

# The Irish Revolution and How It Came About

(By WILLIAM O'BRIEN.)

INTRODUCTION V.—(Continued.)

Before passing from this part of the narrative, let us finish with another fiction which has almost become classic. It is a dogma with all pious believers, Liberal and Hibernian, that it was the Ulster Orange members, and not the Irish Party, who drove George Wyndham out of the Irish Secretaryship. The legend is an impudent falsification of the facts. The expulsion of Wyndham from the Irish Office before his benign work was half completed was the first exploit of the new masters of the Irish Party, and it was only the preliminary to their next achievement, which was to repeal his great Purchase Act of 1903. It was Mr. Dillon and his friends who alone had the power to do it, and it was they who did it.

Mr. T. P. O'Connor wept tears of ink over "The Passing of George Wyndham"—his passing from the Chief Secretaryship, and into his grave—and sang canticles over the great things he had done for Ireland and the greater things he might still have done, were it not for wicked men. The wicked men were, of course, the handful of Ulster Orange members, and to these Mr. T. P. O'Connor, without a wink in his scandalised eyes, attributed the entire guilt for the overthrow of Wyndham's career in Ireland. Never was hypocritical fable more easily confuted by the incontestable facts. It is quite true that the Orange Ulster Party did combine and conspire with Mr. T. P. O'Connor's Irish Party to harry Wyndham and to hang upon his flanks, until he was finally chased from the country—so much the deeper disgrace to both sets of conspirators. But it is true as well that the Irish Party, commanding 80 votes to the Orangemen's 14, and being in a position in addition to carry the whole Liberal Opposition into the voting lobbies with them, were incomparably the most powerful partners in the conspiracy. A brief summary of what really happened will, it is to be hoped, dispose once for all of the legend that it was the Orangemen who killed Cock Robin.

Before the Session of 1904 opened, Mr. Redmond announced that his Party held the Government of Wyndham as "prisoners in a condemned cell" waiting in fear and trembling for the execution of the sentence, and gave them notice that they would be "struck at as quickly and as strongly as we can." He lost no time in keeping his word.—On the 15th March, on a vote of censure moved by the Irish Party on the Education Vote, the Government was defeated by 141 votes to 130. Col. Saunderson and the other Ulster members—Messrs. Lonsdale, Gordon, Moore, Craig, and Sloane—aided on this occasion by abstaining from voting for the Government.—On 22nd March, the Irish Party moved another vote of censure on Wyndham (Arterial Drainage) in which they were joined in the division Lobby by the entire Ulster Party, Col. Saunderson declaring that "all Irish members were going to act together and fight what he called the Battle of the Bann"—On March 29th the Irish Party moved still another vote of censure on Wyndham (popular control of R.I.C.) and this time the Ulster Party voted with the Government.—On 3rd August Wyndham speaking on the University question, said the Government were accused of trifling with the question, but he pointed out that during the Session the Irish Party had joined in every attempt to turn out the Government. He appealed to the Party to think it out. (A Nationalist Member—"We want to turn you out!")—In the Session of 1905, Mr. Redmond moved (20th February) an Amendment to the Address censuring the Government and was joined by Mr. William Moore (of the Orange Party) in a violent denunciation of Wyndham, which was followed up by a speech from Mr. Dillon bespattering Mr. Moore with his praises and reiterating the attacks upon Wyndham. Mr. C. Craig said they had been invited by the Nationalists to go into the lobby with them to show their indignation against the Government. As Unionists they could not do that, but they were so profoundly dissatisfied with the conduct of Irish affairs that it had been their intention to abstain from voting. Mr. Flavin (North Kerry)—I will win my cigars if you are going to vote with us to-night. Mr. Craig

said he sincerely hoped he would win his cigars and if they could vote he would give the Hon. Member a few more.—A few months afterwards, Wyndham resigned.

Will anybody be ever again found bold enough to deny that it was the Irish Party who killed Wyndham as Chief Secretary in 1905, as surely as it was they who killed his great Purchase Act of 1903 by their own Act of 1909?

## VI.

To return to the comparison between the two Policies, if the second can be described as a policy which was merely the destruction of the first:—We from the start advocated, as everybody advocates now, a special consideration for the apprehensions, and even the historic prejudices of our Protestant countrymen in Ulster, and in the other three provinces as well—our assailants scoffed at the Ulster Difficulty, and up to a late period joyously relied upon the weapons of contempt and ridicule to conjure it down, while the aid of the Southern Unionists was fiercely repulsed as though it covered some treacherous intrigue against the Home Rule Cause. Kindly Irishmen, of Unionist traditions, of the stamp of Lord Dunraven, Mr. Lindsay Talbot-Crosbie, Mr. Moreton Frewen, Lord Rossmore, and Col. (now Sir W. Hutcheson) Poe, who from cautious Home Rule beginnings advanced to the acceptance of full Dominion Home Rule, were vilified more and more savagely the further they advanced, as "landlord swindlers," as "our hereditary enemies," as "blackblooded Cromwellians," and as crafty "anti-Irish conspirators," to whom we had, "in a moment of weakness mortgaged the future of Ireland."

## VII.

The folly of the anti-Conciliationists went further. They transformed the National Party and the National Movement into one from which not only all Unionists but all Protestants were excluded.—We proclaimed the first dogma of the Nationalist faith to be that the Protestant minority must not only be relieved from any imaginable danger to their religious or social liberties, but, on the one condition of their being "Irishmen first of all," must be welcomed into the high places of honor and power in an Irish nation of which the master-builders were the Protestant Grattans and Davises and Parnells. Our critics, on the contrary, proceeded to add fresh fuel to the flame of Orange fanaticism by subjecting the National movement to the new ascendancy of a sham Catholic secret society, with the result of changing the tepid suspicions of the most level-headed of the Episcopalian and Presbyterian farmers and shopkeepers into sheer terror for the future of their children and themselves in an Hibernian-ridden Ireland.

It happened thus. There had of late years crept into the North of Ireland a seceding wing (calling itself "The Board of Erin") of the great American Antient Order of Hibernians, a genuine Benefit Society which had distinguished itself by many works of charity and benevolence. The seceding Board of Erin never offered any public explanation of the objects of their establishment in Ireland. Their work was carried on in secret, under an obligation equivalent to an oath, not to reveal their secrets and passwords; and nobody was admitted to membership who was not a Catholic, frequenting the Catholic Sacraments. Such a body would have been entirely harmless, if confined to the legitimate sphere of a Friendly Society; but suddenly and secretly established in control of the entire visible National organisation, the effect in Ulster was that of a brand flourished in a powder-magazine. The transformation was effected by a stealthy process without any consultation with or consent of the Party, the League, or the country, and indeed passed all but unnoticed until the operation was complete. The paid Secretary of the United Irish League (Mr. Joseph Devlin, of Belfast, who now for the first time came into prominence) became the National President of the Board of Erin;\* the Standing Committee of the League was flooded with young Members of Parliament who had taken their vows of secrecy on initiation into the Hibernian Order; the paid organisers of the League were similarly initiated and were despatched through the country to turn the branches into as many occult Hibernian Divisions at the expense of the United Irish League.

\*Better known in popular parlance as "The Molliens."

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