



# THE PHILOSOPHY OF IRISH IRELAND

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Published by An Chartlann.



# CONTENTS

<b>Preface</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Chapter I: Is The Irish Nation Dying?</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Chapter II: The Future of the Irish Nation</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Chapter III: The Pale and the Gael</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Chapter IV: Politics, Nationality and Snobs</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Chapter V: The Gaelic Revival</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>Chapter VI: The Battle of Two Civilizations</b>	<b>85</b>

# PREFACE

The first of these articles was published about seven years ago – to be precise, it appeared in 1898, in the December number of the *New Ireland Review*. The remaining five of the series of six articles were also published in the same review – the last, *The Battle of Two Civilizations*, appeared in August, 1900. On the 1st of September of that year the *Leader* was started. The articles contain the reflections, the arguments, and register the convictions that led up to the starting of the *Leader*. They are republished practically as they were written, and no effort has been made to bring them up to date.

They are to be read as having been published prior to the starting of the *Leader*, and as efforts to grapple with and diagnose the situation that then – existed. The last article was republished in a volume containing a collection of essays by various writers. It was revised for that purpose, and part was omitted, and a slight addition made. The article now appears in its original form plus the later addition. I have added nothing to the articles, and the total amount of the subtractions would equal only about four or five lines.

The author believes that the republication is opportune at the present time, and that the volume will be welcomed by the serious and sincere thinkers who are the inspiration and the mainstay of all intellectual and moral movements.

DPM.

# I.

## **Is The Irish Nation Dying?**

“We are a great race”, said a priest to me the first day I arrived in Ireland. As I had not been in my native land for a long period I was glad to hear that flattering statement. I readily assented to the view, the more so as it was so agreeable. Since then, however, I have spent a month in the South of Ireland, and if I met His Reverence this moment there would be a lively argument.

The resident native of a country is, perhaps, too familiar with everything to see anything. The foreigner is always prejudiced; everything that differs from his view is, so far, bad, for we know that each country would like to rule the destinies of the world for the greater good of the human race. I suggest that the native who has lived for years among a different people is usually the best equipped for the role of observer and critic.

I have no desire to add to the existing definitions of that which we call a nation. But if we regard countries as several collections of human energies, then one is differentiated from another by certain general characteristics affecting the manner in which these energies are put forth. A characteristic way of expressing thought, a distinct language, is usually the most prominent mark of a nation. Then there will be found a native colour in arts, industries, literature, social habits, points of view, music, amusements, and so on, throughout all the phases of human activity. It is scarcely necessary to point out that of the things which go to the making of a nation, some, such as art, practically do not exist in Ireland; others, such as the language we speak and the literature we read, are borrowed from another country. There are certainly some traits to be found in Ireland which stamp the people as a distinct race even yet; but they characterise her torpor and decay rather than her development. If one were

asked to sum up the present condition of the country in one epigram, he might say that our activities spring from a foreign inspiration, and that we only preserve a national colour about the manner in which we don't do things. The condition of a country might appear quite hopeless at the first glance, but if there were a real and virile national spirit left in it, it would be too soon to say that the nation was dying. That reflection brings us to the question: Is there such a national spirit in Ireland at the present time?

One can never dare to find fault with one's countrymen but he will be instantly told that there are historical causes which explain all our defects. We are ever laying contribution on poor history to explain away our shortcomings. Was it not Fergus O'Connor, of Chartist fame, something of a giant in physique, who told a gaping English mob that only for famines every Irishman would be as fine a specimen as he? And you will meet men every day who will ask you how in the world could Ireland be prosperous considering that England stole our woollen industry from us some hundreds of years ago. Heaven knows we have overdone that sort of nonsense. Those who don't see eye to eye with the "national" politicians are held up as the enemies of their race – a state of public feeling which is responsible, I think, for the regrettable fact that in Ireland there is no criticism, only abuse.

Still, it were well to look at things as they are, apart from our boasting, our invincible spirit – of which we talk so much – and our '98 processions. There are after all no penal laws now, and we are getting little bits of freedom by degrees. Of course it is true that we cannot make our laws yet. That is a fact which we never forget, and, when we are playing at excuses, it is our trump card. There is an old saying about the making of a country's ballads, the significance of which it would appear we have never rightly appreciated. Everything is to come straight

when we can make those precious laws; in the meantime it would be futile to do anything. In other words, all the national life is to be left to bleed out of us, until we come by our right to make laws for the corpse.

Throughout my visit a few unwelcome questions would keep troubling me for an answer. Has the relief, such as it is, come too late? Have we been crushed so thoroughly that we are unable to rise now that the weight has been somewhat lightened? I look in vain for that fiery hate of subjection we hear so much of from the political platforms. Contempt for England, and all things pertaining thereto, is not to be found outside the sunburstry songs. The Irish Gael, when he does work himself into a passion of patriotism, generates no further energy than that which enables him to shout himself hoarse at the local political meeting. He then goes home, and looking out over his half-door, self-pitying, contemplates the weakness of his own, and the greatness of the English people. It never strikes him – how could it, as he was never told? – that, were he true to himself, he might, his rags notwithstanding, hold his head as proudly as any other man. I have no desire to direct contempt upon him. There he is, an honest, ignorant, spirit-broken man, swelling with a little national self-esteem whilst the brass bands and the banners of some political procession go by. After that his attitude may be summed up in an expression very frequently on his lips – “There’s some ‘myaw’ (mi-ád) on poor ould Ireland.” The Land League, which seemed to make a spirited Irishman of him for a time, was – though a great and necessary agitation – in one sense an utter delusion; for, while it imposed itself upon the people as an outburst of patriotism, it was, in its essence, only a material movement. Whilst it bellowed and sent its echoes all over the world, the real national life was asleep or else gliding away.

The tendencies of the people, at the present time are not altogether inspiring. The ignorant peasants are the most

interesting portion of the population. In them are yet to be seen, undeveloped and clouded perhaps, the marks of the Gaelic race. An impassable gulf separates them from any type to be met with in England. They still possess the unspoiled raw material for the making of a vigorous and a real Irish character. The moment we mount up the social scale, the prospect is less pleasing. Teach the peasant to read and write in English, put a black coat on him and let him earn his living in some “genteel” fashion, and what does he become? Well – they call him Irish.

If you go into a Kerry town in the centre of an Irish-speaking district at the fall of the day, you will probably meet the bank clerk in his knickers and brown boots stroking his moustachios with one hand and petting his dog with the other. He, of course, is above the interests of the common folk. He is not a bad looking specimen of a man, all the same, and he is a Gael if his name is any indication. The type will stand for thousands who are not in banks. A great world of interest and romance surrounds him. Not a stone nor a stream in the neighbourhood but has its history. Most of the interest is, however, inseparable from a knowledge of the Irish language, and of course he knows nothing so common as that; even if he did he would deny it. He might learn much about his country in the English tongue if he cared to, but he prefers to read *Tit Bits*, and discover how many times one issue if stretched out would go round the world and that sort of thing. He is a man of culture amongst the native savages. He may know an Irish phrase or two by rote which he will hurl now and again at the head of the servant-maid and laugh consumedly at the brilliant joke. But where are the distinctive marks of nationality about this man? Further up the street you will probably meet a young fellow who considers himself very clever, and who is credited, in a vague sort of way, with being a classical scholar, and who certainly has written letters to the newspapers. Though about thirty years of age, he has never done anything for his living, as his father keeps him.

The four or five others along with him by no means run any risk of sinking into an early grave by reason of the amount of work they have to do. This group are very “patriotic.” The Irish language, it is well to remember, is spoken in their hearing every day.

However, upon the language and upon the people who speak it, they look down with bragging contempt until they are challenged to justify their attitude. Then their superior airs desert them, and they begin to look sheepish. If you ask them why, as they are patriotic men and have leisure, they are not anxious to learn something of their native tongue and their native literature, they all have the one reply. If they said that the language was too difficult, it might pass as a kind of excuse, even though we knew that some of them stayed up of nights learning a little bit of French or Latin. But nothing of the kind. The universal answer is – “Ah, sure, what use would it be to us?” The utilitarian point of view of these young men, who during the greater part of the day have nothing useful to do, is really exasperating. The busy man who can get profitable work for his every waking hour, may, with some reason, refuse work otherwise desirable, because it would be of no use to him; but when one hears men whose sentiments are hotly “patriotic” and whose chief business is to kill time, talking in this way, it fills one with dismay. Has the iron gone in so far that even the sense of the ludicrous has been driven out? Of course the fact is, these men take no interest whatever in their country; they have ceased to be Irish, except in name and in what they call “politics”. How they would chaff one of their friends if he told them that he loved one girl and despised another and showed his feelings by giving all his attention to the latter! For it is to England and her tittle-tattle periodicals that they turn their eyes and open their hearts. On all sides one sees only too much evidence that the people are secretly content to be a conquered race, though they have not the honesty to admit it. Even the pride that frequently dignifies

failure is not there. There is nothing masculine in the character; and when the men do fall into line, with green banners overhead, and shout themselves hoarse, is it not rather a feminine screech, a delirious burst of defiance on a background of sluggishness and despair?

I am being misunderstood if this is considered as a wholesale denunciation of the people; rather it is a denunciation of the false standards of Nationality that have grown up everywhere and are quickly driving everyone into the mire. The native charm of the Gaelic race takes a lot of killing, and good nature we have always with us. When this much has been admitted, all that remains to be added is that the people have "patriotic" opinions. It would be interesting to inquire into the development of that strange idea, that a set of professed political opinions, which may or may not be believed in, constitutes a man a patriot. Any person outside Ireland might, and many actually do, see eye to eye politically with Irishmen. I suggest that, looked at from any comprehensive standpoint, "Ireland a Nation" is rapidly dissolving out of view.

Are there any causes, besides national degeneration, for this deplorable state of affairs? We must allow at once that an aristocracy and society, more or less alien in blood and almost exclusively alien in feeling, is a great stumbling-block to the growth and development of character racy of the soil. Irish fashionable society is, as we know, a satellite of Mayfair. It follows the English lead in everything. Under these circumstances, what is there for the Irish masses to follow? In Ireland the struggle between the path of least resistance and some other path that is vaguely felt to be national is always going on. The natural tendency is to follow our "betters". The people who drive in carriages, and hold authority in the land, form, under normal conditions, the social standards; in them is vested the right to confer social distinction and set the fashion

for the manners and popular points of view of the country. In Ireland, where conditions are never normal, and where the right of the classes to influence the country is flouted, the temptation to follow their lead has, nevertheless, been apparently too great. A strong man may stand out against it; but the masses are not composed of robust units.

They must stand in a body with a clearly defined purpose, or drift straggling with the tide. I need not pause to point out what the Irish “classes” think of anything Irish. In England they are glad enough to glory in the name of Ireland, on the principle, no doubt, that cows in Connacht have long horns. In Ireland they have been brought up to despise everything racy of their native land and of the Gaelic people. During all this century we notice these two contending forces at work – the sense of a separate nationality, with the duties it entails, warring against the natural tendency to imitate the rich and mighty, who happen to be a foreign race. Under the most favourable conditions the struggle would be a hard one. But there was no orderly struggle; every man was left to fight for himself if he chose; he generally didn’t choose, and all along the line we have given our nationality away with our eyes open. We have given so much of it away that in recent years the word has lost all meaning for us except as an expression for a certain set of political opinions.

We are now neither good English nor good Irish. While everyone has been quarrelling about political party cries, the essentials of national life have been overlooked. From whom can one get any rational expression of that nationality about which all talk so loudly? The ’98 processions are a grand intoxication, and no more. What, after all, was the great Wolfe Tone demonstration significant of? Violent, undefined passions of love and hate probably filled most of the great mass who took – I don’t know how many hours – to pass a given point. How many of them had any seriously considered views, reasonable or unreasonable, as

to the building up of a national life? What was it all but a mere parade of men being dragged further and further after the British chariot, or rather not being dragged, but going open-eyed that way, the while they cried out to deceive themselves and the world: – “ We are not English!” If not, what are they? let me ask again. They have discarded their language, and they know nothing of their literature. The national character was not allowed to grow from its own roots, but was cut off from the parent tree and engrafted clumsily on the worst branches of the British oak.

The prevailing manners at the present time are the resultant of good-nature, the influence of Lover’s novels, and a half-hearted attempt to copy the English lower middle class, who, in the shape of cheap holiday trippers, are a dream of gentility to the Irish snob. Sulky West Britons is the only name by which the great majority of “Nationalists” can be designated. Of course, everybody agrees to give up the well-to-do and “respectable” natives – those who send, or would like to send, their children to English schools for good-breeding and the accent – as hopeless. Further, we are constantly told that the mainstay of “nationality” is the working men in the towns; the people who preserve in some degree the traditions of the Gael are the ignorant peasants. This state of affairs points to a rather hopeless outlook. Improve the condition of the peasants and you wipe out the traditions and the language; advance the more intelligent of the working men, as a consequence of material prosperity, into a higher class, and you weaken the prop even of “nationality,” and add to the already large contingent of the vulgargenteel. Truly, there is something rotten in the state.

It is hard to put much blame on the masses. For what are they to do? They look for light and they get none. All the guidance they receive from those who would lead them is to join this political league or that political league, and cry – “Down with the

English". When they have done that they are taught that they have performed the whole duty of Irishmen. As for the language and such trifles as that, the politicians have taught them to ask – What use are they? That material standard has been drummed into them with unwearied energy. It has one bright side. The people are now asking – What use are the politicians? Has history ever presented such a sorry spectacle as an historic nation wiping herself out while her flags are flying and her big drums beating? Why not call ourselves British right away and have done with all this clatter and clap-trap about nothing, which we miscall nationality? It deceives no one but ourselves; and if we would only stop this self-deception for a while we might get a better perspective of things and a clearer view of what nationality means. If instead of talking pikes and blunderbusses and bragging about being a great people we learned in public, what so many have a suspicion of in private, that we are getting perilously near that time when we shan't be a distinctive people at all, we might then mend our ways and do something masculine.

## II.

# **The Future of the Irish Nation**

If any one, after reading the title of this paper, should suppose that the author considers himself a prophet, and that the future is about to be unfolded before him, he had better read no further than this. What follows is only an attempt, and, perhaps a rough one at that, to think out the present situation.

A great many people in Ireland, unfortunately, live from hand to mouth; most of them, apparently, think after that fashion also. They not only think in that unsatisfactory way, but they impose arbitrary limits on their thinking. There are certain things which the average Irish mind will never allow as debatable. The spirit of nationality is eternal – that is a fine-flowing Irish maxim. No one ever thinks of asking himself – Is it? We nearly won in '98; we may win another time. Another undisputed view. No one ever dares to ask himself – Can we? I suppose the Gael is a sensuous creature, liking music, rhetoric and day-dreams, and hating realities when they wear a dour and threatening look. We are the most fitted people in the world for living in a fool's paradise.

No man of any sense would dream that this peculiarity of the Gael can be eradicated. No Irishman would wish it to be so. In many of its manifestations this characteristic of the Gael is his greatest charm. His optimism and hope spring from it; his good humour flows from it; his happiness and content, amid surroundings that would be intolerable to a more matter-of-fact nature, depend upon it. We can't have our cake and eat it. And as we all are proud of the glamour and light-heartedness that are part of our national disposition, we must not grumble too much at the disadvantages which they carry in their train. But when these characteristics are indulged in to such an extent as to

threaten our very existence as a nation, it is time to call a halt and examine whither we are drifting. The dreamy Spaniards, who possess so many characteristics like our own, had a very cruel awakening when 'they found that the courage of their sailors, which might have swept the world under medieval conditions, was powerless before the money and ships of the Yankee. Even if the Anglo-Saxon race, or, as it is now being called, the English-speaking race, stopped where it is we could not keep on in our present way without disaster. But the English-speaking race, in the meshes of which we are interwoven by a thousand material and immaterial ties, is making the pace, and we must either stand up to it – which I fear we cannot; isolate ourselves from its influence – which we largely can do; or else get trodden on and swallowed up – which, it appears to me, is, if we keep on as we are going, inevitable.

I doubt if there is one Irishman who has ever mounted a platform to “speechify” who has not, at some time or another, declaimed that fine old hackneyed saying of Burke’s – “The age of chivalry is gone”. In so far as chivalry means sentimentalism, tilting at wind-mills, and cutting other absurd capers, it is, unfortunately, one of the things that has not gone out of Ireland yet. But the most remarkable thing about this quotation is that the other part of it – “That of sophisters, economists, and calculators has succeeded” – is never allowed to have a look in. None so poor as to repeat it. Yet economic tendencies. sway the world now. The highest aim of English and other statesmanship is to find new markets. What is known as the industrial revolution has changed the face of the world and fundamentally altered the forces that make the figures move. The new forces have driven Ireland into an ugly economic corner. Some of us keep on prating about physical force, whilst the weapons of every country are becoming more complex and expensive, and Ireland is losing what little she had. She is like a huxter’s shop in competition with a monster store, if we imagine that the huxter

is still unable to see that the conditions of competition have changed since his rival was a huxter also. Owing to stagnation of thought, or some other reason, we keep on thinking that what was good enough for us a hundred years ago will serve us very well to-day. If English weapons of war had not improved we might have had another '98 in the past year of grace, and have been more successful than on the last occasion. I remember visiting the Naval Exhibition some years ago with a friend of mine who had "gone out" with his rifle in the affair at Tallaght. I believe that until he had seen the stupendous engines of modern warfare there he nursed the hope that he might shoulder that rifle again in the cause of the liberty of his country. Up to this we have retained a little bit of our nationality by various means. The forces at work that tend to crush out this remnant are changing and growing every day, whilst we go on declaiming and growling and demonstrating, and, what is worse, persuading ourselves that we are a parcel of patriotic heroes, whilst all the time the observer with common sense sees that we are only playing the parts of hysterical old women.

Some time previous to 1782 the English who happened to be born in Ireland took a dislike to their mother country for various reasons not necessary to mention. The Irish people, who at this time were nearly all Gaelic-speaking and sunk in enforced ignorance, took little or no interest in this family dispute. Those few of them who did wished Grattan and his followers well, as they considered that the successful issue of the revolt would be beneficial to the mere Irish. This English revolt has ever since imposed itself upon the people as a thing embodying all the attributes of Irish nationality. Later on, O'Connell roused the Irish nation, for the first time in modern history, but failed in his main purpose. He started the method of gaining influence over the people by flattering them. The poor people were so crushed at that time that a large amount of flattery was probably good for them and justifiable. But this method, after the circumstances

that called for it had disappeared, has remained the one method of all our minor leaders since. Every one of them has his few fine-sounding flourishes with which he feeds the elemental appetite of the Irish gallery. They have got so much of that sweet stuff, with spicy personal abuse as a condiment, that they make wry faces at any other fare. One of the most common flourishes of the minor leader is the one about “the Isle of Destiny”, and what great vague things it is going to do in a manner never explained, as the gallery don’t want explanations. Then the minor leader knows that a Sarsfield flourish will always bring down the house; and a reference to Owen Roe, in a language which that chieftain would not have insulted his throat by attempting to speak, stamps him as a man deeply versed in his country’s historic lore. The ingredients that go to make a minor Irish leader are very simple – no wonder the trade is overcrowded. In many ways the Irish mind is very shrewd, but the Irish love of being in rosy conceit of the nation plays it strange tricks. We are conscious that we are breaking into fragments, but yet we somehow manage to keep our spirits up. We all tell one another that we are wonderful people, and we are happy on the strength of one another’s bombast. Since O’Connell’s time, the whole country, with the exception of a few primitive and remote patches, has lost all knowledge of the national language. In O’Connell’s time, Ireland, so far as the great body of the people were concerned, had no capital city. The Gaels did not read or write, and all they had to feed and influence their minds were the old stories and gossip in their native tongue. If the conditions under which they lived made advance impossible, they, at least, secured isolation. At the present time the capital of Ireland is London. This great change, with all that it implies, is a fact that must be reckoned with.

Let us attempt to trace the probable development of Ireland assuming the continued play of existing forces on both sides. First of all the age of economics has come. The human

foundation of economic science is Adam Smith's "economic man", the individual who follows his self-interest as measured in terms of cash. There is not any person who absolutely corresponds to the "economic man", but we all tend that way. We are all economic men qualified by prejudices, sentiments, affections and so forth. How does the tendency which impels the man with sixpence to cross to the other side of the road, if he can get sevenpence, affect "Ireland a Nation"? Ireland is a poor country, situated, for all practical purposes, next to the two richest countries in the world, with both of which she is now in perfect accord as regards language. One country rules her – or tries to do so – and claims her inhabitants as fellow-countrymen when they behave themselves: the other contains more Irish blood than Ireland herself. She has a sentimental attachment for the United States: she has a sentimental hatred for England. The latter feeling, however, puts no barrier between them to hinder the play of economic tendencies; on the contrary, Irishmen take a keen delight in making good livelihoods out of their enemies. At present there is no stopping the march of Irishmen to the best markets, and every market in these English-speaking countries is open to us. The melancholy procession is never-ending. Every youngster with a little education and some enterprise looks round on his country, and, with few exceptions, sees no possible career for him in it, nor feels any compelling ties to bind him to it. He shakes the dust of Ireland from his feet on the first opportunity. I have seen it remarked somewhere that if the names of the most prominent 100 or 1,000 Irishmen were collected, nearly all of them would be found to belong to men who have left their country for ever. Many of them have gone vowing that at the first opportunity they would return; but, nevertheless, Ireland sees them no more.

Nearly all young Irishmen keep one eye on the possibility of emigrating. Their characters are formed under the shadow of that possibility, and they look upon their life in Ireland as a

transitory fact. They give up their country, and they shape all their endeavours with a view to preparing themselves for a foreign environment. If eventually they do not emigrate they help on the more vigorously the Anglicisation of their neighbours. Some time ago I was driving through a remote part of Kerry, and stopped at a village hotel to have something to eat. I invited the driver – a fine sturdy young chap – in, and he ate with his fingers. “Now, if I go to America,” said he, “they’ll make game o’ me for not bein’ able to use a knife and fork”. The eye is always on America or somewhere else. The point which I want this story to impress is this: If that man did not contemplate the probability of going to America he would be content during the course of his life, were it the easier way, to eat with his feet. Every incentive comes from abroad, and the Irish nation so deeply despises itself that it has ceased to develop by force of its own vitality. The Irish people who emigrate, never having been really Irish at all, quickly become absorbed into whatever community they fall among, during their own lifetime; and in the next generation all signs of their Irish origin are usually lost. I know there may be some people who will feel inclined to throw down this article at this point and say – “Bosh!” They will be those who consider that the Irish-American of the boasting, blaspheming, vulgar type has preserved his Nationality.

Alongside of the outgoing Irish procession there is the foreign incoming one. Ireland is civilised, but she cannot supply the wherewithal for her own civilization. Even the little town from the back of God-speed is anxious in some ways to be up-to-date, and to toe the line with the great world outside. Ireland has invented nothing of importance during the century except the Dunlop tyre. I don’t say this as a reproach, as there are good reasons to explain the why and wherefore; and Irishmen abroad have done their share in this kind of progress. I only state it as a fact. But Ireland cries for very many of the modern mechanical inventions. Twenty years ago the people would have their

photographs taken, like the rest of the advanced world, and a little stream of skilled men crossed the Channel and cornered that business before the native had a chance. She wants electric light, and again a little cargo of Saxons are unloaded on the Irish quays. Waterworks, railways and all the other modern developments have each deposited its little foreign colony in our midst. In Dublin the huxters' shops and the public houses have Irish names over their doors, but the insurance offices and other complex institutions are largely controlled by Scotchmen. This tendency will go on because Ireland will keep demanding ready-made skill of a new kind which she can only get in so many cases from outside her own shores, for she has no way of developing it herself. She has become, from an economic point of view, a poor county of England. No one denies that Ireland can supply raw human material as good as, if not better than, any country in the world; but a large proportion of her people must get their experience and training out of Ireland. This state of affairs brings about facts like these: – When Ireland wants a new kind of mechanic she has got to import him from England or elsewhere, whilst on the other hand when England requires to make, say a Tower Bridge, she has to get an Irishman to engineer it. And the saddest part of it is that though Ireland is in this peculiarly weak economic position, the efforts of the enthusiasts to arouse her people to the vital necessity of strengthening the nation at this weak point are treated with shameful apathy, and are sometimes looked on with suspicion. The prating mock-rebel has no stomach for such prosy things. I do not believe that it was the intrinsic importance of the Financial Relations Question which caused it to spring so suddenly into popularity, but the grand opportunity which it offered for indulging in the sensuous pleasure of calling England – what, no doubt, she is – a robber and a cheat. A few years ago I was present at a very able lecture on the economic history of Ireland, after which there was a long discussion. During the course of the discussion even the word

economy was scarcely uttered, but the hall rang with the rankest rebel clap-trap that one could wish not to hear.

What prospect, in view of this state of affairs, has Ireland a Nation in the future? The social and intellectual forces working in Ireland herself make for completing the destruction of whatever relics of nationality yet remain; and the outgoing stream, ever carrying away a portion of the cream of the race, and the incoming stream, hasten on the work. It may be said that the influx of the British into Ireland is very small, and that, in any case, history will repeat itself, and that they will in time become more Irish than the Irish themselves. I can see no foundation for this view; those who hold it forget the little fact that the relative conditions which obtain to-day are somewhat different from those which obtained three, four, five hundred years ago. When Ireland absorbed strangers, she was a strong, positive entity; she had customs, laws, language, and ways of thinking of her own. She held to these with grim fanatic intensity, and treated all foreign ways with a scorn perhaps greater than they deserved. There was something in the land in those days that had absorbing power. Is there anything now? No man can write to-day as Edmund Spenser wrote three hundred years ago – “It seemeth straunge to me that the English should take more delight to speake that language (Gaelic) than theyre owne, wheras they should, me thinks, rather take scorne to acquaynte theyr tonges therewith: for it hath bene ever the use of the conquerours to dispise the language of the conquered, and to force him by all meanes to learne his.” The tables are turned now. We have no scorn for the ways of strangers; we welcome them as teachers; we have nothing to teach them; every poor little ill-bred Saxon that comes along is a giver of light and a maker of manners. They hold the loadstone, and the Irish nation is moving their way.

I do not think it is in any way extravagant to predict that, as Irishmen refuse to rise to the economic occasion, the time is not far off when many of such industries as are suitable to the present condition of Ireland will be largely “run” by English commercial enterprise. It will not be done on the wholesale scale in which the South African Republic is exploited; but England is almost sure to send us over capital, skilled managers and foremen, to replace the native ability economic tendencies have, and will have, drawn out of Ireland, and the natives will do the servile work at wages lower than must be paid in England. Then there is the tourist traffic, which is already upon us, but yet in nothing like the volume which it is bound to assume. What good can this traffic do to Ireland a Nation? Without speaking of the demoralising influence of the “tripper” himself, who forms the great bulk of the present-day touring public, there will be the troops of French chefs and Swiss waiters, and English managers and supernumeraries, which the tourist will demand for his money, for the man who pays call the tune. The English visitor must have a shock-headed Swiss to wait upon him, and Paddy will be good enough to laugh at. And Paddy has lost so much of his self-respect that he is only too glad to make a buffoon of himself for a few English coppers. In this age, when economic tendencies rule the world, there is no stopping the tourist development. Yet, this particular industry breeds some of the meanest types of the human species. It is all fawning on vulgar people with money, tip-taking and cringing. It breeds beggars in rags and beggars in broad-cloth – products which, I need scarcely point out, do not tend to the glory or preservation of Ireland a Nation.

For many years the Irish nation has been breaking up before the inexorable forces of political economy. The Irish language was dropped, because it hindered the people from making their way in the world; millions have left their native land through necessity or with the money-making fever in their veins, and the

best intellect of the country has wandered, does and will wander, all over the world for the golden markets of foreign lands. We have all been brought up from our cradles in a half-hearted Anglo-Saxon civilization, as it was possibly amongst that people that we should have to seek our fortunes. There is certainly a sediment of the race that was not influenced. Some of the country poor learnt nothing, and we despise them; a still lesser number remained Gaelic-speaking, by the accident of their geographical position, and we make game of them.

Amid all this decomposition of the nation there is one movement that is claimed to have risen spontaneous out of the soul of Ireland. A certain number of Irish literary men have "made a market" – just as stock-jobbers do in another commodity – in a certain vague thing, which is indistinctly known as "the Celtic note" in English literature, and they earn their fame and livelihood by supplying the demand which they have honourably and with much advertising created. We make no secret of the reason why we have dropped our language, have shut out our past, and cultivate Anglo-Saxon ways. We have done them all in the light of day, brutally, frankly – for our living. But an intelligent people are asked to believe that the manufacture of the before-mentioned "Celtic note" is a grand symbol of an Irish national intellectual awakening. This, it appears to me, is one of the most glaring frauds that the credulous Irish people ever swallowed. I hope no one will think that I am attacking the "Celtic note" from an English literary point of view. I am looking at it merely from the point of view of the Irish nation, of which it is put forward as a luminous manifestation, Beyond being a means of fame and living to those who can supply the demand, what good is the "Celtic note" in English literature to the Irish nation? What good is it to any, except the owners of them, that Irish names figure largely in current English literature? I hasten to allow that it secures for Ireland a little bit of English patronising praise, which is at

present the breath of our Irish national nostrils. We were recently asked to swell ourselves out with pride after contemplating the English debt to Irish literature. What a happy pass we have come to when we cry out with joy because of the gifts we have given our enemies. Has the Irish nation got anything for it? Nations which give away things and get nothing in return are playing the fool; nations that pride themselves on their folly are crazy. The next thing which we shall be asked to pride ourselves about is that we give England two-and-a-half millions a year for nothing.

I have attempted to show that economic forces make for the obliteration of the Irish nation. The question which every Irishman should think out for himself is whether it is better to allow economic tendency to work its way free from all sentimental obstructions, or whether he will elect to attempt to stem the tide and endeavour to fight on for the realisation of the dream of Ireland a Nation. History satisfies us that when Irishmen have a good definite sentiment to stick to they can put their backs against the wall and defy a material world in arms. Economic force and ruthless oppression combined could not rob the Catholic Irish of the religion which they believe to be right, and these forces, were they combined again, cannot kill the Irish nation if the Irish nation makes up its mind to live.

It was true all through this century – and it is true now – that legislative independence – even entire political separation – would only have cleared the decks for the work of the rehabilitation of the Irish nation; and, if under present conditions the people do nothing but keep their eyes on the English Parliament and Irish political agitators, I submit, for the broad reasons I have referred to, that the break up of the Irish nation will shortly have gone too far for remedy. It is unpleasant to watch a man going to the devil with the very best of muddle-headed intentions. If Ireland will go to the devil, let her go as a

responsible entity, and not drift there unknowingly, while she is making a great demonstration ploughing the sands. If we don't care about Ireland a Nation, if we won't pay the price at which it must be bought, let us admit the fact to ourselves, and shape our course accordingly. Take all such literature as "Speeches from the Dock" from the hands of the Irish youth. The little squint-eyed bit of nationality, the spirit of impotent hate and surly growl, which we get from such sources, do no good under present conditions. On the contrary the sentimental and ineffective sulks which these books put most of us into do us a great deal of material harm. Even abroad, the '98 spirit, the spirit which causes us to sit down and put our hats on when "God Save the Queen" is struck up, shuts us out from a great many avenues that would lead to our better material well-being; and it creates an anti-Irish prejudice in England which falls hardly on the Irish working classes in the British towns and cities. Why not make a decent job of it while we are about it, and fire the whole national bag of tricks into oblivion – send "Speeches from the Dock" and the likes of it after our language, customs, literature, and self-respect? Let us be Irish as the lowland Scotch are Scotch. Let us shout that God may save the Queen or anyone else whom it may serve our policy to toady to at the moment. Let us work up an ambition in the hearts of Irish youth to become Empire makers and civilisers of the heathen. If the rebel sentiment against serving the Empire were removed I do not think it would be too much to say that hundreds of Irish boys, out of the National and Christian Brothers' Schools, would rise to the front ranks of Empire-makers, and load their pockets with riches: as it is they stop at home and stultify themselves, or go abroad organising insurrections which never come off. If Ireland became politically "loyal," as the logical extension of her other backslidings, she would in no way, I submit, hasten the passing of the nation. And think of what we should gain – we should get cart-loads of the English praise that we thirst after: we should get a royal residence which would induce thousands and

thousands of additional ill-bred trippers to come into our midst, and teach us genteel English manners of speech and behaviour; the Mayors of Dublin and Cork would stand a chance of being knighted, as well as those of Belfast and Derry; politicians – for there would be still politicians – would be free to hob-nob with high placed people without prejudice to their avocation as mob orators. In short, a little beggarly smug millennium might be expected to descend upon the land. The Irish people would at least have acted thoroughly and logically, and those who did not like the new complexion of things could leave it, and forget that they ever had a country. As it is, so strong is the mere rebel sentiment, that an Irishman feels he does something most unscrupulous if he touches Dublin Castle with a tongue, with the result, that the Government officials in Ireland – when they are Irish – are frequently men who have turned venomously against their country, just as people who change their religion, from some unworthy motive, usually turn on their former persuasion. Yet, is the Irishman who thanks God he has a country to sell, and goes up to Dublin Castle and sells it, doing any more real damage to “Ireland a Nation” than the shouting rebel who holds himself aloof, drifts with the Anglicising tide, and waits, sulking in poverty, for something which never turns up? Both are selling their country, and isn’t there something to be said for the man who is sensible enough to get something for what he gives away?

If this thorough and logical policy does not meet with the approval of the Irish people let them take the other practical and effective course. The average Irish head does not take kindly to thinking out national problems for itself; but, I believe, the instinct of every Irish heart is to compass by some means or other a real separation from England – not the separation adorned with the bleeding heads of “loyalists”, and illuminated by their burning homes, that the Primrose dames love to shriek about, but a separation of national personality, the keeping distinct and

clear cut as many things as possible that may mark us off from our neighbours. Along this line lies the only effective way in which we can attempt to regain our lost nationality. We must retrace our steps, and take as much of our inspiration as possible from our own country and its history. We must be original Irish, and not imitation English. Above all, we must re-learn our language, and become a bi-lingual people. For, the great connecting link between us and the real Ireland, which few of us know anything about, is the Gaelic tongue. A national language will differentiate us from the rest of the world, and keep us ever in mind that we are an entity of original and historic growth, not a parasite stuck on to the side of England because our own heart was too weak to keep the vital spark in us. A distinct language is the great weapon by which we can ward off undue foreign influence, and keep ourselves surrounded by a racy Irish atmosphere. The value of such a language as a fount of a hundred inspirations; its direct and indirect influence on the character of a people; its potent isolating power, are things gone beyond the necessity of proof now. The state of Wales, where political union is not questioned, contrasted with the state of Ireland, where we have been working all the century to hoist the harp without the crown, bears its own eloquent witness; the language wars on the Continent proclaim them, and we have the echo of the voice of the Irish-hating Spenser ringing out from three hundred years ago – “for it hath ever bene the use of the conquerors to dispise the language of the conquered, and to force him by all meanes to learne his”. There is one great advantage which a language movement has over a political agitation, an advantage which must appeal to a people sick to despair with disappointed hopes – it cannot be betrayed by any leaders. The death of one man, or the stupidity and cowardice of a section in an hour of crisis, cannot render years of labour worse than useless: every move is a step forward and a step that cannot be blotted out. A movement of this kind stands like a cone upon its base, not like so many of our disastrous agitations, a cone

upon its apex with one man holding it in place. When the fashionable young Irishman and woman, not overburdened with strength of character – the type which in every community follows the tide whithersoever it may lead – can talk Irish as well as English, and knows more of the real Ireland than of modern London, then there will be a genuine Irish nation – whoever may be making the laws – which economic tendencies, battering rams, or the Queen's soldiers will be powerless to kill. If anyone is startled at this view, and decides that it is impossible of realisation, that the price is too much, the difficulties too great, then let him have the courage of his convictions, think things out to a rational conclusion, and cease playing the fool.

As far as I can see the national journals do not agree with this view, neither do the rank and file of the people – they in fact do not appreciate that it has any real importance whatever. In face of the fact that so many numerically – even though proportionately they are not considerable – hold grimly by the necessity of restoring the language as they would by an article of faith, it were time that the national papers should try to justify their attitude by attempting to show the movement up to ridicule, and prove that this hankering after an old language is only at best a fad or a mere academic movement. Some of the papers countenance it, others of them patronise it, none stick their faith to it, but all are apparently afraid to attack it. This is not spirited. The political leaders for the most part follow a similar flabby policy. It is allowed a look in on sufferance in the paper programmes of some of the Irish-at-Home-and-Abroad conventions, but nothing comes of it. Human nature in essentials is the same all the world over. The English Government take no notice of an Irish grievance until things are made hot for it, and the Irish powers that be, the politicians and the press, will go on ignoring this national movement until it becomes so pressing that they will have to swallow it whether they will or no. A

master of tactics, like Parnell, would have seen the importance of annexing it before he was publicly forced to adopt it.

At the present moment the Ireland that we love is an Ireland of our dreams and fancies, in which we can live as well – perhaps better – though we exist and move on a foreign soil. The real Ireland is not a land of heart's desire. Does a patriotic Irishman who has lived and made a fortune abroad ever go back to spend the rest of his days in the land of his birth? A few have tried it. There was Kevin Izod O'Doherty, for instance, who came back to sniff his native air, and, evidently not liking the smell of it, departed after a decent interval. The people who emigrated from Ireland were only about half Irish when they left, and in a foreign environment they quickly became absorbed. I once heard a man bewailing bitterly the lack of patriotism on the part of those Irishmen who have become rich abroad, and who refuse to come back to Ireland when they retire from their work. But the fault is in Ireland and not in the voluntary exile. Where is the motive to come from? The man was sent out in the first place half Anglicised, and the associations that might have surrounded his younger years, and which would appeal to him in later times, he never experienced. What is there to come back to? Whatever part of the Anglo-Saxon world he may be in he hears better English spoken, he finds more thought and activity, more thoroughness and independence of character: he finds, in short, that in everything that appeals to a man the real is better than the imitation.

When an Irish generation is brought up with a knowledge of the Irish language, and gets a view through that, the only possible medium, of the character, and genius of their race, they will feel a thousand new cords binding them to their native country. They will cease to be the unworkable compound which they are now – Gaels by heredity, and English by adoption. It is not conceivable that the Irish born under such circumstances will

cease to be drawn to the better economic markets of the English-speaking countries, but though the relative economic weakness of Ireland will remain a permanent fact, her position is capable of being considerably strengthened, and a real Irish atmosphere would act as a barrier to emigration by tying the people's hearts to their country, and by intensifying the foreign nature of other lands. And even those who do go will have been licked into national shape before their departure, and will carry a good deal of their Irish atmosphere along with them, and help to form genuine Irish colonies across the seas. Had the Irish-speaking millions who left Ireland since the Famine been educated, self-respecting men, instead of being cringing spirits ashamed of their language, great tracts of the United States might be Irish speaking and Irish thinking: had the sea-divided Gael carried their language with them in their wanderings what a potent imperial race the Irish would be to-day! We have lost those emigrants in a two-fold sense: they went out from us, and the English-speaking race which threatens to swamp us, swept them into her net. English traditions, language and influence have been made irresistible by the colonising Irish Gael!

I have refrained from referring to many points for fear of dragging out this paper to an unwelcome length. Yet, if I succeed in inducing anyone who may read it to grip the question for himself from the points of view I have taken, he can go into the bye-ways of reflection which it leads to, on his own head, as well as he could on mine. I have made a rough effort in one article to present a picture of a situation which should, properly, be treated piece by piece in half-a-dozen, and, therefore, all attempt at that nicely-regulated sequence and finish, which lazy-minded readers crave for, had to be abandoned. I hope no one will take away the impression that in my eagerness to dethrone political agitation from its present false position as the begin-all and end-all of Irish nationhood, I wish in any way to belittle its necessity and importance in its relative place. But the time has come when

people and politicians must be made to recognise that there are two other Irish movements as important as politics, and which have an equal right to as much public attention as Home Rule. Both movements are in their infancy yet, but each has a great possibility before it. One is the movement which aims at making the best of Ireland's economic opportunities, and the other, that for reviving a universal interest in all that appertains to the Gael and his language.

### III.

## **The Pale and the Gael**

After the fall of Limerick, the country was leaderless, soldierless, without any effective powers of resistance, and England, true to her instincts, let loose the Penal Laws to kick her foe when she had got her down. Ireland, however, clung, with her characteristic feminine tenacity and capacity for suffering, to her faith, her habits, and her language. At this period the line of demarcation between the races was scarcely blurred; now it is very much to seek. But already the forces were hatching that were destined to completely turn the flank of the Irish position. Sophistries were springing up that were to blind her and send her like a wild horse galloping to destruction. The finishing stroke was delivered at the historic Irish nation when, on a fateful day in 1782, Grattan bowed before "the august majesty" of the Irish nation. Looking back upon that episode in the light of subsequent history, the shouts of victory and exultation reverberating from College Green are drowned by the mournful peals of the death-knell rising on all sides outside the Pale. The corpse of every saint and scholar in Ireland must have turned in its grave – had it the gift of seeing into futurity – when, having witnessed the sacrifice of the things which make the soul of nations, it saw in the distance the inevitable corruption of Ireland. The spirit of Molyneux and Swift – that same spirit which Grattan apostrophised, the spirit which 99 out of every 100 of us still look up to as our polar star – was the death of those elements of the Irish race that could have defied the attacks that were to come. It started the spirit of English civilization and English progress in our midst, and the Irish race, ceasing to think for itself, has since persistently mistaken this for the spirit of the Irish nation. This movement deceived a people that might otherwise have been annihilated – and then the great national

question would at least have been settled for ever – but who could not be conquered so long as they had anything to put their back against. It caused the Irish people as a whole to walk into a trap which no force on earth could have driven them into.

If the position of the Gael, the matrix of the Irish people, was degraded and weak beyond expression at this period, it is at least some satisfaction to know that that state was due not to their immediate fault, that is, not to any fault operating at that time which it was in their power to remedy, but to the bigotry and bullying instinct of the British people. In allowing the spirit of Swift to take the place of the spirit of Ireland in the minds of those who stand out in the Irish history of that time, the Gaels in the background were blameless as they were helpless; not so those who during all this century have allowed this unnatural state of affairs to continue. In Swift's time the Pale was a kind of buffer state between the British and the Irish. In an evil hour the Pale got into the grumps, and after a while it adorned this temper, which had sprung largely from sordid motives, with the title of patriotism. But there was little patriotism in it. There was some spirit, some nobility, a little genius, greatly exaggerated, in the movement commenced by Molyneux and carried to success by Grattan, but beyond a few traces of local colour, the whole thing was English, where it was not inspired by the American, and later on by the French Revolution. When we look back upon 1782 from 1899, we see it not in the halo of a glorious victory, but in the shape of an animated skull grinning at us, an emblem of victory perhaps – the victory of death. It did not mark a noble but a disastrous epoch and turning point in Irish history. It sent us adrift in a new world by which we were first corrupted and then eaten up; it set up a new temple before which we have burned incense, and have made the greatest sacrifice in our power – the sacrifice of our national character. It stimulated some of the people into a foreign activity; it threw back others into a profound torpor defying explanation so far. The peasant

does not understand the Anglicised Irishman, and the West British rebel growls with feigned contempt – not real contempt, because he feels in his heart that he is a fit object for that himself – about the unresponsive peasant. The West Briton drifts with the tide, clutching a bit of green rag to remind him of the place from whence he came and the poor country Gael, finding himself between two stools, gets bewildered, falls to the ground, and stops there. The turning point of 1782 is where we must look for explanations. Smith O’Brien and John Mitchel lashed the Irish masses for their apathy; had they penetrated into the truth of the situation and comprehended the genius of the Gael they would rather, being honest men, have lashed themselves for a pair of simpletons.

Swift was a good type of the changing influence – that great Irishman, as we love to call him, who had not a drop of Irish blood in his veins, no Irish characteristics, and an utter contempt for the entire pack of us. He set the forces which he found in Ireland against the English Government, not because he loved Ireland, but because he was a morbidly proud man who hated oppression, and was by accident stationed in Ireland. This Englishman, whom, with characteristic latter-day Irish cringe we claim for ourselves, became a popular hero of the Irish people. In consequence partly of his teaching, the English-speaking bit of the country – the bit that had cheated the Gaels of education and wealth, and monopolised both for itself – stood up to England for its own ends, as it mainly sides with her now for like reasons, and ever since the Gaels who have not remained in their torpor, have hailed these Palemen as their would-be saviours and their models. The lesser element commenced to absorb the greater. Grattan truly put a new soul into Ireland, but what he vivified with it was not the once illustrious Gael, but an English-speaking, English-imitating mongrel, a people without a past, a people who, we were afterwards to see, could not by any chance carve out a future of its own. He put Ireland in tow

with a world-compelling power, in whose wake she has had to go ever since, the spirit of Common Sense laughing at her frantic foolish efforts to steer a course of her own, and wondering why in the world it never occurs to her to cut the hawser. In 1782 the country became fixed, not as an Irish nation but as an English province. It is sickening to contemplate the smug satisfaction with which at the present day Irishmen reflect on and gloat over the Dublin of those decadent “Independent Parliament” days, on its duelling, its fire-eating bucks, its dissipations, its clubs, its cock fights, and the rest of the excrescences which the first feverish rush to turn English threw up on the surface of the polite society of those days. All the while they have no thought for the leaderless, powerless millions, the real historic Irish race – hunted to the hills, and clinging to the language which should have been that of all Irishmen; those: millions that were to be slowly, insidiously conquered by all this Anglo-Irish parade of sentimental Paleism.

The Gael has never raised his head since the fall of Limerick. The stretch of time between then and now is barren in his history. He has eaten his potatoes and milk three times a day – when he could get them – and he has practically done nothing else as a Gael. Individuals in appalling numbers have turned their backs with a kind of loathing on their race – felt compelled to do it, though they had no clear conception of the reason why, for necessity was by no means always the driving force. Some of them took the Queen’s shilling, and helped to make an empire to scourge their country with; some took a passage to New York, and others, staying at home, learned a bit of English, and became Palemen, possibly rising in course of time to the position of modern patriot. At the fire that was kindled in 1782 we light our torches whenever we go forth anywhere in the name of Ireland a nation. When a man sets himself to reflect independently over modern Irish history, and probes things as best he can, for what

they are worth, he must marvel at the bucketfuls of trash which he has been given to drink since his boyhood.

No one wants to fall out with Davis's comprehensive idea of the Irish people as a composite race drawn from various sources, and professing any creed they like, nor would an attempt to rake up racial prejudices be tolerated by anyone. We are proud of Grattan, Flood, Tone, Emmett, and all the rest who dreamt and worked for an independent country, even though they had no conception of an Irish nation; but it is necessary that they should be put in their place, and that place is not on the top as the only beacon lights to succeeding generations. The foundation of Ireland is the Gael, and the Gael must be the element that absorbs. On no other basis. can an Irish nation be reared that would not topple over by force of the very ridicule that it would beget. However, since the glories of 1782 the process has been reversed, and we are all Palemen now.

It is important to trace how this state of affairs was brought about. It is interesting, as a study in the capacity for self-blinding, which a people can attain to, when they discard their old landmarks and standards, to examine how it was retained. The position of Grattan and his followers is simple enough. Their attitude towards England was similar – though more wishy-washy – to that of the American revolutionists. They had, broadly speaking, a common past with England; they had the same root ideals, the same speech, the same religion, and the same hatred for other people's religion. There was no radical, though there were several detail, differences between the patriots of 1782 and Englishmen. England had been fighting the mere Irish for centuries, and telling lies about them, and it is not difficult to understand – for England has no sentiment that will not go under before the gentlest tap of self-interest, let her talk as loud as she likes to the contrary – how she overlooked her own colony in the island, and bundled the whole population into

one, and treated all as her enemies. The English in Ireland resented such treatment, not because it hurt their sense of patriotism or self-respect, but because it affected their pockets and prestige, and timorously and gradually they developed the sulks. Eventually they began to look upon themselves as a kind of English-Irish colony, that ought to be independent of English Parliamentary interference. Many of them, like Swift, regarded Irishmen with contempt, and even Flood, who left his fortune eventually for the study of Irish, was a bigoted opponent of Catholic emancipation, which then meant a bigoted anti-Gael. Those people, in fact, cared nothing about the Gaels, who, to their minds, were undesirable aborigines, speaking gibberish: a low multitude, whose existence they would like to forget, if they could. When they talked in stilted eloquence, fashioned after the styles of Pope, and not inspired in the least degree by anything Irish, about the ancient constitution of Ireland, they did not refer, as 99 out of every 100 unsophisticated Irish readers, including, probably, many Nationalist Members of Parliament, think, to anything connected with Emain or Tara, but to that glorious constitution for the upholding of which Munster was laid waste by Carew, and Mullaghmast was made famous in our history. They took the fetters off their constitution, but they were unable to keep it. That Grattan was not rebel enough to put it beyond the power of being bought, or that the other leaders, sincere according to their narrow views, were fools enough to think that England Had changed her spots, and would not cheat them when she became strong again, matters nothing to my present argument. The movement placed the Pale at the head of Ireland for the first time in history, and ever since the Pale has retained that place. The '98 and '48 movements, the Fenians and the Parnellite agitation, were Pale movements in their essence, even when they were most fiercely rebellious. In many respects they were tinkering movements, for, while they were making a loud noise the great canker was left unheeded. The passions and excitements of those days distracted all men's attention. from

one long monotonous series of fateful sounds. No one heeded the dull incessant sap, sap, of English ideas, ideals and manners – mostly of the worst English kind too – that were all the time rotting the only possible foundation for the Ireland that the people were vaguely, incoherently seeking after. This century presents us with a picture of a whole people deluding itself, and, consequently, tumbling into all manner of absurdities. At one and the same time they talked of their ancient glories and turned their backs upon them. That piece of rhetoric of Davis commencing, “This is no sandbank,” was to the people a piece of rhetoric and nothing more. They didn’t believe a word of it. Their attitude was this: they knew nothing about their past except by hearsay, and they were afraid to enquire too far for fear their conceit should be pulled down. For the pretensions of Ireland were, naturally, derided by Englishmen, and against the volume of that derision all the Irishman had to fall back upon was that he saw in this newspaper or that penny reading-book a statement that we were a fine people long ago; that O’Curry and others had gone into the question and gave their words that it was right. But you might as well put up a wattle to stop a steam roller. English derision conquered, of course, for, like the children that we have allowed ourselves to become, we look nervously to our masters to find out how much good we may believe of ourselves. England did not flatter us; so to-day we are a mean race in our own estimation. Not one in a thousand Irishmen believes in his heart that we were anything but savages before the Norman appearance. We know all about second-rate ’48 men, large-hearted well-intentioned fools, whom we magnify into our great heroes; but as for ever being an isle of saints and scholars, that is a brilliant foreign kind of picture which we can never find a place for on the ragged Irish canvas that we are familiar with.

The United Irish Movement was organised and led by men of the Pale. It produced many noble men. When we consider his

opportunities there are few more masculine characters than Theobald Wolfe Tone. But the truth remains that he was not an Irishman. He was a great Irish rebel; not more extreme, however, than the Bishop of Derry, who was English born and bred. If I were asked to define Tone's nationality I should say that he was a Frenchman born in Ireland of English parents. The principles of the French Revolution made a deeper impression on the English in Ireland than on the English at home, and that greater impression helped to widen the detailed differences between the peoples. Nevertheless, the United Irish Movement was a colossal failure, for it was not a movement running in line with the genius of the Irish people, and it took but a poor hold on the peasant. What did the peasants know of republics? What did they understand about English-speaking independent states? What did they care about the glorious Pale victory of 1782? The peasant was crushed and ignorant and conservative, and his mind could not be rooted out of its traditions by any Pale-steeped emissaries ; it was not ripe for the grasping of French principles or Paleman's patriotism. It would be difficult to say what would have roused the peasants of that time. Anyway the appeal should have been in Irish, the object held out not an academic republic but the re-conquest of the land, the reestablishment of old ways and manners, and the sweeping away not only of the English connection but, I fear, of the Paleman as well.

O'Connell's movement gives us the first instance of the Gael – ignorant by the blessed dispensation of his civilizing conqueror – giving away his mind to the keeping of one man. This act on the part of a people of a country is a long price to pay for an immediate victory – particularly by a people largely denied the training which develops thought – but it is a price which it is perhaps sometimes necessary to pay. The evil which it works may be amply compensated for when the object for which it was done is attained; when the object is not attained a new train of

evils are created to embitter the defeat. Twice during this century we have paid this price to little purpose. The process tends to sap the individuality and self-reliance of a people. Whilst a country is under a sway of this kind the greatest crime a man can commit is to say what he honestly thinks. It is the harvest season for timeservers, sycophants and men of the stuff that petty tyrants are made of. They grow up like mushrooms under the protection of the strong hand, and when the strong hand is gone there they remain posing as men and never suspecting that they are merely creatures. And it is a long process for the sorely pressed country to get rid of the most of them – a necessary preliminary, however, to the restoration of common-sense and the re-commencement of effective work. Under a sway of this kind the Irishman soon loses the habit of thinking for himself – and 'twas little he ever had in modern times – and becomes a sheep. A nation like Ireland that gives its mind away to one man no sooner loses him than she writhes in agony until she gives it to another. If there is not another handy there will be wigs on the green for a long time. The people are not used to the burden of carrying their own brains. Most leaders focus and control forces; O'Connell, besides this, had to create his own force. Other men see a great confused inarticulate mass in want of some master-spirit to voice it and give it cohesion. O'Connell beheld a Prostrate people without spirit enough even to feel the craving for a leader. He was one of the greatest leaders that the world has ever produced, but he had one shortcoming common to all men – his mind was finite and had walls of brass round it. One of the things which people, whilst under the sway of a conquering mind and personality, are apt to forget is that every man must be, and is, in many ways a fool. But O'Connell had no sympathetic critics, at least none whom he could not send into space with an epigram or a joke; and anti-Irish critics never count. He and public opinion were unfortunately one and the same, so he grew in his folly and his sheep grew with him. His greatest folly was that he was blind to the necessity of keeping

the Irish language the general, or at least one of the general, tongues, and of raising Ireland from her own roots. It would be useless to speculate now as to what would have happened had O'Connell not appeared upon the scene. The Gael would not have become so defiant in so short a time, but neither probably would he have become so anxious to be Anglicised. O'Connell turned his back on his own language. He was in a hurry and his material was not promising, and by a perverted notion of raising the status of his countrymen he wished them to compete with England in her own tongue and on her own terms. It apparently never crossed his mind that in doing this he was levelling to the ground the strongest national barricade, and making a breach for the free entry of English influence. He was a giant, but like all of us he was hood-winked by the new interpretation of nationality sprung upon the country by the Glorious Constitution of 1782. He did more than any other man, because he was a giant, to kill the Gaelic language and the distinctive character of the people.

The '48 men put a few more nails in the coffin of the Gael. The worst thing they did, the thing which naturally they are most belauded for doing by enlightened English critics, was that they brought into life a mongrel thing which they called Irish literature, in the English language. Literature in the English language is English literature and all the Duffys that were ever born could not make it anything else. However, they made the people believe they could – a state of things which has since been responsible for many things. Let the jingling rhymes which have been poured out ever since as Irish poetry in the English tongue stand as one of them. Perhaps it needs no further condemnation.

So long as the anti-English sentiment was kept at white heat, as it had been kept more or less until the impossible "Union of Hearts" disorganised things, the weakness which all our departures from the Irish traditions had made in the Irish

position, since Molyneux first blew the blast, was not very much noticed. Now, however, that the anti-English or any other sentiment is not at white heat, or scarcely at any heat at all, we are beginning to realise fully the desperate position to which we have come. All barriers are down, and we are quickly becoming, whether we like it or not, as English in our ideas, aims, thoughts, and slang as the genuine Briton of the lower type. It is true that our new clothes do not sit absolutely easy on us yet, so that we look a bit awkward in them, and sometimes they become so uncomfortable that we take some of them off, just as the country girls throw their boots over their shoulders until they come near the towns. But let not the genteel retail dealers of the Irish towns be too impatient – in four or five generations hence their posterity may become accustomed to the new clothes and be able to carry themselves with as much swagger and coarseness as any Briton.

The great present result of our conquest by the Pale, and of the failure of subsequent partly national movements – whose success would probably have long since put Pale influence into its proper subordinate place – is that Irishmen are now in competition with Englishmen in every sphere of social and intellectual activity, in a competition where England has fixed the marks, the subjects, and has had the sole making of the rules of the game. It may be interesting to examine briefly some of the main conditions under which this unnatural competition is carried on. They can only be understood, perhaps, by people who know both countries. England has been a great commercial and industrial country for centuries, and within her borders there has been, broadly speaking, free competition, and the population has, as a consequence, undergone a rough sifting process. The greater part of what was strenuous, fighting and capable has long since gone to the top. To assert that the poorer classes in England are only the dregs, would be too sweeping, but anyway they are largely composed of the dregs of their race.

Millions of those who have got uppermost in the fight are living on rents, interests, profits, from their own and other countries, or working under most favourable conditions with large means and much leisure. They have little or nothing to do but to cultivate the amenities of life by their own firesides, and from this class a degenerate sub-class has been evolved, a class of narrow, well-dressed, well-washed, thoughtless people of both sexes; people out of whom all traces of originality have long since been drilled, and who might be described as articulate formulae. They are very powerful, however, in social England, and the novelists would starve if this class were not made to suppose that it is correct to pretend to be interested in books. For generations every profession, every art, has been followed in England, and the dull brains of the nation have been burnished and rubbed after the most improved methods in order to put a little artificial polish on them. The great shop-keeping classes have nearly everything that riches can give, particularly the veneer of manners and gentility which costly surroundings are calculated to impart even to a born Caliban, and which it takes a keen Irishman, raw from his native bog, years to penetrate through, and to discover the mean, vulgar thing that usually lurk underneath after all. England has realised herself, and, contemplating the product, she is, as she well may be, disappointed and cynical. The English mind is essentially one which justifies the means by the end, though it may be too dull to see it and too self-righteous to suspect it. It is narrow and bigoted by nature, and it is bloated by the fat traditions of success. All people can, to a degree, deceive themselves when it is their interest to do so; but this dull, prosperous people have a malign genius for it: they can deceive themselves into believing that blind hate for a race is love for mankind, that massacres are the harbingers of the higher civilization, that liberty of conscience is liberty to think as they think. They have, nevertheless, been ever a God-fearing race for the reason that their God is a portable deity, easily shifted. And whenever they

take any enterprise in hand, the first thing they are sure to do is to place God Almighty on their side.

Now let us look at the other side. Ireland has never known a time when any real development could take place since she was the school of Europe. A hundred years ago many of the descendants of her chieftains and aristocrats were probably to be found, as, I think, Sir Jonah Barrington remarked, unloading ships on the quays of Dublin. Inasmuch as there was never any considerable competition, as there was nothing to compete for until very recently the sifting process which took place in England never operated in Ireland. And you will find as good natural capacity and native courtesy in a western cabin as in the families that send their children to Trinity College. The number of eminent Irishmen all over the world who look back upon a mud cabin or something little better, as their natal place is one of the effects of this state of things. It is, perhaps, this long absence of the forces that tend to differentiate people and send the stronger to the top that accounts for the curious versatility of the Irishman. We all have a bit of everything in us, and none of us have any specialised characteristics stamped upon us, by a long line of hereditary influences, except the almost universal inclination to cringe and crawl which over a century of Pale ascendancy has driven into our souls. Since 1847 a rapid sifting process has been going on, but instead of operating, as in other countries, to send the man of brains and character to the top, it sets him sailing across the seas. In Ireland there are no set types, nor can there be for very many generations. The greasy obsequious English shopkeeper, who is just as greasy, whether he pays £10 or £1,000 a year as rent, has no prototype in Ireland where undertakers follow the hounds, grocers go coursing, and publicans sometimes march off to gaol for their principles. The Irish are by no means saints, but at least their God pertains to the nature of a polar star, and will not be moved so as to ease their path down the line of least resistance. We have not the flexible, convenient

way of looking at things that the English have. The Anglicised Irishman in England is too often an easy prey to English scampdom – takes a perverted national pride in being first on the road to ruin. Later on, at the parting of the ways, the Englishman walks off with a smile of unctuous rectitude; but his dupe, the poor Gael, differently constituted, daren't lift up his head, and too often goes the whole road to the devil.

These, roughly and briefly, are the conditions under which Nationalist Ireland, in consequence of her conquest by the Pale, attempts to break a lance with England. Can anyone for a moment think that this poor, ragged Ireland, undeveloped, unorganised, dormant for centuries, can fight England, as she now is, on her own terms – fight her literature, her cynicism, her moral conceptions, her social ideas, her wealth? Evidently the majority of Nationalist Ireland think they can. And there could be no more damning criticism of our half-National political agitations, and of our conquest by the Pale, than that they have lulled us into this state of simmering ignorance of the realities of the contest. We go ragged and raw, with no conscious traditions behind us, but traditions of failure and beggary into the fray, and cut a contemptible and sorry figure, indeed. It has been observed that it takes three generations to produce a normal Lancashire factory hand. I suppose the assumption is that an Irishman can be turned into an Englishman in one!

Of course, we are beaten and demoralised all along the line, as at one and the same time we are hating England and imitating her. We take all our ideas from England, for we are afraid to have any of our own. We have no faith in our own judgment, daren't have any judgment in fact, unless we can find some English or foreign opinion to back us up. How many Nationalists I wonder would consent even to consider the claims of Gaelic were it not for the long array of foreign professors that can be brought to bear on its side? Few Irishmen are of any account in the eyes of

their countrymen until they have made reputations outside of Ireland – an unnatural state of affairs which obtains in no other country calling itself a nation. Without our traditions and language, without a knowledge – a knowledge sunk into us and pervading every part of us – of the causes which led to Ireland's failure, to her poverty and degradation, and an insight, to be obtained from an independent Gaelic point of view, into the hollowness, the rottenness, and the sham of England and the English, without having an eye for the accidental in each country as against the intrinsic, we must, as sure as a greater force overcomes a lesser, go down, flicker for a while, and die out. We can never beat England, can't even remain long in a fight with her, on her own terms. All we can do, and it should be enough for us, is, remain Irish in spite of her, and work out our own destiny in the very many fields in which we are free to do so.

The concrete absurdities which our position as a tail to England throws us into are infinite. They are before our eyes at every turn though we may not see them. When an English actor of eminence visits us don't we take the horses from his carriage and cheer ourselves hoarse, and the next day when he says something gracious about us in the columns of the evening paper we beam all over our faces and add an inch to our stature. We call it hospitality, warm Irish welcome, anything but what it is, self-debasement, servility and cringe. The shifts, and twists, and turns of the respectable Irish to behave after their absurd second-hand conception of English ladies and gentlemen – the antics they play, the airs they assume, the ignorance on the one hand and the knowledge on the other they pretend to, are full, no doubt, of the comic element, but the sad slavishness of it all is what strikes the Irish observer; and 'that leaves him no heart to enjoy the comedy. The ludicrousness is heightened when we consider that every honest, brilliant mind in England is never done laughing and hammering at this dullness covered in veneer and surrounded with wealth that our respectable classes

- neither dull nor uninteresting if they were true to nature - look up at aghast, feeling a load at the heart as they contemplate the impossibility of ever scaling the heights. The most disagreeable thing about all this cringe is its needlessness and absolutely false basis. The appeal to Irish history condemns it. It is sad to see an unfortunate wretch whining under the lash of a whip: it is, however, natural to whine under such circumstances. But it is revolting to see a people whining for no adequate reason whatsoever. And why do we whine? Because we have lost all our national pride owing to having no understanding of the things that would make us proud, but a very clear view of the superficial things which overwhelm our ignorant minds with shame. Even the bit of Irish history we know is knowledge to little purpose. For the great effort of history as taught in our national books and papers is to show that England over-reached us in every conflict, and that she is a very wicked kind of devil indeed. This does not go deep enough. It does not carry us very far in the way of pumping up any national pride; on the contrary, however a man may try to despise him I fear he cannot help a secret admiration for the one who is strong and unscrupulous enough to over-reach him, and a powerful devil has a curious fascination for us all. The inevitable result of our conquest by the Pale must be - as it is now - that the relative position of the Irishman to the Englishman is as that of a beggar to a patron. We may talk sentimentally of the "nameless grave," of rebellions and Lord Edward, sing patriotic songs in English until we are black in the face, and all to no purpose. They give us nothing to lean upon when, cap in hand and shaking at the knees, we stand before the power, the outside polish and wealth of England. The course of reflection, conscious or unconscious, which leads Ireland to cringe is clear enough. Power and wealth are tangible things - though their origins are not so plain to the naked eye - and England has both. When we went under the rule of England's mind and traditions in 1782 we had to take her standards as part of the bargain; and wealth - with the things

which it can buy and generate – is her great standard. Poverty is a holy thing, taken philosophically; but Irish poverty, butted at and kicked by English wealth, Irish weakness insulted and trodden on every day of the year by English power, can make no stand since Ireland has accepted English wealth and power as her standards. Ireland develops under these circumstances a spirit in keeping with her lowly material lot. Even Irishmen capable of great spirit get embarrassed and cringe in the company of English wealthy middle-class noodles, as if an ancestral line of grim, hard-suffering Irish peasants who sacrificed everything at one time to their principles and traditions was not better than that of a line of sleek, trimming, bread-and-butter Saxon bourgeois, who would have swallowed the devil any day sooner than lose a customer.

This is the state of things which our conquest by the Pale has brought about, and the new soul which it put into Ireland has proved itself not even to possess any of the saving qualities of salt. The old soul must be put back again. The Gael has been led by the nose long enough by the spirit of the Pale. The mere Irish after the various spasmodic attempts at their conquest used to come out of their hiding places and harass their enemies. Usually they came out in scattered groups, sometimes strung together in almost national proportions by the genius of a Hugh O'Neill. Unfortunately they had not only to fight their natural enemies but the Queen's Irish as well. The Queen's Irish were never so numerous as they are to-day, and to add to their effectiveness they dress themselves in green. But the penetrating eye of the Gaelic spirit is beginning to see through the disguise. The next few years will decide for all time whether the Gael is to lift up the Irish race once more, or whether the Pale is to complete its effacement.

## IV.

### **Politics, Nationality and Snobs**

It may appear paradoxical to say so, but it seems to me that one of the most hopeful signs in Ireland at the present time is the growth of pessimism. Groundless optimism has sapped our energies and blinded our eyes for generations. Its sleek face is still to be met at every turn, and its oily tongue chortles in every discussion. Notwithstanding the havoc it has already done, it is still making a stand for its old supremacy. It has poisoned the reasoning powers of the country. I knew a family whom luck was supposed to follow like a shadow. The luck of the So-and-So's had developed into a local proverb. In the fullness of time, one of the sons ran away with practically all the wealth and left the family facing a black future. Surely the tradition of luck could not stand this blow. However, the youngest girl, with the characteristic spirit of Irish optimism, was equal to the occasion. "After all," said she, "wasn't it a sign of luck that he didn't run away with everything?" This is the attitude of mind which the Irish critic still meets on nearly all sides. If anyone, whilst allowing the good points in any individual or institution, complains that there is not nearly so much as there might be, and ought to be, he is barked at as a sour pessimist and a cantankerous fault-finder. Cannot a man be allowed a standard to judge things by, or must his heart necessarily melt before the first faint streak of virtue he discovers? A great many things have happened during the past fifty years that we may be proud of; yet one may review the period without satisfaction: there are a great many things at present calculated to inspire hope, yet one may think that the country is honey-combed with palpable frauds. Are not the two sets of views compatible? So much by way of preface, for what I have got to say.

One of the first things, I have observed, which we all do when we get into a patriotic fit, is to shy stones at the large crop of shoneens and snobs which this country so plentifully grows. But notwithstanding all the missiles the crop has at various times received upon its empty heads, it does not seem to grow any less nor to appear in any wise battered. This result is enough to give one pause, and it suggests that it might be useful to enquire into the origin, nature, and growth of the Irish shoneen or snob. For it must appear plain at the first glance that if the breed is only raised in Ireland it argues something rotten in the race. Having enquired as best I could into the real causes that tend to produce the Irish shoneen, I must admit that the conclusions I have come to are not reassuring. I have no indignation in me to pour upon his head. He is a poor creature with whom we all may sit down without resentment; the French have a proverb to the effect that to understand everything is to forgive everything. In the first place, if one will only think it out, we are, strictly speaking, all snobs. Thackeray, who could pin a snob when he met one as well as any man, was a snob himself. There are infinite degrees in snobbery, and where the spirit of it leads people in a direction in harmony with public sentiment, we call it by all sorts of pleasant names. Snobbery, in some degree or other, is, as much as flesh or blood, a constituent of human nature. It arises from lack of head or from lack of heart, most frequently, perhaps, from lack of both. And however it manifests itself in intellectual or social life, we can always trace it back to two great sources – to the desire to be “respectable” or to a shallow ambition to appear better than your neighbour. Perhaps the easiest way to define what a snob is is to point out the type of man who has least of the quality.

The least snobby man is he who sees most into realities, who can detect a barbarian under a title, a fool behind half a dozen University degrees, a wise man in a cobbler’s shed, a mean rascal dressed in ermine, a gentleman in rags, a coward amidst the brag

and swagger of a winning side, and so on and so on; whilst on the other hand the individual whom the common sense of the world agrees to call a palpable snob is one who can never see beyond the skin of anything, a person who classes men according to their clothes and other superficial and accidental distinctions, one to whom, in short, that which is neglected in the world is irretrievably base, and that which is held in esteem at the moment is altogether what the fashion of the time would have it. Of course, the least snobby may be chicken-hearted, for it is one thing to see into things and another to act according to your lights, whilst the palpable snob, though often a sleek, mean-souled creature, may have a fairly honest and generous disposition. The vast majority of the people of every country, and certainly of Ireland, is, I suggest, made up of palpable snobs. They have their uses in the economy of nations. They prop up every worthy institution. They buy books they don't understand, they go to plays they don't appreciate; they pay their shillings to enter into a picture gallery out of which they take nothing but a headache. In fact they accrete round everything, even round anti-snobbery. A few years ago when Socialism was a popular thing in London, men who were not fluent at talking the jargon of the cult made up for their deficiency by wearing a red tie and a flannel collar.

They were palpable snobs, and their snobbery consisted in ostentatiously pretending to the world that they weren't snobs. One might as well attempt to make bricks without clay as to construct a nation without properly manipulating its snobs. No society exists without them. It is useless to bark at them; the national leaders stand condemned who cannot handle them properly; and those who ignore their existence as an important estate in the country have no right to be termed leaders at all. However, during this century, the respectable Irishman who, though he possessed a head, could not think, eyes and could not see, and who was constantly mistaking the shadow for the

substance – in short, the natural born snob who must satisfy his vanities in superficialities, because he lacks insight and comprehension – has been allowed to drift into the camps of the enemy. No provision was made for him in the Irish ranks; he was treated as an outcast and stoned by short-sighted leadership. I see no hope for Irish nationality unless things can be so ordered that the average snob will in the ordinary course of his personal evolution turn his face to his own country; for a snob is really only an adult baby, who never attains, but in a very limited degree, to the use of reason, and if circumstances are such that in the nature of things he becomes what we call a shoneen, the blame must be mainly placed on the shoulders of those thinking men who are responsible for the circumstances. There is no use in casting stones at palpable snobbery in the bulk, for it is a widely prevalent weakness of human nature, and human nature, though a fit subject for inquiry, is none for criticism, as it cannot be altered. We did not make human nature, and a kick at it is, at the least, an unconscious form of blasphemy.

It is not difficult to put oneself in the place of an Irish snob, for he is not a complex individual. Take what specimen of him you will: the civil servant or commercial clerk who gives champagne suppers to his friends and spends a quarter of his wages on outside cars, in order to demonstrate what a fine fellow he is; the highly dressed grocer's son who lounges at the Dalkey band and lifts his hat to the English national anthem in the hope that he may be mistaken for an officer; the genteel scamp who boasts of his obscenities because, from his reading of smart "literature" and up-to-date papers, he thinks it is form; and so on through the whole gamut of West British snobs. However they manifest themselves they are all of a piece. It is part of their nature to be pretending something, and they cannot help it. The important question which they suggest is: – Who is responsible for the directions which this pretence takes, and why does it never take a native turn? It seems very clear to me that a very large number

at least of our West British snobs could have been turned into good, downright racy Irish snobs if the leaders and thinking men of this century had only known their business. But the poor snob was left to shift for himself, the very thing which he is not able to do, for he, like a barnacle, must stick himself on to something.

Let us trace the career of the most honest and well-intentioned Irish snob – the man who really desires to be Irish if only some one will show him the way – from the first day he entered public life until now when he sits fat and comfortable in a mansion in Rathmines, the butt of every young Nationalist politician who little suspects that, unless conditions alter, a similar ending awaits him should he prosper in life. This young man possessed of a moderate amount of shallow brains, plenty of energy, and a great desire to be thought a hero, was the product of the usual Anglo-Irish day-school education, of the anti-English English literature of the Galloping Hogan and Michael Dwyer type, and of the Emerald green incorruptible politico-national papers of the day. He had his faults, but he was generous impulsive youth, and his day dreams were mostly woven of stricken fields of English redcoats, triumphant pike men, defiant orations from dock and gallows tree. He went to political meetings and cheered until his poor throat was hoarse, and returned home wishing that he might have an opportunity to die for any of the noble heroes who defied the whole power of England from the hustings.

He joined a revolutionary society where they talked wisely about foreign complications and held a picturesque midnight drill occasionally. He tried to persuade himself as long as he could that a few of the members were not drunkards, and he exhausted his ingenuity in attempting to square his youthful idea of a revolutionary hero with the characters of several of his comrades. He held on to the society for a few years, but it did nothing. There was one informer; two suspected of informing;

one who bolted with the funds; and the great body of members – mostly honest, enthusiastic youths like himself – were getting sick of all the boasting and lip-rebellion that went on. He dropped out of it after a while and attended to his business, but still held extreme opinions. His intelligence was beginning to ripen, but the papers were mostly given over to politics, ringing the changes on the same old themes day after day, and they offered nothing new to the young mind to speculate upon: for the rest, they were mostly abuse, and he liked that well enough until some of it turned upon himself. He had recourse to the Irish periodicals. Some of them he thought very suitable for convent girls but somewhat goody-goody for a man like him. The periodicals of a national complexion satisfied him for a time. Each number usually consisted of an amateur essay on Robert Emmet or some '98 or '48 man which, however, taught him nothing that he did not know before, and besides it was mostly composed of adjectives; there was an adventure story concerning the Wexford Rising which was neither probable nor done with any literary finish whatever. Besides, it was written on the apparent assumption that no man in the wide world ever died fighting for liberty but an Irishman. There was also a funny story which made him melancholy, and an article on the decay of some Irish industry or institution in which all the blame was laid upon England and none whatever on Ireland.

From all the periodicals, in fact, one was impelled to take away the impression that Irishmen were a lot of injured saints who only needed half an opportunity to become the finest, purest, truest, richest, and whatnot-else people on the face of God's earth. Not being a man of originality, and having been brought up in the good sound "national" principle that what was good enough for his father to swallow should be good enough for him, he was thrown into a perplexed state of mind. He was not strenuous enough to think things out for himself; and of course he dared not ask questions, for that would lay him open to the

suspicion that he wasn't "sound." But the poor man got sick of all these periodicals after a while, and ventured even to suggest to a friend, on the quiet, that there was a great deal of "blatherinskite" in them. Later on in his mental development he felt compelled to buy a few English magazines and novels in order to get something new in the way of fiction, and the English weekly reviews for something thoughtful and common-sense-like in the way of criticism on matters of human and general interest. Once he got the taste of the real thing the screech and vapidness of the imitation struck him more forcibly than ever. His mind was now full of contradictory views which as he could not reconcile, and daren't grapple with – for an Irish "nationalist" must not think – he had no course open but to dodge them as best as he could, and as occasion required. Here are one set of them: – The English are a low, stupid people – we are a noble, quick-witted race; the English have a solid, thoughtful, well-written periodic literature – we have nothing but a few trashy rags.

He dodged this and other contradictions until the poor man got into a chronic state of mental dishonesty on national questions, a state for which, being only an honest snob, I would not like to say he was in any considerable degree responsible. As he grew rich he was frequently called upon to preside at national meetings; but the people he met there said the same old things which he had heard any time for the last twenty years. He knew now, however, that one was not supposed to believe what he said, and that the people were looked upon as an ignorant, credulous rabble to be cajoled and made use of. When it came to his turn to talk he could see a multitude of eager faces yearning for some blarney that would rouse them to cheer. Being a kind, soft-hearted man, he said the sort of things which he knew they liked, wound up with a promise that at no far distant date the green immortal flag would float over the old house in College Green, and sat down amid thundering applause. He is now

known to his country as a level-headed, practical patriot, a cheery man who sees the bright side of everything, a sort of living copy book headline to the rising generation. No man dares breathe a word against him, or the nationalist organ would dig its righteous beak into the recreant tongue that dared to utter the abomination.

But the honest, shallow-minded man, whose master passion is to stand high in the estimation of his fellows, prospers beyond all expectation, and gets more muddled in his views. He stands upon the threshold of Society. One day, after carefully glancing up and down the street so as to make sure that no one is looking, he darts into the Kildare Street Club to keep an appointment with one of the members. An Irish landlord, he finds, cares at least as much for the good of the country as some of his own quondam comrades. Besides, the landlord has got an ease about his manners not to be noticed about his friends, the members for Ballybeg and Ballymore. Then there is his wife at home putting notions into his head, and his daughter, just “finished” at a Continental school, is pining to show off her French phrases and her knowledge of botany at a Castle ball. The muddle deepens; the man’s brain is racked, for he has an honest heart and would like to do right. He cannot see any semblance of daylight through the situation. All that appears plain is that nationality and “respectability” don’t tally somehow. If drinking “the Queen” is a fraud, was not his whole later national career a fraud also? Are not his comrades mostly frauds? Besides, what is a nation or a nationality at all? Cannot he serve his country though a Castle hack drinks his champagne, as well as if only nationalists drank his whiskey? Perhaps better. He can still vote straight and subscribe to the land agitations, and what more is required of a patriotic Irishman? Besides, does he not owe it to his family to get them into the “best” society, and what good is all his money, the fruit of an industrious life, if he cannot waddle up the back stairs himself? He deserves to be respected, and

what other way is there of being thought well of and of being known as a successful, worthy man except to be seen knocking at the door of somebody who knows somebody else who is a friend of the Viceroy. Fenianism, National Leagues, patriotic sentiments – what are they but dreams and fancies which not one in ten who brawl about them most believes in? A few years later as his carriage passes by a nationalist meeting he is greeted with hisses and jeers. His good-natured heart is sad, and he shakes his muddled head in sorrow at the ignorance of his countrymen.

The modern history of Ireland with its grand mistake is crystalised in that picture. This man, in any other land, would have stood out as one of the solid bulwarks of his nation, respected by the people, bearing the burdens of his country, perpetuating her traditions; in Ireland he ends his days as a shoneen. What else would you have him do in his old age? He could not be other than he is, for the full-aged man is the product of everything he did during his life, and of the influences that surrounded him. He can glare back upon that nationality that flouts him now, and charge it with his shortcomings. He started an honest, average, shallow-brained enthusiast, ready to do the best that was in him for his country; he, as did all of us in our callow youth, cheered the “rawmish” (ráiméis) of the toy-heroes; he had his misgivings during his career, but he dared not try to think, and in the long run so often did he suppress his mind that he began in a muddled way to look upon many men as patriots whom he knew to be rogues. In the end West British snobocracy was his inevitable doom. The whole history of the man might be summed up in this: – At the threshold of his career he asked his countrymen to make an Irishman of him, and they replied by making him a West British politician.

It has been said before, and it needs to be said ten thousand times again, that politics is not nationality. As this view, however, is

still a rank heresy to the multitude, it may be worth while unfolding it in detail. An Irish political reform is got or striven for by popular organization, by public protest, by boycotting, by illuminating houses, by demonstrating, by going to jail, and by a vigorous party in the House of Commons. Out of the entire population of Ireland, however, only about eighty-six can hope to be sent to Parliament on the popular side; under Forster's regime the highest number called upon to go to jail never exceeded two thousand. Taking the nationalist population at 4,000,000 what is left for the remaining 3,997,914 to do? There must be secretaries of the branches of the national organisation, committee men, organisers, etc., to give most of their attention to the political campaign. Allow as liberally as you will for the number of people required for these purposes, and a considerable balance of population will be left. How are they to show their patriotism? Many of them will be called upon to give up a day or a few hours now and again to attend a political meeting; the vast majority, including the women and boys, care nothing for politics, and have no political power; hundreds of thousands of men who have sound national views on the political requirements of Ireland could never, owing to the natural bent of their minds, take a keen interest in politics. They would do their part if it were absolutely necessary, but, recognising the sound wisdom underlying the division of labour, they are content to allow those who have greater aptitude for it to run the political machine. How are all these people to be Irish and patriotic? What of the thousands of doctors and other professional men, the wealthy business men of leisure who do not happen to have any stomach for politics? They may be keenly interested in literature, in science, in music, in the dramas, in art, in economic questions, in local reform, or they may be merely social men. What of the large numbers of shallow, unthinking people who when they have done their work think of nothing but amusement? How are all these to be Irish; for if they cannot be made true to their country the nation

as a nation is bleeding to death. I have pointed out that politics only requires the special devotion of a few, the partial help of a considerable number, and from the rest nothing but opinion in conformity with nationalist sentiment. But the politicians, by some system of reasoning which I certainly cannot follow, have made their movements synonymous with Irish nationality; and so obstinately do some of them of stick to this position that Forster himself never got such a douche of uncomplimentary adjectives thrown over him as the Irishman gets who has the temerity to say that he does not agree with them. I give them the credit of holding their peculiar view honestly and conscientiously, and only remark in passing, by way of parallel, that it has been observed that one of the greatest dangers to the Church is a pious fool.

Assuming for the moment that a man who devotes his life to politics is fulfilling the whole duty of an Irishman – a proposition with which, however, I entirely disagree – let us examine how the remainder of the population are to be Irish. At the start, the question arises – Beyond politics, what is being Irish? Does it mean speaking English with a brogue, and if so, is a Kerry brogue or a Dublin one the better? Does it mean putting your feet on the tea table? Does it mean spitting on the parlour floor? Does it mean making a fool of yourself in order to make English people laugh? All these things have been done and justified on the ground that the doers were Irishmen and were proud of the fact. Or perhaps the Cork lady was right who told me that after all the thing that differentiated the Irish people from the English was the influence of the climate and the scenery? To the people of the country who can read, Irish literature is a closed book as they do not know the language; and as there is practically no demand for current literature there is no supply. The books in English about Ireland are few, and not interesting to all classes.

When you subtract the news and politics out of the papers, the remainder is usually a London syndicate story. If you like a drama you must open your mouth and shut your eyes, and see what London will condescend to give you. If you want literature or criticism you must import it from England or abroad. If you like music you have the barrel organs, the Bray minstrels, and other importations from foreign countries. If you want amusements of the frivolous order, music halls, comic songs, merry-go-rounds, panoramas, side shows for the bazaars, you are at the mercy of the energetic initiatory foreigner. So far the quest for an environment where you can grow up Irish without being a politician is not successful. How are the women to be Irish within the definition of the politician? Are they all to go on the stump for this league or that? Let us imagine an Irish girl asking a politician what to do in order to be Irish, and what answer could he give her? How is polite society – or the society endeavouring to be polite – that section of the people which might be and ought to be the ornament of every nation, how is that to be Irish, let its members have what will they may? Suppose the occupants, male and female, of every drawing-room in Ireland joined one of the nationalist leagues, went to a few political meetings every year, and sang “Who Fears to Speak of Ninety-eight” at the rising of the sun and at the going down thereof every day, how are they, when they are not engaged in these patriotic labours and return to social life, to be Irish? In what function of society, garden parties, bazaars, balls, scandal gossipings, can they show any continuity with the past history of the country? Is anything they are connected with a modern development of any native institution? In what way can they differ from a similar class in England, except that in consequence of having less money they must have recourse to more make-believe and, therefore, more vulgarity

At the risk of weary repetition let me say again that the redress of political grievances calls for the whole efforts of a few, the

partial efforts of many, and for no effort at all beyond good-will from the majority; and yet, in the face of this, any attempt on the part of the people to make Ireland Irish, to restore her language, to resurrect her old customs and modernise them, any attempt to help on a movement that in its fullness would give us a native literature, a native drama, a native music, a native social atmosphere, is tortured into an attack upon politicians, a danger to the country, and a wile of the devil. Ireland is like a great tank half full of water, which is escaping rapidly from many leakages. A number of tinkers are gathered round one of them, some endeavouring to plug it and the others keeping off all who think that the only way to save the contents is to attempt to plug all the leakages simultaneously. "Keep off," the cordon of tinkers say, "one thing at a time." "But," urge the others, "the contents will have all leaked out if-." The remonstrance is drowned in a shriek. The tinkers will not listen to any such nonsense, for are they not the great and only menders of everything? Infallible tinkers who have held undisputed sway for over fifty years; is not to reason with them as impious as for a mortal to challenge the wisdom of the gods?

The view that the only way to be Irish is to be a nationalist politician, has all but made a corpse of the Irish nation. Politics is not one of the polite arts, and in no country does it attract the best class of the population. Take away the comparatively few clever and able men required to pull the strings at headquarters and in the local centres and the rest is mainly rabble. It follows from this that the quiet, accomplished, and wealthy portion of the non-combatants in the political fight, not to mention the palpable snobs, are driven to associate nationality with a movement which, however necessary and however ably and honestly managed it may be, is largely made up of wild talk, village demagogues, lip-patriotism, and petty tyranny. As stepping into the ranks of that awkward squad and doing active service in it is the only way of identifying oneself with Irish

nationality, can anyone wonder at the never-ending procession of Irish-born men and women that year by year commit themselves to the capacious maw of West Britonism?

Another evil effect arising out of the false basis on which Irish nationality rests, is that the politicians themselves – though they may not be conscious of it – instinctively feel that the only way of keeping up any difference with England is by hysterical and artificial stimulation of racial hatred. Racial hatred is a bad passion at the best, and one which, it appears to me, is absolutely unjustifiable on moral grounds, unless in so far as it is impersonal and complementary to a real desire to keep intact the distinctive character, traditions, and civilization of one's own country. But the hatred which is raked up in us is merely personal spite and a desire for vengeance; for, having gone willingly into English nationality, we have no just grounds for quarrel beyond those arising out of our diminishing political disabilities. Privately some of the hillside men will tell you that all the wild rebellious talk is nonsense, but that it is necessary to keep up the national spirit: that if you do not keep the prospect of bloody war with England alive in the Irish mind Irish national sentiment will cease to be.

Again, the fact that the Irish nationality of the politician stands in an untenable position – a position which it cannot hold against the light of reason – is at the bottom of the hatred of anything like criticism, and explains why this nationality is so prone to express itself in hyperbole and screech. The people may do anything but think, for once they commence to do that, and call things by their proper names, the game is up. As a man who commences with a lie may have to tell twenty to bolster the first one up, so the guardians of the nationality which stands upon an impossible foundation must attempt other impossible things to keep it straight. Listen to the feverish cries for unity arising out of every camp which hates every other camp. Unity of

opinion on any subject, or unity of view as to political methods, is not a normal condition amongst an independent thinking population. In a moment of crisis a healthy nation will rise to it, but over any considerable period of time it can only be obtained – even amongst a very ignorant people – by a policy of systematic suppression and tyranny and at the cost of the loss of individuality. The politicians of today are misled by the coincidence of a few years ago, when an extraordinary leader synchronised with an extraordinary and desperate economic grievance. There is not the slightest probability that these two things will synchronise again, and no amount of browbeating, name-calling, or screeching, will cause Irishmen to stultify themselves in order to bring about an unnatural and deadening level of opinion. In England a parliamentary candidate can be “heckled” by the meanest of his sympathisers, and the existence of that institution of heckling tends to foster the habit of political thinking amongst the rank and file and adds to their sense of responsibility, whilst on the other hand it stimulates the politician to consider all the bearings of his position so that he may be able to stand the criticism that may be directed against him. But what would happen to the unfortunate Irishman who dared to put a question to one of the statesmen who sought the suffrages of Donegal or Mayo? Why he would be held up by the scruff of the neck in one of the screeching national organs as a specimen of an atrocity who – to use the phraseology in favour in some quarters – “was yesterday not known beyond the four corners of his own house,” and yet today dares to call his soul his own and say what he thinks to one of his heaven-sent leaders. To ask a question or make an independent remark is an outrage upon the sacred cause of Irish unity.

It is only half a truth to say that the slave makes the tyrant, for the tyrant has undoubtedly a considerable amount to do in the making of the slave. The people of Ireland have been ground down by outside forces, but, at the same time, slavery of their

own making is writ large over the country. I will not suggest how far this homemade slavery can be traced to the politicians of recent years, but, certainly, amongst the forces that at present tend to keep the people ignorant and unthinking, a prominent place must be assigned to those second-rate politicians who are competent to lead sheep but who would have to go to the right-about if confronted by independent thinking men who wanted to know the reason why.

It is not only not true that politics is the only manifestation of nationality, but the fact of being a sound political nationalist of any stamp, from a constitutional Home Ruler to a fire-eating revolutionist, does not necessarily mean that one is Irish at all. I deny that the Irish Parliamentary Party is composed of real Irishmen; few of them, if any, are products of native Irish influences. Their education, literature, social surroundings, are either English or, what is far worse, imitation English. They have no great woof of national tradition to fall back upon for inspiration, strength, or isolation, in their times of trial. Parnell, with the instinct of genius, knew that the only way to keep a West British party isolated and effective was, when he got sufficient stability round him, to fill up the voting strength with nondescripts who were not supposed to think, and then to rule the whole with an iron hand. Left to itself such a West-British party would no sooner commence to work than it would commence to corrupt. One West Britisher would be sapped by a compliment from a lord, another by a job, another from a growing and honest conviction that English civilization was a much better thing than its vulgar Irish imitation.

If the people want national unity they will have to learn that the longest way round is the shortest way home. It cannot be got by any attempt to force one particular brand of one particular political nostrum down the country's throat, and by throwing mud at every other movement. The attempt to do such a thing

could only succeed by driving the spirit of slavery deeper into the vitals of the people, and by creating such a state of terrorism that individual independence would be afraid to make a ripple on the dead level of the slimy waters. National unity that is worth having, and that is not a worse evil than national chaos, must be the flower of a number of movements for the creation and fostering of all the elements, spiritual and material, that go to the making of a nation. When the people go back into their national traditions, get permeated by their own literature, create a drama, resurrect their customs, develop their industries; when they have a language to bind them together and a national personality to guard, the free and full development of every individual will in no wise endanger nor weaken any political movement. When the people are required to speak and act as one man and circumstances call for a special effort, that unity will come about spontaneously as the result of the appreciation of the various distinctive characteristics and institutions that have to be guarded and preserved. A nation must be inspired into unity, she cannot be drilled into it; and the ethics of mere politics, I fear, will never rise much superior to the ethics of business.

One finds oneself face to face with an extraordinary fact after having made an inquiry into modern Ireland. That fact is this:- During all this century with its Repeal movements, Young Irelands, Fenians, National Leagues, and what not, that were put on foot to make Ireland free, no provision whatever was made or attempted to enable men and women born in this country to grow up Irish! Our present condition is the result. Let us cast stones at the shoneens no longer. Owing to their nature they have to cling to something, and pretend to what is held in esteem. No Irish customs were given them to perpetuate, no Irish language to glory in, no Irish drama to enjoy or pretend to enjoy, no Irish pictures to buy, no Irish books to learn the titles of and fill their libraries with, no traditions to swell them out

with racial pride, they were barked at and left to shift for themselves; so they sought the little glories which their own nation denied them by buzzing about everything “respectable” that came from England, and by saying “steek” for steak. The convent school “finished” young lady or the West British jackeen are really no subjects for satire either. They are melancholy monuments to the incapacity of those who took the moulding of the country in their own hands. The politicians have a heavy load upon their souls, but let us admit that it must be shared by all the thinking Irishmen outside the political circle who claim pride in their nation. They should have seen the unreality of it all and made a stand for true nationality even if they had to face the adjectives of the politicians. But still it is upon the politicians who were all powerful and who claimed to be the exponents of Irish nationhood that the great responsibility rests. They undertook to erect a nation upon a lie, and the people trusted and followed them. Today we have evidence in every corner of the land of the eternal truth that a lie cannot live for ever. The country and the country’s mind have been led into such an entanglement of dishonesties in the endeavour to bolster up that lie that the strongest and bitterest thing which anyone can utter today is the plain unvarnished truth.

## V.

# The Gaelic Revival

The problems suggested by the Gaelic revival present a most absorbing field for study and speculation to anyone interested in Irish human nature. Revolutions of any kind throw a great flash light onto men; and people brought face to face with a state of affairs which boldly challenges their accustomed habits and traditional way of looking at things exhibit many unexpected sides of character before the eyes of any who can see. A revolution is inseparable from a large amount of temporary chaos, for it demands of people that they make some attempts to think, a most confusing demand for those accustomed to buy their views on things ready made by the sheet, or receive them for nothing from the platforms.

All minds – more particularly untutored minds – hate doubt. They crave for something to cling on to, to swear by, to feel like shedding the last drop of their blood for. The only two practical ways of dealing with doubt, are either to close your mind to it, or to grapple with it like a man. Most people do the former as long as they can. The Gaelic revival has thrown a formidable doubt into the heart of the country. It has gripped the present century by the throat and has told it unceremoniously to its face that it was and is more than half a sham. The effects are as might have been anticipated. The people do not want doubts; and when they knock at the hall-door the man of the house quietly slides out at the back. Yet as this particular doubt is, if I may express it so, dragged to the tune of pipes, songs and speeches through several tracts of country, it forces itself upon many whether they like it or no. There are several – for doubt has its fascinations at certain stages – who peep at it with one eye. There are some who look at it with two, and, becoming perturbed at

the sight, beat a hasty retreat to the nearest acquaintance who may be relied upon to tell them that there is nothing to be frightened at. The doubt has proved too strong for others, and they are in grips with it with varying degrees of strength, weakness and mental honesty.

What does all this uprising portend? One common landscape is a hundred different landscapes to a hundred different people, for the eye sees what it brings with it to see. And the Gaelic revival, however it may attempt to define itself on paper, in constitutions and in speeches, represents something which every one must interpret for himself as best he can. I emphasise this fact for I am about to criticise and weigh it up, and if any one should put an authoritative pronouncement of the scope and objects of the League in my hand and say that I am talking of a different thing altogether, I must answer that I can see things only through my own eyes, and that I claim the liberty to discuss what I see.

The Gaelic revival appears to me in the light of a great practical possibility, an opportunity of vast moment, a good deed shining in a naughty world. I know little and care less for linguistic pedantries. I take it that the people are learning Irish because it is the national language; if the national language were Dutch they would be learning Dutch. Ireland strikes me as being at present almost the very antithesis of what she ought to be, what it is natural and reasonable that she should be made. She is uninteresting to herself. She refuses to look at the problems of secular life seriously. She is either in a wild carnival of screech or in a drowsy state of Oriental fatalism. From what I can gather from my slight knowledge of ancient Ireland, I find no reason to conclude that either screech or fatalism is indigenous to the race. How far it is within the power of her will to alter her condition must remain a matter of opinion; but I would point out that national character, as much as individual character, can, by

conscious effort, be moulded and changed. I see in the Gaelic revival a means to effect such a change. I read into it a great instrument for developing individuality. The highest point, I suggest, to which a people can go is the sum of its individualities. When individuals are drawn out to their utmost the country which embraces them has realised her uttermost possibility. The process of drawing out individuality is not wholly pleasant, for you draw out the good and the bad, the sense and the folly of the people. Human nature is lovable only when too much is not expected of it; and the people whose nostrils are offended at anything less than the ideal in men have a sad time of it in their journey through this world – in Ireland or elsewhere. Unfortunately, we, Irish, always look for distilled virtue in our own countrymen; needless to say, we never get it. We have got grand aspirations and noble dreams, but an acquired as well as constitutional antipathy to paying the price of their realisation. If it be desirable that people should be drawn out they must be given room for what is petty in them as well as for what is great. If the Gaelic revival is to rise on a sound foundation it must give everyone his head, and let him do the best he can with it, be it much or little – in most cases, no doubt, it will be little. If it should descend to be a machine for manufacturing formulae to be swallowed without mastication, I can already see its limits. We shall not have a Garden of Eden when every mind in Ireland is kindled and does its best, or makes some honest effort to think for itself. The book-learned Irish speaker, full of superiority and knowledge of facts, will not like to be told by a more or less unlettered country boy that he knows nothing of Irish because he happens to use a phrase never heard in the parish of the latter. Yet it is better for the nation that the country boy should be stimulated to think – even unjustly – that some of his betters are fools, and emboldened to say so, than that he should remain lolling over a hedge thinking of nothing at all. There is hope for him in the former state; there is none for him in the latter. If the people of the country are to be drawn out

the people of the country must be borne with. That full breath of principle of liberty I fear we have yet to acquire; but acquire it we must if anything worthy of us is ever to be accomplished. I would put no limit to criticism, but of the principle of suppression we have had enough. It is the general tendency to suppress your neighbour who disagrees with you that frequently turns what might be criticism into abuse – just as it is the efforts to attain an unnatural unity that are responsible for most divisions.

I fear there is already too much reason to dread that we may carry the methods of heroic politics into the altogether different field of a social and intellectual revival. In Irish politics you have a definite measure or measures to wrest from a foreign power. There is some best way to do it, and the *less* waste of force there is the better. The Gaelic revival has no definite objective; it is a stirring up, portending no one knows exactly what. For work such as the League has in hand – and I would like to emphasise this point – the more we struggle amongst ourselves and compete against one another the better for the commonweal. There will be an apparent waste of energy at which many a shallow mind will get dismayed. The apparent waste by competition in industrial countries like England is something appalling. You observe people evidently bent upon cutting out their neighbours, you see three or four great combinations of people doing what could be done at half the cost by one combination. But a little seeing, like a little learning, is a dangerous thing. You will also notice that the net output of all this warring energy is enormous. Turn, on the other hand, to the Utopias, where they have been tried, and you will be delighted to observe that the apparent waste of energy is infinitesimal. You will not be delighted when you look further and find that the net output of all this severely regulated effort is also more or less infinitesimal. An infallible way to paralyse a people is to aim at a Utopia. Let us have as many papers as people choose to start

and others are willing to buy; let us have opposition leagues in one town if two sets of people of different temperaments cannot agree to work in one; let people champion their own ideas about spelling, grammar, metre, or anything else, if they feel strongly about them. The net benefit to the Gaelic revival of all this energy let loose in free fields will be comparatively enormous. Uniformity is soul-destroying, and leaves more than half the faculties of a man dormant. It is in strife of all kinds that men are drawn out for what they are worth; and free play for strife and competition is an essential condition if we are to get the greatest net amount of energy out of any community. This may sound a strange doctrine in many Irish ears, but it is not necessarily the less true for that. We must have liberty – the thing itself, and not the much abused word. As far as I can judge, ‘liberty’ in the mouths of most of our eminent, as well as most of our humble leaders, is as ludicrous and as much out of place as it is over the jails of France. No doubt, if the Gaelic revival is based upon liberty, we shall have to put up with many disagreeable things. Papers and people will often hit below the belt, and good men will be misrepresented; steady and necessary work may be unjustly belittled and laughed at, and cranks may become uncomfortably numerous. But for all that, liberty with such drawbacks will go further in a week, than one ‘strong’ organisation, bounded on north, south, east and west by rules, definitions, pedantries and barbed wire, will go in a year.

Let me now sketch out roughly the things of first importance which, it appears to me, the League has got to do immediately. We have got a Gaelic-speaking people who are mostly unlettered and down-trodden in spirit and economic conditions. With ignorant people, let them be as quick-witted and intelligent as they may, very little can be done by fine reasoning and argument. Ignorance in others is a convenient thing when it happens to be travelling in the direction you want it to go; when you desire to turn it out of its accustomed course, it is as crass

and stubborn as a mule. The Gaelic-speaking people have been driven into ignorance, and there they are in it, and until you can take them out of it, one would be as usefully employed in submitting his enlightened views and his fine arguments to the consideration of a mile-stone. Other methods must be found to impress them.

Then we have got a curious mixture of an English-speaking population. They have never been analysed, as all other civilized people have been, by their own literary men. If an Englishman is curious to understand his own countrymen, he goes to some of his novelists, and he is put at once on the track where he can see things which, unaided, he probably would never have seen for himself. Our case is different. We practically have no literature of national self-criticism. No brilliant Irish minds have ever turned themselves with sincerity on to their own countrymen. We spend much time endeavouring to unravel such mysteries as :- Who are the Celts? As if it mattered to anyone, beyond a few specialised scholars, who they were. It seems never to strike anyone that there is a much more interesting mystery, with all the necessary data for unravelling it, at our own doors; one, besides, which it is very desirable for practical purposes that we should attempt to solve. That mystery is:- Who and what are we? Of course, we have got that vague abstraction of 'the typical Irishman,' whom, like the banshee (bean-sighe), everybody has heard of, but nobody has seen, or ever will see. If we turn to Anglo-Irish literature we find one set of characters made to the order of English prejudice, and another set to that of Irish prejudice. Is there any character in Anglo-Irish literature really drawn with a sincere desire to be true? I doubt it, with the possible exception of Mick M'Quaid. The result is that when we speak of the English-speaking Irish people we are in the dark; we speak of an unanalysed quantity, and we have perforce to trust to our own individual and limited experience. What are these people really capable of? What are their limits

and possibilities? The riddle is rendered more complex by the fact that they are all in a state of general affectation playing up to a civilization that is not natural to them. What they would do should it occur to them that they ought to be men and women, and strike out originally for themselves, must remain for some time at least a matter of hazy speculation. In fact whether there is or is not any chance of them endeavouring to be men and women is difficult to determine. All we can be sure of is that the Gaelic League has, in them, a motley gathering to work upon. Observe it in the music halls yelling inanely at low jokes and indecent songs; watch it coming from a patriotic meeting roaring 'The Boys of Wexford' between the 'half-way' houses; see it in petticoats in its thousands filing into the circulating libraries and the penny novelette shops for reams of twaddle about Guy and Belinda; listen to it in the literary clubs discussing, as the footman might discuss his master in the security of the kitchen, the ideas of English literary men, and never for a moment becoming conscious that God also gave it, too, a head which He intended it to use in some original and independent manner. Watch the motley throng wherever you go, the eyes of its members turned anywhere in the world but on their own country. How can anyone conclude that it can ever be licked into Irish shape? It is, indeed, a blessed dispensation that faith can move mountains. However, possible or impossible, the Gaelic League has got to attempt to work a fundamental change in all that. If it is frightened at the job it has undertaken, and will not show the fight necessary, it had better capitulate at once.

One meets with several crude, half thought-out plans for effecting the general purposes of the League. There are many people who harbour the hope that the Gaelic idea can be realised by working from the bottom upwards. Stiffen the backs of the Gaelic speakers, start *feiseanna*, and work outwards until the whole people are railed in in the Gaelic circle.

This is a pretty plan, appealing strongly, no doubt, to the sentimental for the element of 'poetic justice' with which it is charged. But as a main line of advance it is utterly hopeless and belated. It is too late in the day to think that the routed Gael will, or can, unaided, and of his own vitality, turn back and conquer the Pale again. The Gaelic-speaking population are too far gone to lead themselves anywhere. With many individual exceptions, I fear they even still contemplate the well-dressed English speaker as a black contemplates a white man. They have extraordinary spirit, but it is latent, the active principle has been knocked out of it, and they will only work under stimulus. The intellectual and social centre of gravity is now in the heart of the English-speaking people of Ireland. Their point of view at present is utterly wrong, and that point of view has got to be turned. For many years to come we must have an active, vigilant, and merciless propaganda in the English language. Anglicisation must be fought all along the line on every day of the week. So little is this necessity appreciated by some that the spectacle of certain people sitting down and discussing the conduct of the movement in English excites them to laughter. I begrudge no man his laugh, but if these people will but throw their minds over the whole field the humour may possibly vanish from the picture. The Gaelic papers carry on a propaganda in English with very satisfactory results, I have no doubt, as far as they go. But they have two grave and obvious limitations. The first is that, being Gaelic papers, they necessarily only circulate amongst the well-disposed, the already converted, and therefore, though they may help to intensify the Gaelic idea they have little power to spread it. The second is that, being Gaelic papers, the scope of their criticism in English is very limited, whereas, if the League is to be successful, it must not only defend its own positions to its own followers, but it must march abroad, invade the enemy's territory, and attack every stronghold with all the horse, foot and artillery it can dispose of.

It may be that the English-speaking Irish are, to a large extent, hopelessly lost. There is no way of knowing until the experiment of converting them is tried. That work of conversion will be a formidable business, and there is no good object gained by shutting one's eyes to its magnitude. You may take a man into a public-house, and by giving him a half-glass of whiskey, and by a judicious laying on of blarney, succeed in wheedling a vote out of him; but by no process of blarney or corrupt treating that I can think of can you lift up the skulls of a certain number of millions of people and place a new language and a new set of points of view in them. They must do these things for themselves in the sweat of their own faces. Unfortunately, the League has a work to do towards the accomplishment of which cheering is of little avail. This fact cuts off from it a vast amount of Irish energy that can always be put on tap, and which plays such a large part in many other Irish movements. It is not a difficult thing to get an Irish crowd to cheer, or even to march defiantly in procession when there is nothing but self-glorification to be done. But when you want them to do anything, even to learn, say, the First Book of O'Growney – well, that is a different story. Mobs are no good to the League directly; they will not act, but must, by roundabout means, be acted upon; and, unfortunately, as everybody is afraid of mobs in Ireland, they rule the country. Nearly all the leaders play down to them. Mobs rule the policies of the newspapers, for the editors are only like galvanised frogs jumping in sympathy with their masters in the streets. And as the Gaelic League appears to me to be far too much afraid of the newspapers, it is, therefore, too much afraid of the mob. If the main body of intelligent, informed, and serious opinion in Ireland cannot be won to the side of the League, and its active co-operation secured, there is no hope for it. There is such a body in Ireland, but it is neglected, unorganised, unrepresented by any newspapers. The League gives no opening for appeals to passion and 'high falutin' sentiment; its only appeal is to reason, common-sense, and enlightened patriotism. You cannot

effectively reach the proper public through the existing newspapers, so that in default of establishing a newspaper in English to go direct to it, you must reach it otherwise over the heads, and in defiance of, existing papers.

If the Gaelic revival is only such a thing as will strike the people as a pretty sentiment it will fail. Pretty sentiments are pretty sentiments, and they are nothing more. Unless it corresponds to a real need and a living aspiration of the people, unless it can be shown to have a real utility, it cannot make popular headway, and in bringing the question to the test one cannot err, I suggest, on the side of boldness. Hang out the idea here, there, and everywhere for all it is worth, and test as quickly as possible how far it accords with the common good sense of the people. If it get the common good sense on its side the main position is taken, and the rest will be only a matter of development. Further than this, the League, by boldly appealing on its merits to the brains and serious opinion of Ireland, will not only put itself into an impregnable position, but will go a long way to organise, if it does not absolutely organise, for the first time in Irish history, all the floating and disjointed good sense, thinking power, and shrewdness which for so many years have been almost powerless in face of organised mob rule. There are thousands and thousands of individual thinking men in Ireland, but no thinking popular body. Such a body would, if formed, inevitably rule the country and lead public opinion. We shall remain always in the dust so long as the popular rulers of the country derive their power from playing solely to the mob with mere appeals to passion, to spite, and maudlin sentimentality.

Here is a picture drawn from current events which illustrates one of the absurdities into which the present state of affairs lands us. There is a certain body, largely tainted by Unionism, I believe, who preach a propaganda of industrial cooperation and economic progress which, whatever its shortcomings may be, no

man can reasonably oppose, and which every man is at liberty to improve upon if he can. But they are sneered at by the Empire wreckers of the streets. During several nights recently large crowds have spent hours in the public thoroughfare cheering for Kruger and praying for the defeat of the English army – no taint of Unionism about that. Let us follow the inevitable sequel. Several of the crowd in due course look about for employment, but the economic conditions of the country are so desperate that their search is in vain, and as a last resort there is nothing for them to do but enlist in the Queen's army, and swear to fight against whatever Kruger may at any time be opposed to England. Let me put plainly to any serious, sensible man – which of these parties is in reality working in the interests of the Empire as against the interests of Ireland? It has been said that England has won her battles on the playgrounds of Eton: I should rather say that she has won them out of the poverty of Ireland. But where is there room for considerations such as these in a popular Press that lives by pandering to everything that is merely sentimental, unreasonable, and unthinking in the country? I repeat, that what is best and most solid in the country is the element which will carry the League, or any other reasonable and masculine movement, to victory; and if the League takes its opportunity of appealing boldly and fearlessly to that element it not only will be pursuing a good policy for its own ends but it will help to organise a body, the existence of which must react most favourably and powerfully on other phases of national activity.

The League must stand upon its solid merits, and its policy must be that of independent opposition to all its opponents. It represents a point of view absolutely opposed to the point of view of most of the newspapers, and with these newspapers it must be unremittingly at war – war to the end. Use them, but keep on attacking them. Accept their offers, if they make them, to put in little bits of Irish now and again, but keep independent

of them, and don't cease firing so long as they remain the enemy. 'A suicidal policy to profess openly' some one will say, 'the papers will all boycott you.' It does not appear by any means so suicidal when you have opened the back of the clock and have watched how the works go. At present, the mob rule the papers. Get a public opinion on the side of the League – there is a not inconsiderable one already – and the papers must bow just a little bit to it. Get a sober, thinking, organised public opinion behind the League and they will rule the country, including the mob. What, then, I ask, will the newspapers boycott? The League is non-political, non-sectarian, non-partisan, because it is above and beyond all these things. Its genius is another name for the moral essence of the Irish Nation. It stands for a new element, or rather for the neglected old element, in Irish life, and until it is fully recognised by papers and politicians, neither should get or will get any peace. It is not a thing to be bought or sold by or to any man or set of men, nor is it a thing to be invited upon a platform to speak through the mouth of any partisan.

I could not emphasise too strongly my conviction that the programme of the League is one of the greatest practical importance to the country. It appeals to the head and judgement, not of a clique, not of the educated, but of the whole people of Ireland. For many years, Ireland has literally been standing on its head, out of which unnatural position it must be taken if it is to live. If you read only the papers and the speeches you almost despair of the country; if you take an individual Irishman, even of the ranting order, you are at once struck by the contrast. I believe some ingenious Frenchman has proved, or endeavoured to prove, that the collective individuality of a crowd may be directly at variance with the several individualities that compose it. We certainly have some such condition of things in Ireland. So much has sentimentality and humbug got the better of the main body of the people, that only a strong, vigorous, combined effort can put a wedge through them preparatory to smashing

them to pieces. Accepting Irish human nature as it is, which we must do, I believe it impossible for any of the existing national journals to put the country on its feet. For, if one journal sounds a common sense note, another, finding that a march has been stolen from it, replies by a ra-ta-ta-tat on the Emerald drum, invokes the shades of a few departed rebels, common sense is routed from the field as a mean, if not an unclean thing, and matters are once again as they were. If the Unionist papers or the Unionist party strike a practical note – as they often do – it is of little or no avail. For various reasons, which I need not go into, all the backs of us mere Irish go up at once, and we all agree to have a flying kick at any practicality that comes from such quarters. The broad reason of this, as I read it, is that all of us, however we may talk, are conscious that practical men and measures must inevitably rule and gain ascendancy wherever they are set moving. The position which we still hold to, and out of which we are determined – primitive and antiquated though our weapons are – never to be driven is, that the mere Irish represent, and must continue to represent, the paramount power in Ireland. Observing, however, that the mere Irish are given over so largely to brag and bluster, we are instinctively driven to block every practical advance attempted by the other element in Ireland, feeling that, under the circumstances, such a policy is the only way to maintain utter submersion and conquest. Unionists may make up their minds that they will never wag this country. The country, if it is to wag, must wag itself – Unionists taking their legitimate share in the process. I would suggest that the statesmanlike thing for those who belong to the foreign element in Ireland to do, would be to help on the stirring-up of the Gaelic mind. When the Gael is put on his feet, and feels that he is marching somewhere, he will be less jealous of the march of the other element. As it is, my reading of his attitude to the Unionists is this:- ‘I am not marching anywhere, and if I can manage it, you, too, shall, at least, stick where you are.’

Let me turn aside and discuss the progress of the past few years, and the present position. A great deal of solid, hard, up-hill work has been done, but it appears to me that the League having pushed so far has created a new situation, and must, therefore, reconsider its tactics. Guerrilla warfare must give place to an orderly and open campaign. The movement has now been brought into national proportions; it has ceased to be a mere language, literary or philological one, and as a consequence it can no longer be led by scholars, linguists or philologists. Without scholars it cannot succeed; with scholars as leaders it is bound to fail. What do scholars know of men and the rough and tumble of life? As the old Scotchman said of the Professor, 'Take him from his books and he's as helpless as a child.' But further than this, any leader and every attempt to lead it – as in Ireland during the last twenty years leaders and leadership have been understood – will only hamper it if it do not wreck it. No one leads the intellect of France or England, or other countries; in fact, intellect cannot be led though it may be stimulated and directed. In other countries, men work their way into prominence and exert what influence they can, they create concurrent schools of thought that sway men's mind and clash with one another for a time, and then probably give way in turn to others. Were one man, or set of men, empowered to dictate to their fellows they would quench most of the literary energy out of a country. Under the particular circumstances in Ireland there must be an organisation, but it will be disastrous if it forget, as for many reasons there are great temptations to lead it to forget, that its primary office is to help to liberate the mind of the people in a Gaelic atmosphere, and not to scoop a few holes in an imaginary breastwork and say:- 'If you cannot squeeze through these you must stay outside.'

Beggars can't be choosers, and the League was right, no doubt, in the past in craving any little bit of support or patronage it could get, and in being profusely thankful for the favour. But it

has made a solid square of public opinion now, and its policy should be to demand and not to beg. Its demand, or its criticism of Irish life, or its diagnosis of the present situation, call it what you will, cannot be rebutted by anyone who stands for Irish nationality. Once admit that it is right to strive for Irish nationality, and the ideas and ideals of the League are unassailable. But too few, it seems to me, recognise the strength of the position. Most of them prefer to go about like mendicants asking for alms, and it is little that satisfies them. Recently, on expressing some views, not in the complimentary key, about a certain person to a member of the League, I was answered in this fashion:- 'Well, after all, he's not so bad, he buys the Gaelic papers regularly.' A strange condition of things in Ireland is that you may be humbug from head to toe and yet disarm criticism by expressing a 'strong' opinion, or by payment of a modest fine of a penny a week. You observe this weakness in the manner in which the slightest bit of encouragement which you get from newspapers that boast of nationality – in fact, live on it – is accepted with praise. Their columns may be, more than half of them, a gross violation of the irreducible minimum of even current 'nationality,' and yet the insertion of a couple of inches of Gaelic – sometimes turned upside down – absolves them from their sins. There is nothing so contemptible as men who have made up their minds, and see a clear course before them, floundering about from lack of a bit of spirit. Few people are tempted to rally to the side of such men. One day they will summon up courage to support a well-deserved blow at a newspaper, and the next, getting cold down the back, at the recollection of the pluck they had mustered up, they lick the wound, the giver of which they had the unwonted boldness to applaud. It will not do. If people want men with fight in them to back them up, they cannot afford to be showing the white feather every other day.

I observe, or think I observe, a lack of boldness in the League as well as in other Irish institutions. An eminent Irish-American, as the result of a recent tour through the country, came to the conclusion that the chief virtue of the Irish was prudence. I am inclined to agree with him. The League says that, as things are, the country is going to national ruin, and yet in too many quarters it is 'hush' here and 'hush' there, for fear you might hurt the susceptibilities of this fraud, or flutter the temper of that honourable high faluter. Cannot it pluck up courage to plant its standard boldly in the midst of the enemy, give no quarter, ask for none, and God defend the right? For let me repeat that if the people do not want the League they cannot be cajoled into it. Put a bit of nerve and fight into the movement, for milk and water tactics will not rouse a demoralised and disheartened race.

But my chief fear for the League is that it lacks the full breath of the spirit of liberty. The organization is an humble means to bring about a national uprising of the spirit and intellect of the country. If it interprets its powers as exceeding that, it is, I conceive, taking up a false position inimical to the objects it proposes to aim at. Inspire as much uniformity as you can, but you make a fatal mistake in making uniformity your objective. It is none of the business of any elected body of the League to sit down and make enemies by an impossible attempt to decide a standard spelling. These, and such like small matters, are the usurpations of authority that irritate and drive independent men out of the ranks. Again, if other people like to start an organization of their own, turn the light of criticism on it by all means, but let it be, if it can make shift to live. Suppression is twice cursed. There may be, in fact assuredly there will be, many foolish and unjustifiable things done by individuals and organised bodies. Men have an inalienable right to play the fool if they elect to do so, and imperfect humanity, at the best, will always go right in curves. Why cannot fools and men who may be half good and half bad be borne with? You cannot get out of

the position that a country cannot be made better than the sum of the individuals who compose it. But it will be said, if you grant liberty you create chaos; to which I would reply, that the man who thinks so knows nothing of human nature. Men hate chaos as they hate being suppressed. Let men have their way, and they settle into customs, habits, combinations, and conventions as naturally as water goes down hill. Besides, people are influenced and held in check by other things besides Executive Committees. The Brehon Laws had no executive force behind them. Unique, I understand, amongst all laws, their equity was their sole power to exact obedience. We may have degenerated much since those times, but we still have the spirit of equity in us, and are amenable to it when not irritated and angered by attempts at suppression and petty annoyances.

It may be said that anything that has really happened does not warrant all these warnings. I should not in the least mind admitting that that may be so, for then I could take up the position of a famous Monaghan woman. One evening she came home and found her poor old husband sitting by the fire as quiet as the cat. 'Silence!' said she. But the poor man said nothing. 'Silence!' said she again, and still the old man held his peace. 'Silence!' she roared for the third time, whereupon the old man turned round and said - 'Sure, woman, I'm saying nothing.' 'I know you're not,' was the reply, 'but for fear you might.' The scope of the League will shortly embrace nearly all the country, and its future conduct and the traps that may beset it are legitimate matters for open discussion. The League draws and will continue to draw from all sources. There are, I have no doubt, many politicians in it who have taken it up partly with ulterior motives. It is quite legitimate and likely that Unionists discern, or think they discern, in its probable effects on the intelligence of the people, in its power to make them rational and serious, a ground for hope that the political views of the country may become fundamentally qualified by its influence. It is

likewise probable that sensible and thinking extremists are struck by the isolating qualities inherent in the movement, and, calculating its effect on the pride and spirit and pretensions of a people, now given over to boasting and spit-fire threats, they are driven to the conclusion, as a matter of tactics, that if they are still to look forward to political separation they must throw all their weight in with the attempt to accomplish intellectual and social independence. There are many others who view the full programme of the League as a belated dream, but who recognise in the propaganda a means of stirring up the intellect of the people, of drying up somewhat the floods of gush which at present almost drown the country, of turning the mind of Ireland on to Ireland, of making the people sober, moderate, masculine, and thereby paving the way for industrial advancement and economic reform.

Whatever their politics, whatever their motives, the work of the League is to make the population of Ireland Irish. Men of all parties and of no party have already flocked to the ranks, but there must be no diluting of the Irish ideal to please any of them. At the same time, while we stand steadfast by that, let us not commit the too characteristic Irish mistake of expecting distilled virtue from any man, leader or follower, but remember that all men must act according to their natures, which are composed of prejudices, blindnesses, and passions, as well as intelligence and goodwill. Put no bounds either to criticism or to liberty, and above all, keep sight of the fact that you cannot get more out of a people than is in them, and that if you want to get that you must put up with the good and with the bad alike.

## VI.

# **The Battle of Two Civilizations**

I and many others have convinced ourselves that Ireland during this century has in many vital matters played the fool. If this view in any way soothes the conscience of the English for their own country's cruel injustices to Ireland I cannot help it. Let the truth be stated though the sky should fall. We are sick of "Irish National" make-believes and frauds; sick of shouting nation when there is no nation; and the much abused national consciousness of the Irish people cries for truth and light, and death to shams and impostures.

The cry of the friendly Englishman fully responded to by the "reasonable" Irishman is, "Let us know more about Irishmen and let Irishmen know more about us; we will learn to like and understand one another." As against this view it is absolutely clear to me, though the expression may appear to have some of the form of a "bull," that when two nations understand one another there is from that moment only one nation in it. International misunderstanding is one of the marks of nationhood. Our modern differences have largely arisen not only because the English persisted in their attempt to bring up the Irish after their own pattern, but because the Irish, though vividly conscious of a separate national identity, did nearly their best to be English and completely failed. Where the English were dull was in their attempt to throttle Irish civilization instead of allowing it to grow and develop in all its native vigour, and where the Irish were dull – dull beyond comprehension – was that while they with much noisy demonstration made a desperate stand for something which they called the eternal cause of Irish nationality, they did nearly their level best to turn themselves into Saxons.

Unfortunately it is difficult to get the Englishman to admit that there is any civilization in the world other than British. (And Anglicised Ireland naturally enough has come roughly to that conclusion too). This is one of the most flagrant examples of dullness. When he talks of morality he thinks only of the British variety; of liberty, progress, good taste, and so on, it is a like story. He shows somewhat more intelligence on the question of manners, for here he allows himself to be haunted by the suspicion that his may after all be only second rate. He wants to Anglicise the world; and everything is tainted with barbarism that is not British. This heroic state of self-conceit is perhaps natural to a vigorous but dull race that has made its mark upon the world; but it is not founded upon truth. There are other worthier things between heaven and earth than English music halls, May meetings, company promoters and bean feasts. These may represent some of the highest points of English civilization, but there are other struggling civilizations that will have little or none of them; that may in fact have the hardihood to look upon most of them with contempt. The world is divided into civilizations: for several reasons I think this word is more expressive than the word nation. And surely, on the principle of liberty, which England prides herself so much upon, each civilization has as much right to look out on the world in its own way as an individual has of holding his own views. England will not admit this. I do not blame her for attempting to spread by legitimate means that form of civilization which, as it is her own, she not unnaturally holds to be the best; but her impatience of, and her ill-mannered contempt. for, other civilizations, her denial that, if they happen to be any way weak, there is any justification whatever for their existence, makes her hated all over the world; and I fear that when a weak civilization impedes her advance, killing stands in great danger of ceasing to be murder.

I think it would be a bad day for the world were one common form of civilization to embrace it all; when the individual and independent growth of separate nations was stopped. However, I cannot dwell to develop this point now. I have used the word civilization instead of the word nation: the development of nationality is the natural development of a distinct civilization, and any power that kills the one is guilty of the death of the other. In Grattan's time Irish civilization was thrown overboard; but "Irish nationality" was stuck up on a flag of green – even the colour was new fledged – and the people were exhorted to go forward and cover themselves with glory. If I am right in equating Nationality with a distinct civilization, we get now a vivid glimpse of the first great source of the insincerity – all the more insidious because unconscious – the muddled thinking, the confusion of ideas, the contradictory aims which even the most cursory observer discerns in the Ireland of to-day. Since Grattan's time every popular leader, O'Connell, Butt, Parnell, Dillon, and Redmond, has perpetuated this Primary contradiction. They threw over Irish civilization whilst they professed – and professed in perfect good faith – to fight for Irish Nationality. What potential genius that contradiction has choked, what dishonesties and tragedies, above on what comedies, it has been responsible for, I will pass over without detailed enquiry. The Irish all this time, as they are at the present day, were absolutely different from the English. The genius of each nation was distinct. To English ideals we did not respond; English Literature did not kindle our minds: we continued to be born the brightest, and continued to be reared the most stupid and helpless of peoples. There is something, be it instinct or the living sub-conscious tradition of an almost dead civilization, that says to nearly every Irish heart "Thou shalt be Irish: thou shalt not be English". This is written plainly even over the history of the last hundred years – in every respect the most decadent century that Ireland has seen. The propaganda of the Gaelic League has effected a partial revolution in Ireland. The criticism

that it has inspired has been largely destructive; the energy it has let loose decidedly constructive. Much of the perpetual flow of wholesale and largely unreasonable denunciation of England was turned from its course and directed back – where it was badly wanted – upon Irishmen themselves; much of the energy that husbanded itself in idleness until certain political reforms were granted, commenced under the new inspiration to move and bestir itself at once. It is moving with increased velocity as the conviction gains ground that at last Ireland has gained some kind of a footing, and can advance – somewhere.

The League found Ireland wrangling over the corpse of Parnell. When A, who shouted one cry, called himself an Irish Nationalist, and declared with many strong adjectives that B, who shouted a different cry, was a West Briton, it began gradually to dawn upon the average mind that, as there was practically no difference between A and B but a cry, “Irish Nationality ” must be made of a very cloudy substance, indeed. Under the inspiration of the new gospel of the Gaelic League the common man, much to his surprise, was driven to the conclusion that A and B were after all a pair of ordinary, unmannerly politicians, and nothing else. And then the light dawned upon him that Politics is not Nationality, and that the nineteenth century had been for Ireland mostly a century of humbug. That, in brief, is the revolution that the Gaelic League has worked, and that revolution has fundamentally altered the Irish problem. Until a few years ago no one challenged the accepted view that politics was the begin-all and end-all of Irish Nationality. And as politics in Ireland consisted in booing against the English Government, and as Irish Nationality was politics, the English Government became logically the sole destroyer of nationality.

Of course it was an utterly false and an almost fatal position for us to have taken up. All the time that we were doing our share

in the killing of our nation, everything was put down to England. An infallible way to distract criticism from domestic affairs – and this can be clearly seen by observing the state of the public temper in England at the present time – is to get entangled in a foreign war. When a great struggle is on hand domestic reformers may sing for an audience. A people who are watching their nation in death-grips with another are in little humour for attending to the parish pumps, least of all for listening to uncomplimentary criticism. But, supposing this condition of things lasted for a hundred years, what would become of the home economy? And this has practically been the condition under which Ireland has spent the century. We have been fighting England as our only enemy, looking to her as the sole source of all our evils, as the only possible source of all our blessings, inasmuch as until we had settled with her we could do nothing for ourselves. All the while, like Pendennis, we ourselves were our greatest enemies. As politics was nationality, every patriotic Irishman who watched his decaying nation felt new drops of hatred for England descend into his heart. Until England could be brought to her senses no progress could be made, and as the life was all the time ebbing out of the Irish nation, then ten thousand curses be upon her oppressor. This attitude flowed reasonably from the first false position that politics was nationality. When Ireland was great she sent men of learning and religion to instruct and enlighten Europe; when she was at her lowest ebb she sent out desperadoes with infernal machines. The commandment, “Thou shalt be Irish,” was written alike upon the hearts of all. From the great error that Nationality is politics a sea of corruption has sprung. Ireland was practically left unsubjected to wholesome native criticism, without which any collection of humanity will corrupt. If a lack of industrial energy and initiative were pointed out, the answer naturally was “Away, traitor. England robbed us of our industries; we can do nothing until she restores our rights.” If you said that the people drank too much – “Well, what are the

poor people to do? They are only human; wait until our rights are restored, and all that will be altered." And so on. To find fault with your countrymen was to play into the hands of England and act the traitor. There were enough abusing us without Ireland's own joining in the chorus. This was the negative side of the matter: there was a positive side also. It manifestly became the policy of Irishmen to praise and bolster up their own people, and make out the most glowing account of their virtues and importance. The minor political leaders let themselves loose over the country, telling their audiences that they belonged to a great and immortal nation, that they were engaged in a noble struggle for Irish freedom, and that the eyes of the civilised world were upon them. Irish popular oratory was corrupted under these influences into one string of uncomplimentary adjectives applied to England and the English, and another string of an opposite description applied to Ireland. Thought had been squeezed out of the platform and the press, and every vestige of distinctive nationality was fast leaving the country. This was certainly a pretty pass for a quick-witted people to allow themselves to drift into. But once, I submit, that the Irish mind allowed itself to be muddled into considering politics and nationality convertible terms, the condition of things that resulted became, as an eminent Englishman might put it, "inevitable."

I will now attempt to trace, in broad outline, the influence which the state of things that I have referred to has had upon literary taste and literary production in Ireland, on social progress and the development of polite society, on the Irish attitude towards England, and its powerful bearing upon the economic helplessness and stagnation of the country.

I think I have read somewhere that the great Duke of Marlborough knew no English history except that which he learned from Shakespeare's works. I mention this in order to

point out that it takes an Englishman to get the most out of English literature, as it takes a Frenchman to get the most out of French literature. A literature steeped in the history, traditions, and genius of one nation, is at the best only an imperfect tutor to the people of another nation; in fact, the common, half-educated people of another nation will have none of it. The Irish nation has, this century, been brought up on English literature. Of course it never really kindled their minds or imaginations; they were driven to look at literature as a thing not understandable and above them – a position, I need scarcely say, not making for the development of self-respect or intellectual self-dependence. In most cases when they left school they ceased to read anything but the newspapers. Of course there are many exceptions to this generalization. If an Irishman received a higher English education and lost touch with Irish aspirations, he practically became an Englishman, and many people with less advantages, by force of exceptional ability, got their heads above the entanglements around them and breathed something like free air. But I am talking of the common run of men who make up a nation, and not of the few exceptions.

Tell me of any ordinary man in Dublin, Cork or elsewhere, who professes an appreciation for the best products of English literature, and I will have no hesitation in informing you that he is an intellectual snob, mostly composed of affectation. Literature, to the common Irishman, is an ingenious collection of fine words which no doubt have some meaning, but which he is not going to presume to understand. A good speaker in Ireland is not a man who talks keen sense well, but one with “the devil’s flow of words”; and Irish “ oratory ” has developed into the windiest thing on earth. The state of literature and thought and original intellectual activity of any kind had indeed dropped to a low level. The “Irish National ” literary output chiefly consisted of a few penny magazines in which the most commonplace rhymes were passed off as “ Irish ” poetry, and

which contained an unceasing and spirit-wearying flow of romances about "48, '98, and other periods, in all of which, of course, Ireland was painted spotless white. Romances in which Irish heroes of a couple of hundred years ago, who probably never spoke a word of English in their lives, were made to prate heroics in English of the "Seest thou yon battlements" type, were so manifestly absurd, that no one but very young boys could put up with them. Thought was necessarily absent from all this literature, for assuredly the first effort of thought would be to let the light through all this make-believe that passed current as part and parcel of "Irish National" literature. Criticism had died, and this sort of thing, along with "oratory," was allowed to swell like soap bubbles all over the land. The Irish people dropped off reading, not from any lack of intellectual desire, but because nowhere was to be found that which would interest them. Then the great rise Of cheap periodicals came about in England, and the market in Ireland was flooded with them. Ireland being a poor country, the cheapest class of periodicals only is within the popular resources, and it soon became evident that a great evil' was threatening us, and that Ireland was largely feeding on a questionable type of British reading matter. And the commandment—"Thou shalt be Irish"—was all the while troubling Irish hearts.

A number of writers then arose, headed by Mr. W. B. Yeats, who, for the purposes they set themselves to accomplish, lacked every attribute of genie but perseverance. However, by proclaiming from the house-tops that they were great Irish literary men, they succeeded in attracting that notice from the people of Ireland which the crowd walking up Ludgate Hill would give to five or six men who waved their hands and shouted on top of St. Paul's Cathedral. Practically no one in Ireland understands Mr. Yeats or his school; and one could not, I suggest, say anything harder of literary men. Or if a literary man is not appreciated and cannot be understood, of what use is he? He has not served his purpose.

The Irish mind, however, was wound down to such a low state that it was in a fit mood to be humbugged by such a school. Ireland it must be understood, was fully convinced at this time that she possessed an Irish literature in the English language. She pointed proudly to Goldsmith, Sheridan and the rest, and cursed the Saxon when that dull gentleman asked where particularly did Ireland come in, and then went on in his dull way classing all such literature as English. What is Irish literature? was a simple question which generations of Irishmen for good instinctive reasons fought shy of. They were afraid of the truth. There is manifestly no essential difference between first-class literary work executed by an English-speaking man born in Ireland, and that executed by an English-speaking man born in England. But we had to make a difference, for though we had adopted the English language, it was death to the man who called our writings by their proper name. Another make-believe had to be manufactured.

We put in “throths” and “begors” and “alannian” and “asthores” by way of Irish seasoning. But though certain classes of, ballad and lyric poetry can be written in dialect, as Burns has proved, you cannot rise to dignity or poetry on “begors and “bedads.” There is something essentially mean about the corrupt English of the Irish peasant, particularly when put into cold print; it passes the power of man to write literature in it. Here, then, was an impasse. We were all on the look out for somebody to think for us, for we had given up that habit with our language. Matthew Arnold happily came along just in the nick of time, and in a much quoted essay suggested, among other things, that one of the characteristics of Celtic poetry was “natural magic.” I confess I don’t exactly know what “natural magic” means; and even dare to submit that if each of the words mean anything at all that their meanings are contradictory. But let that pass. We seized on that phrase like hawks. Then we called ourselves Celts — a word which is supposed to stand for a people, but who

that people are no one seems to know, and indeed very few care. Beardless boys studying for their degrees, and serious girls were haunted by the phrase; and literary articles and literary discussion were studded with these two words, "natural magic." At last we had found the missing gulf, the missing something that separated us from the dull Saxon mind, and rejoiced accordingly. We now knew the difference between English literature and Irish literature, and satisfied ourselves that Shakespeare was demonstrably a Celt.

Then yet another Irish make-believe was born, and it was christened "The Celtic Note," Mr. W. B. Yeats standing sponsor for it. The "Celtic Renaissance" was another name invented about this time, and we were asked to pride ourselves on the influence we had exerted, and would continue to exert on English literature. The birth of the "Celtic Note," and the discovery of what Irish literature was really made of, caused a little stir amongst minor literary circles in London, but, much less stir in Ireland itself, where the "Irish National" demand for *The Mirror of Life*, *The Police Gazette*, and publications of a like kind, showed no signs of weakening. The people, when they showed any evidence of interest whatever, asked what these gentlemen were driving at. Their backers thereupon put them up proudly on a pedestal, and said: — "Hats off, gentlemen; these are mystics." Never, indeed, was a truer sentence uttered. Mystics they were and are, for a mystic is assuredly a man who deals in mysteries, and mysteries are things which the limited human mind cannot understand. The whole situation was really charged with the comic element. A muddled land which mistook politics for nationality, and English literature for Irish, which confused black with white, was offered the services of a few mystics. But, man, its too many mysteries we have already," no one had the courage to say, "and what Ireland wants is not men to muddle her with more mysteries, but men who can solve some of the too many already in stock." However, it must be

admitted that the mystics served a useful purpose, though it was by no means the one they intended. By making a serious and earnest effort to create a distinct Irish literature in English they pushed forward the question, "What is Irish literature?" The Gaelic League took up a logical and uncompromising position, fought a sharp and, as it proved, a decisive campaign, and last summer Mr. W. B. Yeats formally surrendered his sword, and Irish literature henceforward was not to be thought of outside the Irish language. When exactly, or by what process, Mr. George Moore came to the same conclusion I cannot say. His first public pronouncement, as far as I am aware, was made only a few months ago. The Irish language is now the ultimate goal of the Irish Literary Theatre, and a play in Irish is announced for next year. No man will dare now to say that such a contradiction as Irish literature in the English language does or could exist. And thus in a few years the work of the Young Irelanders and the ideals of Sir Charles Gavan Duffy, "The Celtic Note," "The Celtic Renaissance," and the whole Irish literary make-believes of a century were weighed in the balance and found wanting; and the triumphant Gaelic League is free to march along as if they had never been.

If thought and literature dwindled away in modern Ireland, an enquiry into social life and manners presents even a more muddled and hopeless picture. It was all very well for people to say that everything would come straight when we obtained our rights from England, but in the meantime people had to do something, for what we understand in current language as "doing nothing" is in reality a form of doing something. Even those who shouted most about Irish Parliaments and Irish Republics were swayed by the general desire common to all aspiring men, to be gentlemen of some kind, to be socially "superior," to reach to some point of social vantage. And in this department of Irish life we will observe the deepest muddle of all. What is a gentleman from the point of view of an English-

speaking Irishman? Manifestly the same thing as a gentleman is in England. What are good breeding, good taste, etiquette, from the same man's point of view? Manifestly again the same as these things are in England. The English-speaking Irishman and the Englishman were children of one common civilization. Social advance under modern Irish conditions could therefore only lead in one way, and that way was in the direction of the English ideals. But there was still that commandment like a fallen oak across the road, barring the way – "Thou shalt be Irish and not English." Here was a serious question which the modern Irishman had to solve.

Like many another question he refused to face it; he merely tried to shelve it. And too often he avoided becoming an English gentleman by becoming an Irish vulgarian. Ireland had either advance socially along English lines or along Irish lines. She refused to do the former with any thoroughness; she had cut herself completely adrift from the latter. Had Ireland developed her own civilization the manners and etiquette of Irish society would, I think, be very formal and elegant; but as she had thrown over Irish civilization, there was nothing for her to do but imitate England with the best grace she could. But the conventions and manners of English society, owing to various local and particular reasons, as well as in consequence of the radical difference in the genius of the two peoples, she found repellent to her. Society without conventions is necessarily vulgar and chaotic, and much of the social life of Ireland was driven to prove itself Irish by kicking against convention altogether. There are various degrees in this long procession of vulgarity, and those who had least convention were perhaps less vulgar than many mean-spirited imitators after everything they considered English and "respectable". You would, I believe, search the world in vain for the equals of the latter class English conventions were known to them mostly by hearsay, and these hearsay accounts they copied with a dog-like fidelity. They

cultivated English accents, they sent their children to English schools they tucked in their skirts from contact with the “low Irish,” and they played tennis, not because they liked it, but because it was English and “respectable”. However, if we look charitably upon them, and keep in mind the impossible conditions under which they were compelled to live, we shall find much to say in their extenuation. Fate has revenged herself upon them, for she has decreed that all of them, from those who live in fashionable Dalkey, on through the ranks of the “gentleman farmers” down to the huxter who is making his son a doctor and his daughter a “lady”, should be known to the world under the comprehensive title of “shoneens”.

I now pass on to consider briefly the effect which the condition of modern Ireland had upon our attitude towards England. A professed hatred of England, but not of things English, which is a different matter altogether, not illogically became part and parcel of Irish nationality. This led to more muddle. The Irish people do not hate England or any other country. As a matter of fact the genius of our nation is far more prone to love than hate. There is no gospel of personal or national hate in our religion; we are told at our mothers’ knees to love all men including our enemies. But as England, in consequence of the situation I have attempted to sketch, became in our view the source of all our ills, was responsible not only for her own sins against us — which heaven knows are many and great — but also responsible for our own blunders and stupidity, she came in for a double dose of resentment. Whenever an Irishman contemplated anything hurtful to his national pride a curse against England gurgled in his throat. No wonder Englishmen completely misunderstood us, and classed us as a lot of grown-up children, when Ireland swayed and writhed in a helpless entanglement herself. It was certainly difficult to deal satisfactorily with a country that had missed her own path, and had only a very muddled idea of what she wanted herself. All this light has been thrown upon Ireland

by the propaganda of the Gaelic League. It has compelled us to ask ourselves the elementary question: What is Irish Nationality, and what in reality do we want to see realised in Ireland? Will a few soldiers dressed in green, and a republic, absolutely foreign to the genius of the Irish people, the humiliation of England, a hundred thousand English corpses with Irish bullets or pike wounds through them satisfy the instinct within us that says: — “Thou shalt be Irish?”

These things we probably can never see, though we may try to drown our ‘national conscience by dreaming of them. But were they possible they were vain; for a distinct nation is a distinct civilization, and if England went down to the bottom of the sea tomorrow that distinct civilization which we have turned our backs upon, that woof of national tradition which we have cast from us would not be restored. Our nation cannot be resurrected merely by the weakness of England, but mainly by the strength and effort of Ireland herself. This then is the new situation that has been created—the political disabilities of Ireland remain, and the political fight must go on until they are redressed, but England stands in our mental view no longer as the sole destroyer of Irish Nationality; we have learned that we ourselves have been acting like fools, that we, during this century, have been the greatest sinners against that nationality whose death we were only too anxious to lay at the door of England. The Irish Nationality that has sprung merely from a misguided hatred or affected hatred of England has not been a brilliant success if we judge it by its fruits. Hate, I suggest, inspires nothing but destruction. And looking over this great century during which the civilized world has made such strides, we find that Ireland, representing one of the oldest and independent civilizations, has attempted nothing and achieved nothing. She has gone back in every department where other nations have advanced. She threw away her initiative and her language, and became a mean and sulky imitator of another people whom she professed to

hate. Whilst clamouring and organising insurrections to bring about something which she called "National Independence", she willingly cast away the main functions of independent existence which, notwithstanding English misgovernment, she was still in a large measure free to exercise.

The baneful effect of the state of things that I have attempted to describe, did not stop at literature, public opinion, and social development; it sapped the very foundations of economic advance. At the first blush it may appear a far-fetched idea that there is a strong connection between the development of a native civilization having its roots in the native language, and the production of economic wealth. English thought was, until comparatively recently, in a rather muddled state over economics; and it passes the understanding of modern man to comprehend by what mental process certain not very old theories were held by the best thinkers of those days. We have come now to see that land, though an indispensable, is by no means the main source of modern economic wealth. Human skill in all its manifold manifestations has taken the premier place, and conditions precedent to the production of that skill are the existence of initiative and self-dependence. If you have to begin with a self-distrusting people who are afraid to rely on their own judgment, who have learnt by a long and reluctant effort to imitate a rich and highly-developed people foreign to their genius, to conceive a mean and cringing opinion of themselves, you will never get much economic initiative out of them. You will find it difficult to raise what economists call their "standard of comfort." Creatures may heave bricks and draw water, but it takes men to command, to think, to initiate, to organise, and to will. The first step in the acquirement of skill is a man, and if you have not a man, but a sulky, imitating being to begin with, it is a poor look-out for your economic projects. For behind and above the economics of a nation is the heart of a nation. And Anglo-Ireland of today has no heart. It is led by a hempen cord and

frightened by a shadow. The economic ills of Ireland can be traced to many diverse minor causes, but if you follow them up you arrive at the great common source — the lack of Irish heart. Ireland has not courage to say — I will wear this, or I will not wear that. So the draper from Ballyduff goes to London — sometimes he gives out that he has been as far as Paris — and a hideous poster in three colours announces that the latest novelties from London and Paris have arrived. This sends a thrill through the households of the village. The greasy draper rubs his hands and dilates on “the circulation of money”, and the moss on the still wheel of the village mill weeps for the native heart of other days.

Ireland, because she has lost her heart, imports to-day what on sound economic principles she could produce for herself. She who once gave ideas to the world begs the meanest tinsel from that world now. She is out in the cold amongst the nations, standing on a sort of nowhere looking at a civilization which she does not understand, refuses to be absorbed into, and is unable to copy. She exports cattle, drink, and human beings, and she imports, among other things, men with initiative and heart. A dolt from England manages a naturally able man born of the soil, because the dolt uses his head, such as it is, and the native of the soil has lost his heart. The great modern economic tradition of Ireland is simply this — Nothing Irish succeeds! We have not even heart to amuse ourselves, and our “humour” and our “drama” — God save us from most of both — are imported as well as our shoddy. The tinker of thought — and modern Ireland is full of that type — has traced the ills of Ireland to everything in turns and to nothing long. His curses and complainings are ever floating over the seas, and he stands by the side of a native civilization that he has neglected almost unto death, and is never inspired to exclaim: “It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul!” In fact he is not aware that he ever had a civilization. He frets and mourns and curses as he gropes in the dark recesses between

two of them. If I were autocrat of Ireland tomorrow, and someone were to come to me and ask what I wanted most, I should have no hesitation in answering: men. And if we are to have men we must make the population of Ireland either thorough-going English or thorough-going Irish. No one who knows Ireland will entertain for a moment the idea that the people can be made English; the attempt has been made, and a country of sulky, dissatisfied and self-distrusting mongrels is the result. Ireland will be nothing until she is a nation, and, as a nation is a civilization, she will never accomplish anything worthy of herself until she falls back upon her own language and traditions, and recovering there her old pride, self-respect and initiative, develops and marches forward from thence.

I have attempted to trace the evil effects arising from our efforts to imitate England whilst the commandment, "Thou shalt be Irish", is written upon our hearts. I hope I am no quack. The influences that mould a nation are infinite, and cannot be clearly grasped by the human mind. We can only hope to trace them in the broadest outline. Of what English legislation has done to undo Ireland I have a lively appreciation, but that matter does not come within the scope of this article. I have confine myself to an inquiry into the effects of causes which it is within Ireland's power, and within her power alone, to remove. The only hope that I see for Ireland is that she may set to work to create what does not exist now, what mere political independence, a parliament in College Green, or the humiliation of British arms, will not necessarily bestow — to create a nation. Abroad, during this century, wherever Irishmen have unreservedly thrown themselves in with the particular civilization of their adopted countries, they have done honour alike to themselves and their neighbours. During previous centuries Spain and France and other countries had hundreds of thousands of our bravest and our best, and well, and not without good reason, were they welcomed. The Irishman of modern times has succeeded in

every land but his own. For at home is the only place where he cannot make up his mind— he will not be one thing or the other, he will not be English or Irish. Grattan, though not a great statesman, was visited with many vivid flashes of insight. The history of this century gives a new and deeper meaning to one sentence he uttered more than a hundred years ago concerning the relations of Ireland and England. “As her equal we shall be her sincerest friend; as anything less than her equal we shall be her bitterest enemy.” Unless we are a nation we are nothing, and the growth of a civilization springing from the roots of one of the oldest in Europe will alone make us a nation, give us scope to grow naturally, give us something to inspire what is best in us, cultivate our national pride and self-respect, and encourage our self-dependence. Marching along that line the hurt or humiliation of England will cease, must cease, to be our ambition; for our master-passions will be wrapped up in the construction of our own nation, not in the destruction of another. Whether an Ireland of the future, relying upon her own genius, will ever do for mankind what the old Ireland of the early centuries did with such generosity, love, and enthusiasm for Europe, is a matter for faith rather than for speculation. The prospect of such a new Ireland rising up out of the foundations of the old, with love and not hate as its inspiration, has already sent a great thrill through the land. It is a new and unlooked for situation, full with fate, not only for Ireland, but for the world.