

THE DOCTRINE OF NATIONALITY.

By Arthur Griffith.

From *Sinn Féin*, November 18, 1911.

The Auditor of the College Historical Society delivered an address on 'The Doctrine of Nationality.' The 'Freeman' did not report a word of the address, but it reported very fully what Dr. Hyde said about it. The 'Irish Times' gave half-a-column to the auditor and three columns to the speakers – two of whom, in a column-and-a-half of our contemporary did not produce an idea between them. To the daily Press what is interesting about an auditor's address is not the light it throws on the mental attitude of a younger generation but the opportunity it gives to the spokesmen of the present and passing ones. Yet when the views of the young generation are to be debated by the elders it is right the victim of the debate should be heard in full.

It is only from the summary in the 'Irish Times' we can gather the views of the Auditor of Trinity Historical Society on the Doctrine of Nationality. He believes it was with the French Revolution that the power of Nationality began to make itself felt, and in a sense we agree. The French Revolution was a challenge to Nationality and it was Nationality not the embattled despots who triumphed in the fall of France. The Illuminati who carried out the French Revolution were the first active and avowed enemies of the National idea – the first who openly at least sought to exalt the idea of the State above the idea of the Nation. The attack on the National idea converted a placid faith into a passionate creed and a hundred and twenty years after the French Revolution, the National idea dominates the world. Imperialism and Socialism – both forms of the Cosmopolitan heresy and in essence one – after a centuried war on Nationalism are weaker to-day than ever in history. Imperialism seeks peace with Nationalism through the way of Federalism. Socialism now offers to seek its end through the Nation instead of against it. The National idea, assailed

from above and below, through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries stands triumphant in the twentieth.

Imperialism and Socialism have offered man the material world – Nationalism has offered him a free soul, and Nationalism has won. Between the tyranny of the State and the soul of man stands the Nation. It assures to the individual development in harmony with the laws of his being and in consonance with the laws of a universe in which all are one and yet all are different. Nationalism is the prime political truth and even its old enemies are realising now that through it, evolution and progress must work. The State and the Nation are neither necessarily enemies nor necessarily friends. The State may oppress – the Nation always frees. Loyalty to the Nation may dictate rebellion against the State, and loyalty to the State may be treason to the Nation. But where State and Nation go hand in hand there is the surest guarantee for political progress. In Ireland the Nation and the State are hostile – therefore, there can be no peace in Ireland until the Nation dominates the State or the Nation be extinguished. The common confusion of the State with the Nation was evident in three of the speeches delivered at the Historical. It was most evident in the speech of Dr. Mahaffy. No definition of the Nation was given although it was attempted. Language was discounted because Switzerland and the United States have no distinct languages. Neither are these countries nation. They are independent States. Before there can be an American nation there must be an American language. An Irish independent State speaking the English language is possible, but an Irish nation is not possible without the Irish language. Two nationalities coalescing may produce a new nation, as Normans and Saxons made the English nation and Gauls and Romans made the French nation. But an English-speaking Ireland or a German-speaking Poland is not and cannot be an Irish or a Polish nation. Here there is no marriage, no coalescence – but absorption and national extinction.

There is no nation without a distinct language. That is the primal. Community of tradition, law and interest are the secondaries. The German nation is not Germany alone, but Germany and Austria – one nation in two States. Austria is equally German with Prussia –

the United States is equally English with England – it is only equally English-speaking – a different matter. The English nation is England alone – the English-speaking countries are her intellectual, moral, and physical conquests. There is no brother on the throne of the English nation. But there are two brothers on the throne of the German nation.

One assertion and one proposition laid down by the Auditor we deny. The assertion is that the Scots and Irish benefited ‘from the more advanced civilisation’ of the English. The Scots and Irish had nothing to learn in morality, in the Arts, in laws, or in tenures from England. Their inferiority to that country was a military inferiority such as the inferiority of Japan to the European powers was thirty years ago. Occupied by a higher culture than their neighbour, they forgot that the barbarism of Rome had overpowered the civilisation of Greece, and that later barbarians who modelled their Government and military system on the Roman plan could prove equally inimical to the cultured nations who undervalued the importance of the armed man. The proposition we deny is that where ‘two or more nationalities combine to form one State, the predominant people will have reached a higher level of civilisation than the others – consequently it will recognise a higher standard of morality.’ If we take this to mean that where two nationalities agree to form one State one is necessarily predominant we reply – Austria-Hungary. Here two nations combine to make one Imperial State wherein neither dominates and the standard of morality is equal with both. If it means that a physically conquering nationality recognises a higher standard of morality than those it subdues – the Spaniards and the English supply the refutation in their history. The great lesson that the Nation has to learn from the history of organised mankind is the high importance of the armed man. No civilisation, however enlightened, cultured, virtuous, is secure by its culture, virtue, enlightenment. The noblest, the bravest, the wisest of men is helpless when unarmed he meets in the jungle the tiger hungry for blood. Ireland met her tiger. If she gets away from its claws and yet again walks abroad unarmed she will indeed deserve to perish.