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FROM PARNELL TO PEARSE

(1891–1921)

by Donal McCartney

The thirty years between the death of Parnell and the signing of the Anglo-Irish treaty in 1921 flashed with more brilliance, and, at the same time, were riddled with more disappointment, than any comparable era in our history. At the beginning of the period the Irish people seemed content that Ireland should remain part of the United Kingdom, retaining English institutions and the English language. In parliament, national demands went no further than a limited measure of control over domestic affairs, and a continuation of the reform of the land system enabling the tenant farmers to become owners of the land they worked. But in 1921 the demand was for a more definite break with England, and for a more distinct and separate national existence in politics, economics and culture.

What follows is an attempt to account for the change that took place in the outlook of a generation.

In 1891 Parnell was dead. The forces which his leadership had held together in a great unified national movement had split apart, and the result was a decade of political division and ineffectiveness.

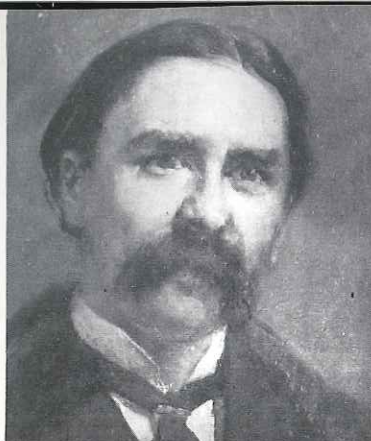
The bitter years of the Parnellite split presented a sharp contrast with the days of Parnell's glory; and with the fall of Parnell, the romantic hero, young men retreated from the party politics of home rule and fashioned their dreams in other activities. Small coteries turning away in disgust from the vicious political squabbling of the 1890s built for themselves so many separate little dream-worlds in a nationalistic Tír-na-nÓg, where poetry meant more than politics, and where ideals counted far more than votes.

One of these non-political movements emerging in what was called the Anglo-Irish literary revival was led by the poet, William Butler Yeats. In Yeats's vision the poets and the dramatists and the writers would cater for the intellectual, as distinct from the material, needs of Ireland. For without an intellectual life of some kind, it was argued, the Irish could not long preserve their nationality. Yeats dreamed of the people cultivating a national literature that would be of the highest aesthetic quality. And in this movement he was assisted by a galaxy of literary talent – Lady Gregory, George Russell, Douglas Hyde, T. W. Rolleston, Standish O'Grady, J. M. Synge, George Moore, James Stephens, and others. Between them they revived and romanticised the early legends and history of Ireland. And they sent into circulation the image of a new Irish hero, the legendary Cuchulainn, famed for heroic feats, to replace a prosaic Grattan or O'Connell, the models of the home-rulers. The literary revivalists pictured Ireland as a poor old woman who would become a queen once more only when men became as chivalrous as Cuchulainn and thought her worth dying for. This idea was dramatised by Yeats in *Cathleen Ní Houlihan*:

It is a hard service they take that may help me. Many that are red cheeked now will be pale cheeked; many that have been free to walk the hills and the bogs and the rushes will be sent to walk hard streets in far countries; many a good plan will be broken; many that have gathered money will not stay to spend it; many a child will be born and there will be no father at its christening to give it a name. They that have red cheeks will have pale cheeks for my sake; and for all that they will think that they are well paid.

They shall be remembered for ever,
They shall be alive for ever,
They shall be speaking for ever,
The people shall hear them for ever.¹

The nationalistic, and even separatist, impact of Yeats and his friends was profound, but it was limited and confined mainly to fellow poetic natures. However, what the literary revival lacked in popular appeal was supplied by the Gaelic League. The Gaelic League, founded by Douglas Hyde and Eoin MacNeill in 1893, had its own dream – at first to keep



119 Pioneers of the Gaelic revival:
(a) Douglas Hyde, by Sarah Purser,
R.H.A. (photo. National Gallery of
Ireland);



(b) Eoghan O'Growney (*Leabhar an
t-Athair Eoghan: the O'Growney
memorial volume, 1904*);

Irish alive where it was still spoken, and later, to restore Irish as the spoken language of the country. By giving up our native language and customs, said Hyde, we had thrown away the best claim which we had upon the world's recognition of us as a separate nation. Therefore the task facing the present generation of Irishmen was the re-creation of a separate cultural Irish nation, and this could only be done by what Hyde called de-anglicisation – refusing to imitate the English in their language, literature, music, games, dress, and ideas. Hyde argued that the practical steps taken by the Gaelic Athletic Association to revive the national games had done more good for Ireland in five years than all the talk for sixty. D. P. Moran vigorously developed Hyde's message. Every week in his influential paper, the *Leader*, Moran relentlessly propagated what he called the philosophy of Irish Ireland in well-written pungent commentaries on passing events.

With such publicists as Hyde and Moran, workers like MacNeill and Pearse, and authors like O'Growney, Dinneen, and An t-Athair Peadar, the Gaelic League caught hold of the popular imagination. It showed great potential as an adult education-cum-entertainment movement with its language, history, and dancing classes, its drama groups, its local *feiseanna* and the annual *oireachtas* and *ard-fheis*. The league became much more than a mere language or literary organisation. It propagated national self-reliance and self-respect, and campaigned against all forms of west-Britonism and *shoneenism*. The Gaelic League in fact, became a well-organised, nation-wide pressure-group, and it could claim among its



(c) Eoin MacNeill (Cashman Collection,
Radio Telefís Éireann)

other achievements that it gave Irish a prominent place in every branch of education; closed the pubs on St Patrick's Day; turned that day into a national holiday; and promoted native industry by helping to organise industrial parades.

The Gaelic League appealed even to some unionists. Horace Plunkett, for example, then busily engaged in organising the cooperative movement in Irish agriculture, was impressed by the fact that in 1903 the number of Gaelic League branches, 600, had trebled in a couple of years; within a single year Irish had been introduced to 1,300 National Schools; the sale of its publications in a country which allegedly did not read stood at a quarter of a million for one year; its administrative expenses, collected by voluntary subscription, reached about £6,000 a year; and it was employing full-time some twenty-two people. The league, wrote Plunkett, was invigorating every department of Irish life, and adding to the intellectual, social, and moral improvement of the people.

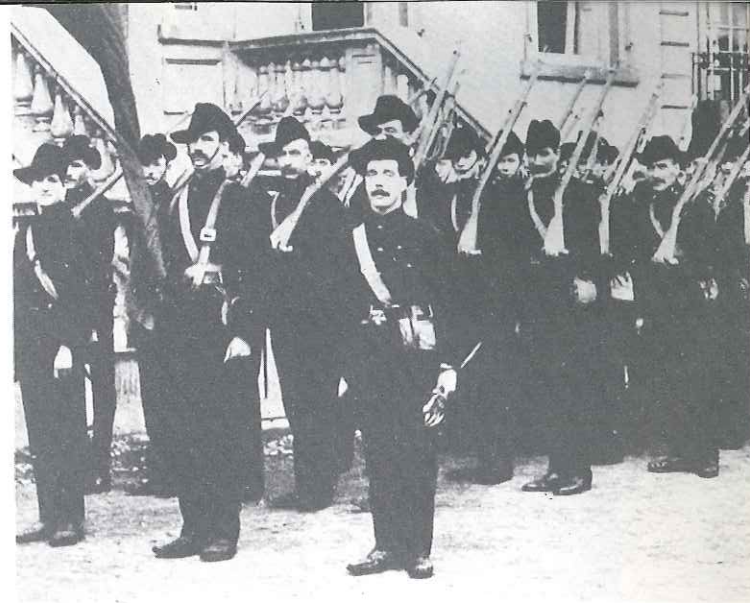
Although it claimed to be non-political the league had provided the best argument yet for the recognition of Ireland as a separate national entity. More than any other movement the Gaelic League provided the atmosphere for the development in Ireland of the new-look nationalism then powerfully operating in Europe. According to this new nationalism politically independent states should be raised up wherever there existed distinct cultural nations. The Gaelic League was demonstrating that Ireland was a cultural nation; therefore, went the argument, Ireland was entitled to become a nation-state.



120 National
Volunteers in
training, 1913
(Cashman Collection,
Radio Telefís
Éireann)

Among the political groups coloured to a greater or a lesser degree by the Gaelic League's philosophy were Sinn Féin, the I.R.B. and Connolly's socialist movement. Sinn Féin owed its inspiration to Arthur Griffith, who, like so many other Dubliners, had remained stubbornly loyal to Parnell's memory. As in the case of Yeats and Hyde and their colleagues, Griffith, too, rejected the post-Parnellite politics of home rule. In the *United Irishman*, the paper which he edited since its foundation in 1899, Griffith first propounded his policy which was in fact an extension of Parnell's obstruction tactics and an adaptation of the Land League's boycott – or, for that matter, the G.A.A.'s ban on foreign games, or the Gaelic League's policy of de-anglicisation – to the political situation. Griffith's articles were collected, and published in pamphlet form for the first time in 1904, under the title, *The resurrection of Hungary*.

The great attraction of the Sinn Féin policy – as it came to be called – was the sheer simplicity of its logic. Griffith held, as indeed did the leaders of the home rule party, that the act of union of 1800 was illegal. But Griffith drew from this the conclusion that the Irish M.P.s who since 1800 sat in the Westminster parliament were thereby participating in an illegality and helping to perpetuate a crime. They should withdraw from the imperial parliament and together with the elected representatives of the county councils and local authorities set up at home in Ireland a



121 Citizen Army
on parade, 1914
(photo. Keogh Bros.,
Dublin)

Council of Three Hundred to take over the government of the country and to pursue a policy of political and economic self-sufficiency. This was the policy which had won the Hungarians their independence from Austria.

What is often overlooked is the fact that Griffith was himself a separatist, at least when he first formulated his policy, and was for a time a member of the I.R.B. When therefore he proposed that there should be a return to the constitutional position of Grattan's parliament with the crown as the personal link between Ireland and England, he did so because he held that in the circumstances the principle of a dual monarchy would win more widespread support in Ireland. Griffith's policy possessed a certain fascination for the members of separatist societies like Cumann na nGael and the National Council and Maud Gonne's *Inghinidhe na hEireann*, all of which had developed out of opposition to the royal visits of 1900 and 1903, as well as for the Belfast republicans who had founded the Dungannon Clubs. And these were welded together from 1908 to become the Sinn Féin organisation.

Sinn Féin had some success at local elections and started its own weekly paper. But although a young intellectual home ruler like T. M. Kettle could describe Griffith's policy as 'the largest idea contributed to Irish politics for a generation',² Sinn Féin won little sympathy from home rule supporters generally. Nevertheless Sinn Féin felt confident enough



122 Funeral of O'Donovan Rossa, Glasnevin, 1 August 1915 (Cashman Collection, Radio Telefís Éireann)

to engage in a trial of strength with the Irish party in 1908. A young home-ruler, Charles J. Dolan, M.P. for North Leitrim, resigned his seat and offered himself for reelection as a Sinn Féin candidate. But the parliamentary party retained the seat by a two-to-one majority. Sinn Féin however, although no match for the parliamentary party at the polls in the years when the prospects for home rule were brightening, continued to offer an alternative to parliamentarianism.

Between Sinn Féin and the I.R.B., there existed an affinity based on separatist tendencies in both, and cemented by close personal friendships. The big difference between the two was that while Sinn Féin stood by a policy of passive resistance and hoped by aiming at a dual monarchy to cast a net wide enough to catch most Irishmen, the I.R.B. planned to establish an Irish republic by physical force. After the Parnellite split the I.R.B., small in membership, suffered from its own internal divisions and did not consider rebellion feasible in the circumstances. But, like John Mitchel before them, men in the I.R.B. dreamed of the outbreak of a war which would involve England and thereby provide Ireland with an opportunity.

You that Mitchel's prayer have heard,
'Send war in our time, O Lord!'³

The growth of two armed camps in Europe, and the crowding of one diplomatic crisis on another increased the possibility of a European war. A frail little man with an indomitable Fenian spirit which 15½ years imprisonment had not broken, and with a single idea in his head – *to get the English out* – was cheered by the prospect of a general war. To ensure that Ireland would be ready to seize its opportunity, Tom Clarke returned from exile in America. His small shop in Parnell Street became the nerve-centre, and his closest friend, the handsome Seán Mac Diarmada, then the paid organiser of Sinn Féin, became the essential link-man, in a revitalised I.R.B.

By 1910 the I.R.B. was publishing its paper, *Irish Freedom*, managed by Mac Diarmada and edited by Hobson, with its motto taken from Wolfe Tone – 'to break the connection with England'. And soon eager young nationalists who, as Pearse put it, had been to school to the Gaelic League, like Pearse himself, MacDonagh, Plunkett, and Ceannt, were being drawn into the I.R.B.

Independent of the I.R.B. another small group, of trade unionists and socialists, were dreaming of a somewhat different kind of revolution. Since the land war of the 1880s a revolution had taken place in the ownership of the land of Ireland. For one of the effects of the land war was that following a series of land acts, the unionist ascendancy landlords were replaced by small proprietors, for the most part catholic and nationalist. The settlement of the land question, together with improved material conditions left the farming classes reasonably well satisfied. In the larger towns, however, conditions were far from satisfactory. In 1911, although it was then held that there had been a 'manifest, material improvement' over the previous eleven years, Dublin had one of the most underfed, worst-housed, and badly paid populations in Europe. 21,000 families lived in single-room tenements. The death-rate at birth of 27.6 per 1,000 was higher than that of any other city in Europe (with Moscow second to Dublin). Pearse wrote in *Irish Freedom* (October 1913):

I calculate that one-third of the people of Dublin are underfed; that half the children attending Irish primary schools are ill-nourished. . . I suppose there are 20,000 families in Dublin in whose domestic economy milk and butter are all but



123 Éamon de Valéra addressing anti-conscription meeting at Ballaghadereen, 1918 (Cashman Collection, Radio Telefís Éireann)

unknown; black tea and dry bread are their staple diet. There are many thousand fireless hearth places in Dublin on the bitterest days of winter.⁴

Marx, Engels, and Lenin, who each had kept a close eye on Ireland, had allowed for the fact that when the socialist revolution came to the world, overthrowing the existing social order, it might well be sparked off in this country. Events in Dublin in 1913 encouraged this belief among European socialists.

To improve the conditions of the working class a fiery Jim Larkin, assisted by the more intellectual James Connolly, organised the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union. In August 1913 began a show-down between Larkin and the employers' leader, William Martin Murphy. Murphy organised some 400 employers into a federation and locked out the workers who were members of Larkin's union. By the end

1891-1921

of September 24,000 people were locked out. A bitter struggle, protracted over eight months, followed. Dublin witnessed massive rallies, baton charges by the police resulting in numerous injuries and a couple of deaths, riots, arrests, imprisonments, food-ships from English sympathisers, and sympathetic strikes.

Neither side won, but the results were far-reaching. The spirit of militancy that had been aroused played a significant role in extending the revolutionary climate. The Citizen Army, which had been established to protect the strikers, continued in existence after the labour troubles had subsided, to play an important part in the rising of 1916. Connolly, who, as far back as 1896, had founded the Irish Socialist Republican Party, was all his life a nationalist as well as a socialist. In 1913, Connolly the socialist had called on the British working class to show solidarity with their brothers in Dublin and to stage a general sympathetic strike. But after some signs that this might be realised, Connolly was disappointed. For the future he put his trust more and more in the establishment of a republic by the Irish workers themselves. 'The cause of labour,' he wrote, 'is the cause of Ireland, the cause of Ireland is the cause of labour'.⁵ Besides, Tom Clarke, Pearse, and *Irish Freedom* had given their backing to Larkin in 1913 and thus had increased the sympathy between the labour movement and the republicans.

Here, then, were a number of small dynamic groups – the literary movement, the Gaelic League, the G.A.A., Irish Ireland, Sinn Féin, the I.R.B., and the labour movement – each concerned not so much with electoral or parliamentary success, but devoted rather to some social, cultural, or political ideal and together acting as a ferment in the mind of a generation. It was the interaction of these forces upon each other that was effecting the change in the mental climate of Ireland between 1891 and 1921.

Pearse at Tone's graveside in 1913, and at O'Donovan Rossa's in 1915, is an excellent example of the synthesis of cultural and political separatist traditions then taking place in individuals. On these occasions Pearse spoke as an I.R.B. man, dressed in 1915 in the uniform of an Irish Volunteer, to honour Tone the father of Irish republicanism and Rossa

'the unrepentant Fenian'. His opening paragraphs on Rossa were in Irish, showing the impact which the Gaelic League – 'the most revolutionary influence that has ever come into Ireland', as he called it – had on Pearse. And when in his oration at Tone's grave he spoke the passage about the sorrowful destiny of the heroes who turn their backs on the pleasant paths for Ireland's sake he might well have been paraphrasing the words which Yeats had put into the mouth of Cathleen Ní Houlihan when she enticed the young man in the play to leave all things fair and follow her down the thorny path of history, or equally Pearse's words might have come from the lips of Cuchulainn defending the gap of the north as romanticised in the books of Standish O'Grady. Pearse admired both Tone and Rossa for reasons which would also have won the approval of the labour leader, Connolly; running through these graveside orations was the defiant and self-reliant note of the Sinn Féin gospel. Thus were the ideals of the literary revival, of the Gaelic League, of the I.R.B., of Sinn Féin, of the Irish Volunteers and of Connolly's socialist republicans becoming part of the psychological make-up of a generation which Pearse represented.

What still made the loudest noise on the political surface, however, was home rule. The liberal party under Gladstone had introduced home rule bills in 1886 and 1893 which were defeated. With the unionists entrenched in office, and the Irish parliamentary party split, home rule did not become an issue again until 1906 when the liberals returned to office and the prospects for home rule brightened. Meantime, the Irish party, reunited under Redmond since 1900, recaptured much of the support and respect which it had gained from the Irish electorate in the days of Parnell. Moreover the reform of county government in 1898, which transferred control over local affairs from landlord-dominated grand juries to popularly elected bodies – county councils, and rural and urban district councils – enabled nationalists to gain experience of local self-government which they looked forward to applying in an Irish parliament.

The general election of 1910, which made the liberal government dependent on the support of the Irish party, brought home rule still nearer. For forty years home rule had embodied the hopes and aspirations

of the vast majority of Irish nationalists. The Irish party could claim with some justification that nearly every major reform in Ireland during the past forty years was traceable to its efforts. And during these years there had been a massive commitment on the part of the Irish people to the parliamentary party. The decline in the fortunes of Sinn Féin, after losing the North Leitrim by-election was only one indication of the greatly improved prospects of home rule, and of how close the parliamentary party was considered to have come towards achieving its main objective of a domestic parliament for Ireland. As Erskine Childers put it in 1911 in his book, *The framework of home rule*: 'If the Sinn Féin alternative meant anything at all, it meant complete separation, which Ireland does not want, and a final abandonment of constitutional methods.'⁶

In 1912 Pearse spoke from a home rule platform in Sackville Street. The home rule bill of that same year passed the commons, and because of the parliamentary act of the previous year the house of lords could not delay its coming into operation beyond 1914. In the interval, however, the unionists, basing their tactics on the fact of the existence of a stubborn Ulster aversion to home rule, mounted a violent agitation.

Edward Carson, a successful Dublin lawyer, aided and abetted by the leaders of the conservative party, led the opposition to home rule with considerable skill and courage. 218,000 pledged themselves to use 'all means' necessary to defeat home rule. The Ulster Volunteers were established (January 1913) and armed by gun-running from Germany; and a provisional government was set up (September 1913) to take control of Ulster on the day that home rule became law. Carson declared: 'I am told it will be illegal. Of course it will. Drilling is illegal. . . the Volunteers are illegal and the government know they are illegal, and the government dare not interfere with them. . . Don't be afraid of illegalities'.⁷

The Orangemen felt assured of the full backing of the British conservatives in whatever they might do, for Bonar Law, the leader of the party, had already publicly announced that he could imagine no length of resistance to which Ulster could go in which it would not have his support and that of the overwhelming majority of the British people.

Home rule had reached an impasse. Both Asquith, the prime minister,

and Redmond, his Irish ally, thought that it would be extremely unwise to make martyrs out of Carson and his supporters. Asquith calculated that merely by waiting he would see the unionists damage themselves politically by their unconstitutional antics. Asquith, who had not Gladstone's dedication, and Redmond, who was no Parnell, chose to fight the battle for home rule on the ground where they felt they could win – in parliament and by means of parliamentary majorities. Then, faced with Carson's intransigence, Asquith persuaded his fellow parliamentarian, Redmond, to retreat from his first position, which was home rule for all Ireland, and Redmond agreed reluctantly, and step by step, 'as the price of peace'.

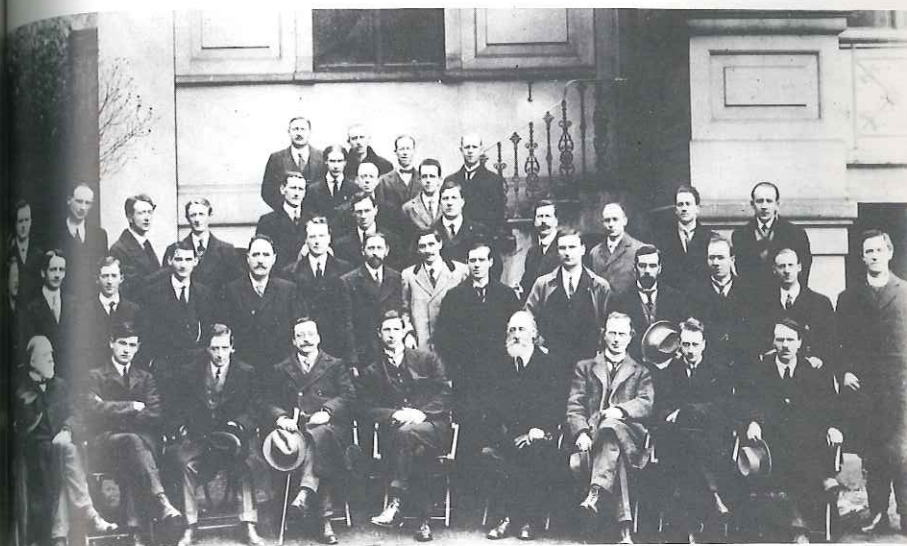
Meantime, the voices off-centre of the stage grew louder in their criticism of the shilly-shallying about home rule. *Irish Freedom* declared that Carson was the only Irish M.P. with any backbone; and in imitation of what he had achieved in Ulster, the Irish Volunteers were founded in Dublin (November 1913).

The outbreak of war in 1914 put the question of home rule into cold storage, but the heat that had been generated over the past few years was not so readily turned off. In 1914 the country contained no less than five armies. First were the official forces, which, as the Curragh 'mutiny' had shown, could not be relied on to enforce a settlement of home rule for all Ireland. Then there were the private armies – the Ulster Volunteers, the Irish Volunteers, the Citizen Army, and the I.R.B.

The Irish Volunteers split when Redmond pledged support to England in the war for the defence of 'small nations'. For this he was severely criticised by the more advanced and sceptical nationalists. A contemporary jingle in Connolly's paper, the *Workers' Republic*, expressed their position:

Full steam ahead, John Redmond said
that everything was well chum;
home rule will come when we are dead
and buried out in Belgium.⁸

After the outbreak of the war the I.R.B., whose members held controlling



124 Dáil Éireann, 1919 (Radio Times Hulton Picture Library, M 91074). The names from left to right are: 1st row – L. Ginnell, M. Collins, C. Brugha, A. Griffith, É. de Valéra, Count Plunkett, E. Mac Neill, W. T. Cosgrave, E. Blythe; 2nd row – P. J. Maloney, T. McSwiney, R. Mulcahy, J. O'Doherty, J. Dolan, J. McGuinness, P. O'Keefe, M. Staines, J. McGrath, B. Cusack, L. de Róiste, M.P. Colivet, Fr M. O'Flanagan; 3rd row – J. P. Ward, A. McCabe, D. Fitzgerald, J. Sweeney, R. J. Hayes, C. Collins, P. Ó Máille, J. O'Mara, B. O'Higgins, J. A. Burke, K. O'Higgins; 4th row – J. McDonagh, J. McEntee; 5th row – P. Beasley, R. C. Barton, P. Galligan; 6th row – P. Shanahan, S. Etchingham (spelling of names as on back of photograph)

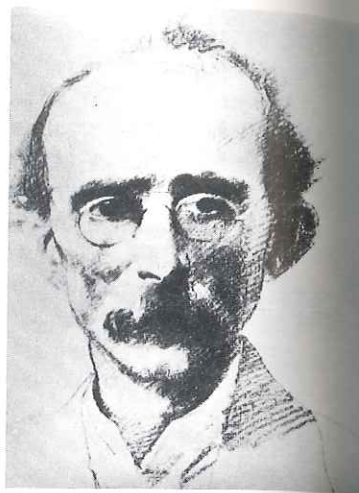
positions in the Irish Volunteers, decided on an insurrection to take place before the ending of the war. They secured the cooperation of Connolly's Citizen Army which was also hoping for a rising. The outcome was the Easter rebellion of 1916.

It was not so much the rebellion of Easter week that completed the change in the attitude of the Irish people generally as its aftermath. Of the ninety rebels condemned to death for their part in the insurrection,

From Parnell to Pearse

Signatories of the proclamation
of the republic (24 April 1916),
by Seán O'Sullivan, R.H.A.
(National Gallery of Ireland).

128 James Connolly



125 Thomas James Clarke

129 Thomas MacDonagh



126 Seán MacDiarmada

130 Éamonn Ceannt

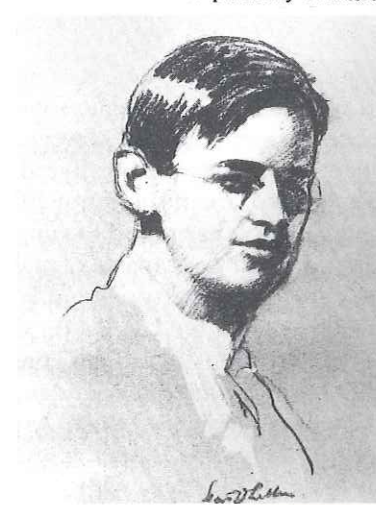


1891-1921



127 Patrick Henry Pearse

131 Joseph Mary Plunkett



fifteen, despite a mounting volume of protest, were executed, the first executions being on 3 May and the last ones ending on 12 May. The officials appeared to panic, martial law was imposed, and more people were arrested than had actually taken part in the rising. The pacifist, Sheehy Skeffington, although he had taken no part in the rising, was arrested and shot without trial. The government too, apart from the military, made more mistakes, and the threat of conscription hung over the country. The Irish parliamentary party blundered and lost the initiative. Everything that happened in the next few months played into the hands of Sinn Féin, which made the most of its opportunities.

By the time of the general election in December 1918, the country had moved unmistakably towards Sinn Féin. Sinn Féin won 73 seats, the unionists 26, and the parliamentary party a mere 6. The defeat of the parliamentary party took place in circumstances extremely unfavourable to them. They had been geared to constitutionalism and in fact committed to it under Redmond. Essentially they were a peace-time party, but Ireland in 1918, and possibly since 1912, could hardly be described as at peace. But their defeat in 1918 was not sudden, for their position was being undermined for years past by Ireland's most able propagandists – Griffith in his Sinn Féin papers, Moran in the *Leader*, Connolly in the *Workers' Republic*, the I.R.B. in *Irish Freedom*, and Hyde who creamed off into the Gaelic League some of the best talent in the country. The relentless criticism had a wearing-away effect, and it proved decisive when the electorate was offered an alternative to parliamentarianism in the changed circumstances of 1918. Parnell had shown how forces in Ireland could be harnessed to support the Irish party in Westminster. But where Parnell was capable of making use of the Land League and even of the Fenians, the party without Parnell never gained the confidence of the Gaelic League, the I.R.B., or Sinn Féin. It paid the penalty in 1918.

The victorious Sinn Féin constituted itself as Dáil Éireann, pledged itself to the Irish republic and proceeded to put into operation the policy of passive resistance which Arthur Griffith had outlined for it years before. Eamon de Valera, a senior surviving Volunteer officer, became the head of the Dáil, with Arthur Griffith as his deputy, and Michael

132 1916 memorial: statue of Cuchulainn by Oliver Sheppard in the General Post Office, Dublin (photo. Bord Fáilte Éireann)



Collins from the I.R.B. as the ruthlessly efficient organiser of the military resistance which opposed British attempts to smash Sinn Féin.

The Anglo-Irish war from early 1919 to July 1921, or the 'troubles' as the people euphemistically called it, seriously embittered Anglo-Irish relations. It was a struggle characterised by guerrilla warfare, ambushes, raids on police barracks, and planned assassinations on the one side; and reprisals, the shooting-up and burning-up of towns, executions and terrorising on the other, as the 'flying-columns' of the Volunteers took on the 'black-and-tans' and Auxiliaries of the British. Eventually public opinion in America and in Britain demanded a truce, which was arranged in July 1921. In December 1921, after months of negotiations, a treaty, which was essentially a compromise, was signed by the British and Irish

representatives. The British conceded dominion status to the twenty-six counties; and the Irish negotiators brought back not the republic but 'freedom to achieve freedom'. Ironically, the unionists of Ulster who had most strenuously rejected home rule had been granted a measure of home rule by the Government of Ireland Act, 1920.

The unhappy legislative union, established in 1800, between Ireland and Great Britain had been finally dissolved, but on terms none had visualised. The years 1891-1921 had been a crowded hour in Ireland's history. Solid achievement and improvement there had been in plenty. Larkin had built up trade unionism, William Martin Murphy a commercial empire, Cusack the G.A.A., MacNeill and Hyde the Gaelic League; while Redmond, Dillon, Devlin, and their friends had brought the people within sight of the promised land of home rule. By a series of land purchase acts initiated before 1891 and continued throughout the period the land question was well on the way to being solved in the interests of the tenants. By the universities act of 1908, establishing the National University of Ireland and the Queen's University of Belfast, the university question of the nineteenth century was to a large extent solved; and the constituent colleges of the National University played a big part in the building of modern Ireland. Legislation had improved housing; old-age pensions had been granted; more money had been invested in education. A congested districts board, a department of agriculture, county councils, and light railways had also been established during these years.

Yet there was also grave disappointment. Gladstone once said that men ought not to suffer disenchantment since ideals in politics are never realised. In Ireland none of the dreams had been fulfilled. Not the Gaelic League's Irish-speaking nation, nor Yeats' literary-conscious people, nor the republic of the I.R.B., nor the workers' republic of Connolly, nor Griffith's economically self-sufficient dual monarchy, nor Redmond's home rule within an empire which the Irish helped to build, nor Carson's United Kingdom. Although all the dreams had to some extent been frustrated, the many dreamers had left their mark. With the signing of the treaty, however, the dreaming gave way to political realities.

NORTHERN IRELAND, 1921-66

by J. L. McCracken

The vast majority of the protestants in the north of Ireland were bitterly opposed to home rule. 'Home rule is Rome rule' was their slogan. They believed that under a Dublin parliament in which they would always be in a minority their religion, their way of life, and their economic interests would be endangered. And home rule aroused strong passions in Britain too, so that powerful elements there were ready to encourage and sustain the Ulstermen in their opposition. Gladstone's home rule bills of 1886 and 1893 were angrily received in Ulster: there was rioting in Belfast and the Orange order took on a new lease of life. Lord Randolph Churchill came to Belfast to play the Orange card, as he put it, and coined the rallying cry 'Ulster will fight; Ulster will be right'. By the time the third home rule bill was introduced in 1912 its opponents in Ulster were organised for resistance. An Ulster Unionist Council had been set up in 1905, a leader had been found in Sir Edward Carson, and the backing of the British conservative party had been secured. Bonar Law, the conservative leader, vied with the Ulster unionists in the violence of his language.

The Ulster unionists did not confine themselves to words. A day of dedication was observed by protestants throughout Ulster on 28 September 1912, when religious services were held and a solemn league and covenant was signed by over 218,000 men who pledged themselves to use 'all means which may be found necessary to defeat the present conspiracy to set up a home rule parliament in Ireland'. An Ulster Volunteer Force was enrolled for political and military service against home rule, a provisional government was formed to take over the province on the day the home rule bill became law, and a consignment of arms was brought in from Germany – all this with the approval and often active assistance of sympathisers in Britain.