

## The Present Status of Irish Autonomy

A RETROSPECTIVE glance over past Nationalistic efforts towards Irish Autonomy is perhaps essential to a comprehension of the salient points of the present agitation, which threatens to assume the disastrous aspect of civil war. The Ulster position would be more worthy of serious consideration, and would lend itself more readily to the sympathies of the impartial student of Irish politics, if it bore even an appearance of consistency. When, however, one beholds the men who once cheered to the echo such Home Rule champions as Butt and Parnell, offer such violent opposition to the present leader of the Irish Nationalists, one cannot but exclaim, "They know not what they want."

In the year 1870 Ireland voiced her first protest against an English union obtained by trickery and maintained by coercion, by the formation of the "Irish Home Rule Association" at Dublin. The association was the logical outcome of national opinion relative to that object which the Fenians sought to attain by the mistaken method of physical force. It was not by any means an endorsation of the method, but a public recognition of a praiseworthy object, with a determination to attain it if possible by constitutional means. Its organization was due mainly to the indefatigable efforts of Isaac Butt, a prominent Dublin advocate, and a firm believer in the efficacy of constitutional agitation in bringing the English House of Commons to a realization of the national rights of the Irish people. In accordance with this belief, the association advocated the establishment of an independent Irish party in the English parliament; devoted entirely to Irish interests, owing allegiance to no English party, supporting no English question that did not in some way further the cause of Irish autonomy. The organizers of the association were representative of no particular locality, faction or creed. History presents few more striking examples of the complete repression of factional prejudices and considerations of creed in effecting the furtherance of a National movement,

than Ulster Orangeism standing shoulder to shoulder with Irish Nationalism in the ranks of this Home Rule Association. No more conclusive argument could be adduced to prove the injustice and oppression of English rule in Ireland.

In several of the bye-elections of 1871-2 Home Rulers under the auspices of the association ran and were elected. Although the general election of 1874 came as a surprise, nevertheless, Home Rulers succeeded in carrying fifty-nine seats in all. Thus it was that the Irish independent party as it exists today had its beginning in English politics.

Isaac Butt the man who had done most in the formation of the Home Rule Association became the leader of this small but devoted band of Irish patriots in the English parliament. Butt,—although he possessed a striking personality, a like able disposition, and great ability as a parliamentary debater—was unable, after several years of effort, to wring a single concession of Irish reform from the English government. He was too mild. He believed in convincing the English parliament by sheer force of argument and eloquence. He relied on the kid-glove policy of concession to English public opinion, and was most careful to give no offence to English parliamentary parties. He was a model of courtesy and moderation. He sought to win English sympathy with persuasive argument rather than to force English consent by a policy of exasperation. He refused to tolerate legislative obstruction in any of his colleagues. "I am not" he once said, in condemnation of some obstructive measure proposed by one of the Irish party, "in favor of a policy of exasperation." The House of Commons applauded the sentiment, listened politely to his speeches, and threw out his Bills with scant consideration. Measure after measure he introduced dealing with Irish reforms, only to see them consistently defeated by sheer majority.

The Fenians then as now were the dominant factor in Irish affairs. In fact, no Irish parliamentary party, or no leader of such a party, could hope for existence without at least their tolerance.



They were willing to give Butt's constitutional movement a fair trial, although not enthusiastic as to its success ; but the moment that his frequent humiliations in the English House threatened to cast ridicule on the Irish nation, they withdrew their support in disgust, and his career as leader of the Irish party was doomed. That they did not abandon the constitutional policy altogether, was due mainly to the efforts and genius of Charles Stewart Parnell, the man who has since compelled the English parliament to look upon Irish Home Rule not as the impossible dream of a political agitator, but as a measure of justice : as an urgent and much needed political reform.

In 1878 Butt died, and in 1880 shortly after the general election of that year, Parnell was elected leader of the Irish party. The choice was a popular one. Parnell had already made his mark as an active and relentless obstructionist in the English House of Commons, and was beloved by the rank and file of Fenianism for his unremitting hostility to all things English. The supreme council of the Fenian organization, however, were persuaded of the uselessness of parliamentary agitation as a means of attaining their end, and determined to withdraw their support entirely and return to their original method of physical force. The church also was strongly opposed to the movement. The Irish party in parliament was facing a crisis. Its very existence was threatened by the violent opposition of even Irish institutions. A leader with a genius for pacification was needed to pour oil on the troubled waters ; and Parnell came forward. O'Connell, were he alive, would have broken with Fenianism, allied himself with the church, and instituted a mighty constitutional agitation. He would in all probability have succeeded as well as Butt, for Fenianism had become a power in the land and was absolutely essential to the success of any movement. Had Stephens been there, he would have organized Fenianism, broken with the church, and kindled a blaze of insurrection throughout the land. Parnell did none of these things. He won over Fenianism, overcame the opposition of the church, and returned to

parliament with the whole strength of the Irish nation at his back. This ability of promoting unity of political purpose among the people was the great secret of his success as an Irish leader. He once said speaking before the Home Rule League, "unless we can unite all shades of political opinion in the country, I fail to see how we can ever hope to achieve national independence." He possessed the ability to accomplish this Herculean task, and came nearer to a realization of the aim than any other Irish agitator before his time.

In 1882 the Irish party, being in the possession of the balance of power, and as a measure of retaliation, threw their strength on the side of the Tories and ousted the Liberals from power. Mr. Gladstone and his government immediately resigned and Lord Salisbury and the Tories succeeded to power. Although they must have realized their dependence on the Irish vote, and despite the fact that the Earl of Carnarvon, the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, strongly recommended concession to Irish demands, the Tory cabinet were unable to agree on Home Rule Legislation. The general election of 1885 found them still in a state of vacillation. In this election the Irish made their influence felt even in England itself. Liberal majorities were pulled down, and in many important centres Liberal candidates were defeated by the Irish vote. The result was as follows :

Liberals .....	335
Tories .....	249

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Liberal majority over Tories .....	86
Irish Nationalists. ....	86

Thus Parnell held the balance by throwing his strength on the Tory side he could neutralize the Liberal majority. On the other hand should he return to the Liberal ranks he would give that party a working majority of 172.

What move Lord Salisbury would have made in the Home Rule direction, could he have formed a government with the aid of the Irish party, would be an interesting speculation. Realizing the impossibility of



this, however, he saw a splendid opportunity of saving the skirts of his party from contamination, and incidentally of gaining the applause of the electors, and repudiated the Irish party altogether. This move gave the Liberals a comfortable majority. Upon coming into power, Mr. Gladstone, at once realizing the importance of concession to Irish demands, introduced the Home Rule Bill of 1886.

The failure of this Bill to pass through the House was due principally to the intervention of Mr. Chamberlain, leader of the radical wing of the Liberal party. Chamberlain had from the beginning been in favor of conceding a certain measure of local government to Ireland, under the jurisdiction of the Imperial parliament, but had declared himself unalterably opposed to Home Rule. The Bill, previous to its introduction, met with considerable opposition not only from Chamberlain, but from the other Radicals in the cabinet as well. Notwithstanding this opposition, Mr. Gladstone resolved upon introducing the measure, relying upon the spirit of party loyalty to carry it through the House. The Radicals, however, led by Chamberlain, refused their support and it was defeated by a majority of thirty votes.

Owing to this dissension in the ranks of the Liberal party Mr. Gladstone was compelled to resort to a general election. In July of 1886 he went to the country in alliance with Parnell and the Irish Party.

#### Result

Tories .....	316
Radicals .....	78
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Unionist Total .....	394
Liberals .....	191
Irish Nationalists ....	85
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	276
Unionist majority .....	118

Mr. Gladstone immediately resigned and Lord Salisbury and the Tories again took up the reins of government.

This defeat proved a knockout blow to the Home Rule movement. One from which it did not rally until after the death of Parnell in 1892. True, Mr. Gladstone stood to his guns nobly, repudiating all suggestions that he should recall the dissentient Liberals to the ranks by throwing over Home Rule. The blow was struck by the Irish members themselves. Parnell once said that it would be impossible to keep the Irish party absolutely aloof from English activities, and thoroughly immune from English influences for any considerable length of time. This prophseey was fully borne out by their Brutus-like action during the famous caucus in committee room 15. Parnell had committed a grave offence against the moral code, and acting on instructions from the Liberals, a majority of the Irish members attempted to oust him from the leadership. The party met for discussion in committee room 15, in the parliament buildings at Westminster, with the intention of moving the suspension of their leader. Parnell tried to save the situation by strategy and proposed a counter motion. About forty of the Irish party, however, headed by Mr. Justin McCarthy refused to vote, causing a split in the ranks impossible to repair.

From a moral standpoint this disaffection was certainly defensible, but considered politically it was simply party suicide. Parnell was the only man in Irish politics who had shown himself competent to navigate the Home Rule ship safely into port. The action of the party in abandoning him, resembled that of the crew of a vessel who would throw their captain overboard in the midst of a violent storm, merely because they had just found out that he was guilty of a moral offence. The move was dictated by the leader of an English party, and by yielding to his command the Irish made a laughing stock of their boasted independence. They no doubt supposed that the reward of their obedience would be the realization of their hopes, but future experience demonstrated the folly of the supposition. Parnell never rallied from the shock caused by this act of injustice, and died in London on Oct. 6, 1891.



After his death the Home Rule agitation was allowed to drop for a time. This was due to three main causes. The Irish party being dependent upon the Liberals were forced to follow the Liberal policy; and in view of the late split in his ranks over a Home Rule measure, Mr. Gladstone did not feel safe in again introducing a similar Bill until the cloud of Radicalism had ceased to threaten the clearness of the party horizon. Secondly, the dismemberment of the Irish party itself, precluded the possibility of any united action, and lastly, no leader possessing the executive qualities and parliamentary ability of the late chief, had arisen to fight the battles of Ireland in the English House of Commons.

Through time, however, the party recovered their old time vigor. Damages were repaired, differences patched up, and under the leadership of Mr. John Redmond the members arose, donned their accustomed armor and renewed the conflict. English public opinion on Home Rule legislation had undergone a complete change. Men were beginning to realize and to feel ashamed of the gross miscarriage of justice under the old order. English legislators were beginning to understand the necessity of reform. All these things had weight with Premier Asquith and the Liberals, and are, no doubt, largely responsible for the Home Rule Bill at present under the consideration of parliament.

To a student of English politics the similarity of measure between the proposed Home Rule legislation of the present day and Gladstone's Bill of 1886 is apparent, and leads to conjecture. Any one of three possible reasons might be adduced to account for this resemblance. It might be said that Gladstone's Bill was too advanced; too indigestible a morsel of Liberal reform to be assimilated by public opinion of that day. This supposition, however, is contrary to the well known astuteness of Mr. Gladstone in the game of statecraft. It is difficult to conceive of a statesman who had successfully consummated such sweeping reforms as Catholic emancipation and the disestablishment and disendowment of the Irish Protestant Church,

failing to correctly gauge public opinion on so simple and obvious a reform as Home Rule. It is also possible that present day Liberals doubt their ability to secure the passage of a stronger and more advanced measure of reform. This again is very unlikely. Mr. Gladstone had to contend against a public less accustomed and less educated to reform than the English electors of our day. He was handicapped by disunion among his own cabinet ministers, and in his own party. He was forced to conciliate an Anti-Liberal House of Lords, to whose land interests any Home Rule Bill was likely to run counter. If in the face of such difficulties he considered himself justified in proposing advanced legislation, why should the present day Liberals confronted by none of these difficulties, hesitate to introduce a moderate Home Rule Bill? The third and most probable solution is that the English government, anxious to conciliate, if possible, all shades of Irish political opinion; have in view of the violent protests of a portion of the Province of Ulster, moderated the measure so as to leave not a loophole for adverse criticism.

We have seen that the Home Rule agitation originated as the protest of a nation against the unjust oppression of a alien government. We have seen the various political ups and downs of the Irish Parliamentary party. We have beheld, with admiration, the self-sacrificing and patriotic lives of the Irish leaders. We have traced the progress of the movement from its inauguration to the present day. In short we have witnessed the constitutional struggle of a nation for political autonomy. In view of all this we may well inquire, what is it all going to lead to? Will the century-long agitation of a nation come to naught? Are the efforts, genius, nay even the very lives of patriot leaders to be in vain? I think not. You may say "Gladstone failed to pass the Home Rule Bill of 1886." True, but Gladstone had to contend against an adverse public opinion, an Anti-Liberal House of Lords, and intestine bickerings in his own party. Present day Liberalism fears none of these things. Public opinion has changed, party disunion is unknown, and, as is



well known the House of Lords have been made innocuous. Harrassed by none of Gladstone's difficulties, it is difficult to see how Mr. Asquith can fail to place the present Home Rule Bill on the British statute books.

So much for the difficulties besetting the path of legislative reform in the past. It now becomes necessary to examine into the causes of opposition detrimental to the present measure.

Within the past few years there has arisen in Ulster a violent opposition to political independence in Ireland. Under the old order of things, the Protestant majority in Ulster held complete control of all government positions in the province, to the complete exclusion of the Catholic minority. The present opposition to Home Rule is seemingly dictated by a fear that a necessarily large Catholic majority in an Irish parliament would exercise a like discrimination. In the days before the Union when Ireland possessed a parliament of her own, such discrimination was not exercised, and there is no reason to suppose that this policy would change under present conditions. In pre-union days Protestants often occupied the highest executive positions in the Irish government. The conduct of the Catholic majority then, is a pleasant contrast to the discriminating behaviour of the present Protestant majority in Ulster political life.

After an impartial consideration of both sides of this Home Rule question I can see no reason why the groundless opposition of a mere handful should prevail over the cause of a nation. Why the empty and senseless threats of an insignificant minority, inspired by ambitious agitators and political demagogues, should have more weight with the English nation than the cause of Ireland; pleaded with all the eloquence of a Butt, furthered by the genius of a Parnell, and watered with the life blood of a martyred Emmett.