

*Mr. Redmond to the Dublin Corporation, July 20, 1915.

when the latter severed his connection with the Irish Party in November, 1903, and that severance would never have taken place except as a protest against the plot to wreck the Policy of Conciliation in the hour of its most splendid promise. This confession was made in presence of his own Party. Mr. Redmond even went the exaggerated length of proclaiming: "But for Mr. William O'Brien there would have been no Land Conference and no Land Act," which was equivalent to saying "there would have been no 300,000 Irish serfs turned into freeholders—no 3,000 evicted soldiers of the Land War triumphantly re-instated—no 50,000 half-starved labourers installed in snug and happy homes." To make the avowal was to avow, what, indeed, everybody who knew him knew already, that in that Policy he saw the one statesmanlike and assured hope of combining all Irish ranks and creeds for the establishment of Home Rule by the same triumphant process of consent which had extinguished Landlordism. It was to confess further, that from that date forth he allowed himself to be used for the destruction of the programme he believed in in the interest of a programme he detested. For every development of Irish Party policy from that date was in the direction of reversing the settlement of 1903, of obstructing the progress of Land Purchase, and eventually killing it, of reviving the bitterness between classes and religious denominations, of rousing the alarms and flouting the resistance of "Ulster," and trusting all the hopes of Ireland to the generosity of the Liberal Alliance and the Act which paralysed the veto of the House of Lords. Practically every blunder of which Mr. Redmond's memory bears the heavy reproach was the blunder of advisers (not to say masters), whose English Radical and anti-Conciliationist tenets he, in his inner forum, mistrusted. Nevertheless he enfeoffed himself to men who could detect nothing in the policy and the Act which have made Ireland one of the most prosperous nations in Europe, except "a landlord swindle," which, in their wise eyes, was bound to lead straight to "National Bankruptcy." He deserted the authorised National Unity, and took sides with the Disunionists who had just launched

"a determined campaign" against the Policy to which not only he but every Nationalist organization and representative authority in the country stood solemnly committed. And he aided for years in duping the unfortunate country into the belief that it was the Disunionists who represented "Unity and Majority Rule." The impudent "Unity" cry of the Disunionists coerced the country and ruined it.

Feebleness of character, it may be said, if it be not dishonesty? Feebleness, no doubt, was the secret of the initial blunder of his surrender in 1903 from which all the subsequent tide of follies flowed. It was due in large part to private circumstances which need not now be dwelt upon, but which at the moment shook the confidence of the people of Ireland in his own transactions under the Purchase Act; but his capitulation to the wreckers of the settlement of 1903 must above all else be set down to his honest and abiding horror of the danger of a renewal of the Parnell Split, if he persisted in the policy to which the immense majority of the people had given their allegiance in every constitutional form. He took meekly the threats of "rending the National ranks asunder" with which he was plied, and allowed the will of the country to be overridden by "the determined campaign" launched against the policy of which he was the standard-bearer by three men of enormous influence who had persuaded themselves that the Land Conference settlement was "a mortgage of the future of the country in a moment of weakness," and that Wyndham's overtures to Home Rule covered some dark treason to Ireland. Mr. Redmond himself crystallised his defence in the bewildering apophthegm: "Better be united in the pursuit of a short-sighted and foolish policy than divided in pursuit of a far-seeing and wise one." With the ethics of this extraordinary proposition this is not the place to deal. But its essential unwisdom was to confound the National Unity of which the Policy of Conciliation was the assured begetter with the Party Unity, which was indeed achieved with an iron discipline never attempted before, but with the tragic result for the country that the "far-seeing and wise policy" was untimely finished with, and "the

short-sighted and foolish one " has led the Irish Cause into the welter of defeats, disappointments, betrayals and despair in which it is at the present moment immersed. He possibly averted the Party Split with which he was threatened by the three men from whom alone a Split could come; but by his capitulation he quite certainly gave the signal for the policy of United Unwisdom which shipwrecked Home Rule and himself.

VII.

THE REAL MASTERS AND THEIR WORK.

The tragedy was that Mr. Redmond, as his famous " war speech " proved, possessed the affability and personal charm which would have made him an incomparable leader if the purpose was to conciliate English or Irish Unionist opponents, while he was acting against all his own natural instincts in pursuing the policy of exasperation forced upon him by the threat of rending the country asunder unless he submitted to the Liberal alliance and the bear-baiting of " Ulster." His long succession of failures was in reality a succession of reluctant testimonies to the wisdom of the policy he felt himself coerced to throw over. The real directing force lay elsewhere. Of the three powerful Irishmen who reduced the glorious opportunity of 1903 to a nullity only one now survives as an actual living force, but Mr. Dillon's word was made thenceforth supreme by the adhesion of a younger man of an audacious ambition, supported by a certain trick of flashy Socialistic rhetoric which fascinated the unreflecting and by extraordinary gifts as an organiser. Since his uprising in the double capacity of Secretary of the open organisation and of National President of the secret one, Mr. Dillon's new lieutenant had enlisted the active fighting forces of the country in the service of a political machine popular alike with pseudo-Catholic place-hunters and with the believers in the English Democracy,

and made none the less formidable by the secret signs and passwords with which the initiated were bound together. A third force in the combination was the genial Mr. T. P. O'Connor—consistently throughout his life an English Radical first of all—who as President for twenty years of the Irish Nationalist Organisation of Great Britain, had gradually diverted that vast fabric of Irish opinion from its original function under Butt and Parnell as an electoral force to be thrown either on the Liberal or the Conservative side according to the shifting interests of Ireland, and had turned it into a reliable Hiberno-Radical chapel-of-ease of the Liberal Party. The only change hinted at for the future would seem to be that Mr. T. P. O'Connor's chattel interest in the Irish vote in Great Britain is to be made over to the English Labour Party on the usual loose terms—that is to say, on no terms at all, so far as Ireland is concerned. These three gentlemen, the guests of Mr. Lloyd George at a certain historic breakfast party in Downing street, are those to whom the glory, or the guilt, of the Liberal Home Rule policy properly belongs.

It would be out of place here to detail the particulars of how the plans of the Downing street breakfast room worked themselves out. The historian will find them a curious study, almost passing belief by their sameness of futility. For the moment the details have lost interest in the fresh horror of the calamity in which they have culminated. Sufficient here to point out that not only was the golden year that would have made all the difference between success and failure lost to Home Rule for the *beaux yeux* of Mr. Lloyd George's Insurance Act, but Ireland's historic financial claims were renounced before the Home Rule Bill was introduced at all by the raptures with which Mr. Lloyd George's "great and good Budget" of 1910 were hailed on the Irish Benches. These ill-timed raptures have cost Ireland an addition of £20,000,000 a year to the difficulties of financing Home Rule. When the Bill generated in Downing street made its appearance it was found to be, above all else, a Bill to establish a nominal Parliament in Dublin with power to divide a rich argosy of salaries out of whatever

moneys the English Chancellor of the Exchequer was pleased to spare out of Irish taxation, but with little other power of any substance. The right of taxation—the pith and marrow of Grattan's Parliament—was maintained at Westminster in a worse form than ever, since the Irish representation there was nearly two-thirds abolished.

The absence of any provision to complete the Abolition of Landlordism—and consequently the throwing back of the country into agrarian anarchy—was another shocking feature of the Downing street Bill; but again it was the criminality of Ireland's own representatives that was mostly to be thanked for the betrayal. The Act of 1903 was the first financial bargain favourable to Ireland to be found in a financial history of which England's foremost experts have acknowledged themselves ashamed. It would pass belief, if it were not a truth now manifest to the most stupid person in Ireland, that her own chosen members of Parliament permitted the English Treasury—avowedly for the purpose of making a petty economy for an Exchequer chest which could scarcely allege the bankruptcy of a South American Republic—to repudiate England's obligation to Ireland and for all practical purposes to put an end to the life of the great Purchase Act of 1903. Not only that, but the one solemn protest attempted against the iniquity was suppressed by main force at the infamous "Baton Convention" by the boxwood batons and revolvers of the "Board of Erin" Hibernians. The blackguardism of "the Baton Convention" absolved England from her treaty to finance the purchase of the soil of Ireland at the now unthinkable interest of $2\frac{3}{4}$ per cent. Only one darker touch of perfidy was possible, and it was supplied by the legislators of the Downing street breakfast table. This Bill not only freed England from the duty to carry the Abolition of Landlordism any further, but, as to the transactions already completed, Ireland was actually charged as an addition to her National Debt with the bonus of some £20,000,000 granted to the selling landlords, although nobody pretended that one solitary representative of Ireland would have dared to vote for that Bonus only for Wyndham's solemn guarantee, re-echoed by the

two English Parties, that the Bonus was a free Imperial gift to lubricate the settlement of the greatest of all Imperial difficulties in Ireland.

And so on and so on, through all the gamut of shameful concessions made at Mr. Lloyd George's breakfast table.

This caricature of "complete Self-Government for Ireland" was worsened, and not mended, as it got through the House of Commons. The silent impotence of Ireland's representatives during these momentous debates for three Sessions was a spectacle of unspeakable humiliation for Irishmen. The official Irish Party did not offer a single amendment of their own. The Party in general were either unable to understand the real bearings of the Bill at all or obeyed orders to make no contribution to the debates, beyond swelling the occasional hosannahs chanted by the three official spokesmen. The only occasion on which they broke their shameful silence was for a purpose more shameful still—to cry down the little group of their countrymen who, in the least aggressive terms, strove to point out the injustice the financial clauses would inflict upon Ireland and to roar with delight at every shallow quip and sneer with which Mr. Lloyd George laughed down the financial claims which had been their country's historic inheritance, and which the Imperial Royal Commission of 1896 had reported to be indisputably just. The "unity" of the Party majority was perfect: so was the doom of the Irish cause. The darkest curse of the prophet of old was that the people's blessings might be turned into curses. The National Unity which would have been our nation's richest blessing, if it were really national, became her ruin as an instrument of Party. In the words of a famous Englishman: "Such a bunch of imbecility never disgraced a country."

VIII.

FROM DEBILITY TO DISGRACE.

One depth of infatuation—we need not yet say perfidy—remained to be sounded. Bottom was reached when the Liberal Government proposed to solve the difficulty of carrying Home Rule for all Ireland by cutting Ireland up into two hostile States, and—most intolerable thought of all—when they obtained the consent of the official Irish Party. As time goes on the bargain for the Partition of Ireland will be found to be one of the most hateful transactions in history. It was only the first step towards the deliberate plot of certain Liberal Ministers to throw Home Rule over altogether, but it was the culmination of a long course of incompetence, short-sightedness, and poltroonery on the part of the Home Rule Cabinet and their Irish advisers. Their first error was in under-estimating the very real Ulster Difficulty, and their next in taking to their heels in a panic before the bogey on which they at first lavished their cheap derision. Facts which are still confidential will hereafter prove that the concessions which were afterwards pressed upon “Ulster” with caresses and tears when it was too late would have substantially contented Protestant Ulster and even Sir E. Carson’s Parliamentary followers, if offered at a certain stage, before the Ulster army was in existence, before the British Unionist Party was pledged to support them even in arms, and before the Board of Erin Hibernians had yet sprung into omnipotence at Dublin Castle. In my own hearing it was admitted by Mr. Barrie, Mr. Craig, Mr. Moore, Mr. Gordon, Mr. Fetherstonhaugh, and Mr. Ronald MacNeill that the consent of Ulster might have been won if I could speak for the Irish people in suggesting the concessions afterwards pressed upon her by the Irish Party in a far more humiliating form. Mr. (now Mr. Justice) Moore’s memorable words were: “My friends and myself have

always marvelled at the fatuity of the Irish Party in throwing over the member for the City of Cork when he had all the cards in his hands." Throughout those priceless years, no concession of any sort was offered to the expectant million of Irish Protestants—nothing but the length and breadth of the law, raw and unboiled, with the comforting *obiter dictum* that "minorities must suffer." Insult was added to injury. Their "wooden guns" and their "gigantic game of bluff" were the subject of innumerable contemptuous pleasantries from the Ministerial and the Irish Benches. The wisest prescription the most powerful man in the Board of Erin had to offer in the circumstances was this: "Let the police and soldiers stand aside and make a ring, and you will hear no more of the wooden gunmen." The bare suggestion of concessions which the statesmen of the Board of Erin subsequently proffered with their hands on their hearts was made the pretext for a ferocious campaign of vengeance in Ireland against the Irish Nationalists who ventured to tender them.

The Liberal-Irish Coalition, which had bowels of iron while concession might still have done its happy work, sinned yet more inexcusably when confronted with the results of their own ill-timed mirth at the expense of "Ulster." No sooner were the "wooden guns" replaced by fifty thousand German rifles, wafted over by the *Fanny*, than the Ministerial jokers abandoned the reins of law and order to the gun-runners. Their two trembling attempts to reassert the constitutional axiom that armed rebellion against the law is treason, be the rebels whom they may, had the effect of completely convincing the Ulster rebels that they were invincible. The mutiny of General Gough and his brother officers at the Curragh, when ordered North, not only went unpunished, but ended in the heavy punishment of England by the promotion of the chief mutineer to the command of the English Army, which signalized itself in the first battle of Cambrai. Mr. Winston Churchill's famous invasion of Ulster by land and sea, with the characteristic intimation that "the red blood must flow," terminated as absurdly as his own oratorical raid on

the Ulster Hall in Belfast, with its sequel of an humble retreat to a tent in the Nationalist quarter of the town. From that day forth Sir Edward Carson, and not unfortunate Mr. Asquith—and still less his funny Mr. Birrell or his Irish advisers—was the master of Destiny. His rebellion had not even to come off in order to secure him the title deeds of his Kingdom of Ulster.

IX.

FROM MIRTH TO PANIC.

Whether the shame rests most with the Liberal or with the Irish wing of the Coalition remains still to be settled as soon as secret history ceases to be secret history. Probably the Irish leaders had the greater part of the guilt for the refusal of concession and for the early honeymoon joys of their taunts to the wooden gunmen, and the Liberal Cabinet the major part of the responsibility for the disgraceful panic when Sir E. Carson had his army ready to drive their bayonets through an Act of Parliament passed by the King, Lords and Commons of England. Up to a certain point the consent of "Ulster" was perfectly negotiable; if that consent was unreasonably withheld, Sir E. Carson could have raised no rebellion which a firm Government could not have put down before it had well started. But this only upon two conditions which were missing: first, that the Home Rule Cabinet should have offered the ample allocation of power in the Irish Parliament which they afterwards went on their knees to press upon the Protestant minority; and, next, that, if these splendid gifts were rejected, the Cabinet should have the firmness to face the country at a General Election and call upon Britain once for all to pronounce as between the supreme interests of peace between the two countries and the unreason of Ulsteritis in its narrow Orange area of infection. The tide of Liberal reaction, and indeed of Unionist

conversion to Home Rule, was still running strong enough not to leave much doubt what would have been the answer to such a bold appeal. Even among Unionists, *The Times*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Morning Post*, and *The Observer* had demonstratively laid aside their hostility to Home Rule. The verdict of Britain and the Empire, once specifically given, Mr. Bonar Law could never again have pledged his Party to armed rebellion; and without his pledge an Ulster rebellion must have been a scuffle between the police and the hoodlums. But firmness there was none in carrying the appeal to England, as firmness there had been none in dealing with the Curragh officers or with the *Fanny's* German cargo. The Liberal Party Whips, with the prospect of years of golden spoils still before them, shrank from the chances of a General Election, and, worst of all, Sir E. Carson and Mr. Bonar Law knew that they shrank, and that, without an express mandate from England, they dared not lay a hand upon the Ulster rebellion-mongers or their leaders.

From weakness the descent was easy to betrayal. The Cabinet placed in power with a special mandate to establish "full self-government for Ireland" proceeded to abolish the very existence of Ireland as a unit and to carve up her richest province as a peace offering to Sir E. Carson's potential rebels. Nay, Ireland's official representatives, in a fit of aberration for which even the men who sold the Irish Parliament to Castlereagh offer no parallel, made themselves consenting parties to the infamy. Nor let honest Liberals hope for balm in the reflection that a Partition of Ireland was a war necessity. It was nothing of the kind. The Buckingham Palace Conference was summoned before any of its members had a thought of any other war except in the streets of Belfast, and the only difficulty about clinching the Partition bargain at the Buckingham Palace Conference was the difference whether it was to be the amputation of six counties or only of four. The constitution of the Conference was in itself borrowed from the All-for-Ireland programme of "Conference, Conciliation, and Consent," but in a manner certain to ensure the defeat of

that programme, as happened again three years later, when Mr. Lloyd George's "Irish Convention" was nominally taken from All-for-Ireland sources, but again, as will be seen, in a form devised not to secure but to baffle a settlement. Irish Nationalists were only two out of the eight conferees at Buckingham Palace, and one of the two had devoted himself for ten years to digging deeper the gulf between "Ulster" and the Hibernians, and for the very word "Conference" entertained a hatred bordering on monomania. The abortiveness of the Buckingham Palace Conference enabled him and his colleagues to soothe the country with the assurance that the Conference had all been an empty stage-play to put "Ulster" in the wrong, and the people were thus prevented from realizing the almost irreparable wrong done to the Irish cause by their admission, on behalf of Ireland, that Sir E. Carson's Volunteers represented a separate race and nation.

Neither was it a war emergency that provoked the deliberate revival of the Partition bargain two years later in an aggravated form and with a desperate attempt by the Liberal-Hibernian Coalition to force it upon Ireland. It was the device of a half-hearted Home Rule Cabinet to escape from the dilemma in which they had landed themselves by their obstinacy in refusing concessions in good time and their poltroonery in shrinking from asserting the law when men with arms in their hands were no longer to be conciliated. It is at this point the superior adroitness of the Liberal leaders in the management of their Irish confederates becomes shockingly like wilful bad faith, such as will rankle long in Irish minds. It became no longer a question of satisfying their pledges to Ireland but of saving the Liberal face. Nobody will accuse Mr. Asquith of anything worse than an indulgent indolence which kept him from ever really mastering the facts of the Irish situation for himself, and a constitutional habit of mind which made the less disagreeable course always seem the better one. It must be plainly said, however, that these vices in a man of action must be visited with the heaviest portion of responsibility for his failure, throughout a period while his power was

unbridled and opportunity was smiling upon him on every hand, to produce anything for Ireland except the miserable disappointment of her hopes and the reawakening of anti-English passions which, when he came to the Premiership, were as dead as Cromwell. Above all, he had the weakness to transmit his powers in a larger and larger degree to colleagues who, without actually compassing the ruin of Home Rule, had never been fanatical believers in it, and were now anxious enough to take advantage of the pretext of "Ulster" to pour plentiful water into the wine of Home Rule, if the difficulty could not be banished altogether from the path of Liberal ambitions. Mr. Lloyd George was already *de facto* Prime Minister when his nominal chief handed over Ireland to his charge.

X.

IRISH COMPLICITY.

Liberal perfidy would, however, have been impossible, if it were not for the complicity of a backbonelessness scarcely less guilty in Irishmen. That men deeply trusted by the Irish race should ever have listened without horror to the first suggestion of Partition, will remain one of the ghastly riddles of Irish history. Parnell's response, there cannot be a shadow of doubt, would have been ruthlessly to throw out the Government at the first whisper of such a treason, to force a General Election and negotiate a settlement by consent with the incoming Unionist majority, already more than half-converted. The sly hints of a temporary and, indeed, make-believe arrangement by which the alarms raised by the Buckingham Palace consent had been coughed down were answered once for all by the "Headings of Agreement" to which the Irish plenipotentiaries affixed their seal under Mr. Lloyd George's suasion. The number of counties ceded to Sir E. Carson was to be six, not four; the setting up of the "excluded area" as a separate State was not to be a transitory one, but to be carried out by an

elaborate system of Government departments wholly independent of the Dublin Parliament; and the Partition could never be undone except by a new Act of the Imperial Parliament retracting those concessions to "Ulster," to which the representatives of what remained of Ireland were themselves consenting parties—never, that is to say, until England should have repealed Magna Carta. Two new names would actually have to be found for what was once Ireland, and "Molly-Maguireland" and "The Orange Free State" were suggested as appropriately descriptive.

The bargain was recommended to the official Irish Party by a new condition even more constitutionally immoral than the proposed carving up of the country. The "Headings of Agreement" stipulated that the existing Irish members were to constitute the first Dublin Parliament, without their constituents being permitted to have any voice in the matter. They were also to continue to hold their seats in the Imperial Parliament, and to be absolved there as well from any necessity for facing their constituents. By this arrangement "Home Ruled" Ireland was not only to be deprived of any constitutional means of protesting against Partition, but was to be handed over like a piece of personal property to the very men who would have perpetrated the Partition and who would have ample time, without any constitutional control whatever, to distribute among their adherents the prodigious mass of patronage the "Headings of Agreement" would place at their disposal. The "blackguardism and baseness" by which Castlereagh carried the Union was not so impudent an invasion of the Constitution and smelt little more rank of corruption. It is impossible to believe that the bulk of the Party, or even all the leaders, understood the instrument they were asked to put their hands to. The mournful fact remains that the leaders proceeded to a still more daring assertion of their right to partition their country by refusing to give "the remaining area" of Ireland any vote at all in deciding whether the bargain was to be consummated. The demand for a National Convention was summarily set aside, as though Ireland a Nation had no inherent right to pronounce

whether she was to be subjected to the mutilating knife. Twenty-six counties were absolutely ignored. The only pretence of consulting any section of the Irish people was to summon a local Convention strictly confined to delegates from the six counties of "the excluded area." These delegates were for all practical purposes, the nominees of the Board of En; nevertheless the resistance, even in that carefully selected secret assembly in Belfast, was so irrepressible that a majority could only be secured by the threats of resignation rained upon their heads by Messrs. Redmond, Dillon and Devlin. Nobody will now seriously dispute that "the Headings of Agreement" would have been hustled into law only for the breakdown of the proviso ensuring absolute power at the start to the official Irish Party. Their most influential spokesman made it a complaint against the Government that the compact had not been "hurried at-foot through the House of Commons" before the country could have any adequate conception of what was going on.

But Mr. Dillon was mistaken in imagining that this scandalous transaction could have been so smoothly carried through—even under the pressure of Martial Law and the terrorism that followed the stamping out of the Dublin Insurrection. The country had really long before come gravely to suspect if not fully to understand. It was in the main, because the young men were worked into a delirium by the whole story of incapacity and treachery which reached its climax at the Buckingham Palace Conference, that they burst into the Rebellion of Easter Week, and if they signed their own death warrant signed also the death warrant of the "Constitutional" Parliamentarians.

XI.

WHO WERE THE REAL BEGETTERS OF EASTER WEEK?

The baffled Partitionists have made repeated, if somewhat faint-hearted, attempts to conceal from guileless English audiences the truth, known in every home in Ireland, that the rebellion of Easter Week was the direct product of their own misdoings. The first excuse of the discarded "Party" was that it was the brutalities connected with the putting down of the Dublin Rising that turned over the sympathies of the Irish people to Sinn Fein. The plea is a totally untrue one. These brutalities excited just indignation; so did, in a still greater degree, certain ill-timed expressions of "hatred and abhorrence" of the rebel leaders from the Irish Benches at a moment when their lives were trembling in the balance. But it was not the sentiment of a moment that changed the face of Ireland. Nationalists of the old school had long seen corruption eat into the body politic until they began to doubt whether there were any left ready to give their lives unselfishly for Ireland; and, lo! they were there in thousands and in tens of thousands going joyously to the sacrifice. It was the coming of a new soul into Ireland; and honest-hearted Irishmen forgot everything else in relief and gratitude. The Partitionists found themselves confronted with

—a people from the depths
Of shameful imbecility uprisen
Fresh as the morning star.

The next pretence was that the invitation to Sir E. Carson to join the Coalition Cabinet was the beginning and end of all the mischief. The plea cannot survive a moment's serious investigation. Mr. Redmond was invited into the Cabinet by the same messenger who carried the invitation to Sir E. Carson. If Mr. Redmond was sincere in his

protestations of solidarity in the work of carrying on the war he must have known that a Coalition Cabinet that would leave out Sir E. Carson would be a parody of the name, and that the best way of countering his influence would be to plant an Imperial Nationalist of his own pattern by his side. If, on the other hand, there was prescience enough to foresee that the Coalition Cabinet marked the definite abdication of the Home Rule Government, and the putting a Cabinet of Partitionists in their place, the Irish Party had still the power to forbid the surrender by Parliamentary means which could not have aroused English antipathy a bit more than it was aroused by the Rebellion provoked by their own indecision and lack of steady principle. They need never have allowed the Coalition Cabinet to come into existence.

The attempt to make Sir E. Carson the only villain of the piece is the most pitiful resource of the incapables. Carson, in my poor judgment, missed the noblest chance of his life in not consenting to become the greatest of contemporary Irishmen, rather than the only great Orangeman. But the fault was not his alone. The incapables never knew how either to do justice to Carson's strong points, which were considerable, nor to assail his weak points, which were infinitely vulnerable. It never occurred to them in the days of their power to press for an investigation (such as yet, no doubt, will have to come), into the origin and extent of his German armaments—an investigation which to be a damning one need not have copied the foul methods by which *The Times* obtained its Commission to probe to the bottom its very much paltrier indictment of *Parnellism and Crime*. They never even took the pains, either of removing from the Statute-book the Perpetual Coercion Act, or, if it was retained, insisting upon even justice by extinguishing Sir E. Carson's Volunteers, as they could have done by a single Proclamation under its provisions. The perpetual Coercion Act was left undisturbed on the Statute-book to be mercilessly employed by Sir E. Carson's Cabinet later on against Irish Nationalists. The synod of incapables never plucked up courage even to attack Carson straight in the

House of Commons, which was the only place where he could have been attacked with effect. They treated him with a fatal deference even after they had erected him into a bogey to excuse their own insignificance to the outer world.

There is no truth whatever in the suggestion that the Sir E. Carson of the Ulster Volunteers is a particularly objectionable personage in the eyes of the young men of Ireland. He supplied, on the contrary, the model for their own preparations to sign their idealism with their blood. His unflinchingness of purpose made them often recall with a sigh Sarsfield's remark on the evening after the Boyne was lost: "Swap Kings, and we will fight the battle over again." The anger of the young Nationalists of Ireland was not so much concentrated upon the "Ulster" leader (who is not an Ulsterman) as upon the pigmy Parliamentarians who had neither the foresight to make a single concession to him in good time, nor the firmness to treat him like any other subject of the King when he had put himself defiantly beyond the pale of the law, but, far from that, strove to buy him off by ceding to his new Orange Free State the holiest ground in Ireland, the Primatial See of St. Patrick and his grave, the Palace of the Red Branch Knights of Irish Chivalry, the bones of King Brian of the Tributes, the proud battlefields of the Yellow Ford and Benburb, the Derry of Columbcille, the Dungannon of Grattan's Protestant Convention, and the Belfast of the United Irishmen of Wolfe Tone and William Orr.

Sir E. Carson "were no lion were not Romans hinds." It was not his guns—"wooden" nor German—but their own invertebracy that was the undoing of Home Rule, and it was only the imbecile undoing of Home Rule that could ever have rendered the Dublin Rising practicable. Mere failure is never an unforgivable sin in Irish eyes. Failure has dogged the steps of all our best beloved heroes. But it was failure because the odds were hopeless—because there was nothing left to do except to die. The inexpiable shame in the present case is that Ireland held all the trumps and yet most miserably lost the stakes. A noble band of young idealists—the salt of the rising generation in every land—

would, doubtless, under an Irish Parliament, as under an English one, dream dreams of their Republic; but between their ideology and the astounding fanaticism which enabled a parcel of youngsters with little more than a thousand serviceable rifles to seize and hold the Irish capital for five days against a considerable army there was a gulf which could never have been crossed had not the soul of Ireland been agonised by the spectacle of all her hopes and trusts ending in a dead-born Home Rule Act, which was only placed on the Statute-book at all on the express pledge that it was never to operate except on condition of the dismemberment of Ireland into two warring s  ctarian states. And all this was the work of a Liberal Home Rule Cabinet having nothing to fear from King, Lords or Commons, and of an Irish Party armed with such powers as never entered into Irish leaders' dreams before—the power, among others, of life and death over the Cabinet or the Parliament any night they chose to exercise it. Surely fatuity could not well go further than to ask rational men, as the architects of all this ruin have done, to believe that the Dublin Rising, and the more formidable Rising of the Irish Electorate are amply accounted for by the invitation to Sir E. Carson to join the Coalition Cabinet, of which in any case (thanks to the Liberal-Hibernian genius for government) he must have been the master from outside.

XII.

HOW REMONSTRANCE WAS SILENCED.

Were those who assume the now deplorably easy task of criticism equally sure of their ground then, and, if they were, how comes it that their remonstrances were of so

little avail? The challenge is a fair one. Whenever documents, which must still remain confidential, can be given to the world, the answer will, I think, be a satisfactory one on both heads. But it must be borne in mind that the All-for-Ireland minority counted only eight against seventy-five in the division lobbies, and that the people of Ireland, wisely or unwisely, knowingly or unknowingly, had declared for the programme—"Trust Asquith!—trust Redmond!" by a majority before which Irishmen with any respect for constitutional principles were bound to bow. They represented, indeed, an enormous mass of unexpressed Nationalist opinion, and had won as well the secret confidence of the influential body of Irish Unionists, whom Lord Midleton has since led into the open for Home Rule, as well as of a new Independent Orange Order, whose watch-word was "Irishmen first of all!" and who, with judicious encouragement, might well have brought over the pick of Sir E. Carson's "shock battalions" in Belfast. Few of the great Unionists, however, had yet decided to make the plunge with the intrepidity of men like Lord Dunraven, Lord Castletown, and Mr. Moreton Frewen, and the leaders of the Independent Order of Orangemen were promptly driven from the field by an Hibernian hate scarcely less lively than that of Sandy Row. Mr. Lindsay Crawford, an Independent Orange leader of conspicuous ability, was obliged, by Hibernian discouragement, to give up his task and quit the country. Another Orange leader of enormous power was disposed of by Mr. Dillon's scoff at the Nationalists who could propose "a scratch alliance with Tom Sloane."

The circumstances dictated a plain duty to the All-for-Irelanders. It was to avoid, in a supreme national emergency, any scandal of public discord which might give perfidy or incapacity at Westminster its excuse. The propaganda of the All-for-Ireland League in the country was altogether suspended, while the Home Rule Bill was in any danger. The criticisms offered and the amendments suggested in the House of Commons were submitted with a scrupulous desire to make the Bill a tolerable

one, and were never pushed to an extreme that could harass its authors. The public records are sufficient to attest that one claim may be with fairness made. It is, that the three main amendments contended for by the advocates of "Conference, Conciliation and Consent"—viz., the monstrous injustice to Ireland of the Financial Clauses—the absence of any provision for completing the abolition of Landlordism—and the vital necessity of encountering the Ulster difficulty with generous concessions of power in the Irish Parliament—are now by universal consent the points, the neglect of which brought the Bill to ruin. The concessions laughed to scorn by English Chancellors and their Irish *claque* in the acceptable time are almost textually those which have since been pressed with a belated zeal by Mr. Lloyd George's "Irish Convention." One illustration must be given of the incredible difficulty of bringing the Parliamentary majority to reason, or even to convey to the Irish people any real suspicion of what was happening. When the Bill came to its final reading in the House of Commons it was passed with a clear Ministerial guarantee that it must never come into operation until an Amending Bill had first been passed repealing its essential clause by cutting Ireland asunder. According to an ancient principle of equity, that which is fully agreed to be done must be regarded as done. It was fully agreed by the official Irish Party, as well as by the Liberals and Unionists that a repealing Act must be the first condition of the so-called Home Rule Act ever having any efficacy at all. Accordingly in voting as they did without a word of protest the official Irish Party voted, not for a Home Rule Act, but for a Partition Act. Everybody sees that now. Will it be believed that for the offence of at least saving the future for Ireland by abstaining from giving their votes to what their votes would have constituted an unanimous acceptance of Partition by Ireland's own representatives, the little group of Nationalists who abstained from giving that fatal vote were not only assailed with scenes of rowdy violence in the House of Commons as "factionists" and "traitors," but were condemned with one consenting voice by the

"Nationalist" Press at home, and had their friends at the Local Government elections of that year beaten by the villainously false cry that they "had voted against Home Rule"—the cry raised by the very men who had turned the Home Rule Bill into a Partition Bill against the only Irish representatives who had made the smallest public protest against consummating the infamy!

XIII.

THE WAR OPPORTUNITY AND HOW IT WAS LOST.

The great war opened up the last opportunity of repairing the mischief. The war has, quite otherwise, completed the ruin of the kind of Home Rule settlement for which Ireland has been constitutionally striving for forty years and, a more sinister sign still, has rekindled Irish rancour against England and English rancour against Ireland with a bitterness of which those of us who are going down into the valley of shadows are not likely to see much abatement. Sir E. Grey's much ridiculed description of Ireland as "the one bright spot" in the English outlook in 1914 was an absolutely true one. The minority who then believed the destruction of England by armed force to be the first condition of the freedom of Ireland was a negligible although a transparently honest one. The overpowering mass of the people were ready to side with Belgium, France and the United States and their British allies, not, indeed, on the terms of equal effort, either in men or in money, with England whose material interests in the event were incomparably vaster, but on a sufficient scale to make their military and moral co-operation an asset of priceless value to England at the outset. But always, be it quite frankly

stated, on the basis of that "sacred egoism of nations" (to use the phrase of the Italian Prime Minister) on which all the other belligerent nations laid down their tremendous stakes. In plain English, on condition of the honest payment of the debt of "full self-government for Ireland" to which England had pledged herself through her Cabinet and her Parliament, and which she had actually written-up upon her Statute-book. The "bright spot" was promptly darkened by the same combination of Liberal half-heartedness and Irish backbonelessness which had turned the previous four years of supreme power to nothingness. The same ill-advised counsellors who wrecked the great Policy of 1903 were allowed to sow division and equivocation in the Irish camp, and the Liberal Home Rule Cabinet in their last days rivalled the Irish Party in feebleness and equivocation.

There were two war policies for Ireland, for either of which much might be said from the "sacred egoism of nations" standpoint—viz., the policy of active co-operation and the policy of neutrality. The Irish Party opted neither for the one nor for the other, but wobbled into an incoherent combination of the evils of the two. Mr. Redmond's famous war-speech awakened a storm of enthusiasm in the House of Commons which can have astonished nobody so much as himself, for he did not promise a single recruit for the front but only that his Volunteers would look to "the defence of the shores of Ireland," if they were first placed in armed possession of the country. He, however, accepted with increased conviction the situation created for him by the blunder of the House of Commons, and with great gallantry stood up against unpopularity, himself and the members of his family, even unto blood, in the attempt to live up to his first supposed war-speech. Mr. Devlin did also, in his first fervour, supply a considerable body of recruits from West Belfast and was received by his recruits with their chaste war cry, "Up the Mollies!" when he was permitted to review them in khaki on the parade ground. On the other hand, Mr. Dillon took up a totally different attitude—neither friendly nor unfriendly, but a good deal

of both. Fresh from the excitements of the Dublin Rising (for which the Hardinge Rebellion Commission fastened upon him a responsibility all the more disquieting, because a certain confidential letter of Mr. Dillon, referred to in the Report, was suppressed in the body of the evidence, as published) he went over to the House of Commons to mitigate his unpopularity in Ireland by a speech which probably did more to antagonise English feeling than the Rising had done. He went further. He bragged to an audience of peasants in Mayo, where his words signified a good deal more, that "he had never stood upon a recruiting platform and never would." The boast was an inexactitude, for he was in fact the proposer of a vote of thanks to Mr. Asquith for his great recruiting speech in Dublin. His repute for veracity was not enhanced, while the effect upon his followers was both to confuse them as to his real attitude and to prejudice them against Mr. Redmond's. He spoke with two voices, both of them indistinct and contradictory.

XIV.

WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN.

Again the Socratic querist may demand: what of their critics themselves? Of the legitimacy of the policy of neutrality they made no doubt—no more than England made of the attitude of the Czecho-Slovaks. No Nationalist of authority ever promised England that loyalty would come before Home Rule. England promised Home Rule in the belief (which was ours also) that loyalty would follow. Ireland broke no promise. England shamelessly broke hers. By her fault, and not by Ireland's, the situation reverted to the old one of hostilities between the two nations—*nunc, olim, quocunq̄ue dabunt se tempore vires.* Judged by the standard of "the sacred egoism of nations"—and

cant itself will scarcely deny that egoism of that description, more or less "sacred," predominated in the war policy of every nation in Europe, belligerent or neutral—Ireland was as well entitled to decide for herself her measure of sympathy with Belgium as Belgium would have been free to withhold her armed assistance from Ireland in the like circumstances. It was a question of Ireland's own supreme interest first of all, and here the All-for-Ireland standpoint was as clear as that of the Irish Party was hazy.

The writer of these lines never doubted that, however legitimate would have been the policy of compelling England to fulfill 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. However unpopular it may be to say so, that continues to be his unchangeable conviction still, and his is not the summer zeal of the time-servers who are now eager enough to rush to the rescue of the winning side. A few days after the House of Commons went wild over what they imagined to be Mr. Redmond's war-speech the members for the City of Cork put the matter to a practical test by summoning a public meeting of their constituents of all parties to proffer their united assistance to the Allies. They wired invitations under their own hand to all members of Parliament, Redmondite, All-for-Irelander, Unionist and Labourite connected with the County or City of Cork. They invited the Lord Mayor of the day, who was a follower of Mr. Redmond, to preside. With a simultaneity that need not be underlined every Redmondite member of Parliament or representative man invited failed, without exception, even to acknowledge the invitation, while every member of Parliament and representative man invited from all the other parties sent enthusiastic responses. The Redmondite organ in the local Press went even the length of refusing to insert a prepaid advertisement of the notice summoning the meeting. The assembly was nevertheless the most amazingly represen-

tative, enthusiastic and harmonious one witnessed in living memory in Rebel Cork. The Redmondite rank-and-file, ignoring the boycott of their leaders, were present in full strength. So were the Sinn Feiners, who then numbered not more than a hundred young enthusiasts in all Cork. They naturally had their reserves as to what they regarded as a repetition of the old Irish error of soft-heartedness where a grim demand alone could bring England to business. They felt, however, that a great and delicate experiment was being made, and they did not mar by a single jarring voice the tremendous chorus of goodwill towards the Allied cause that went up that night from a Rebel Cork as absolutely united as it was possible for a great community of thinking men to be.

It was "the bright spot" at its brightest. It was the flowing tide, which, taken at its flood, might have shortened the war by two years and supplied a Home Rule impetus which nothing could withstand. Struck by the action of the Redmondite man in the street, Mr. Redmond's principal supporters in Cork (including the proprietor of the daily paper which had suppressed the advertisement of the meeting) applied to the writer to set forth some plan for united action. He did so in a memorandum suggesting that Mr. Redmond should take the initiative of 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 that agreement, undertaking a joint campaign to raise the Irish Army Corps with its reserves, which was Mr. Asquith's own measure of Ireland's just contribution. He was in a position to assure Mr. Redmond of the ready co-operation of some of the most eminent Irish Unionists who followed Lord Midleton three years afterwards. To that Memorandum, as to his invitation to the meeting in the City Hall, the writer received no reply. He believes it certain that the only reply ever made even to Mr. Redmond's own Cork supporters, who had forwarded the Memorandum with their earnest approval, was an icy

letter acknowledging its receipt. The opportunity was sacrificed, and for ever. The recruiting campaign, which only united action founded upon a definite Home Rule agreement could have brought to fruition, was never afterwards practicable. The prospects of Home Rule went from bad to worse. The attitude of Mr. Redmond's friends towards recruiting changed with every change of the weathercock from an occasional recruiting speech by Mr. Redmond to a speech from one of his own Party denouncing him as "a recruiting sergeant"—from parades of armed Redmondite Volunteers with the sole mission of "the defence of the shores of Ireland" to a last feeble effort at real recruiting under the protection of the police.

Far otherwise was it with more astute politicians. Sir E. Carson's contingent of Ulster recruits was a small one, compared with the contribution of the Nationalists of the race to the Allied armies; but they held compactly together, they left no doubt as to their feelings, they were excellently staged, and at the first battle of the Somme on their favourite anniversary of the Battle of the Boyne, they captured the heart of England, as well as the German entrenchments, to the absurd music of "Protestant Boys."

Two events completed the disgrace of the Parliamentarians. One was to find that, even after the stern lesson of the Rising, Mr. Redmond's friends tied themselves faster than ever to the Partition of Ireland by signing the Lloyd George "Headings of Agreement." The other was the principle of "self-determination for the small nationalities" which President Wilson inscribed as the first article in the programme of the Allies. It was no longer possible to get the young men of Ireland to listen except with bitter scorn to appeals to shed their blood for an England which had responded to Ireland's forty years' cry for peace by breaking her pledges, by befooling or corrupting "Nationalist" representatives, by whittling down Home Rule to a measure beneath contempt, and refusing to pass even that scurvy modicum of self-government into law without a repealing Partition Act, which would have decreed the suicide of "Ireland a Nation." They did what the

young men of any other country, big or little, would have done under the like circumstances. They turned from a Parliamentarianism discredited and rotten to the core to the principle of "self-determination" pressed by England on the subjects of every Empire in the world except her own. And it was not easy to answer them when they pointed out that the Bohemia, for example, in which England saw no difficulty about recognising "belligerent rights" against her own Sovereign, would have to "coerce" more than twice as large a "loyal minority" as is claimed by "Ulster" (if the German population of Bohemia be indeed a minority at all).

A writer of authority in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* (M. René Pichon) thus describes the genesis of the Czecho-Slovak belligerency :

"A people that does not know why it marches will not march long and will not march straight ; the Czechs have made that pretty evident. We have already recounted the innumerable capitulations, which, little by little, emptied the Austrian trenches to the profit of the Russian camps, and the defection of those regiments which passed over with arms and baggage and their bands of music at their head, into the ranks of the enemy. In the two first years of the war nearly 600,000 Czechs have been sent to the Eastern front and more than half of them have surrendered or invited capture."

Does England really desire herself to taste of the chalice which she commends to the lips of Austria? If she does not, she has reason to thank her stars for the poorer statecraft or greater honesty of Sinn Fein which declined to implant 600,000 Irish Nationalists on the British front to copy the example of the Czecho-Slovak "belligerents."

The die was cast. The one hundred tolerant Sinn Feiners of that great night in Cork swelled into many thousands in Cork and everywhere else, and would hear no more of any but Czech-Slovaque methods of impressing England.

XV.

WHY IRELAND RESISTED CONSCRIPTION.

Conscription finished what Partition and Corruption began: A Conscription Act, introduced in violation of repeated Ministerial pledges to the contrary, added to the injury of the betrayal of Home Rule. It was noticed that it was their electoral successes in Waterford and South Armagh that gave the signal for the introduction of the Bill. And it was their defeat in East Cavan that paralysed Conscription as it was on the point of being enforced. Mr. Dillon's wise conclusion that "the War Office cared no more for the opposition of the Sinn Feiners than for the hopping of so many fleas," convinced nobody except himself. If the Act once passed was precipitately laid on the shelf, everybody felt it was not because Mr. Dillon had made speeches. The pledge-breaking Conscription Act although thus penitently dropped for the moment, was, like the Home Rule Act, "still on the Statute Book," and kept the country in a fever of suspicion and detestation of her shifty rulers. Of pro-Germanism there was never a trace, outside a narrow circle of "intellectuals," but if anything further were wanted to account for the tide of passionate anti-Englandism that, undeniably, submerged a country but lately smiling with friendliness, it was the discovery that Partition was only for the moment scotched, and was still the unalterable programme of the Coalition Cabinet, either as the only kind of Home Rule ever to be sanctioned, or as the surest means of killing Home Rule altogether. Of that there could no longer be a doubt; it was to be the "Headings of Agreement" or nothing.

The week before the Dublin Rising, the Home Rule of the politicians was in its last agonies; a few weeks after the

Rising, stigmatise its madness how you may, Home Rule was Mr. Lloyd George's first pre-occupation as a practical politician. With the "push and go" of his dynamic genius, Heaven only knows how far his Irish plans might have progressed, had he not commenced with a false start. Unfortunately, after all the red blood shed in teaching him his lesson, and in despite (as, in the day when Ministerial documents can be disclosed to the public, it will be found)—in despite of the most earnest warnings of certain Irish Nationalists whose advice was then for the first time solicited, Mr. Lloyd George clung obstinately to Partition as the foundation of his Irish programme. He carried the Irish Party with him, and by his "Headings of Agreement" turned masses of Irishmen of the most moderate temper into confirmed enemies of him and his Irish accomplices. His last chance of purging himself of the Partition heresy came a year later when America's entrance into the war, and the world-wide reverberations of President Wilson's principle of "self-determination for small Nationalities" rendered a new attempt to make amends to Ireland the most urgent of War Measures. Again, advice was solicited, again it was readily given, again it was rejected, or rather, with a deeper craft, it was accepted in the letter and frustrated in the spirit.

XVI.

CHOOSING THE WORSE PART.

Consistently, upon every man of authority, Liberal or Unionist, who had been good enough to think our advice worth having, we had urged that the basis of any settlement by consent must be the abandonment of Partition in

any shape, permanent or temporary, but almost any other conceivable concession of power within that limitation that should satisfy "Ulster" in the eyes of reasoning men. In the words of our message to Mr. Asquith when he visited Ireland after the Rising: "Any amount of concession that will appease Ulster, but Partition in any shape, permanent or 'temporary'—never!" Such a settlement, we held, could be most certainly arrived at and approved by the country, but only in one way:—viz., by a small Conference of Irish notables more or less after the model of the Land Conference, followed by a prompt Referendum of their agreement to the people. We even went the length of suggesting a dozen names of the required type out of scores no less eligible. They were, as will yet be found, the names of men who, once assembled, would not have separated without an agreement. The more or less undemocratic method of nomination we suggested would be cured by submitting their agreement without a week's unnecessary delay to a Referendum of the whole Irish people. Few responsible Ulstermen will, I think, challenge our confidence that an agreement so arrived at in such an hour would have been ratified by a majority so overpowering—even among the hard-headed Protestant population of "the excluded area"—that it must have been passed into law with relief and joy by the Imperial Parliament by a vote that would have been worth a dozen victorious battles to the Allies. The all but certainty of the success of the plan was, I am afraid, the main objection to its adoption. It would have meant, what was never available before, a definite vote by the people of all Ireland on a definite plan. It would have put the precise number of intransigents in Ulster upon record. It would have involved an instant necessity for the Government and the Parliament either to endorse, or before the world bid defiance to Ireland's "self-determination" thus unmistakably crystallised.

To the general astoundment, Mr. Lloyd George was found, in appearance at least, to adopt the despised plan hitherto only weighed by Party Whips in the scales of the Division Lobbies. He recognised that a settlement must be wrought

out by Irishmen themselves, and seemed only to stipulate as a mere affair of nomenclature that their meeting was to be called an "Irish Convention" and not a "Conference"—the word which spelt "Ichabod" to Mr. Dillon. Sadly otherwise were the realities of his proposal. For the plan that was bound to eventuate in an agreement was substituted a plan which was congenitally doomed to failure, except on the one condition, which was more odious to Ireland than any failure, that Partition was to be the outcome of the Convention. The "Conference, Conciliation, and Consent" child was stolen by gypsy statesmanship only to be "disfigured to make it pass for their own."

Indeed, when Mr. Lloyd George first broached his new proposal to the House of Commons he frankly stated it to be a rehash of the old "Headings of Agreement," with some small trimmings added, and he dropped not a word of the alternative Conference proposal. It was only at the last moment, and under the pressure of the Sinn Fein triumph at the Longford election that he adumbrated and finally adopted as his own the Conference plan, abandoning in appearance the official Partition programme. In appearance, only, and in order to make the participation of the Irish Party practicable. When the constitution of "the Irish Convention" was promulgated it became evident that it was so framed as to render any agreement, except on Partition lines, impossible. Sixty-five of its ninety-two members were Redmondite Members of Parliament and County Councillors, not a third of whom dared face their constituents without the certainty of being rejected. The remainder were Mr. Lloyd George's own nominees, or Unionists delegated by Sir E. Carson's official Ulster Council, a secret Committee of whom, worse still, was constituted in order to watch over and control their delegates at the meetings of the Convention. These figures made it clear that the Convention was to consist of the creatures of the two official parties who had assented to Partition. If any agreement there was to be, it could only be upon some project of Partition, for Partition alone could buy off the iron resistance of the supreme potentates of the Ulster

Council, and the Redmondite majority had already twice over pledged their readiness to accede to their demand. According to Mr. Lloyd George's plan there were to be two All-for-Irelanders and three independent gentlemen nominated by himself, to resist this overwhelming coalition for Partition!

Once more the politicians were checkmated and the country saved by the unbought instinct of the people. Before the Convention sat the staggering victories of Sinn Fein at the East Clare and Kilkenny elections struck dismay into the hearts of the Redmondite signatories of the "Headings of Agreement." Had East Clare and Kilkenny gone the other way nothing could have averted the acceptance and consequent legal enactment of the Partition bargain by a "substantial agreement" of "the Irish Convention." But the most obtuse or the most corrupt now saw that to persist in any conspiracy for Partition, however easy their victory might be at the Convention, would be to encounter certain ruin in the country, with personal consequences which might well make the stoutest quail. But no honest man with any inside knowledge could now fail to realise that, the moment Partition became impracticable, failure to agree could be the only possible end of the Convention. It must have been with this certainty present to his mind that Mr. Lloyd George persevered for twelve months in entertaining the world with the farcical sittings of the Convention, with all their attendant foolery of Viceregal dinner parties, plentiful Knighthoods, Corporation banquets, and periodical oratory bragging that all was going well. But in all this Mr. Lloyd George was only mad nor'-nor'-east. His thoughts were not of Ireland, but of America, whose first impulses of enthusiasm for the war were dangerously chilled by the various betrayals of England's promises to Ireland. Twelve months were successfully negotiated in humbugging America with prospects known to be delusive. As soon as America was committed beyond recall, and the curtain had to be rung down at last on the "Irish Convention," the Convention no sooner turned from festal oratory to business

than they bumped their heads with almost comical suddenness against a stone-wall. As could easily have been foreseen at their first sitting, it must be Partition or nothing, and, in view of a country furious against the smallest whisper of Partition, nothing it had to be. Rather, indeed, worse than nothing. The nett result was that instead of arriving at one "substantial agreement," they arrived at three "substantial disagreements." Mr. Redmond only escaped by a neck from finding himself in a minority of his own *arriviste* followers. He left the Convention a broken and, in fact, dying man.

The only practical outcome of "The Irish Convention," which was not to Ireland's damage, was the acceptance of Dominion Home Rule instead of Asquithian Home Rule as the Nationalist programme by a minority which was all but a majority of "the Party" which was no longer Mr. Redmond's. It is now as obvious as the noonday sun that the Irish Convention was not framed with a view to a business-like agreement, but to a showy exhibition of puppets for spectacular effect in America.

XVII

FINIS HIBERNIÆ—"THE BOARD OF ERIN" HIBERNIA.

The breakdown of the politicians' conspiracy, nick-named "The Irish Convention," completed the undoing of Home Rule—that is to say, of the official Liberal Home Rule of the Asquith and Lloyd George Cabinets and of their Irish confederates. A sense of repulsion, akin to detestation, ran like lightning through the Irish blood. Men might, and the majority did, and, I think, do, profoundly disbelieve in the

two main tenets of the revolutionary movement now known as Sinn Fein. They cannot subscribe to a programme of armed resistance to England in the field, or even of permanent withdrawal from Westminster; but to the spirit of Sinn Fein, as distinguished from its abstract programme—to the spirit of passionate reaction against dependence on English Parties or their Irish puppets—to the spirit of reliance upon native genius, native inspiration, and native self-sacrifice which is the very mould and substance of "self-determination"—it may safely be affirmed the great mass of intelligent and single-minded Irishmen, old as well as young, moderate as well as fiery, have been won over by the feebleness and tergiversation of the Hiberno-Liberal coalition, and later by betrayal after betrayal, in years when the instruments of success in their hands were all but omnipotent. It is childishness in the ruined politicians to attribute the growth of Sinn Fein to some "dark hand" in Dublin Castle, much less to "German gold." Their own was "the dark hand," during their lease of power in Dublin Castle, that brought an indignant country—an all too indulgent country—at long last thundering about their ears. Their house of destiny is wholly of their own building. In the words of the wittiest English victim of their advice, they were "whirled off to hell in a fiery chariot of their own construction." The fiery chariot remains their only lasting constructive work—except the ruins of their movement.

XVIII.

WHY SINN FEIN WON THE COUNTRY.

Sinn Fein has captured the best elements of Nationalist opinion for three substantial reasons which no railing of the politicians can rebut. Sinn Fein has saved the country from the three plagues of Partition, Conscription, and Corruption, and, be the fault whose it may, there was no other force left which could have saved her from any of the three. These are claims upon the national gratitude which will not easily be forgotten. The Sinn Feiners have yet to develop qualities of statesmanlike insight and breadth of toleration for all their countrymen before they can hope to inspire unconditional confidence for Sinn Fein's own sake. But castle-building for the future is not what the country is for the moment concerned with. "The first thing first," and the first thing is to deliver the National Cause from the men for whom incorrigible incompetence is the most merciful plea that can be invented to palliate their failure to turn to account the most colossal powers and opportunities that ever fell to the lot of Irishmen. It is proved to the satisfaction of nearly all their own disinterested adherents that they failed, not for want of being trusted, but because they were trusted too blindly and too long—not for want of Unity, but owing to the excess of a diseased Party Unity which has grown into a gangrene to the destruction of the true National Unity that might long ago have accomplished its healing work. The first condition of any safety for the future must be the removal from the helm of leaders who to this hour stand committed to the Partition of the country—be the same more or less—as the indispensable price for ever setting their precious "Act on the Statute Book" going. Sinn Fein alone possesses the material forces and

the high purposes which can unhorse the Board of Erin tyranny on the electoral field. The men whom the General Election will place in power may or may not do much better; they cannot by any conceivable possibility do worse. That is, I think, the fixed conviction of a people driven to desperation by the deceit of petty leaders, Irish and English.

One, perhaps faint, chance remained of preventing the inevitable "change of Ministry," so to say, at the General Election from degenerating into a mere brute man-hunt against individual Parliamentarians, good, bad, and indifferent. The Dublin Mansion House Conference, called together to resist Conscription, and in that mission signally victorious, was the only body in the country authoritatively representing the four sections of Irish Nationalist thought, and for that reason commanding universal allegiance to all their unanimous recommendations. A proposal was made to initiate negotiations with a view of 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 Congress. There was some reason to believe Sinn Fein would not prove intractable; there were not wanting even indications of a remarkable character that the Cabinet would have welcomed—nay, invited—the intervention of the Dominion Premiers' Conference at the moment with a view to a settlement, limited only by the formula "within the Empire," if once satisfied that the result would be substantially to content Ireland. Only one member of the Conference 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 be even discussed. As though any topic could be more relevant to Conscription than that of consolidating in the only form now attainable the National Unity which had thus far—but only thus far—rendered Conscription unworkable! What might otherwise have been a united recommendation of the Conference, crowned

with instant National Unity on a definite programme, was forbidden even to be discussed by the veto of one man, and he the unlucky leader who, for fifteen years, had led the country from disaster to disaster to the cries of "Unity" and "Majority Rule!" (of which, as it happened, History will find he had been himself the first and only violator).

With an obfuscation and tardiness of comprehension not uncharacteristic of the man, he was, a few months afterwards in a public speech, advocating, as though it were all his own, the proposal of unity negotiations among Nationalists which his veto had forbidden when it was realisable, but advocating, with a happy talent truly all his own, as the first condition of Unity, the exclusion from the National counsels of Sinn Fein by requiring them to subscribe to an unimaginable recantation of their own principles!

The sheer genius of the suggestion! Unity with Mr. Dillon's broken ranks on the simple condition of Sinn Fein doing public penance for their success in leaving Mr. Dillon and his Partitionist friends unable to address a free public meeting of their countrymen outside the Board of Erin's native fastnesses in Ulster! The last hope from the Mansion House Conference was despatched, like Land Purchase and all the rest, and despatched by the same hand.

The wisdom which destroyed the last chance of his followers and himself at the Mansion House Conference shone with no less lustre on every adventure of his since—the silly flight from Westminster and the still sillier return; the subsidence of the once irresistible Irish Party into the handmaidens of a group of English and Scotch Pacifists the comic falsetto note of indignation against the Saxon tyranny which could compel Mr. Swift MacNeill to have his photograph taken. Not an uncivil word of the thousands of arrests and savage sentences of years of hard labour for "crimes of opinion," like attending a public meeting without a police permit. Not a protest against the sensational "German Plot," now known to be as base an invention as "The Popish Plot" of Titus Oates, but which has served as a pretext for sweeping the Sinn Fein leaders

wholesale into English jails out of the way of Mr. Dillon's "constitutional" Party at the General Election. Professor MacNeill's grievance against his photographer, and nothing more! Mr. Dillon clinched the Sinn Fein argument for withdrawal from Westminster by demonstrating how ludicrously little he could do there. His Party have since earned the contempt of the country by giving up in a panic the whole policy embodied in "the Act on the Statute Book," which they have spent five years in booming as a form of Home Rule greater than Gladstone's—greater even than Grattan's, and by declaring (though in trembling accents) for the Dominion Home Rule which was defeated at "the Irish Convention" by the votes of Mr. Redmond and the majority of his colleagues.

The downfall of Parliamentarianism does not in the least import the dying down of the Irish Difficulty. It does not even necessarily involve the abandonment of Parliamentarianism; be it only conducted with the old elasticity and fearlessness, according to the shifting conditions of the Irish battle-front. It is the Parliamentarianism of the present that must die the death—the Parliamentarianism that eats the bread of English Party managers, and ends by setting the two countries at more bitter variance than ever. Truly the most daring thing in the sorry story of "I and my Party" is the impudence with which they request the country, not only to forgive their past, not only to give them a new lease of omnipotence, but to clear from their path every Irish Nationalist who helped to save the country from their unspeakable follies. In nothing is their hardihood more amusing than in the pretence that it is they who are the sole guardians of "the Constitutional movement." It is they, on the contrary, and not Sinn Fein, who have brought "the constitutional movement" to its present state of decomposition.

"Constitutionalism" in a country whose grievance is that she possesses no constitution is an historical humbug. Parnell built up his movement, not by railing at Fenianism in the spirit of a professor of Constitutional history, but by incorporating its tremendous forces in his ranks and

acknowledging no criterium of the rectitude of his political action, be it "constitutional" or "unconstitutional," except whether it was, in the circumstances, the best thing to be done for Ireland. Nationalists with a memory will smile at denunciations of "unconstitutional action" from the John Dillon of the Mitchel Election in Tipperary and of the early Land League manner, and will find a woeful falling off, rather than a richer wisdom in the John Dillon of the Hardinge Commission Report. When he claims the apostolic succession from Parnell's notions of "constitutionalism," it is quite certain he would have been hooted off any platform of the Land League or the Plan of Campaign if he attempted to air any of his latter-day speeches there. And for the claim that "the Party" represent the intellect as well as the patriotism of our Nation, it can only be observed that if "the Party" did indeed exhaust her supply of capacity for public action, Ireland were a lost land. In any future Parliament, such men could only be, in a more abject sense than ever, so much clay in the hands of English Ministerial potters.

Will Sinn Fein, if they get from the country the same mandate she gave to Parnell in the 'Eighties, exhibit Parnell's skill in the use of "constitutional" weapons, as well as his daring in utilising "unconstitutional" ones? I do not know, but, unless they do, I think I know that they will not long retain the confidence which will, doubtless, be accorded them in a generous measure at the General Election. As yet they have given no ground for a condemnation beforehand. In an hour of National shame, they gave an example of spotless personal character. The Lord Lieutenant, in his evidence before the Hardinge Commission, confessed with a groan that the Sinn Fein movement had not furnished Dublin Castle with a single informer—that leprous growth which was never before absent from Irish secret organisations. Their plans for their apparently maniacal raid upon Dublin elicited the admiration of their bitterest enemies. Heaven send their good qualities may not fail them on a larger field and for a less bloody purpose!

The point on which all genuine "Constitutionalists" except the bankrupt politicians are at one is, that a General Election, at the earliest possible moment must be the first step towards the allaying of the present "putrid fever" which rages in Ireland. The usurpation of Mr. Lloyd George's Long Parliament of placemen, defensible enough perhaps for war reasons in England, is without a rag of justification in Ireland. It deprives a country, throttled by Martial Law, of any rational method of self-expression. It deprives English Ministers of any means of getting into touch with Irish opinion, except through members of Parliament who are in notorious disaccord with their constituents—who represent the realities of the Irish demands little more than the Derby dog represents the Epsom crowd that chevvv him off the course. Until the representatives of Ireland be men who come authentically back from the electorate, instead of men trembling at the thought of meeting them, nothing can be done to give an Irish settlement a new start; much may be done to destroy the last chance of it. The chatter about still another Home Rule Bill in the present Parliament may serve to while away Mr. Shortt's wait for the Lord Justiceship, which will save him from the face of the Irish electorate at Newcastle. It can serve no other purpose except to enrage the Irish people with one other testimony of English Ministers' belief in their unfathomable gullibility.

XIX.

IS THE LAST WORD SPOKEN?

But Ireland once furnished by the General Election with representatives quite certainly entitled to speak for her, it

by no means follows, as some people absurdly persuade themselves, either that the new Sinn Fein Party (or Parliament, as they will no doubt proclaim themselves to be) will be inaccessible to human reasoning, or that although Mr. Lloyd George may come back red-hot with the pride of great military successes, he will be in a position to deport the Sinn Fein Parliament to English jails and put the keys in his pocket with the comfortable reflection that he has locked up the Irish Difficulty for another generation. After the General Election as before it—after the war as before it—Ireland will continue to be England's shame and torment until the courage is found to disarm her in the way in which Papineau's Canadian Rebels, and Peter Lalor's Australian Rebels, and the Boer "Rebels" of Spion Kop and Magersfontein were transformed into the forces from beyond the seas which have been England's salvation in France.

For, first there remains the preposterous "Act on the Statute-book," not, indeed, as an asset to Ireland's advantage, but to England's disgrace. But English Ministers would find little difficulty in conjuring away that awkward "scrap of paper," if it stood alone, as they changed their plans and broke their pledges a dozen times before, with the complaisance of the Irish Party now hastening to its account. The difference that really matters is that the world is now looking on. The situation is revolutionized, now and for ever, by the right of self-determination of the small nationalities having been made the first dogma of faith upon which the allied nations have founded their justification for the war. Even the "unthinkable" request to "Ulster" to obey the law like other people has not only been the subject of "thinking," but is being enforced with the strong hand by England in the case of little Bohemia, whose "belligerent" rights to bring to reason a Bohemian "Ulster" numbering half the population and not merely one-fourth, England has been boisterously proclaiming to the world. Even if every other Power at the Peace Congress conspired to ignore Ireland's centuried struggle for the

right of "self-determination," America—and the America of the Presidential Campaign Year—is not likely to prove equally myopic. "Germany is striking at what the freemen of all the world desire and insist upon—the right of determining their own destiny." These are President Wilson's words. How their application to Ireland's "right of determining her own destiny" can be denied is not to be imagined unless the shining robe of the Allies' cause is to be cast aside when it has served its purpose as the cloak of a Pharisee. It cannot be. "Something will have to be done." The only choice lies between doing it now of England's own volition or after the war in obedience to forces the strength of which—possibly even the danger of which—cannot be easily estimated when the new map of the world comes to be blocked out.

To dogmatise as to what may or may not be now practicable, is not for those of us who can no longer hope to bear any part in the pourparlers. Our proposals on innumerable occasions, approved in private by the best men of all Parties, English and Irish, were ignored in public with a similar unanimity, and for the (to me at least) comfortable reason that they were founded not upon the Party Whip interests of any Party, but upon the higher patriotic interests of them all. All that, for good or ill, is at an end. One or two affirmations only can be ventured upon without diffidence. One is that the precise form of Home Rule that would have contented the Irish race five years ago will never be accepted again in full satisfaction. The Sibyl's leaves have been woefully scattered; the price of those that remain has gone up, until it cannot well go higher. The kind of Home Rule that was practicable five years ago is practicable no longer. In fact, the dropping of the very words "Home Rule"—misapplied, perverted, defiled as they have been—might not be an inauspicious opening of any future negotiations. A pedantic Federation of the Canadian provincial type is no longer to be thought of, if it ever was. The right of self-determination by small nations as the first clause in the world's Magna Charta

makes the measure of Ireland's freedom one to be settled by Ireland's own aspirations, not by the convenience of slim English party managers. It by no means follows that an Irish Republic is the only remaining alternative in the eyes of the Irish people, or even of the Sinn Fein Parliament the General Election will possibly establish in Dublin. The British Empire itself is an illogical omnium-gatherum of Kingdoms, Dominions, and Commonwealths, Federal and Confederate, and separate, built up by no law except the varying wants and wishes of the common people. If in such an unscientific confederation the freedom as a separate unit of New Zealand or Newfoundland—the creation of scarcely half a dozen generations—gives no inconvenience in the working of the gigantic Imperial machine, why should the same elbow-room as a distinct nation be grudged to Ireland with a history as old as Europe? To answer because New Zealand and Newfoundland were enthusiastic for the war and Ireland was not, is to confound cause with effect—to ignore the notorious truth that the Dominions were faithful because they were free and Ireland stood aloof because her search for the same freedom has led only to bitter disappointment and deceit—because the only “self-determination” now in the contemplation of English Ministers for Ireland would be an amputation of her right arm, which, were it possible that the crime might be actually perpetrated, could but fill future generations of Irishmen with an inextinguishable hate for England. Let it be added that, if there be any blunder left for Dublin Castle to make, which has not been made already, it will be to persecute Sinn Fein, as an electoral force, in the hope of re-establishing the “Constitutionalism” of the Board of Erin. Wise rulers will be the first to give free scope to the feelings which are now striving to express themselves through the ballot-boxes rather than at the barricades. The pettiness which claps Sinn Fein candidates into jail, kidnaps their organisers, suppresses their newspapers, and inflicts ferocious punishment on their followers for attending public meetings which are permitted without let or hindrance to their opponents,

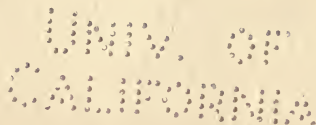
will not hurt Sinn Fein, and will not in the long run serve Mr. Dillon nor England. A Sinn Fein Irish Parliament scattered up and down through the jails of England would make a more profound impression on the Peace Congress than could the most eloquent delegation from their body claiming a hearing in Paris or Berlin.

XX.

AVE, JUVENTUS!

With less assurance, but from a pretty deep acquaintance with the tides and currents of Irish sentiment, the writer still unhesitatingly holds that an offer of the self-government of New Zealand or Newfoundland, made with grace and generous trust, and before England's head is swelled with the fumes of military intoxication—guarded even with whatever specific reservation you please of the control of the Imperial Army and Navy, which has never been in dispute—would command the instant and overmastering assent of the Irish nation—including the mass of the sober and peace-loving Ulster population—including even those *pursang* enthusiasts of an Irish Republic, who have too much sense as well as tenderness for Ireland's unbloody evolution not to understand quite well how thin a wall of paper divides from Republicanism the freedom of the Overseas Dominions.

But all this is for "other men," if one must not complete Robert Emmet's words by adding "in other times." The task must be relinquished to the men and women of a new day, who will have the organized force to realize and the youth and faith that can afford undauntedly to wait. No value is claimed for any conclusions set forth in these pages



except that they are those of not a few war-worn Irish Nationalists, who can have no selfish interest in the future now dimly shaping itself. They are offered to their country as the best counsel they can give by men who must content themselves with bidding God-speed with swelling hearts to the young battalions of the future as they are setting out for the new field in the immemorial wars for Ireland's freedom—wars in which their own old bones may no longer serve, but to whose fortunes they have without a regret given up the prime of their days and the blood of their wounds.

WILLIAM O'BRIEN.

MALLOW, October, 1918.

P A M P H L E T S
BY WM. O'BRIEN, M.P.

THE IRISH CAUSE AND THE IRISH
CONVENTION. id.

THE PARTY, WHO THEY ARE AND
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