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# THE IRISH REVIEW

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## Home Rule—and After\*

By F. CRUISE O'BRIEN, M.A.

ALIKE to the thinking Irish Nationalist and to the thinking Irish Unionist (whom I assume *a fortiori* to be a moderate Unionist) the great constitutional change which is in front of us, and which is shortly termed Home Rule, presents problems which can be wisely solved only by keeping eyes on the future. The moderate Unionist who recognises that, whether the change is for good or for evil, it is inevitable and at hand is concerned if he loves his country—and I am not, I hope, making a large assumption if I take it that he does—with the securing of the best possible system of Home Rule amongst the many systems proposed. The wise Nationalist has the same concern, although the reasons which impel the one are not those which the other would regard as sound or just. It is then of no use for a Unionist who knows that Home Rule is coming to argue that, if the change is made, it is of no import

\* "The Framework of Home Rule." By Erskine Childers. London: Edward Arnold, 1911. Price 12s. 6d. net.

## THE IRISH REVIEW

how it is made or of what character it is, no more than it is of any use for a Nationalist to think that no matter what kind the Home Rule Bill may be it is of little consequence so long as it is Home Rule—that is to say, of course, so long as the Parliament created has legislative powers of some sort. In both cases the character of the Home Rule Bill matters vitally. To think that it does not is only in the one case to confess to no genuine concern for the Irish nation, and in the other to suggest an indifference in taking thought for the morrow, a thing fatal in politics however admirable in less vital concerns.

The touchstone which ought to be applied by all Irishmen, Nationalist and Unionist, to the scheme proposed is the consideration of the effect which that scheme will produce, not on the balance of the party nor on the position of one element of our present political or social life, nor yet on the prospects of sound public finance or stable government, but on the character of the Irish nation. The recognition of this fact in every line of Mr. Erskine Childers' constructive criticism gives his book a value which cannot too highly be estimated. In one sentence, which might very fitly be placed on the title page, so pregnant is it, he touches the dominant note of the whole matter. "Character," he writes, "is the very foundation of national prosperity and happiness, and we are blind to the facts of history if we cannot discern the profound effect of political institutions upon human character." Mr. Childers observes that this is a proposition that few will now care to deny. In that he is certainly right. But the accepting of a proposition is a far different thing from the applying of it. The Unionists of Ireland have long acquiesced in it as an intellectual theorem, but when they came to work it out in the practical region of politics they were loudest in rejecting it. But Nationalists are not free from scathe either. They have, it is true, seen that such a proposition logically entails a change in the system of government in Ireland. They have agreed to alter the "political institutions" on account of their evil effect upon the "human

## HOME RULE—AND AFTER

character" of Ireland. But many of them have been content to stop there, and have failed to see that the altering of political institutions is not enough unless the character of the alteration be satisfactory. A change in the legislative authority is not enough—it is the character of the change which matters.

We have therefore to find first in the realm of theory and then in that of practical politics—by which I emphatically do not mean political opportunism—what is it that we ought to look for in a system of Home Rule to bring forth the most beneficial result to the nation as a whole? I say to the nation as a whole, because Home Rule is to be, if it is to have any value, a healing measure, bringing a cessation of strife and obliterating those lines of cleavage which have marked off, in the later history of our country, Unionist from Nationalist, and which, by a quite natural coincidence of political with religious dividing lines, have kept Catholic from understanding Protestant. The surest means, to my mind, which we can adopt in order to consolidate the country and to bring into free play the best elements—not unhappily separated—in Ireland is to secure that the spirit of real national responsibility is free to operate in the Irish State. (I use the word "State" deliberately and with no Separatist colouring. It is the word which most fully emphasises the responsibilities and duties of a common citizenship.) Without the conception of a real national responsibility, without the recognition of the fact that we are one people, whether our ancestors were Cromwellian or Norman or Milesian, without the breaking down of all barriers which can divide us into artificially-formed groups, foolishly embittered and foolishly jealous, we cannot have citizenship which will make for genuine self-government or a permanent and orderly progress.

These are the principles on which we must base our judgment of whatever system it is proposed to set up in Ireland. They are principles which must be not only scrupulously held, but must rigidly be applied. And it is in their application that men who accept them in the abstract are most likely to fail. Mr.

## THE IRISH REVIEW

Erskine Childers holds these principles, but so I suppose does Lord MacDonnell, if he were put to the question. Nevertheless, there is a world of difference between Mr. Childers and Lord MacDonnell (whom I take, by the way, as representative of a school of "practical" politicians of much import in the Home Rule controversy already begun). Mr. Childers applies the principles he holds; Lord MacDonnell does not apply them. Let me come at once to the concrete issue between the two.

The issue naturally is expressed in terms of the powers of the Irish Parliament that is to be set up. The main difference—although not the only difference of opinion—is concerned with financial powers. Both sides are agreed that Imperial solidarity must be preserved, and accordingly that all obviously Imperial concerns, such as Defence and the Succession, must be left out of the immediate purview of an Irish Parliament and left to the Imperial Parliament. But on the question of finance, those who believe in the rigid application of the principles expounded in this book of Mr. Childers, and those who incline to the views of Lord MacDonnell, at once part company. Lord MacDonnell—we will consider his view first—contends that Ireland having lived up to the standard of expenditure set by England—the champagne standard, as Professor Kettle rightly calls it—must continue to live up to it, and must consequently be, although she has her own Government, financially dependent on her richer neighbour. As a corollary to this, of course we are to give up agreeably to the political doctrine of the *quid pro quo* some powers of taxation.\*

If this were merely a controversial article I should be tempted to remark that we have here a scheme suspiciously akin to that which Lord MacDonnell (then Sir Anthony MacDonnell) put forward at a time when *Devolution* was a more fashionable term than Home Rule. But I do not desire to be merely controversial, but to draw attention to the effects of Lord MacDonnell's scheme, buttressed as it is by an arrangement of

\* See Lord MacDonnell's article in the *Nineteenth Century* for January.

## HOME RULE—AND AFTER

figures which, in their first presentment, were shown to be erroneous by Professor Donovan.\* The fact that the Irish people were forced into living under a system of extravagant government does not necessarily condemn them (despite the costly system of Land Purchase which was thrust on them, and despite also much recent mortgaging of their finances under the Old Age Pensions Act and the National Insurance Act) to continue to live under such an extravagant system. It is idle for Lord MacDonnell to suggest that the contrary is the case, and to tell us that because we have perforce accepted a reckless standard of expenditure we can never run our Government on less. Consequently, if there are grave reasons against our acceptance of a continuance of British doles with a corresponding sacrifice of legitimate powers—which is Lord MacDonnell's scheme in a word—Lord MacDonnell cannot insist that we are face to face with Hobson's choice and must accept his solution whether we like it or not. Those grave reasons undoubtedly do exist. Nothing can be more demoralising to the self-respect of any people than to be continually dependent upon the doles of another. If present-day Ireland lacks self-respect there is to be found the cause. Professor Oldham has well remarked in his paper at the Royal Economic Congress that no incentive remains in a country which is financially dependent on another to adjust the balance between expenditure and revenue. That is the position—a position utterly destructive to wise government as it is to national self-respect—in which Lord MacDonnell seeks to put us.

On the other hand, those who desire, like Mr. Childers, to develop a sense of national responsibility in Ireland to the fullest extent are not afraid to take the view logically opposed to Lord MacDonnell. Mr. Erskine Childers, Professor Donovan, Professor Oldham, and Professor Kettle (if I am not too hastily

\* See Professor R. Donovan's recent speech at University College, Dublin, in answer to Lord MacDonnell, and his further answer in the *Freeman's Journal*, December 10th, 1911.

## THE IRISH REVIEW

rushing to conclusions from the recent declarations of the latter) agree that the only national attitude to take up is to insist, if we want national responsibility, that we get powers which are likely to produce it. That is why they all unite in demanding financial autonomy for Ireland, including control—with reservations in the case of a British tariff—control of customs and excise duties. It is only by giving the Irish Parliament real power, by giving it a genuine opportunity of working out with the Irish people Ireland's own salvation, that we can avoid in the surest way any chances of that bitterness and conflict feared by the minority. That was at all events the opinion of the late Mr. Lecky,\* and it is an opinion worth considering.

If we are to bring this view to its natural conclusion we should be loth to put any artificial hindrance on the powers of the Irish Parliament. One such artificial hindrance, in the form of what are known as "safeguards" for the religious minority in Ireland, is favoured by Mr. Childers. I have failed to find any Protestant Nationalist—and I know a great many—who shares this view. I am daring enough to think that Protestant Irishmen will agree that artificial safeguards promote rather than hinder strife. That is one reason why they should not be asked for. Another reason, that they weaken the sense of responsibility which the Irish Government must, if it is to be strong, feel. In that feeling of national responsibility lies the surest hope of an Ireland slowly uniting; of an Ireland ceasing to feel the war of creed against creed, of party against party; of an Ireland, in a word, which is to be a normal and healthy state, instead of an abnormal and diseased one.

\* See his *Clerical Influences*, first published in 1861; new edition, 1911.