

IRELAND'S YEAR OF DESTINY.

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I.—OUR ATTITUDE.

Ireland has for centuries awaited her year of destiny, and it has come. Think: the promised time for which blood and tears were spilled to such overflowing, that suffering became the normal condition, and a respite only a breathing spell to prepare our people for renewed agony. But the unwearying spirit and the unbroken heart for such immeasurable sacrifice have reward: the destined year has come. Think and pause. How shall we receive it? Ireland first and only. Surely, Ireland, and without qualification first. But there is a battle yet to win, there are enemies yet to conquer, there is the old insidious way of attack. What of our Irish readiness? Irish unity for Irish freedom, and the dream of centuries will be realised. What passionate secret prayers are now being breathed for a leader who will lead Ireland bravely and surely and unflinchingly, and put Ireland first. No man can be so extreme as to decry such a lead. No leader can be so poor as to divide his allegiance. Our hope is our unity, with this simple watchword, *Ireland first*: honourable peace for Ireland supreme in her own land; without honourable peace, war to the end.

II.—IRELAND FIRST.

Ireland first. Let that be our watchword, sworn to by every man and woman in Ireland, and Ireland is safe. Let it stand out clear and absolute. Let it be a sacred oath before God with each one, without qualification, that his allegiance is to Ireland first. Let there be no thought or hint of conditions till that vow is registered by all, pure and fixed for ever. Then, in its light let us step forward to consider all things, and in its light we shall see all things in their true perspective.

III.—ENGLAND'S ATTITUDE.

And in its light clear and full we see England's attitude. We see the present situation aright. We see the war, and what it involves for us, and our place; and we see the initial point of cleavage. The first appeal from England for recruits leaps across the eye, with its significant one line: *For England and her Empire*. Not for England and her submerged millions, not for Ireland and justice, but *for England and her Empire*. Let there be no mistake about it. Think of it till it burn into your brain. It is England's attitude. England first. It is incompatible with our attitude, Ireland first. If we are honest with ourselves, we must see it. If we are true to ourselves, we must challenge it.

IV.—IRELAND'S DIFFICULTY ENGLAND'S OPPORTUNITY.

It was O'Connell made the historic declaration, England's difficulty is Ireland's opportunity. Parnell put in practice with the coldness of a science; and for the achievements of both we have reared them monuments in our Capital. But the irony of it, we must not whisper the famous dictum, lest we hurt the new friends of Ireland. And greater irony still, at this moment England has turned the tables: for the hard fact of the situation is this: Ireland's difficulty is England's opportunity. And mark you, England is using her opportunity to the full. Mark it, good friends. She is playing off North against South. Her parties combine to outwit us. She persuades each side here that it will be gratified, and the other side disappointed. She tries to establish a rivalry between both, to provide her with soldiers for her broken army. Because we are in deadly earnest about our fight for freedom, we are mortally afraid of starting mere disturbances among ourselves. She sees it. She practises on it. Ireland's difficulty is England's opportunity. And the astute contriver is actually winning some of our party leaders to accept a new promise deferred for an old promise broken, and is urging us on all hands in joy for the compact to come forth and fight her battles!

V.—OUR RESOLUTION.

We must realise this, and meet it with the resource and resolution of men. There is one honourable way: Irish unity for Irish freedom. There was never a time more opportune, never a people more eager, never a success more assured—if only our leaders will seize the chance and work the miracle. The men who are called extreme are ready and anxious. If the leaders of the Irish Party only realise, they could unite Ireland as it was never before united, if they give Ireland undivided allegiance, if they break with English intrigues, if they fall back on Irish honour and Irish manhood. But if their allegiance is divided, it will lead to—

VI.—AN ILLUSTRATION.

An apt illustration will show best. As indicative of the feeling deep in many hearts, an incident that took place at Sunday's Volunteer Review in Midleton may be told. It must be first emphasised how the splendid body of men on parade were held in one bond of comradeship as Irish soldiers. For Ireland—that bound them without a murmur. Without a murmur of dissent, but with singing, marching, cheering, glorious enthusiasm. And when Mr. Devlin spoke, and touched on the sacrifices made for Irish liberty, and our resolution to take no comfortable substitute, he was cheered to the echo. But when he touched on the Empire in a guarded way, there was noticeable silence and constraint. There was a feeling we were near the bursting point. Yet the self-control was there, and that self-control was emphasised by the escape of one short, sharp snap, 'Damn the Empire.' The very manner of it was dramatic. It should out—yet in a suppressed voice, that suggested the lid of a cauldron raised and hurriedly shut down. We knew there was fury beneath it. If Mr. Devlin had ventured, following Mr. O'Brien's path, to suggest volunteering for the Empire—we refuse to believe him capable of it—that parade could have been rent and split with the escaping fury. It is certain. It is equally certain that if he stood for Ireland, or if Mr. Redmond, or if both of them, stood for Ireland

militant and uncompromising, all sections of men there and elsewhere through Ireland, moderate and extreme, new and old, would follow them through fire and water. Was there ever such a chance given to a man or men in Ireland? It is unthinkable that they will refuse to take it.

VII.—THE NEW FACTOR.

What is the great new factor in the situation? The eagerness of the men called extremists—simple lovers of Ireland without qualification, no more—to stand in with the men called constitutionalists? They are anxious, eager, almost pathetically eager, it might be said, to strengthen and support any party leader who will take the straight course for Ireland. They recognise that the older party leaders are, perhaps, battle-weary. They want it to be recognised that they themselves are young, full of fire and vitality, that they are not battle-weary; and they want a fight. They wish the leaders to realise there is this support behind them, that they themselves can be relied on, that they crave to be called to sacrifice and trials of endurance for Ireland, to enter the last and victorious battle for Irish liberty. Whatever the cost to them, they crave it. They want it to be realised, approved, and acted on. And then let the issue be set.

VIII.—THE CHOICE, ENGLAND OR IRELAND.

It will come to a choice—England or Ireland. And the party leader who will hold to England's word at any cost—but another of the many broken words—will split Ireland hopelessly. But if he arise, throw up the discredited negotiations, and fall back on vigorous measures, he will unite Ireland in glory and pride. There will be no recriminations. The man who will taunt him with returning empty-handed will be struck down. The spirit of his reception will rather be that of the old Senators of the Republic of Rome when Varro returned beaten and broken after Cannae, and Hannibal was hourly expected at the gates. Did they revile him? No. They gave him thanks in open assembly

because he did not despair of the Republic. And that too will be the spirit of our greeting. When the armed manhood of the nation stands together united with unclouded issue for a straight fight, who will despair of the battle?

IX.—ULTIMATUM.

Our plea is for an ultimatum—an ultimatum to England. Peace or War. We are equally ready for honourable peace or implacable war. And we urge that it be pushed to an issue forthwith. It is the critical time. There will be risks. In battle there is always a risk. But to slacken in effort, in hope, in persistence means disaster. Let there be no fear and we shall triumph, and the blood of centuries will yield a harvest in this time, and the faith of centuries will be justified; and future centuries will dawn on an Ireland proudly, beautifully, firmly based on liberty. But the issue must be set *now*. It is Ireland's Year of Destiny.