

THE POSITION AND PROSPECTS OF ULSTER

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THE flag of England, which for some seven centuries streamed over Dublin "like a meteor against the wind," was on the 17th of December 1922 hauled down for ever, and now the Sinn Fein tricolour flies in its stead. By accident I was that Sunday passing through the Anglo-Irish capital of southern Ireland, and watched the last battalions of the British army marching to the steamers which were to bear them off. All along the route to the quay great crowds lined the way, the Dublin men bidding farewell to the departing soldiers with cheers, the Dublin women with tears. Again and again the cry was to be heard, "Boys, you'll soon be back again." That cry expressed merely a sentimental wish, not a practical expectation. Everybody in his heart knew that English troops, as English troops, were treading on southern Irish soil for the last time; because everybody knew that there were then in southern Ireland only two parties, the former loyalists who had come to detest the English government, and the former rebels who had come to despise it. Irishmen might differ as to whether the English democracy was fit to govern itself; but they were agreed that it was not fit to govern anybody else.

As I watched the last English soldier marching eastwards, in front of the ruins of that magnificent Custom House which the Irish patriots for some occult reason thought it necessary to destroy, I felt I was witnessing the passing not merely of the English rule but of the English race in Ireland; and this feeling touched my heart. For whatever their faults towards their Celtic fellow-countrymen may have been, the Anglo-Irish were a splendid stock. Their situation, as a small alien community among a hostile population, made them strong, brave, self-reliant, and natural leaders of men. And as leaders they did the State great service. In all the Empire wars from the days of Wolfe, the conqueror of Canada, and Eyre Coote, Warren Hastings's right hand in the conquest of India, till those of Kitchener, French, Wilson and Beatty in the great war, there is hardly an illustrious British soldier who was not of their breed. But notwithstanding this, the English government,

having first disarmed them, was now abandoning them to the mercy of those whom the English government had made their enemies. There was only one choice left to them—either to return to England, the land of their fathers, and become out-and-out Englishmen, or to remain in the land of their birth and become out-and-out Irishmen. The Sinn Feiners will see to it that they shall make their choice soon; and however they may individually make it, they will cease to be what they have long been, a distinctive and distinguished race.

But in Belfast, the Anglo-Scottish capital of Northern Ireland, the flag of England still flies; there it streams like a meteor *along* the wind. The whole current of public opinion is with it. But the Anglo-Scot's feelings towards it have always been very different in their nature from those of the Anglo-Irish. The latter were devoted to it because it was the flag of England, the country from which their fathers came, and to which they claimed still to belong. Those few who, like Swift, took up Irish nationalism, did so primarily because they were infuriated by the English in England treating the English in Ireland as if they were what the English called contemptuously "mere Irishry." The present devotion of the Anglo-Scots arises from their greater devotion to the principles for which, in their opinion, that flag has come to stand. Those principles are civil and religious liberty, order, justice and progress.

I say the principles for which "in their opinion" the flag has come to stand: they know their own past too well to think that it has always stood for these principles. And at all times when they were convinced it did not do so, they had no hesitation in abjuring it and transferring their allegiance to another standard. The Anglo-Irishman's motto was *England right or wrong*; the Anglo-Scot was ready to fight and die for England, but only when she was right.

History is a subject little studied by the average Englishman of to-day; his knowledge of it consists of a smattering as to his own past, and a vague recollection of the conquest of India and of the great settlements in America and Australia. But of the history of the Anglo-Scottish colony in Ulster he is absolutely ignorant. I have met distinguished graduates of Oxford and Cambridge who had never heard of the Plantation! The Englishman's usual notion is that the only English in Ireland were the landowners, many of whom were in fact of pure Irish ancestry and most of whom had some Irish blood in their veins, due to intermarriage with Catholic landowners who had turned Protestant to save their land. He has never heard of the Anglo-Scottish farmers and workmen of the North who have

never intermarried with the native Irish, and who by their patient industry have changed a whole province into a smiling garden, turned small villages into great cities, and established in an otherwise unindustrial country some of the greatest industries existing in the world. To him the population of the progressive North East are simply native Irish who, having in some way or other (he cannot guess how) caught the Protestant religion and become bigots, now devote most of their energies to oppressing and from time to time murdering their Catholic brethren. But for this ridiculous delusion, I venture to think that no English party would ever have proposed to use force to compel that population to submit to a parliament dominated by the Catholic Irish of the South; and if any party had been so foolish as to do so, it would never have secured the support of a majority, or even of a respectable minority, of the British voters.

As the Canadian view may not be essentially different from the English, a sketch of the history of the Anglo-Scottish colony may be useful as an introduction and explanation of the present position in Northern Ireland. That history begins in the early years of the seventeenth century. Ulster, the last part of Ireland to stand up against English rule, had then at last been conquered. The war of conquest had been carried on by methods of barbarism to which anything done in the late war was child's play; and when it ended, large districts all over the province were left without cattle, houses or inhabitants. It occurred to King James I and his adviser, the great Francis Bacon, that it would be good policy to plant those desolate districts (now by confiscation become the property of the Crown) with semi-military colonies, after the Roman fashion, to secure the English position in Ireland which had been so hardly won. So James proceeded to grant large tracts of land in Ulster to persons who were called "undertakers," because a condition of their grants was that they should undertake forthwith to settle on the land granted a certain number of Englishmen or "Inland" Scots. By "Inland" Scots was meant Scots coming from the eastern side of Scotland, where the people were chiefly Anglo-Saxon and Protestant, the people of the west seashore being then chiefly Celtic and Catholic. This arrangement resulted in a considerable immigration from Great Britain into Ulster. The native Irish naturally hated the immigrants whom they regarded as the robbers of their inheritance; and, when the disputes between the English parliament and King Charles I rendered England helpless to prevent it, they rose in arms, massacred many of the settlers, expelled more. A Scottish army swiftly came over to

protect the remainder; and some years later, when Cromwell had avenged the massacres by worse massacres of people who did not commit them, the settlers who had fled returned to Ulster bringing many others. After the Restoration the stream of immigrants continued. It consisted chiefly of English Puritans and Scottish Covenanters, both of whom during the second Charles's reign had found things very uncomfortable in their native lands. Then on the Revolution of 1688 a new war between the settlers and the Irish broke out. In the previous war the settlers had concentrated on the fortified towns, Carrickfergus and Derry. At the outbreak of this one, Carrickfergus was garrisoned with Irish soldiers; so the settlers concentrated on Derry and Enniskillen. There they waged against immense odds one of the most heroic struggles in history, with such success in both cases that when William III landed with the British-Dutch army it was not till he had marched out of Ulster that he saw his Irish enemies. From then till now Derry and Enniskillen have been the Marathon and Salamis of the Ulster Protestant.

It is to be noted that most of the English and Scottish settlers had fled to Ulster to escape persecution for being *too* Protestant for the taste of their respective governments. Their last war against the Irish was in their view a religious war—a war fought to decide whether they were to be ruled by a Protestant or a Catholic king. If that is remembered, it will be understood why it is that the Protestantism of Ulstermen of to-day is of such a fervent kind, and why the prospect of being ruled by a Catholic parliament is so unspeakably distasteful to them. But though both the English and Scottish settlers were Protestant, and always ready to combine to defeat the common enemy, Catholicism, their Protestantism was not of the same brand; the English as a rule were Episcopalians and the Scots Presbyterians. Not only so, but they settled in different parts of Ulster, the English as a rule seeking the more genial southern counties of Armagh, Tyrone, and Fermanagh, the hardier Scots confining themselves largely to the more bleak northern counties of Antrim, Down and Derry. These circumstances tended to prevent intermarriage and indeed intercourse to any extent between them, and to keep them separate and rival peoples. After the triumph of the Protestants in the Revolution of 1688, that separation and rivalry soon developed into bitter division and hostility; and this was due to the completeness of the Protestant triumph.

That triumph was so complete that the Catholics for nearly a century afterwards did not dare even to raise a protest against the infamies perpetrated upon them. Historians, endeavouring

to find an excuse for the Penal Laws, have represented them as due to fear of another Catholic rebellion. Burke says truly they were due not to fear, but to contempt and greed. Swift, who knew well the feelings of his own time, declared that the native Irishmen were no more dangerous than so many women and children. The Protestants of Ireland felt that their domination of the country was secure; and it was that very feeling of security which led to the break-up of the combination between the English and Scottish, the Episcopalian and Presbyterian, settlers by which the security had been won.

After the Revolution all power rapidly passed into the hands of the Episcopalian. The Irish House of Lords was dominated by the Episcopalian bishops, as most of the Irish lay peers lived chiefly in England; the Irish House of Commons was dominated by the nominees of the landowners, most of whom were Episcopalians; the Irish government consisted chiefly of a pack of hungry younger sons and adventurers, sent over from England to fill well paid places in Ireland which their characters precluded their receiving at home. All power was thus in the hands of the English and Episcopalians who looked with a jealous eye on the presence of the Presbyterians on the magistracy and the municipalities of the North, and with a greedy eye on the wealth which by their industry the Presbyterians were acquiring—the Scottish settlers, as Swift rather angrily notes, being in his day the only prosperous community in Ireland. Being no longer in need of their assistance, the Episcopalian English faction, with the government's support, resolved to deprive them of both.

The Test Act excluded the Scots from the magistracy and the municipalities; and some half dozen of the most distinguished leaders in the defence of Derry were ignominiously expelled from the corporation of the city which they helped to save. Then the landlords began systematically to raise the rent of the Scots farmers so as to appropriate all the benefit of the improvements which the farmers by labour and outlay had effected on their farms. This the farmers regarded as absolute robbery. It is true that their leases gave them no express right to renewals at the old rents, but it was understood when they first settled in Ulster that in fixing new rents the farmer's improvements were to be treated as his, not his landlord's, property; that is what was called the "Ulster Custom" which in happier times was recognized by statute. When the Scots found this persecution and fraud protected by the English flag, their allegiance to it came to an end. Tens of thousands of them abandoned Ulster; and, going to America with hearts burning

with hatred of England, they became when the American Revolution broke out the fiercest and ablest enemies of English rule. Montgomery who died before Quebec, Knox whom Washington called his right hand, Wayne Stewart and Maxwell among the army, John Hancock the first President of Congress, Charles Thompson its perpetual Secretary, and no fewer than nine of the signers of the Declaration of Independence among the public men were Ulster Scots. Those who remained at home were as bitterly alienated from England by what they regarded as her betrayal of them. Many of them even entered into a conspiracy with the southern Catholics to drive the English out of Ireland, and to establish an Irish Republic on the model of the new French Republic—a republic whose motto would be for all, wealthy and poor, Catholic and Protestant, English, Scottish and Irish, *liberty, equality, fraternity*. While many Scots joined in this conspiracy, only a very few joined in the rebellion of Ninety-Eight in which it culminated. That was due to Lord Castlereagh, himself an Ulsterman, and in his early youth a supporter of the revolt against English misrule. He had official knowledge of the real objects of the southern Catholic rebels long before the rebellion broke out; and he took measures to see that his Ulster kinsmen should know them too. So by very harsh measures he drove the conspirators of the South into a premature “rising.” This, as he knew it would, soon developed into a massacre of southern Protestants. When the time came for the Scots of Ulster to “turn out,” very few of them did so. They were opposed to the rule of Englishmen, bishops and landlords, but they were not prepared to drive it out if the result would be the slaughter of their fellow Protestants.

The effect of the rebellion of Ninety-Eight and of the Union with Great Britain which may be said to have resulted from it, I have set out in another place.¹ “The rebellion had,” I there say, “important consequences in Ulster”:

It convinced the government and the landlords that their interests still needed guarding, and it convinced the Ulster Scots that co-operation between Ulster and the South was impossible. The landlords once more recognized the north Custom of tenant-right, and the government encouraged trade and commerce in Ulster. With the Union, justice advanced quickly. All religious disabilities were abolished, the church tithe which the Presbyterians hated followed, tenant-right was enforced against landlords by statute, and then the tenants were given the right to purchase their own farms. Now the Protestants of Ulster find themselves perfectly free, and perfectly contented and attached to the people

(1) *Blackwood's Magazine*, September 1919. p. 393.

of Great Britain, not merely by the Union, but by the stronger ties of a common race and a common religion, common tradition and common ideas, while they are separated from the Catholics of the South on every one of these points. That is shortly why they are now as anxious to maintain the British connection as they were before '98 to break it.

This was written in 1919, and in the same place I state what was then the position assumed by the Anglo-Scots of Ulster, for the reforms which had been made had abolished the old jealousy and separation between the two races, and made them one and indivisible, summed up in one word, Ulstermen. Their position, I pointed out, is this:

Ulster, they say, is as much a part of the United Kingdom as Middlesex or Midlothian, and we deny the right of parliament, as the people of Middlesex or Midlothian would, if it were their case, deny the right of parliament to turn it out of the Union against the wishes of the majority of its inhabitants. If the other three provinces want to separate from the United Kingdom, then, though we think such a separation will be disastrous to them and to Great Britain, if parliament agrees we cannot claim to veto it. If a scheme of devolution applicable equally to all parts of the United Kingdom is made law, though we doubt its utility and know that nobody in Ireland wants it, we of course will accept it, and work it as best we can. But we will not submit to be treated as a colony or dependency, and have a new constitution forced on us; the colonies and dependencies were not parts of the United Kingdom, and so when they had constitutions made for them were not deprived of any rights as parts of it. We are the sons of Great Britain, not her slaves to be sold when she gets into difficulties.

That was the Ulstermen's position as regards Great Britain five years ago; notwithstanding that Ulster has since then accepted a scheme of devolution applying only to Ireland, it is in essence her position still. That scheme of devolution is contained in the Government of Ireland Act. As I said, nobody in Ireland wanted devolution. The southern Irish wanted independence and rejected it with scorn. The Ulstermen wanted to remain as they were, and accepted it with reluctance. Their reluctance would have been greater had they not begun to despise the glove of steel upon a hand of water, the violence without firmness with which England was dealing with Sinn Feiners, and to distrust the English government which—though Unionist in name—was every day showing more and more its annoyance with the Ulstermen for their loyalty to the Union. They remembered England had betrayed them once before, and they were not sure she or her government might not betray them once again.

This distrust of the English government, as events soon showed, was not altogether unjustified. While its representatives in parliament were describing the Sinn Fein rebels as bands of assassins and boasted of having murder by the throat, while its representatives in Ireland were hanging Sinn Fein prisoners and burning down towns and villages where British soldiers had been attacked, other representatives of it were secretly negotiating a surrender to Sinn Fein. At length these negotiations came into the open, an armistice was arranged, and the chiefs of the bands of assassins were invited to Downing Street to arrange a peace treaty.

This turn of affairs made the Ulstermen very uncomfortable. Mr. Lloyd George however soothed them by an assurance given to their premier, Sir James Craig, that nothing affecting Northern Ireland would be decided behind the back of the Ulster government. What then was the amazement of the Ulstermen to discover, when the terms of the peace treaty were announced, that those terms applied to northern as well as southern Ireland, and that northern Ireland was to have an option to vote itself out of the treaty, but if it did go, a commission was to be appointed to rectify its boundaries in accordance with the wishes of the inhabitants, "so far as may be compatible with economic and geographic considerations"? This amazement was turned into fury when the Sinn Feiners declared that rectification of boundaries really meant dismemberment of the six counties, and that at the negotiations for the peace treaty some of the English negotiators had assured the Sinn Fein negotiators that that dismemberment would be so complete that the northern government could not survive it and Ulster would find itself forced to unite with southern Ireland—a declaration which some of the English negotiators have not seen their way to deny. If it had not happened that at the time these revelations were made Ulster was incensed against the South owing to the outbreak of murder and incendiarism due to the arrival of a set of southern Sinn Fein gunmen, it is at least possible that the desire of the English political Unionists would have been gratified, and Ulster would have ceased to be a part of the United Kingdom.

The whole trouble between northern and southern now arises out of this treacherous and secret agreement. The late Mr. Collins, who was one of the Sinn Fein negotiators, was in his way something of a statesman. After the negotiations were completed, he had a conference with Sir James Craig, and came to a reasonable understanding to the effect that rectification of boundaries meant rectification and not dismemberment. But he found himself forced by the hotheads of his party to repudiate this understanding. These

people claimed then, and apparently claim still, that the area of Northern Ireland shall be reduced from six counties to one and parts of three others. They claim all Fermanagh and Tyrone because the elections show the Nationalists have a small majority of the voters—something like five per cent. They claim South Armagh, South Down and the city of Londonderry because, though these counties all contain an Ulster majority, these particular districts in them have—they alleged—a Nationalist majority. Their principle then is that when there is a scratch majority in their favour in any county, the whole county must be transferred to them; yet where there is only a minority, Ulster is not to be permitted to retain the whole county, but any particular part of it which has a Nationalist majority is to be detached and joined to southern Ireland!

The Nationalist majority, such as it is in Fermanagh, is largely due to immigration of labourers from Connaught who come to find employment among the more progressive Ulstermen. All the commerce, all the manufactures, most of the land and most of the wealth are in the latter's hands. The same is the case in South Antrim, South Down and the city of Londonderry. It is only by the primitive process of counting noses that a Nationalist majority in any of these districts could be obtained. It has gone out of fashion to consider persons "who have a stake in the country"; but if that test was applied, the friends of Ulster would count ten to one.

The dispute between North and South is now under negotiation. Perhaps before these lines appear a satisfactory result may have been achieved. In the interests of both North and South this is eminently to be desired. The southern government under the direction of Mr. Cosgrave has shown itself both firm and sane; and, if his hand is not forced by the extremists, most people are convinced that such a result is certain. But they remember what happened to the understanding with Collins; and they fear. One thing is certain; no Ulster government will surrender, to anything but force, Fermanagh and Tyrone and the city of Londonderry. Fermanagh contains Enniskillen; and it and Londonderry, as I have said, are the Marathon and Salamis of Ulstermen. They would as soon think of surrendering them as the Scots would of surrendering the field of Bannockburn. Already the extremist press in the South are recognizing that force will be necessary; and, just as in 1914, they are saying it will be for the English army to do the job. The English government, whether it is composed of Conservatives, Liberals, or Labour men, will have a clear recollection of what happened at the Curragh and in the fleet when coercion of Ulster was attempt-

ed then; and I venture to think it will be very reluctant to send English forces to coerce Ulster again. And even if the English army was ready to carry out the job, I venture to think that before it was completed the prediction of Mr. Bonar Law (an Ulsterman by blood, though by birth of Canada) would be fulfilled, and a good many of the Ministers who sent it on that errand would be hanging by the neck from the lamp posts in Whitehall. Ulster has often distrusted the English politicians; it has never distrusted the English people.

Mr. Cosgrave's government of Southern Ireland has, as I have said, been firm and sane. It has surprised and impressed most favourably the Ulstermen. If it shows the same determination in restraining expenditure which it showed in repressing disorder, it will advance itself still more in their good opinion. The difference in race, religion, traditions and ideals, not to mention occupations and interests, makes complete union between Ulster and the South impossible; but that a working arrangement between North and South, which will for most purposes abolish the boundaries between the two, will—if good government continues in the South—come about before many years, is the opinion of most intelligent observers. It will be a terrible calamity if that end is defeated by an exasperating struggle over those boundaries which, if southern Ireland only tries to obey Lord Carson's counsel and "win Ulster," will soon cease to exist.