

ciliation, had not the appointed ministers of peace aimed the last blow at it, gave up the hope to dream of the Republic, even if it had to be sought by meeting England in battle array. The fact tells its own tale that, in the desperate insurrectionary years that were to follow, West Cork was the headquarters of a resistance to the Black-and-Tans and all their bloody aiders and abettors, perhaps more widespread and more unconquerable than in any other district in the country. Mr. Herbert Samuel and his wise brother Ministers crushed the All-for-Ireland League only to be obliged to sue for peace to Michael Collins—himself a West Corkman and a West Cork Deputy—and make him Prime Minister of the country they set out to whip into subjection.

CHAPTER XXV—THE GENERAL ELECTION AND THE GENERAL JUDGMENT. (1918)

The General Election which the war enabled the Hibernian Party to evade for three years beyond the normal term smote them at last in November, 1918. The determination of my colleagues and myself had been formed as the result of the West Cork election of two years before, and only awaited the approaching Dissolution to be put into execution. Our conclusion was not to allow ourselves to be nominated for re-election to the English Parliament. In the words of my own address to my constituents: "The Irish people in general, in tragic ignorance of what they were being led to do, remained silent while I was being deprived of all power of interfering with effect in Irish affairs. . . . So far as the platform and the newspaper press were concerned, my position has long been that of a man buried alive and striving in vain to make his voice reach the ears of his countrymen." In these circumstances, there was nothing for it but frankly to recognise "that our efforts to reform the Parliamentary movement upon an honest basis must—under present conditions, at all events—be abandoned, and that those who have saved (and who alone could have saved) the country from Partition, from Conscription, and from political corruption ought now to have a full and sympathetic trial for their own plans for enforcing the Irish nation's right of Self-determination." Mr. T. M. Healy in endorsing this conclusion, quoted: "two sentences in your exposure of the debasement of the Parliamentary movement which strike me as setting a datum line by which the general body of Nationalists may guide their course. You say: 'We cannot subscribe to a programme of armed resistance in the field, or even of permanent withdrawal from Westminster, but to the spirit of Sinn Fein, as distinct from its abstract programme, the great mass of independent and single-minded Irishmen have been won over.' Of the 'ruined politicians' still clinging to power, and their policies, you foretell that 'their successors cannot by any conceivable possibility do worse.'"

That was why we could not conscientiously throw ourselves into the Sinn Fein ranks. It was not Parliamentary methods, but rotten Parliamentary methods, that had broken down. That was also why we conceived it a

duty to remove all obstacles on our part to the mandate of the country, as between the disgraced Hibernians and the only force in the country capable of coping with them, being as decisive as that which in 1884 empowered Parnell to overthrow a Parliamentary majority less baleful. Before the World-War, the rawest schoolboy would have laughed at the suggestion of an armed struggle with the might of England. The Sinn Fein movement, so long as it was directed by Mr. Arthur Griffith, never contemplated a rising in arms. Even its own programme of a pacific withdrawal from Westminster failed to command on its merits the approval of a single constituency. It was Sir E. Carson's example in drilling and arming with impunity a vast Ulster army to resist the law of Parliament which first inspired the young men of the South with the emulation to go and do likewise. But it was President Wilson's promulgation of the doctrine of the sovereign right of the small nationalities to shape their own future on the principle of self-determination—above all it was the necessity imposed upon Mr. Lloyd George to welcome that principle with seeming enthusiasm in order to ensure the entrance of the United States into the war—which once for all fixed in the mind of the youth of Ireland the feasibility as well as the dignity of a demand for liberty arms in hand, in contrast with Parliamentary methods which had become a byword for failure and degradation.

It must be owned that none of us measured truly the growth of the new spirit until the Rising of Easter Week revealed as in a lightning flash how dauntless it was, and how deeply it had entered into possession of the nation's soul. The original literature of Sinn Fein was contributed by half a dozen poets and journalists who readily accepted the description of "intellectuals" accorded to them by admiring English prints. They were not content with condemning the poor work-a-day politicians who transferred the land to the people and three times over forced their way to the very last rampart between Ireland and *Homo Rule*. They went to the ludicrous length of despising because it was "intelligible" the poetry of Thomas Davis, which was so grossly "intelligible" that it has roused the hearts of two generations of Irishmen like a burst of trumpets. They actually proposed the De-Davisisation of Ireland (the phrase is that of the intellectuals) as an adventure of the highest literary distinction. The insincerity of these *précieux* and consequently their futility may be illustrated by a story of perhaps the most distinguished of their number, the ill-fated poet Synge, as related by another and more delicate dreamer, Mr. W. B. Yeats: "I once asked him: 'Do you write from hatred of Ireland or for love of her?' and he answered: 'That is just what I often ask myself.'"

With the single exception of Mr. Griffith, always a man of sound sense as well as high purpose, the intellectuals were *frondeurs* who found a superior virtue in disclaiming any part in the hard battles which had restored the ownership of the soil to the people and given them the command of the whole machinery of local government, and which threw open the road to every victory that has

followed since.* They only succeeded in limiting an influence which might have been widespread to their own small circle in Dublin. They had discredited Sinn Fein in the eyes of common men with such fatal effect that the movement had all but ceased to exist when by a bizarre blunder of English pressmen, it found its name of Sinn Fein transferred to the wholly different armed organisation which had its baptism of fire in Easter Week. These distressingly ineffectual writings were not of a kind to dispel the discouraging conviction which was creeping over my once sanguine self that, in the rank demoralisation in which the placeman and the place beggar thrived apace, there was no longer to be found a body of Irishmen who really thought Ireland worth dying for. To the amazement of the older generation, it turned out that such men were to be counted by the thousand, and of the very flower of the race—men for whom patriotism was a holy religion—who were as eager for death for the "Little Black Rose" in the firing line or on the gallows as were the Christian martyrs for the embrace of the beasts in the Colosseum. We had not kept pace with the newer school of the Pearses and the O'Rahillys and Mac Donaghs who had replaced the dilettanti, and who in half a dozen obscure sheets were inditing a new testament of which self-immolation for Ireland was the chief of the beatitudes, and in the very wilderness where all noble purpose seemed to have perished were raising up a generation whose disinterestedness, whose sobriety of character, whose almost incredible gift for combining action with idealism were to sweeten the air with the efflorescence of a divine springtime of the Gael. Not alone had the coal of fire of the prophet touched their tongues; in the administrative work of the country which, in spite of the brutalities of Martial Law was steadily falling into their hands, they were developing a capacity and an impartiality of outlook which put their elderly critics of the old order to shame.

Aimlessly to stand in the way of such a reformation would have been to dash the country's last hope. Nobody doubted that, had it come to a series of triangular battles, we should have in more than one instance outpaced both the Sinn Fein candidate and the Hibernian, or, indeed, induced the Sinn Feiners to desist from opposition to our re-election; but vainglory apart the only result would have been to confuse the public mind and probably enable the Hibernians to return in numbers that would have paralysed the power of reform for the term of another Parliament. It is not perhaps excessive to claim that it was in a large degree the self-effacement of the All-for-Irelanders which put it in the power of the country, upon the straightest of issues, to return a verdict

* "The task of William O'Brien's generation was well and bravely done. Had it not been so the work men are carrying out in this generation would have been impossible. In that great work none of Parnell's lieutenants did so much as Mr. William O'Brien"—Arthur Griffith in *Young Ireland*, June, 1920.

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