

## Mr. Arthur Griffith

(By STEPHEN GWYNN, in the *Manchester Guardian*.)

Arthur Griffith was too pertinacious a man, too desperately in earnest, for it to be possible that he should die without reluctance. He must have known the difficulties that lie ahead, and certainly he was not one to shirk his part in facing them. Yet I think if ever a man was lucky in the opportuneness of his death it was he. He had given his best; his ideal had been accepted and brought to fruition. Ireland, after turning down so many leaders, had stood by him, even to accepting the ordeal of civil war. Ireland had learnt to trust his courage and his patriotism, and refused to be led away by those who cried out that he was hauling down the national flag. Wisdom was justified of its children; he had been the great educator of Irish thought in his time, and the settlement which he secured was the settlement which he had taught Ireland to aim for. It is statesmanship to formulate an end which is attainable, and the proof of his statesmanship is that his end was attained. He joined for a period in the demand for a Republic, but on a clear principle. He followed Davis in choosing to work always with the Irish people, and at that moment the people were demanding a Republic. Just so in 1912, when they were demanding a Home Rule Bill, he declared his intention of lending support to Redmond's party. But essentially Ireland knew what he wanted.

The most trenchant publicist since John Mitchel, he had preached to them a Parliament as independent as that of Hungary, but the Hungarian policy implied acceptance of the Dual Monarchy. Certainly no one suspected Griffith of any attachment to the Empire, yet his insistence on Ireland's rights was always on her right, to get back what she had in Grattan's day. The greatest service that he ever did to Ireland was to determine the acceptance of an offer which gave all that he thought to be vital. He was able to do that service because his essential consistency was recognised and because he counted with confidence on the effect of education, which he himself had given, carrying further but not in principle departing from the teaching of O'Connell, Parnell, and Redmond, as well as of Davis and Duffy.

### The Support of the Country.

The statesman in him gave effect to what the educator had taught. His action had three stages: first, in the London debates, where it is plain that he forced acceptance on a wavering Irish Cabinet; second, in the debates where he had to prevent the Dail from going back on what the delegates had done; thirdly, in the Ministry, when he had to decide that attempts to defeat by force the country's declared acceptance must be put down by force. He died on the very day when the resistance of the Irregulars was broken and his third task accomplished with growing enthusiasm of support for his policy over all the country. More than that, he had lived to see those who in opposition to him preached an irreconcilable policy render their own ideal furiously unpopular by the courses they pursued. All danger from the appeal to abstract idealism was over. The appeal to Ireland's historic past had won. Davis, whom Griffith always claimed for his master, would have rejoiced to see the unanimity of support which came from all classes when the Irish Government issued its call to arms. Many who gave or approved that support are anxious to-day. Some think that the opposing sides may not join; if they do, it can only be in support of Griffith's policy. No Government abandons what it has won a civil war to establish.

Some rate so highly the talent which is lost that they think it irreplaceable. Yet in fact Arthur Griffith was ill-fitted for the work of a Parliamentary leader. He showed that in the Dail he was irritable, and certain people, especially Mr. Erskine Childers, made him furious. He was not dexterous in debate, and was not, indeed, a good speaker. He lacked persuasiveness in speech, and his manner of stating a case seemed to create opposition. He lacked also personal magnetism, the gift through which men are followed blindly. Mr. Collins has his share in all these, and it may be as well that the State should have one head and not two with their relative positions ill-defined. For the troubles ahead a leader will be needed who has a free hand and something of the demagogic gift, which Griffith lacked.

### Men of the Future.

But Griffith's views are fully expressed in the Ministry. Mr. Cosgrave, Minister for Local Government, was presumably by Griffith's choice acting as vice-chairman of the Cabinet. He is said to be able and clear-headed, and his reply of this month (August) to a proposal for negotiations was firm and lucid. Mr. Kevin O'Higgins, Minister for Commerce, who assisted Griffith in redrafting the Constitution, is another representative of his opinions, but the real truth is that the country at large stands for Griffith's opinions, and has supported the Government in a war to make them prevail. It is not now going to see them thrown aside. It is determined not to be pushed into war with England for phrases before it has proved that the powers given it are insufficient for its free development. At present it is ready to take Griffith's word for it that they are ample. His feuds—and they were many—die with him. Relations between old Nationalists and the Ministry may be more easily established and they should be. But his ideals survive.

### AN ENGLISH APPRECIATION.

*The writer of the following appreciation had many opportunities of meeting Mr. Griffith during the period of the Treaty negotiations in London last year.*

Ireland has had a roll of famous leaders, but no one quite like Arthur Griffith, drawn from the artisan class, making no pretentious claims for himself, unable to spellbind the multitude with demagogic oratory like O'Connell, imposing no implicit obedience like Parnell. He was a genuine democrat, and did not ask Irishmen to give up their minds to his keeping. He was a silent, shy, sensitive man, hardly of medium height, with a voice pitched in a low key, with a somewhat nervous manner and twinkling eyes behind his pince-nez. He probably knew a lot of Irish. He was a master of written English; but he was disconcertingly brief in the use of the spoken word. From all of which it will be realised how unlike he was to what an Englishman has been taught to expect an Irishman to be. Anyone who spent an evening with Griffith and Collins together would wonder how one country could produce the two men, and would even doubt if the Welshmen's claims to Griffith as one of themselves could be substantiated. It is said that his type is to be found in remote parts of North Wales and that any slight differences must be explained by the long time the Griffith family have been settled in Ireland. Perhaps so. So reticent and anonymous had he been that it is safe to conjecture that when he was deputed to cross to London as chief negotiator the majority of his Majesty's Ministers had never heard his name.

Enough of the inner history of the conferences in Whitehall has leaked out to enable the public to know that the silent man retained his characteristics undiluted in Downing Street. He made no speeches. He gave no opportunities. He was perfectly courteous. He was willing that his country should be associated with this country for certain specified and quite important purposes. He mainly wanted Ireland to be mistress of her own affairs in her own household. He did not believe the Ulster difficult insuperable if we would but stand aside and not foster the quarrel between North and South.

Mr. Chamberlain, Mr. Churchill, and the Lord Chancellor in particular were growingly impressed with the moral qualities of the silent negotiator. He was quite straight. He was not unpractical. He never swerved from any undertaking. These are reputed to be the true English qualities, and I suppose the English statesmen liked this reflection of themselves. Anyway, the story goes that it was the moral courage of Arthur Griffith which rose to the crisis on the fateful night when the Prime Minister posed the final issue. The protracted negotiations had throughout tested supremely the courage and patience chiefly of two men—Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Griffith. In the conflict they learned to respect each other, and the Prime Minister's messages to Mrs. Griffith and Mr. Collins are obviously no formal expressions of regret, but confessions of a personal sorrow felt at the death of a great Irishman.

Griffith took back to Dublin a charter of genuine Irish freedom, and later he took a Constitution which, though disguised in legal terminology, has within its clauses the imprint of his wise care for the best interests of the land to which he utterly dedicated himself.