

DE VALERA: THE HERO OF SINN FEIN

A capacity for the quiet management of emotional men and women, never before displayed so completely by any Irish leader, and a born mathematician's sense of proportion applied to politics afford the combination that seems to explain the career of Eamonn de Valera to mystified London newspapers (says *Current Opinion* for February). He is a man of genius, however misapplied, if we are to be guided by the *London News*, while the Manchester *Guardian* thinks that anywhere but in Ireland he would now be a statesman in responsible office, swaying the destinies of his country. In a period so short that he remains still a character unfamiliar and mysterious, he has converted an obscure and proscribed revolutionary society into the dominant Irish political party. He has routed the entrenched leadership of the Redmonds and the Dillons, the O'Briens and the Devlins all combined. He has revolutionised the attitude of the Roman Catholic hierarchy, at one time openly hostile to him. He has composed feud after feud within his following through his perfect sympathy with Irish human nature and a rare comprehension of its merits and defects. Results of this sort, as the Liberal Manchester organ remarks, are never achieved by mediocrities, and those British newspapers which at first hailed de Valera as an interloper and a foreigner, coming from nowhere and representing nothing, are now inclined to agree that, humiliating as it must be to the politicians in London, he has matched his wits against theirs and made even the great Lloyd George, to say nothing of Sir Edward Carson, seem a trifle inefficient by comparison.

The mystery in which the name and the career of de Valera are involved include his present whereabouts. Nobody seems to know definitely, so rigid is the Irish censorship, whether he is in gaol or out of it or just what part of Ireland he calls home. The prison experiences of the past four or five years have aged the man, our contemporary says, and he now looks, with his lined and pinched face, somewhat older than his thirty-seven years. He is fine-looking still, says the *London News*, although he was never handsome, like Parnell in his prime, or aristocratically elegant, like the martyr Emmet. Nature seems to have given him the heavy build of O'Connell, but he has not grown fat, like that liberator. The wide open eyes of de Valera, set far apart, are large and staring, forming an essential feature of the physiognomical impression as a whole. The lips are firm and compressed in repose. The nose is slightly hawklike, and the skin by its swarthiness reveals the Iberian descent. The father of de Valera is understood to have been a political refugee from Spain when he met and married the Irish girl who was to become the mother of the Sinn Fein hero.

The little boy received the name of Edmond in baptism, not Eamonn. He learned to lisp the English tongue in America. When he first arrived in Bruree, in County Limerick, he was only six. He spoke Spanish and French from childhood, and in Ireland he learned to ride like a centaur and to swim and to shoot. He was educated at a big school near the college of Blackrock. His mother despised the English all her life, and from the first he was passionately Irish, with a strong tendency to play with tin soldiers. He must have the linguistic gift, for it is affirmed that he could speak Gaelic with fluency when he was only twelve. His mathematical genius—the most astonishing of his endowments—disclosed itself when he was seventeen, and he thought at one time of becoming an astronomer. Before he had passed on to the college of Blackrock he was applying mathematical formulas to every conceivable problem. His sense of proportion and of order, his foresight, his constructiveness, his ability to plan far ahead, are aspects, to all who know him, of his mathematical genius. He was a successful tutor in consequence, and he astonished the examiners, when applying for his degree, with abstruse calculations of planetary weights that revealed no error at any stage of intricate computations that filled reams of paper. In a quieter period of history, writes one who knows

him to a London paper, he might have become a Newton or worked out fresh theories of dynamics. He seems to have thought at one time of going into the army, for his military aptitudes, among his followers at any rate, are rated high indeed.

His ringing laugh, his athletic prowess, unexpected in one of his romantic and poetical personal appearance, and the alertness of his manner do not suggest the brooder over figures. He is a brilliant talker, says the *London News*, and he seems to have no reserve on the subject of his dreams of glory for Ireland. His courage is beyond question and he readily faced death at Boland's bakery in the "revolution." He rallies his men under fire as only one with the gift of command and of inspiration can. He received a death sentence calmly, with one of his favorite works, the *Confessions* of St. Augustine, under his arm. He was not in the least moved, his gaolers reported, when a reprieve was read to him in his cell. It would be erroneous to infer that he is cold or impassive. He is emotional but self-controlled. Naturally he is nervous. At times he talks incessantly. His temperament is sanguine, not to say enthusiastic. He is lucky in having that fine physique, for it shows up conspicuously before an audience and prejudices every observer in his favor. His oratory is a blend of the sarcastic, the anecdotal, the polished, the enthusiastic. The spark of fire flashes early from it. He does not rant either. Indignation flames. The soul shines forth from the flashing dark eyes. Such are the impressions of reporters for the London press.

He has a tragic platform manner. He conveys or communicates emotion with his arms, now folded across his breast or again held behind him until they wave in the air as he darts forward at a decisive moment. One derives an impression of youth, precisely as in the time of the orthodox Home Rulers of the Redmond school one beheld middle-age or grey and bespectacled maturity talking about castle government in slightly cracked accents. There is nothing cracked in the accents of de Valera, although there is an occasional hoarseness. He has moments of oratorical frenzy when he seems anything but the cool and calculating geometrician. He might occasionally be deemed diffuse, if not incoherent and irresponsible. In a moment more he is calm, collected, narrating some fresh instance of British stupidity.

Stupidity, as the *London World* says, is the indictment of the British always when de Valera is called upon to frame it. There are moments when de Valera goes so far as to say that the British are not even ordinarily bad. They are simply stupid. The topic is dwelt upon with a wealth of felicitous illustration from the Irish point of view. It is one of the paradoxes of his situation that de Valera is personally quite popular with many of the English in Ireland. He has not the cold aloofness of Parnell in dealing with everybody, his own followers included, nor yet the somewhat aristocratic hauteur of the late John Redmond, suggesting the English country gentleman, nor the vehement hatred of all things British that characterised Daniel O'Connell. In fact, de Valera can be good-natured, if sarcastic, in his allusions to the English. "The English," he is quoted as having said at East Mayo, "are not like the Bourbons, who never learned anything and who never forgot anything. The English learn many things but they never know how to apply their knowledge. When a German learns anything he proceeds to apply the knowledge; but an Englishman lets his knowledge accumulate in his head until it has become solid." De Valera's favorite illustration of the stupidity of the English is drawn from the state of Ireland, a country very easily governed, he insists, inhabited by a people who respect strong government intelligently administered. In fact, de Valera's observations upon the English would make an interesting volume, especially as he affirms that, instead of hating them, he really loves them at a distance. At Dublin he predicted once that when the English put him to death they will in their stupidity impart a superfluously sanguinary character to the act.