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A Moderate View of the Irish Question

By Mr. Philip W. Wilson.*

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Justice Sutherland, Bishop of Toronto, and Gentlemen,—I feel it a very deep honor to be here—and not for the first time—before one of the great Canadian Clubs of the Dominion, everyone of whose sons is so dear to the Motherland from which I come, whether that son be in America or has made his last home forever on European soil.

I understand that Canadian Clubs, very wisely, seek to avoid all differences of politics and religion; and that, I take it, is the reason why you have asked me to speak upon the Irish question, which is one that has merely certain academic properties. Up until this time, in your city I have had a quiet, I might almost say an exclusive, time at a most comfortable place of solitary residence, I mean the York Club. There I was served this morning with breakfast on plates in which I noticed what, I suppose, were the roses of York and Lancaster. One of them in my country would have been colored white and the other red. But here in Toronto both were colored green, showing how the simple English flowers of my own country are absorbed by the dominating Shamrock.

We are interested in Ireland because she speaks our language, sometimes more volubly than we speak it ourselves. Also, she has made, and here I strike a sincere and serious note, she has made great sacrifices in this war. It is perfectly true that, whereas conscription was applied to Ireland, though not enforced, yet it is true that many, many thousands of Irishmen volunteered in the struggle, not merely from Ireland but from all parts where Irishmen live; in England, in your own Dominion, in Australia and in the United States.

I enjoyed the great friendship of Mr. William Redmond,

*As American Correspondent of the "London Daily News" Mr. Wilson occupies a prominent position in Newspaper Circles. Though an Englishman, he has been in close touch with the political situation in Ireland, and is familiar with Mr. Lloyd George's policies towards that country.

whose last speech I heard, dressed as he was in Imperial khaki, before he went out to die for his country. Another gentlemen whose friendship I enjoyed was Prof. Kettlewell, an Irishman if ever there was one, who also laid down his life with your sons in France. I don't know that you have had the opportunity yet of hearing Mr. DeValera, but I may give you as a brief quotation from one of his speeches: "As far as England was concerned, the Irish people wished and hoped that Germany would win the war." I want to say that from my knowledge of Ireland and Irishmen I believe that to be a great slander upon the race. Such sacrifices they made; why, we need only mention one word, the Peninsula of Gallipoli. It is quite true that in the recent parliamentary elections Sinn Fein did in fact carry a majority of Irish seats, though not in the Northeastern section of Ulster. But since then there have been municipal elections in Ireland, fought not upon municipal issues but national issues, when there were 322,000 votes polled. And of those, only 87,000 were polled for Sinn Fein, or a quarter. The Labor polled 57,000, the Nationalists who manage to tolerate the oppression of Great Britain, polled 85,000; and the Nationalists who desire a solution other than independence polled 91,000. Therefore the Sinn Fein vote was very much under 50 per cent.

The grievances of Ireland have been, I suppose, four fold—religious, financial, agrarian, and parliamentary. For a moment I will just, if you will allow me, consider how far each of these grievances has been dealt with. The Bishop at my side knows very well that the Penal Laws which were applied to Ireland, have been entirely removed. We have to remember that they arose out of the repressive measures taken during the Reformation against the Protestants by the Catholics, and they were to some extent reprisals. But, happily, they have been swept away.

Not only that, but Mr. Gladstone, followed by Mr. Birrell, rather more successfully with other statesmen, for thirty years endeavored to obtain a basis by which Irishmen themselves would agree to a system of University Education which would include Protestants and Catholics. And that great system has now been established, not indeed on lines of which all of us would approve, but on lines which are more than generous to all the religions concerned. And if you take the Elementary schools of Ireland, especially in the south and west, I doubt if there has been any system of education in which a great dominant faith like the Catholic faith has had greater influ-

ence. Therefore, as to any grievance continuing out of the memories of the Penal Laws, it has, I think by universal admission, been swept away.

Now, of course, the agrarian grievance, what we call the Land question, arose first because, unfortunately, the Norman conquest did not entirely end with subjecting my own country but passed over to some extent with the French language and the French Feudal system into Ireland. However, that again, I think, is a matter which has been put entirely straight. Seven hundred million dollars, raised entirely in London, where at the moment dollars have an especial value, has been spent upon a system of land purchase for the farmers, which is something utterly unknown in our own country. That money has been loaned at under three per cent.; and, even including the sinking fund, should wipe off the debt in something like 68 or 70 years. I think it only carries three and a quarter or three and one-eighth per cent.—three and a quarter at the most.

We have gone even further than that. In the present bill we are proposing to hand back to Ireland the whole of that capital sum so that the annuity upon it will proceed directly into the Irish Exchequer, a gift amounting to something over one hundred dollars for every man, woman and child in the whole country. This is a gift by Great Britain, war-worn, finance-stricken, to the country which she desires to conciliate. Everyone knows that the farmers have quite unlimited labor, are prosperous. We have bought their foods and produce at their price, and they have doubled their deposits in what still remain, curiously enough, *our* savings banks. I do not want to spoil whatever may be described as my speech with reading a quotation which is vital, but I could give you the remarkable testimony of the revolution in social conditions in Ireland which was given by Mr. Redmond a year or two before his death.

Now I come, thirdly, to the financial grievances. It is perfectly true that up to thirty or forty years ago there was what the British Treasury agreed was over-taxation of Ireland. What was the condition in 1914, when war broke out? Not only was Ireland the only country in the world which was making no contribution whatever to her own defence, to any Imperial purpose, to any diplomatic service, army, navy, or national debt; but, if you take the money raised in Ireland and set it against the money actually spent in Ireland on purely Irish service, she received between five and ten million dollars

a year more than she was paying. Since then there has been some alteration in position owing to the war; but in the last complete financial year the United Kingdom spent upon Imperial services $2,750,000,000. Of those millions, 400 came from Scotland, 75½ only came from Ireland, with a larger population. Scotland paid $80 per head, Britain as a whole paid $65 per head, Ireland paid $15 per head. And upon those figures there is based the charge of robbery and spoliation against the United Kingdom.

I am addressing business men, and I won't waste your time answering the erroneous statement that a restraint is to-day put upon the shipping progress of Ireland. I don't know what restraint has been put upon the shipping industry of Belfast, and it is curious that that is the very industry which does not want Ireland to be independent. If the enormous coal resources of Ireland are not developed; well, I don't know why they cannot be developed out of the loans which President DeValera is raising across the frontier. You know very well that in your own country there are enormous mineral deposits and so on, and that the only question is whether they can be developed on an economic basis. There is, of course, no tariff against Ireland, not, at any rate, by Great Britain. We welcome and we consume, not only Irish whiskey, but Guinness' Stout.

Now, therefore, I am reduced to the parliamentary grievance. If I may say, as one of those Englishmen who, you know, have no sense of humor, I am reduced to the fourth, or what is called parliamentary, grievance. Now let us examine that. In the first place, everyone knows that in the philosophy of government municipal politics are becoming more and more important as compared with National politics. Ireland has complete and absolute control as far as municipal government is concerned. When I went over to Dublin and saw housing conditions there I made particular enquiries whether the condition which was revealed to one's astonished eyes could be in any way attributed to incompetence from London. Rightly or wrongly, as before the Almighty who sees all things, the responsibility for those conditions rests with the corporation of Dublin itself.

The Mayor of Cork, who was recently expelled from the inner counsels of Sinn Fein (I understand so) and afterwards lost his life,—he was a freely elected mayor of the city; and the British Labor party, which just recently sent over a not unsympathetic commission to Ireland to look into things from the point of view of the working man, has issued a most interesting report in which they point out that there is much more in this question than the mere setting up of a parliament in Dublin. I am not certain that even in the United States, a country where as an Englishman I have enjoyed the most boundless and lavish hospitality—I have never had an unkind word said to me in the years I have been there, and in the many hundreds of speeches which I have made I feel I must have offended their opinions—and yet, even in the United States I do not find that there is absolute unanimity upon the value and inviolability of their parliamentary institutions at Washington.

But I wish to say to you frankly that, in the opinion, I think, of most people, that great statesman William Pitt made one of those blunders which was perhaps worse than a crime when, instead of developing the parliamentary institutions of Ireland, he destroyed them. Anyway, there is to-day no statesman in the United Kingdom who is not convinced that there ought to be, immediately, restoration of legislative institutions in Ireland; and the difficulties lay wholly within Ireland herself.

Now, when the Home Rule Bill was put on the statute books, so strong was the feeling in the northeast portion of Ulster that they said not only did they disapprove of the bill but that they would resist it by force. The question was at once raised, therefore, whether it would be wise or politic to coerce Ulster into the acceptance of government by parliament—any government. In that matter the Liberal government of Mr. Asquith was advised, not by Sir Edward Carson merely;—but, far more intimately, by Mr. Redmond himself, by Dillon and Devlin; and all the leaders of the Nationalist party were against the policy of coercing Ulster. Gentlemen, I know how I am touching matters which very closely affect the hearts and consciences of us all. I am not therefore expressing any opinion myself upon the wisdom or unwisdom of any of those distinguished men. I am merely stating the facts of history. That is purely an academic question.

There was called, in August 1914, the famous round-table conference at Buckingham Palace which was opened with a speech from His Majesty the King, and I think I am right in saying that at that time Mr. Redmond himself was not prepared to accept the responsibility of administering the Home Rule Bill except with a settlement for Ulster. That conference broke down on a matter of definition as to what Ulster was. Did it consist of four counties or six counties? And, just as you have in Europe an Alsace-Lorraine; in Denmark,

Schleswig-Holstein; so in Ireland, which in these matters of public controversy is never behindhand, you have Fermanagh and Tyrone. And on Fermanagh and Tyrone that conference broke down.

In the meantime, there was arising a movement which in its origin was chiefly artistic and literary, the Sinn Fein movement. It had a motto, for which I confess I have not myself the highest admiration. Sinn Fein means "Ourselves Alone." Gentlemen, what would the world be to-day if your country and mine in August 1914 had adopted Sinn Fein, "Ourselves Alone," as a motto?

Well, gentlemen, I hope you will allow me to say that to which Mr. Lloyd George himself has given his authority, that our War Office in London, which has not always cultivated the highest qualities of delicate tact, somewhat failed to realize its opportunity with Ireland. There were great numbers of Catholics going into the army. Very few of them were permitted to be officers at first. And it was unfortunate that, just at a time when much might have been done by warm words of praise, the achievements and the sacrifices of many brave Irish regiments, which I saw marching out of London with the grey shadow of death already upon their faces, passed unnoticed in the reports from those heroic battlefields. Be that as it may, I don't think that anything can excuse or condone the outbreak of the rebellion. It is openly confessed in Irish literature that those disturbances were at any rate assisted from Berlin through the Irish-American party, or, I want to say, the party of extremists in that city. When the rebellion broke out, it led, as such events do, to mistakes on the right side; that is always the way when you have mistakes on the wrong side. And, of course, there was the most unfortunate judicial murder, as it was held by the courts to be, of Mr. Skeffington, which, I think we all as fair-minded men realized, was a bad business. But I must say frankly, that deep as must be the impression that event made upon the Irish minds it does not condone either the organized attempt to assassinate Lord French or a campaign of murder by masked men which recalls the excesses of the Molly Maguires of Pennsylvania a generation ago.

Now it is untrue that while these somewhat tragic occurrences were taking place, British statesmanship was idle. Quite frankly, we had other things to think of than Ireland. But on the very morrow of the rebellion a conference was proposed, a conference to consist exclusively of Irishmen to sit in Ireland,

to which English officials were to be admitted for the sole purpose of laying before them the data and information which was necessary to their consultation. Now, it may be a fact that among certain parties in England difficulties were made as to the recommendations of that conference; but the first and supreme fact about it was this, that on the morrow of the rebellion not only were the Sinn Fein leaders invited, but they were begged, to attend to throw their own ideas, whatever they might be, into the common stock, and to meet, not Englishmen and not even Scotchmen, not certainly Welshmen, but to meet their own fellow Irishmen and work out a solution of the Irish question. Those who were subsequently citizens of the United States worked out a solution of their American question, as you in Canada have been working out the constitution of your dominion.

Well, now, that conference failed. The present position is that we have on the statute book a Home Rule Act which comes into force when peace is declared with Turkey. Really, it is one of the most ironical and curious sidelights upon this whole question, that the problem of Ireland should have a time limit dependent upon the Sultan of Constantinople. As I understand it, of course I have not been in England for a year, Mr. Asquith's policy is to use the Home Rule Act, amending it so as to meet the case of Ulster. Mr. Lloyd George's policy is to substitute for it an entirely new measure giving not merely one parliament to Ireland, but even giving her two, assuring to those two parliaments every opportunity, and, indeed, every inducement, to unite with one another, and so unite the nation; and, in the meantime, link them together with a joint council of, I think I am right in saying, twenty members. Not only are those things secured in the Act, but forty Irish members are still to add what they have always added,—a certain delightful uncertainty—to the debates at Westminster. This bill is, therefore, at the moment the official policy of the British government. My paper happens to represent the opposition, but it is clearly my duty to put before you to-day what is the policy of the responsible authorities in Great Britain irrespective altogether of any political partisanship which may still lurk in my Imperial heart.

The argument for this bill is that it is based upon the precedents of the Dominions; that you here in Canada only achieved your unity by giving to each of your provinces the right to enter into the common Dominion by further consent;

and I understand that you still have menacing your eastern coasts the independent territory of Newfoundland. Then, the same policy was pursued in Australia; where the discontent was, I understand, New South Wales. But she came into the commonwealth of Australia by her own consent. In South Africa, there was Natal; and Natal came in by her own consent. In the case of the United States, of the original thirteen states, I believe, the last one to come in was the smallest. I am always interested in that state because it was from that state of Rhode Island that I had the privilege of selecting my wife. And I remind her sometimes that it was always the most difficult in the Union to manage. Happily for me at this moment, the lady in question is at a safe distance across the water.

The sentiment of Ulster is based upon religious feelings which I need not describe; however, also upon economic considerations. I discussed with leaders of Ulster why it was that they were so afraid of a parliament at Dublin. "Well," they said, "we are conducting industries. They are conducting agriculture. We are not entirely certain whether a Farmers' government will understand all our needs."* Gentlemen, I don't know what I have said. But the point is, really, for Belfast, an important one. They conduct the shipbuilding industry, on the one hand; and the linen industry, on the other hand. The whole of their coal, the whole of their iron, the whole of their wool, the whole of their flax, has to be imported as raw material; and Belfast would cease to exist as a competitor in neutral markets if the revenues of Ireland were to be swollen by tariff on their raw materials to relieve the farmers in the south and west of direct taxation.

Now, I understand that this has to be a very punctual speech, and I do not want to keep you too long. But possibly you might like to have one or two words as to the effect of this question upon Anglo-American relations in the United States. There are those who take a somewhat serious view of what has happened there. Undoubtedly, what I may call the Irish-American forces are using the present circumstances in their not unnatural endeavor to establish a solid block of votes which, in association with other blocks of votes, not to be precisely defined, might sway the presidential election; which is due to occur this Autumn. I think it is not impossible that

*This remark aroused the laughter of the audience, as the Ontario Farmer-Labor Government was then holding its first session.

the political activity of those combined forces has been an important contributory cause to the delay in the ratification of the treaty.

One matter of prejudice has been that "England" has six votes. Apparently, it is not generally known that the Dominion of Canada, for reasons of area, cannot be included within the little Island of England, even with Scotland; and, of course, what has happened has been that those who put forward that amendment have found themselves face to face, not with what they call England at all, but with rising nationhood, well defined and splendidly glorified nationhood, which you have in the Dominion of Canada and the Commonwealth of Australia, and so on. And, really, it is not an unarguable proposition that Canada, having lost almost if not quite as many men as the United States, should be denied in the League of Nations, which she did four or five years hard work to establish, the place which is secured to Haiti, where the freely elected president of the colored republic is an American Admiral, appointed at Washington.

Then there appeared on the scene Mr. DeValera. And I understand it is to him now that whatever funds are subscribed for the liberation of Ireland are apportioned. He has been demanding, only recently, full and complete sovereign independence for Ireland, so complete that Congress has been requested to appoint Consuls to the Irish Republic. Our objection from the British standpoint to that solution is this. I sailed the seas twice from Britain to the New World. I sailed them during the submarine menace. Once I crossed the very tract of ocean where sank the Lusitania. Next I crossed the tract off Ireland, where sank the Tuscania. The British position with regard to Ireland is not distinguishable from the Australian position with regard to the South Sea Islands. We say, we will give them every liberty except the liberty in association with some European power to cut off, not only the United Kingdom, but the whole of northern Europe and France as well from the New World, including yourselves.

President DeValera, as we are accustomed to call him, is now prepared, he says, to accept a form of Cuban Home Rule. On that basis, which I confess represents the entire fallacy of the whole Sinn Fein claim up to the present, it is possible that men so ingenuous of mind as the stupid Englishmen might perhaps form a basis of discussion. Cuban independence, of course, gives to the United States the absolute right, which is exercised, of establishing naval stations in the country, of land-

ing troops there, and even of arranging, as they are now doing, the constitutional system under which the presidential election was to take place.

Gentlemen, I think it would not be wise for me to say more than a word or two upon the possibility that this question has been inflamed on one side or the other by religious forces. The only thing I will say is this. I am a Protestant. It is possible that there may be other Protestants here present today. We all take off our hats and bow our heads before great liberal-minded Catholics, of whom Cardinal Mercier or your own statesman Laurier were world-wide examples. But it is idle to deny that in any church you may get what I may call extreme or clerical forces, which seek to subordinate the broader aspects of citizenship to what, I think, are wrongly conceived to be the special spiritual needs of the communion in question. I can imagine that the Italian mind, so marvellous in its ingenuity, may possibly have been afraid of what was seen to be the manifest rising influence in the world, of the Anglo-Saxon, or English-speaking, communities. With the fall of Austria and the impoverishment of Spain, they may have been afraid. To them I would say this, in what English speaking community, including your own in Quebec, in what such community can you find anywhere a condition other than of absolute religious toleration for the Catholics, to whatever church, Roman or Eastern, they may belong.

I cannot believe for a moment that the spiritual influence of any church is wisely exercised in contradiction to that which, after all, was one of the chief objectives of the Prince of Peace; namely, the peace of the world, the prosperity and happiness of those who are brought within the sound of what we may still in Canada call the Good Book, or the gospel of Him who came to unite all nations. What I fear, I frankly confess, is not so much the embarrassment of England, if I may use that term, as the isolation of Ireland. It is very possible for a nation towards which there has been extended an unusual measure of generous sympathy and a great wave of public affection,—it is possible for such a nation at a time of world crisis, if I may say so, to capitalize her grievances and to weary the heart and ear of mankind with that which cannot be established in solid fact.

For that reason, I would earnestly suggest to those who, like myself and like you, realize the importance of a settlement of this question, that we should work, not for controversy, but for peace. Each side should seek what of good

it can find in the other side, that from the association of those elements which are all the bitterer because they are different from one another, there may arise a new, united, yet still varied Ireland; to please the world with her music, with her poetry, with her ideals, and with all those gifts with which Providence has so liberally endowed what I believe to be a great and gallant, though sometimes misunderstood, people. Gentlemen, I thank you.