

# The Infancy of a State

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[This is the second of a series on present conditions in Ireland]

IN the tide of victory for Sinn Fein, there came a mid-night when a treaty with England was signed by five Irishmen, whom some called plenipotentiaries and others envoys. Too many words, too much ink, and far too much rich Irish blood was poured out because of that treaty. Hence, I have no desire to speak of that distressing period of chaos which began in Ireland on December 6, 1921. My purpose is to survey the peaceful, convalescing Ireland that has now emerged in 1926. Last week I discussed the present status of those who, under Mr. De Valera, rejected the Treaty. At present, I shall treat of the Government established by those who sided with Arthur Griffith and Michael Collins. In subsequent papers, I shall endeavor to give "the pros and cons on both sides" of Ireland's attempt to nationalize herself internally and externally.

A fundamental fact must be stated, even though it be platitudinous. An established Government exists and functions in the Free State. A certain section of the supporters of this Government may refer condescendingly to "our young Ministers" and apologize for them on the plea that they are "mainly amateurs, not yet accustomed to be called statesmen." Their enemies, the Republicans, especially those on this side of the ocean, may anathematize them as "traitors" and "puppets of John Bull," may hurl defiance at the "Freak State," the "junta," the "Dublin annex." Nevertheless, no one may gainsay the patent fact that William Cosgrave heads an established Government in the twenty-six counties of Ireland. Faint though it may be as a tribute, the statement made to me by a prominent Republican acknowledges the *de facto* status of the Ministry. He had been arguing against the rights of the Government to rule but in conclusion conceded, "At least, it is a Government of our own people." That is a tremendous achievement in view of the long centuries that have elapsed since Ireland was governed by "our own people." Until five years ago the center of government was out of Ireland; it is now in Ireland. The barracks, the prisons, the courts, the Government Buildings, the Castle, the Viceregal Lodge, all are in the control of native Irishmen. This is a most unhistoric state of affairs. And historically more contradictory is the fact that these native Irishmen who are governing Ireland are overwhelmingly Catholic.

Yet, it must be conceded, this Government is functioning. A visitor realizes this as soon as the cutter reaches his boat in the harbor at Cobh or as soon as he descends the gangplank at Dun Laoghaire. He is im-

pressed by it more if he is privileged to visit the Government Buildings on Merrion Square and Leinster House, and to talk with those who direct them. It is difficult to gain access to the marble corridors on the other side of the screen and soldiers that guard the entrance to the Government Buildings. However, it is a slight task compared to that of fighting for admittance into Westminster where the visitor must explain his business to the half-dozen olympic gods who preside over the entrances. The Merrion Square Government Buildings, interior view, are little different from the office buildings with which we are all familiar. The Ministers who occupy these buildings are not unlike the typical business man. While I must not attempt to pen-picture any of them, I am unwilling to dismiss them without paying a tribute to their hospitality, despite the urgent demands on their time, and to their shrewdness and intelligence. It is my sincere conviction that they are honest men and capable men.

Impressions of the Seanad, which I had the opportunity of observing in session, were not favorable. In every Parliament modeled after the British, the Upper House seems weak and watery when compared to the American. The Free State Senate, neither in its composition nor in its powers, is found satisfactory. Accordingly, a committee is at present working on a revision of the Constitution as it affects the Senate. Someone has characterized it as "the Dail plus senility." Happily, the senility is not of the garrulous type. One suspects that the Senators are not in close touch with popular sentiment and aspirations; this may explain their perfunctory procedure. Last year, for example, their comments during the debate on the Divorce bill antagonized the Catholics of the whole country. Be that as it may, the Senate has not fulfilled expectations and the present Government has a direct way of demanding that ideals be efficiently realized by those entrusted with national responsibilities.

In the Lower House, the Dail, there is a livelier scene. The business is carried on in a manner that would sadden the heart of the old-fashioned Irishman. Should a Deputy burst forth into resounding oratory, he is laughed at merrily. If he talks plainly and simply and briefly, he is listened to with attention. The sessions of the Dail bear favorable comparison to any legislative body in other countries, and the members of the assembly are not unequal to the task of bringing about a reconstruction of the nation. There is one serious and fundamental defect, however, in the Dail. The Cumann na nGaedheal,

the Ministerialist Party, enjoys a too comfortable majority and a too negligible opposition. Had the Republican Deputies found a way to take their seats in the Dail and formed an official Opposition (which by now might have been strong enough to defeat the Government on a vote of confidence), the Dail would be a stronger body. The only check it exercises on the Ministry comes from its own supporters and a handful of Independents, Laborites and Farmers. This is not a most healthy situation.

What has been said is sufficient, I take it, to show that the Free State Government is functioning. There is small need, and less space, to make specific references to the army that is competently organized, to the constabulary that enforces law and order, to the law courts, or to the other departments that regulate the affairs of the citizen.

A more pertinent question concerns the stability of this Government and the confidence which the Irish people have in it. A conclusive answer will be given by the people themselves in the General Election that must soon be held. The much quoted *mot* of Sir John Mahaffy, that Ireland is the place where the inevitable never happens and the impossible always, may be proved true within the next year. Though new political alignments are being made and fresh appeals are being sent forth to the electorate, there seems little doubt but that the Cumann na nGaedheal will again be easily returned to power.

In regard to the stability of the present Government, a remark of one of its members is illuminating. "They would put us out of office tomorrow," he said, "if they trusted anyone else to take our places." He was humble and disillusioned. He knew that his Government was not popular but he also knew that it begot respect and confidence. Its stability is guaranteed by the groups that are supporting it.

Among these, I first mention the Hierarchy and the clergy. Though their profession excludes them from participation in politics, their influence is incalculable. When I asked a revered Bishop to tell me something about conditions in Ireland, he replied: "I have only two statements to make: The Bishops are unanimous in their decision. The Bishops have decided to support the Government." The clergy, in far greater proportion than I had expected to find, are in full accord with the Bishops. And this spells stability.

Another group that is supporting the Government is the settled-in-life class. This consists of the heads of families, the landholders, even though their possessions be a few stony acres, the business owners, in a word those who form the backbone of law and order in every country. This group, all Irish Irelanders, consists of the poor not less than the wealthy. It is composed of those who took no active part in the "troubles" but were upset and almost ruined by them, and of those whose blood has cooled since the hysterical days of their fighting. They are the people who want peace at all cost and who will support any government that guarantees peace. They are definitely opposed to any party or movement that threatens to disturb their serenity. They feel forced to support the Government as against the party in which one of the lady

leaders very recently declared that she was willing to see every bridge in Ireland blown up if that would give Ireland its independence and in which one of the clerical leaders is flirting with Larkinism.

In surveying the groups who are stabilizing the Government, one cannot omit mention of one that is relatively small but disproportionately powerful. It comprises those who are variously called the Ascendancy, the Castle crowd, the Freemasons, the Protestants, the West Britons, the Unionists, the Imperialists, the Redmondites, to mention but a few of the names. That an unnatural alliance has been effected between them and the Government is recognized, I believe, by both sides. When this moneyed, cultured, Anglicized group found itself being swept into the sea, it anchored its fortunes with the Government. In a similar way, the Government discovered that this group could help tide it over the deluge of Republicanism. Thus, a common enemy united those who were not otherwise too friendly with each other. While Republicanism is on the horizon, this group will continue to support and stabilize the Government. And Republicanism has not entirely sunk down beyond the horizon.

Deep meaning is in the statement of the Government official which I quoted earlier in this article. The Government is stable but it is not popular. If you tune your ear to the whisperings of all classes in Ireland, you will hear many sharp and bitter things said of it. From the working classes you will listen to stories of alleged injustice and of actual hardships; from the better educated you will be treated to argumentative disquisitions on the mistakes in policy; from professedly hostile sources you will be told that the members of the Ministry are hopelessly at odds and that it is the personality of one man, that is holding them together. These whisperings are like smoke in the air; they indicate that a fire is smouldering and they show which direction the wind is blowing; at the same time, they may be as tenuous as smoke.

Nevertheless, the dispassionate inquirer is deeply impressed by the Government in Ireland. He marvels that the Government is not even more unpopular than it is. It entered office under staggering disabilities. Within four days it had lost the two outstanding intellects of Sinn Fein, Griffith and Collins. It was composed of young men with no experience or tradition of statecraft. It had to fight for its life against an army greater than that which beat the British, it had to settle a nation that was on the verge of hysteria. It had to organize itself from top to bottom, in all its departments, for the British Government left Ireland as one would a vacant house. It had huge debts but no treasury. "Captain" Boyle spoke the truth in his drunken brawlings when he said "th' whole worl's . . . in a terr. . . ible state o'. . . chassis!" Ireland undoubtedly was. It needed an iron government to weld it again into a machine. Under the circumstances, no government could be popular. Whether one agrees with the political philosophy of the Ministers or one calls them "traitors," one has no alternative but to admit that they have been successful in not only one titanic crisis but in a constant series of them.

