

WOMEN, IDEALS AND THE NATION.

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I take it as a great compliment that so many of you, the rising young women of Ireland, who are distinguishing yourselves every day and coming more and more to the front, should give me this opportunity. We older people look to you with great hopes and a great confidence that in your gradual emancipation you are bringing fresh ideas, fresh energies, and above all a great genius for sacrifice into the life of the nation.

In Ireland the women seem to have taken less part in public life, and to have had less share in the struggle for liberty, than in other nations. In Russia, among the people who are working to overthrow the tyrannical and unjust government of the Czar and his officials, and in Poland where, to be a nationalist, men and women must take their lives in their hands, women work as comrades, shoulder to shoulder, with their men. No duty is too hard, no act too dangerous for them to undertake. Many a woman has been incarcerated in the dungeons under St. Peter and St. Paul—to sit in the damp and mouldy gloom and watch—perhaps for a week, perhaps for a year—the little gate high up on the wall, where one day or other, sure enough, she would see a little stream of dirty water begin to trickle through, which would tell her that soon that which once had been her would drift out into the world again.

Many another woman has dropped exhausted on the long, weary march through the snow-covered steppes to the land of exile. Weighed down by her chains, unable to stir herself, scarcely a groan escapes her, even under the lash of the knout—freely applied by the soldier in charge—she has sunk down hopeless and helpless, alone on the dreary plain, to watch for a few short hours the big black birds circling nearer and nearer, borne up and sustained by the knowledge that 'no sacrifice

is ever in vain,' and that as the death of Christ brought a new hope and a new life to an old world, so the blood of each martyr shed in the cause of liberty will give a new impetus to the comrades who are left behind to continue the work.

Now, England in this twentieth century is much more civilized, and much more subtle than Russia in her methods for subjugating a nation; therefore, more difficult to fight; and much more difficult to realise as an enemy. She deals out pennies liberally and noisily with her right hand, shouting into our ears all the time how good and how liberal she is to the mere Irish, while her left hand is busily engaged in feeling in our pockets and abstracting as many as she can of the few gold pieces we have earned by the sweat of our brows. She trumpets her own praise loudly through the world—John Bull's bluntness, honesty, truth and bravery, his nobleness in dealing with his enemies—all this has been sung, shouted and declaimed throughout civilization, so that Irish people, being very simple and honest themselves, have often taken a very long time to realise that we are being governed—not as we are told for the ultimate good of the Irish nation, but as an alien province that must be prevented from interfering with the commerce of, and whose interest must always be kept subservient to, England. She has systematically overtaxed us for our own good; she has depopulated our country—and it is for our own good; she has tried to kill our language—for our own good; she entices our young men into her armies, to fight her battles for her—and still it is for our own good. She began this policy in 1800 when—entirely for our own good—our Parliament was disbanded, and we were given instead the great privilege of sending to Westminster a small band of representatives to make the best fight they could for Irish rights against an overwhelming majority; which, of course, while causing but a small annoyance to England, brought there with the representatives of Ireland, their families and the whole of the society in which they moved. In fact the wealthiest and most influential section of the Irish nation was, at one fell swoop, transferred to London, there to spend its money, and to learn to talk about the 'Empire.' The immense privilege of belonging to the 'greatest Empire in the world' of being one with 'the greatest people in the world,' has since been shouted and

preached and sung to us, till many of us have been beguiled into believing this story of fairy gold only to be lost—lost to our country in her direst need!

In this desertion our women participated quite as much as our men, they abandoned their Dublin mansions, to hire or buy houses in London, they followed the English Court about and joined the English ranks of toadies and placehunters, bringing up their daughters in English ways and teaching them to make English ideals their ideals, and when possible marrying them to Englishmen.

Of course this could not go on for ever, and the Irish nation, at last realising that they and their interests had been sold for years, refused to be represented by them any longer... but it was too late—the rich and the aristocratic section of the men and women of Ireland had been lost to their country for years, if not for all eternity.

Now, I am not going to discuss the subtle psychological question of why it was that so few women in Ireland have been prominent in the national struggle, or try to discover how they lost in the dark ages of persecution the magnificent legacy of Maeve, Fleas, Macha and their other great fighting ancestors. True, several women distinguished themselves on the battlefields of '98, and we have the women of the *Nation* newspaper, of the Ladies' Land League, also in our own day the few women who have worked their hardest in the Sinn Féin movement and in the Gaelic League, and we have the woman who won a battle for Ireland, by preventing a wobbly Corporation from presenting King Edward of England with a loyal address. But for the most part our women, though sincere, steadfast Nationalists at heart, have been content to remain quietly at home, and leave all the fighting and striving to the men.

Lately things seem to be changing. As in the last century, during the sixties, a strong tide of liberty swept over the world, so now again a strong tide of liberty seems to be coming towards us, swelling and growing and carrying before it all the outposts that hold women enslaved and bearing them triumphantly into the life of the nations to which they belong.

We are in a very difficult position here, as so many Unionist women would fain have us work together with them for the

emancipation of their sex and votes—obviously to send a member to Westminster. But I would ask every Nationalist woman to pause before she joined a Suffrage Society or Franchise League that did not include in their Programme the Freedom of their nation. ‘A Free Ireland with No Sex Disabilities in her Constitution’ should be the motto of all Nationalist women. And a grand motto it is.

There are great possibilities, in the hands and the hearts of the young women of Ireland—great possibilities indeed, and great responsibilities. For as you are born a woman, so you are born an Irishwoman, with all the troubles and responsibilities of both. You may shirk or deny them, but they are there, and some day—as a woman and as an Irishwoman—you will have to face the question of how your life has been spent, and how have you served your sex and your nation?

The greatest gifts that the young women of Ireland can bring into public life with them, are ideals and principles. Ideals, that are but the Inward Vision, that will show them their nation glorious and free, no longer a reproach to her sons and daughters; and principles that will give them courage and strength—the patient toil of the worker, the brilliant inspiration of the leader.

Women, from having till very recently stood so far removed from all politics, should be able to formulate a much clearer and more incisive view of the political situation than men. For a man from the time he is a mere lad is more or less in touch with politics, and has usually the label of some party attached to him, long before he properly understands what it really means.

We all know that when you get quite close to a rock or to a waterfall you lose the general effect of the mountain of which it is only a small part; and it is just the same with politics. Men all their lives are so occupied in examining closely, from a narrow party point of view all the little Bills ‘relating to Ireland’—that all parties in the British Houses of Parliament are so constantly throwing them, to fight and squabble over—that they often quite lose sight of their ‘mountain’ and forget that—as the greater contains the less, as the mountain contains the rocks and the waterfalls, so does the lost

nationhood of their country contain class legislation, sex legislation, trade legislation.

Now, here is a chance for our women. Let them remind their men, that their first duty is to examine any legislation proposed not from a party point of view, not from the point of view of a sex, a trade, or a class, but simply and only from the standpoint of their Nation. Let them learn to be statesmen and not merely politicians. Let them consider how their action with regard to it may help or hinder their national struggle for independence and nothing else, and then let them act accordingly.

Taking my simile from another point of view, as surely that a few stones, and a few pails of water, though improving our garden, are but a poor substitute for our great mysterious mountain, so these little Bills, though improving the conditions of our people, are at the best but a poor substitute for our Nation's freedom, which in the meantime has been shelved and almost forgotten. Now, let our women come forward with the determination that we must obtain possession of the mountain itself—not contenting ourselves with buying or stealing bits of rock and pails of water.

Fix your mind on the ideal of Ireland free, with her women enjoying the full rights of citizenship in their own nation, and no one will be able to side-track you, and so make use of you to use up the energies of the nation in obtaining all sorts of concessions—concessions, too, that for the most part were coming in the natural course of evolution, and were perhaps just hastened a few years by the fierce agitations to obtain them.

Catholic emancipation must have come; it has come even in Russian Poland, where the whole nation was in arms against Russia as late as '63, and where it stands for a much greater thing than it does here.

Catholicism is an integral part of a Pole's Nationality, the Orthodox religion an integral part of a Russian's, for all Poles are Catholic, all Russians Orthodox—and a Pole of the Orthodox religion would even now be regarded with suspicion in Poland and could not possibly enter any Polish National Movement; while a Russian who was a Catholic would find it difficult even to live in his country.

Tenant right and peasant proprietorship, extension of the franchise and universal suffrage, are all but steps in the evolution of the world; for, as education and with it the knowledge of the rights of a man or a woman to live, is gained by the masses of mankind, so gradually they push their way—individually and collectively—into the life of their nation, and being in the majority, the moment they realise their power, the world may be theirs for the taking.

But our national freedom cannot, and must not, be left to evolution. If we look around us, we will find that evolution—as far as Ireland is concerned—is tending rather to annihilate us as a nation altogether. We seem day by day to be brought more and more in touch with England, and little by little to be losing all that distinctiveness which pertains to a nation, and which may be called nationality. London seems to be coming nearer and nearer to us till quite imperceptibly it has become the centre of the universe to even many good Irishmen.

Of course all modern inventions have helped England in the task of submerging our interests in hers—trains, the penny post, the telegraph system, have all brought her nearer, and given her more power over us. More especially the daily papers, forcing England upon us as the headquarters of our politics, our society, our stock exchange, our sport, teaching us to regard her foreign policy and her wars from the point of view of one or other of her political parties—all this, I say, wears away the rock of our national pride, and little by little we drift nearer to the conventional English views on life.

The educational systems through the country have also been used to work for the destruction of our nationality, from the smart English governess who despised the mere Irish, to the village schoolmaster forced to train up his scholars in ignorance of Ireland's wrongs, in ignorance of Ireland's language and history.

The schools, too, were usually under the patronage of the priest or parson of the district, and therefore very naturally concentrated on developing strong sectarian feelings in the children, instead of the broader creed of nationalism.

Every right granted to us by England has been done in such a way that it helped to split us up into divisions and sub-divisions. That

policy is being continued now. We have had landlords and tenants, Catholics and Protestants, North and South, besides the sub-divisions into the different sections of the English political parties. We are rapidly adding graziers and peasants, farmers and labourers, to the list of Irishmen who are all losing sight of their ideal, and sordidly scrambling for what they hope to get. They are curiously blind and inconsistent, too, for no great and real prosperity can be ours, while our interests are always the very last to be considered in an Empire.

To prove this, take a glance at two of the Bills that are being very much discussed at this moment.

The Liberals are talking of Land Tax. This may suit the needs of England very well, with her big, rich proprietors, who can well afford to pay it; but over here, where the land is at this moment gradually becoming the property of the farmer, big and small, through a system of paying a certain rent to the Government, it will mean that this rent has been raised, and nothing more, and that, in spite of England's promises. The rent goes into England's pockets, so also does the Land Tax. Therefore, except in the terms, where is the difference? And who cares whether the extra charge is called rent or Land Tax? It will have to be paid, and that is the only point of any importance to the farmer.

Then take the great Conservative cry of Tariff Reform. We are all told that Cobden ruined Ireland's milling industry with Free Trade, and we are all familiar with the pitiful ruins of mills, great and small, through the country. Round Dublin, along the Dodder banks, one ruin after another, tells its sad tale of unemployment and emigration to the holiday wanderer. In Sligo—my own county—every little stream has the same tale to tell; and where, even the bleak walls have vanished, you often find a record of bygone prosperity in names such as Milltown or Millbrook.

But conditions have changed all over the world since Cobden's day, and tax on flour now would only mean that the wheat-growing industry of Canada would benefit largely. 'Colonial Preference' would mean that Canada would get every advantage over Russia and other wheat-growing countries in our markets, while Ireland would possibly have to pay more for bread.

In the ready-made clothing trades, England with her Black Country, with her great manufacturing towns, has always been our worst enemy, and a tax on foreign ready-made clothes would tend to close the markets to all but English goods—the very ones (that once granted we require Protection at all) we require to be protected the most against. England's greatest rival in ready-mades is Germany. We, at present, count for nothing, and, of course, German goods excluded by a prohibitory tariff, England would do practically what she liked with the markets over here. Her firms would be in the position of a certain English boot factory which established a shop in Limerick in competition to a Limerick boot factory. Being a rich firm, they were able to sell their wares under cost price to the unsuspecting people of Limerick, till the day when the Limerick factory closed its doors, unable to stand up against the competition, and from that day the people of Limerick have had to pay through the boots they wear—the expenses of the fight, and a huge dividend to the English company, as well as having the unemployed from the ruined industry to support, unless they emigrate.

All this points to the one way in which the women of Ireland can help their country; and, indeed, many of them are already doing so; and it is a movement too that all creeds, all classes, and all politics can join in. We have the Irish Industrial Development Associations, and the Sinn Féin organisations both working very hard for this object, but still there is much to be done.

It is not enough just vaguely to buy Irish goods where you can do so without trouble, just in a sort of sentimental way. No; you must make Irish goods as necessary to your daily life, as your bath or your breakfast. Say to you yourselves, 'We must establish here a Voluntary Protection against foreign goods.' By this I mean that we must not resent sometimes having to pay an extra penny for an Irish-made article—which is practically protection—as the result of protection is that native manufacturers are enabled to charge the extra penny that will enable their infant factory to live and grow strong, and finally to compete on absolutely equal terms with the foreign-made article.

Every Irish industry that we manage even to keep in existence is an added wealth to our nation, and therefore indirectly to ourselves.

It employs labour which serves to keep down the poor rates, and to check emigration. The large sums of money it turns over benefits every other trade in the country. So you also will benefit, for the richer the country, the better price you will be able to command for your services in the professions and trades, and the more positions will be created to which you may aspire.

Besides, as in the case of the boot factory in Limerick, so in the other industries. If we allow England to ruin them, it is we that will have to pay up in the end.

An Irishman is but a poor match for an Englishman in trade, because he is such an extraordinary good hand in driving a bargain.

This may sound paradoxical, but you will find that nevertheless it is true. Who can sell a horse better at a fair than an Irishman?—abstracting the uttermost farthing from his English customer. But in his heated arguments, and in his gentle persuasiveness, he entirely omits to mention that his animal has staggers, is a cribbiter, or some other such trifle. The Irishman will tell you with pride for years after of the wonderful bargain he struck, but he will draw a veil over the fact that he has lost his best customer, and a good market for many horses in the succeeding years.

Now, it is the same spirit that prompts us to glory in bargains we make when we are buying, and boast when we return home one shilling the richer than we expected from buying foreign-made articles, forgetting that the shillings spent on foreign goods and the shillings saved are both robbed from our Nation—our Nation is the poorer for them, and we as parts of our nation are the poorer for them too.

If the women of Ireland would organise the movement for buying Irish goods more, they might do a great deal to help their country. If they would make it the fashion to dress in Irish clothes, feed on Irish food—in fact, in this as in everything, **LIVE REALLY IRISH LIVES**, they would be doing something great, and don't let our clever Irish colleens rest content with doing this individually, but let them go out and speak publicly about it, form leagues, of which 'No English Goods' is the war-cry. Let them talk, and talk, publicly and privately, never minding how they bore people—till not one even of

the peasants in the wilds of Galway but has heard and approved of the movement.

I daresay you will think this all very obvious and very dull, but Patriotism and Nationalism and all great things are made up of much that is obvious and dull, and much that in the beginning is small, but that will be found to lead out into fields that are broader and full of interest. You will go out into the world and get elected on to as many public bodies as possible, and by degrees through your exertions no public institution—whether hospital, workhouse, asylum or any other, and no private house—but will be supporting the industries of your country.

Ireland wants her girls to help her to build up her national life. Their fresh, clean views of life, their young energies, have been long too hidden away and kept separate in their different homes. Bring them out and organise them, and lo! you will find a great new army ready to help the national cause. The old idea that a woman can only serve her nation through her home is gone, so now is the time; on you the responsibility rests. No one can help you but yourselves alone; you must make the world look upon you as citizens first, as women after. For each one of you there is a niche waiting—your place in the nation. Try and find it. It may be as a leader, it may be as a humble follower—perhaps in a political party, perhaps in a party of your own—but it is there, and if you cannot find it for yourself, no one can find it for you.

If you are fitted for public work take up any that is within your reach, so long as you feel that you can do it. Ireland wants reforming, sweeping clean from ocean to ocean; and it is only the young people can do it.

Since the Union we have been steadily deteriorating; all our ideals have been gradually slipping from us. Let us look all these facts bravely in the face, and make up our minds to change them.

We know that the Government of England is responsible for all this. First, for the famine, with its deaths and desolations, by which our people were taught to beg and to appeal and to look to England, and our fine national spirit was taught to be submissive.

Emigration—another policy sent to us from England—has helped to build up another great nation at Ireland's expense. The men

and women whom she could least afford to lose were the ones who so often had to go, leaving the weak and the feeble to continue their own race.

But what has done us most harm of all is a system of Government calculated to foster all that was low or mean in our nature—treachery, place-hunting, besides all the petty, mean vices that follow on the idea that commercial prosperity and nothing else is the highest ideal of life. These ideas, and many more, we have been allowing a subtle foe to graft on our national character at her will.

But we have seen it in time; and a nation of idealists and soldiers has only to see it, and she will prune off the bad growths, as a strong nature will throw off an unclean sickness.

Drunkenness is one of the great national evils for us to fight. It has caused more harm to our nation than at first seems possible. Many and many a defeat and massacre in '98 were facilitated by the drunkenness of the patriot army. To quote 'The Boys of Wexford:'

'We bravely fought and conquered
At Ross and Wexford town;
And if we failed to keep them,
'Twas drink that brought us down.
We had no drink beside us
On Tubberneering's day,
Depending on the long bright pike,
And well it won its way.'

Again, another way of helping Ireland—make this country untenable for the British Army—let them be taught to paraphrase the Cromwellian cry and say when ordered to Ireland, 'To Hell or Ireland.' Take a leaf from the book of the Italian ladies in their treatment of the armies of the Austrian usurper. Boycott them, men and officers, let them realise what the sight of a red or khaki coat means to a right-thinking Irishman or woman; let them feel that you would force them to leave, that you would fain see in their place the gorgeous uniforms of an Irish army, the brilliant ranks of regiments like the Volunteers of '82. Make public opinion so strong that no Irish lad will ever again join the army of his country's enemies, to be at any

moment called upon to 'quell sedition' in his own country or to fight against other noble nations in the same plight as themselves.

If Irish boys could realise the contempt the British army is held in abroad, if they heard it talked of as the last relic of barbarism, a 'mercenary army,' and, as the most immoral army in the world, they would indeed hesitate before they entered it.

Then, again, you can educate your universities, colleges and schools. Don't permit pro-English propaganda, vice-regal patronage. I saw the other day a lecture advertised to be given by Father Maturin, Dr. Delany, S. J., in the chair, under the patronage of *Her Excellency, the Countess of Aberdeen*. How long are the students of Ireland going silently to acquiesce in insults such as these? Many of us had great hopes of a new order of things when 'God Save the King' was rioted down by some brave young men, but that protest does not seem to have lead to anything more.

The '63 revolution in Poland was chiefly organised by students. Cannot the young men and women realise their strength? It is they who are the universities and colleges of the country; without them the schools would cease to be. Let them force their senates or governing bodies into line and not allow them to tolerate, or worse still, to solicit any English patronage however they may be tempted. Let the maiden of Ireland, fleet as Atalanta, never pause in the race for freedom; let her shut her eyes to the golden apples that England will strew on her path, wisely understanding the bitter disappointment that must have been the lot of the other Atalanta, when she had realised that she had lost her race, her great prestige, her sex's prowess. And all for what? For some fruit to eat.

As I write this a couple of lines from a Scotch poet are running in my head, which apply very aptly to us and to Ireland—

'Breathes there a man with soul so dead,
Who never to himself has said,
This is my own my Native Land?'

I think that there are very few Irishwomen whose souls are so dead that they would answer that question in the negative, but how many of them have realised the responsibility they have admitted

when they say, 'My own, my native land?' Those words applied to our nation exclude all other nations from your possession. No man can apply the words, 'My native land' to two countries—to Ireland and England, or to Ireland and any other country. That we still can use those words proves that our souls incorporated in the soul of our nation are free still. The great soul of Ireland is still unconquered, and it is to the free souls of her sons and her daughters that she looks to free her body.

Each one of us has a soul, an Irish soul, a tiny atom of the great national soul of Ireland. Let us give that soul her chance; let us listen to her lofty aspirations, to the truth and justice of her claims. Ireland's soul was born free; it is we must free her body too.

In every action we do in life, the idea behind it is the thing that counts—if you go deep enough—the soul as it were. And so it is only by realising that unless the ideal, the spirit of self-sacrifice and love of country, is at the back of our work for commercial prosperity, sex emancipation, and other practical reforms, that we can hope to help our land. Every little act 'for Ireland's sake' will help to build up a great nation, noble and self-sacrificing, industrious and free.

Do you think that Christ would have conquered so much of the world, and held it for nearly 2,000 years, with a selfish practical policy and nothing more? No; Christianity, and other religions which have prevailed, have done so through their ideals, for which men and women were not afraid to die. Why did the Macedonian Empire break up? Why have we nothing left of the glories of the great Kingdom of Spain? What was the cause of the fall of Napoleon, and why did the French Empire crumble away? Because they were founded upon usurpation and sustained by physical force, that most unstable of human powers, and no physical force can hold forever a free-souled and steadfast people.

England is now holding by force three civilised nations—nations whose ideals are Freedom, Justice and Nationhood—Ireland, India and Egypt, not to consider her savage territories and South Africa. Her colonies have to be coaxed into loyalty, and her House of Commons goes into hysterics over the news that Germany is building

ships. Does that look like an Empire that is replete with a great National confidence, that is going to last for all eternity?

Wherever Ireland is known in the world, she is known by the great legacy her martyrs have left her, tales of noble deeds, of fearless deaths, of lives of self-denial and renunciation. Her name stands for the emblem of all that is brave and true, while England, her conqueror, has but gained for herself universally among the nations, the sobriquet of 'La Perfide Albion.'

To sum up in a few words what I want the Young Ireland women to remember from me. Regard yourselves as Irish, believe in yourselves as Irish, as units of a nation distinct from England, your conqueror, and as determined to maintain your distinctiveness and gain your deliverance. Arm yourselves with weapons to fight your nation's cause. Arm your souls with noble and free ideas. Arm your minds with the histories and memories of your country and her martyrs, her language, and a knowledge of her arts, and her industries. And if in your day the call should come for your body to arm, do not shirk that either.

May this aspiration towards life and freedom among the women of Ireland bring forth a Joan of Arc to free our nation!