

THE PROOF OF SUCCESS

What the Rising of 1916 did

Disunion Danger

Ireland is an ancient nation which from earliest times had a distinct civilization. What made Ireland what she was was her people living within the whole island as a separate and distinct community, or nation, by virtue of a common system of law and culture and traditions and ways of life and not depending upon any particular political constitutions. While this lasted strangers who came were absorbed, and the national ways were not interfered with, and were such, by their attractiveness, as to enable strangers to become Irish easily and thoroughly.

Then came English interference, and her policy of robbery and exploitation, and when she had "conquered" us sufficiently she began to carry out her policy—to use us to feed and enrich herself. But having a complete nationhood of our own, which Britain had to acknowledge or to trample out of existence, and having a social system which suited us, and which gave our people security in all their rights and privileges, England found the execution of her policy, though helped by our geographical propinquity, a less

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easy task in Ireland than in her colonies, where there was no separate nationhood and no difference of social polity.

England's idea was to make Ireland an English province. For her purposes Irish civilization was to be completely blotted out. The Gael was to go. Our lands were to be confiscated and given to aliens. Our industries were to be effectively destroyed. Everything that tended to remind us of the past, everything that tended to retain our Irish outlook, everything that helped to keep us a distinct people, everything that tended to keep alive in us our memories of our Gaelic civilization and of our Irish nationality, freedom, and prosperity, was to be obliterated.

Her method even then was to divide and rule, setting chief against chief, as later she set religion against religion.

This policy could not succeed while we had a land system by which men's rights in the land were secure and impregnable. By means of wholesale commandeering the land was taken from the people, and the feudal system of tenure, a system admirably suited for the purpose of enslavement, was imposed. The free men of Ireland, whose rights had been rooted in the soil, became the tenants, the serfs, of the usurpers, and were completely at the mercy of their new masters, the landlords, who joined with the enemy in the policy of robbing, exploiting, and exterminating the Irish people.

When England had succeeded in uprooting the old Irish system of land tenure under which everyone securely enjoyed land to cultivate and common rights of grazing, she had taken the biggest step in

our subjection. It was only in so far as it attempted to reverse that subjection that the land campaign of the Davitt period was justified.

Some historian has yet to take up this aspect of the land struggle and discover a national spirit seeking to manifest itself in apparently strange ways. Were it not for this the killing of landlords would have been murder. The people undoubtedly regarded it in this way. The landlords were the agents who had taken away the liberties of the common folk, and the common folk hit at the agent whom they recognised as the common enemy.

They took first things first. They did the job which was immediately to their hands. In our generation we have no longer to shoot landlords, for landlords as they were known have mostly gone. In the same way we hope that the next generation will have no necessity to shoot an enemy, for the enemy will have gone.

In furtherance of the same policy the suppression of our industries was also necessary if Britain's desire was to be realised. It was doubly necessary. Our manufacturers competed too successfully with hers, and it was to be our privilege to exist, not as an industrial people, but for the purpose of providing England with an abundance of food.

The destruction of our democratic Gaelic social system, the discouragement, the prohibition of all enterprise, leaving us only a slave life on the land, and the imposition upon us of an alien language, alien laws, alien ideas, made our subjugation complete. Our economic subjection was necessary that we might serve Britain's purposes. Our spiritual subjection was

no less necessary that we might learn to forget our former national and economic freedom and acquiesce and grow passive in our servitude.

And we learned our lesson. We forgot our freedom. We forgot our language. We forgot our own native Irish ways. We forgot our Irish love and veneration for things of the mind and character, our pride in learning, in the arts for which we had been famous, in military skill, in athletic prowess, in all which had been our glory from the days of Cormac MacArt and St. Patrick and before them.

We became the degraded and feeble imitators of our tyrants. English fashions, English material tastes and customs were introduced by the landlord class or adopted by them, and by a natural process they came to be associated in the minds of our people with gentility. The outward sign of a rise in the social scale became the extent to which we cast off everything which distinguished us as Irish and the success with which we imitated the enemy who despised us.

And slavery still exists.

To-day in Ireland, although through improved economic conditions, which have been world-wide and in which it was not possible altogether to prevent us sharing, helped by a better living on the land, bought very dearly by the purchase back again of a great part of our country from those who had never any right to it, we have been lifted out of the worst slough of destitution; although we have been turning our eyes towards the light of liberty and learning to lift our heads again as Irish men and Irish women with a land of our own, and with traditions and hopes of which no

nation need feel ashamed, yet still from east to west, from north to south, we are soaked, saturated, and stupefied with the English outlook.

Only slowly, laboriously, do we turn in our chains and struggle to free ourselves from the degrading lie that what is English is necessarily respectable, and what is Irish, low and mean. Even at this moment when our daily papers and our weekly papers are writing of our newly-won freedom and rejoicing over our national hopes, they continue to announce in their leading columns the movements of English society and the births and marriages of upper-class English nonentities.

But by the completeness with which England converted us into hewers of wood and drawers of water, she in the end defeated her own purpose.

Feebly resisting at the moments when we were less completely crushed, when a brief interval came between the long periods of starvation, when we had a moment in which we could reflect upon our condition, we gradually awoke to the cause of our miseries, and we grew to learn if we would be economically free we must be nationally free, and if we would be spiritually free we must be nationally free.

The coming and the presence of the English had deprived us of life and liberty. Their ways were not our ways. Their interests and their purposes meant our destruction. We must turn back again the wheels of that infamous machine which was destroying us. We must get the English out of Ireland.

Our efforts at first were naturally timid, and they were often futile because we were too much concerned

with the political side—confused in this by the example of England where nationality was always expressed that way, and was principally a matter of political organisation.

Repeal of the Union was little more than a cry gaining what real strength it had from the more vigorous hostility of the Young Ireland movement, which revived our old literature, which recovered Irish history, and spread a new spirit. That spirit was not wholly martial, but what Irishman will say to-day that it was not beneficial, even so?

The Fenians came and once and for all raised the banner of Ireland's freedom, with a definite military policy which, though unsuccessful at the time, had its full effect in bringing before men's minds the real road to Irish salvation.

The Fenian idea left a torch behind it with which Tom Clarke and Seán MacDermott kindled the fires of Easter Week, and, though seemingly quenched, these were soon blazing brightly again at Solohead, at Clonfin, at Macroom, at Dublin, at many a place in Clare, in Mayo, and Monaghan, and Donegal during the recent struggle.

After the Fenians, years of death again, while famine raged over the land, till Parnell emerged to struggle for independence under the name of Home Rule which, though accompanied by the social and economic revolt of Davitt's national land policy, was bringing us back again to the dangerous idea of seeking freedom by means of some form of political weapon.

The weakness inherent in Parnell's policy was obviated by his intense personal hostility to the English.

He never forgot the end in the means. But it lost that saving protection when it fell into the hands of those who succeeded him and who, in the lotus-like atmosphere of the Westminster Parliament, forgot the national spirit and lost touch with the minds and feelings of their countrymen.

The collapse came when in the hands of weaker men the national effort became concentrated at the foreign parliament on English political lines. The methods adopted by the parliamentarians, the forum they had chosen, made their crumbling an easy matter, and from the English point of view it greatly helped division in their ranks, and with division came the inevitable dissipation of energy.

We would have an identical situation to-day had we chosen the same methods and fought on the same battlefield for the last five years. In that parliamentary period, however, the people at home were growing in national consciousness and in strength and courage. The Gaelic revival and the learning of our national tongue were teaching a new national self-respect. We recalled the immortal tales of our ancient heroes, and we began to look to a future in which we could have a proud, free, distinct nation worthy of the past.

We learned that what we wanted was not a political form of Home Rule or any other kind or form of Home Rule, but a revival of Gaelic life and ways. Economic thought and study showed us that the poverty which afflicted us came from the presence of the English and their control over us; had come from landlordism and the drain of English taxation, the neglect of Irish

resources, and the obstruction to Irish industries by the domination of the English Parliament. And we saw that we must manage these things for ourselves.

And, besides the hope of material emancipation, we grew to think of love of our land, and all that it had given us and had still to give us, and what we could make of it when it was our own once more. And we became filled with a patriotic fervour before which, when the time came, force would prove impotent. The expression of this new hope and new courage manifested itself in the Easter Week Rising.

The leaven of the old Fenianism had been at work in our midst. Tom Clarke, a member of the old Fenian Brotherhood, came out from jail after sixteen years' penal servitude to take up the work where he had left it off.

Seán MacDermott, tramping through Ireland, preached the Fenian gospel of a freedom which must be fought for, enrolled recruits, and, by his pure patriotism and lovable unselfish character, inspired all with whom he came in contact to emulate him and to be worthy of his teaching.

Our army was in existence again. It was not brought into being, as is wrongfully supposed, by the example of Carson's recruiting in North-East Ulster. It needed no such example. It was already in being—the old Irish Republican Brotherhood in fuller force.

But England's manufactured resistance in the North-East enabled our soldiers to come out into the open, with the advantage in 1916 of a Rising starting unexpectedly from the streets instead of from underground. England was unable or unwilling to interfere

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with her own Orange instruments, and she did not dare, therefore, to suppress ours.

Armed resistance was the indispensable factor in our struggle for freedom. It was never possible for us to be militarily strong, but we could be strong enough to make England uncomfortable (and strong enough to make England too uncomfortable). While she explains the futility of force (by others) it is the only argument she listens to. For ourselves it had that practical advantage, but it was above all other things the expression of our separate nationhood.

Unless we were willing to fight for our Nation, even without any certainty of success, we acquiesced in the doctrine of our national identity with England. It embodied, too, for us the spirit of sacrifice, the maintenance of the ideal, the courage to die for it, so that military efforts were made in nearly every generation. It was a protest, too, against our anglicisation and demoralisation, a challenge of spirit against material power, and as such bore fruit.

The Rising of 1916 was the fruit.

It appeared at the time of the surrender to have failed, but that valiant effort and the martyrdoms which followed it finally awoke the sleeping spirit of Ireland.

It carried into the hearts of the people the flame which had been burning in those who had the vision to see the pit into which we were sinking deeper and deeper and who believed that a conflagration was necessary to reveal to their countrymen the road to national death upon which we were blindly treading.

The banner of Ireland's freedom had been raised and was carried forward. During the Rising the leaders

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of Easter Week “declared a Republic”. But not as a fact. We knew it was not a fact. It was a wonderful gesture—throwing down the gauntlet of defiance to the enemy, expressing to ourselves the complete freedom we aimed at, and for that reason was an inspiration to us.

If the impossible had happened, and the Rising had succeeded, and the English had surrendered and evacuated the country, we would then have been free, and we could then have adopted the republican form of government, or any other form we wished. But the Rising did not succeed as a military venture. And if it had succeeded it would have been the surrender and the evacuation which would have been the proof of our success, not the name for, nor the form of, the government we would have chosen. If we had still a descendant of our Irish Kings left, we would be as free, under a limited monarchy, with the British gone, as under a Republic.

The form of our government is our domestic Irish concern. It does not affect the fact of our national freedom. Our national freedom depends upon the extent to which we reverse the history of the last 700 years, the extent to which we get rid of the enemy and get rid of his control over our material and spiritual life.