

# TRUE AND FALSE IMPERIALISM.

By Arthur Griffith.

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“I am national, in that I am an Irishman and proud of it, anxious to help Ireland as far as lies in my power, along the upward path she has begun to tread; and I am Imperial, glad of my small share in the proudest boast that the world has heard. ‘Civis Britannicus sum – mark the phrase: It is Britannicus not Anglicanus.’ – *An Ulster Imperialist to the “Irish Review,” April, 1911.*

The quotation exhibits a confusion of mind no less curious than that of the English nobleman who believes that under the British Crown there is but one nationality. There is officially an United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. There is not officially a Briton existing in Ireland who is native of the soil. Mr. Birrell and Lord Aberdeen, and the other gentlemen who govern us, are undoubted Britons, but Archbishop Crozier, Mr. William Moore, and the Grand Master of the Orange Order have no more claim to the title than the Shah of Persia. The law does not presume a Briton to exist in Ireland who is not imported, and the law is right. A Briton is a native of England, Scotland, or Wales in the eye of law as well as of commonsense. There are four millions of British subjects in Ireland, as there are four hundred millions of British subjects in India. But there are no Britons in either country outside the Governors and the speculative immigrants.

I mark well that the phrase is “Civis Britannicus sum” – not “Anglicanus.” It could not be “Anglicanus” without excluding Scotland and Wales. It could not be “Britannicus” without excluding Ireland. I mark in the phrase the recognition of English, Scots, and Welsh as British citizens, and the relegation of the people of that “part of the United Kingdom called Ireland” to the status of British subjects. I mark that the adapted phrase implies the Empire is Britain’s possession and that Britain and Ireland are distinct entities – the one imperial ruler, the other subject-nation. The Kingdom is the United Kingdom of Great Britain *and* Ireland, but the Empire is not the Empire of Great Britain and Ireland. It is the British Empire.

If the Imperialists in Ireland recognised this fact it would clarify discussion. The “Ulster Imperialist” is glad to boast that he is a citizen of the British Empire. I suggest the Irishman who is proud to boast himself a citizen of the British Empire will discover his long lost brother when he finds the Scotsman who is proud to boast himself a citizen of the English Empire. When he finds this rare Scotsman he will have made an original discovery.

The title “Austrian Empire” was a denial of Hungary. The title “British Empire” is a denial of Ireland. There is no longer an Austrian Empire – there is an Austro-Hungarian Empire. There is still a British Empire, not a Brito-Hibernian Empire. In the nineteenth century days of the dead Austrian Empire there were no “Hungarian Imperialists” to boast that they were citizens of the Austrian Empire and to declare they were proud of the distinction. While the British Empire exists the majority of Irishmen will not boast that they are of its citizens. Their instinct, if not their reason, will inform them that such a boast is a denial of their country’s right and dignity. Many may be charmed by the idea of equal partnership with Britain in the Empire, but none of the most allured will swap the name of Irishman for that of British subject.

Irishmen who accept the idea of Imperialism as true, and who preach it to their countrymen as if it were a new-found gospel, waste their energy so long as the Imperialism they preach concretes itself into the British Empire. Nationalist Ireland will not hearken, and Nationalist Ireland will be right, as it always is when it follows its instinct. It knows that the acceptance of the British Empire is the acceptance of English ascendancy. It will not accept that ascendancy, for its instinct warns it that to do so is death. It riots, agitates, appeals, protests, intrigues, lies, flatters, abases itself to withstand English ascendancy. It uses any weapon and every weapon. When it has nothing better it copies Pantagruel and covers its people with its tongue. Its meaner methods may be despised, but there is that behind their use that may not be despised. There is a tenacity of life and strength of purpose which no other nation has shown; not even the Jews, who, though they kept their identity, lost their land. The Irish have learned to complain and whimper and even to appeal to their

enemies, but they have not learned to admit defeat. Centuries of cruel punishment, because they kicked against the pricks, have taught them a mean wisdom – to dodge the lash and flatter the overseer. But it has not forced them to throw up their hands and cry, “We surrender.” In seven hundred years that cry has never been forced from the throat of the Irish people.

Such stubbornness has irritated the English mind much more than our unsuccessful insurrections. The blind hysterics of the Celt that awake the English poet’s scorn, and the inability of the Celt to face facts which angers the English philosopher, are natural condemnations from a people who have risen to power by prompt acceptance of defeat on a people who do not understand when they are beaten. We know that most men are easiest flattered by attributing to them that strong quality they most lack. We know from England’s greatest genius and greatest flatterer that England never did and never shall lie at the proud feet of a conqueror. We know from history that England has accepted, after one effort of resistance, every conqueror who landed on her shores; we know that if the legions of Germany invade England to-morrow, England would offer a stout resistance and probably drive them back over the sea. But we also know – although some of us who call ourselves Imperialists do not realise – that if her resistance failed, England would accept defeat and a German Suzerain as readily as she accepted, after Hastings, Conquest and a Norman Duke. The Nationalist star that gleamed from England’s historic page Hereward the Saxon vanishes, a myth. But Ireland has begotten twenty Herewards in every century since she was “struck dead” at Kinsale.

Until those in Ireland who cherish the Imperial idea translate it by Hiberno-British instead of by British Empire they will find no audience outside the ranks of men who have consistently identified “the Empire” with Irish National suppression. When they so translate it they will find Nationalist Ireland willing to discuss their views. And if in these views they see Ireland an equal partner in the Empire with England they will find their bitterest opponents not in Irishmen, but in Englishmen. To the Englishman from the Duke in his palace to the Radical cobbler crying down the House of Lords, the Empire means

England Over All, and has never meant anything else. The Imperial Conference understanding so much meets, foils English statecraft, and dissolves amid the glossed curses of the English press. The colonies may have a use for Imperialism, they have none for English Ascendancy. The fiasco of the Imperial Conference caused me to turn back the pages of *The Review* and re-read "Ulster Imperialist's" article. Should it cause him to turn back and re-write it, he may sow seeds of better understanding between Irishmen who think they are Imperialists and Irishmen who know they are Nationalists.