

LEAFLET No. 6.

THE ETHICS OF SINN FEIN.

OUR MORAL OBLIGATIONS.

It would be difficult, to my mind, to exaggerate the obligation which lies upon Sinn Feiners to keep their conduct above reproach and to make their characters perfect, or as nearly perfect as possible. It is not enough that we should learn the Irish language and write our letters on Irish notepaper, and abstain from drink and tobacco, or become more than moderate in our use of them. The Sinn Feiner may do all of these things—if he is not sound in regard to the language, the industries, and temperance, indeed he is a very poor Sinn Feiner—and yet he may still be comparatively useless to the Irish cause and nation. We accuse the Parliamentarian of *imagining that he has done all that his country requires of him* when he has paid his annual subscription to the United Irish League, or voted at a Parliamentary election. We, for our part, make the test of Nationalism a little severer than that. Are you sure, however, that we make it as severe as we must make it if Ireland is to be saved? In spite of all our talk about the language, the industries, and temperance, is the average Sinn Feiner yet free from the ancient superstition that Ireland must ultimately be saved by committees, by monster meetings, by exciting elections—at all events, that it is going to be saved by somebody else than he? A good many Sinn Feiners, I know, make only a slight and lukewarm attempt to learn the Irish language. The Irish language will never be really saved, they tell you, till it is properly taught in the primary schools, and so they hand over this part of the salvation of Ireland to Education Boards and school managers, and election contests that may not even take place within their own lifetime, feeling that all they can do themselves is so very little that it is scarcely worth doing. *This is the thing we always condemn in Parliamentarians—the hope or wish to save Ireland by the exertions of somebody other than themselves.* Our first duty as patriots is to make Ireland a nation, to free it from subjection to foreign influences.

THE NECESSITY FOR INDIVIDUAL ACTION.

Well, the only part of the Irish nation which a good many of us have any chance of setting free immediately is ourselves. Every Irishman who does not speak Irish is against his will a representative of English domination in Ireland—a stronghold of English

influence. Every word of Irish we speak, every letter we address in Irish, is a blow to that domination, a weakening of the foundations of that stronghold. Even if we are too old to hope ever to speak Irish fluently, or if we have not a gift for languages, we can still do something, however little, to make the stock of our thoughts, words, feelings, more Irish and less English than it is, so that we may stand for national, not for foreign, influences. Nationalism of this sort may be thought by some people to be scarcely worth the trouble, but it is the only nationalism that is infectious and spreads. One man who learns Irish earnestly, however poorly he may succeed in learning it, has a stronger influence on his neighbours than a hundred men who merely advise other people to learn it.

Mr. Griffith gave us what, I think, is the key to the whole Sinn Fein philosophy, when he said that *every Irishman or woman's own self is the Irish nation*. The Irish nation that we have got to save does not consist of our neighbours, but ourselves—yourself and mine.

THE POLICY OF ME FEIN.

The first thing necessary towards making a success of the Sinn Fein policy is that each of us should put into practice within himself or herself what might be called a Mé Féin policy. Each of us is the Irish nation in miniature. Therefore, we ought each to make ourselves as like as possible to what we think the Irish nation ought to be. Do you want to de-Anglicise Ireland? Well, then the first thing to do is to de-Anglicise yourself. Do you want to see Ireland temperate? Become temperate yourself, and you will have taken the biggest step within your power towards making Ireland a temperate nation. Do you think the ideal Ireland would be chaste or impure, ill-mannered or courteous, self-sacrificing or selfish? Choose the Ireland that you think is best, and fashion yourself in its likeness. If you wish to see Ireland become a perfect country, a kingdom of God, do you yourself become a perfect individual, a kingdom of God. The perfect country can only be established by individual men and women, who are striving after perfection—perfection not only in an imaginary Irish nation which is outside themselves, but in the actual Irish nation which is within themselves, in their own brains and hearts and sinews, to mar or to make beautiful as they will.

INTER-DEPENDENCE OF STATE AND INDIVIDUAL.

I realise, of course, that it would be equally true, or nearly so, to say that *it is only the perfect state that could produce perfect men and women, and so my argument may appear to run in a circle*. The State and the individual react on each other, however, each helping the other forward on the way towards some ultimate decency. Some

thinkers lay too much stress on the part that must be played by the State in producing the perfect individual; others have their minds occupied too exclusively by the part played by the individual in bringing about the perfect State. The man with broad views will, I think, see that both progressive individuals and a progressive State are necessary, that they are complementary one to the other. He will aspire after a free and self-reliant Ireland, and the first thing he will do in order to realise his aspirations will be to make himself self-reliant and free—free from everything that is shameful and ignoble, as he wishes to see his country free from the shame of foreign conquest and the ignominy of English rule. He will attempt to become himself among his neighbours, what he wishes to see Ireland among the nations—conspicuous for honour and courage, and courtesy and virtue.

Logically, perhaps, I ought not to be saying these things, for I, of all men, have least succeeded in making myself perfect—I have not even made a brave struggle after perfection. My apology is that I realise that I am imperfect, and that I am for ever making plans for something better, and meantime I serve as a kind of admonition or warning to my neighbours. I wish it was in my power, or the power of someone, to make Irish men and women appreciate not the broadly national, but the immediately propagandist value of virtue, of the struggle for perfection in our individual lives. We are always asking ourselves what is the best method of propagating the Sinn Fein policy.

GOOD EXAMPLE.

The best method of propagating the Sinn Fein policy is that the members of every branch of the National Council should become noticeable for courage and temperance, and manliness, and gentleness among the people of the neighbourhood in which they live. We are warned against judging the rightness of any set of principles from the character of the people who profess them, and the warning is frequently necessary. Still, the fact remains that the majority of people do judge principles and the men and women who profess them by the same standard. A drunken or bad-tempered Sinn Feiner will be used by our critics as an argument against Sinn Fein. We must deprive the other side, so far as we can, of arguments of this sort. We must show that patriotism is a beautiful and noble thing, and the surest way in which we can do this is to let it be seen that it has beautiful effects in our lives. Hitherto, we have not done this sufficiently in Ireland. If we had done so, there would be fewer Unionists, fewer anti-Irish Irishmen, in the country to-day. I do not mean that the Unionists who are now living in Ireland would have been driven out of the country. I mean that they would have remained in the country, and that great masses of them would have been converted to Nationalism many years ago. If the average professing Nationalist had been a perceptibly finer character than the average professing Unionist during

the last half-century, all the noble men and women in Ireland would by the law of their natures have been attracted to the national banner.

OUR MODELS.

If, instead of an isolated Emmet, an isolated Davis, an isolated Rooney, we had had Emmets and Davises and William Rooneys rubbing shoulders in every branch of every Nationalist organisation in Ireland, does anyone think that either the English garrison or the blind Unionism of so many of our people could have withstood us? No, we should have converted the Unionists and have absorbed the garrison. Some people will argue that for us all to be Emmets or Davises or William Rooneys is not possible—that they were men of large intellect and inimitable genius. For myself, I think that the genius of all three lay in their characters rather than their intellects—that it was a genius, not so much for war or statesmanship, or literature, as a genius for unselfish labour and nobility—a genius that is open for us all to imitate. Even at the present time, the national hero of whom Orangemen like most to be told is Robert Emmet, and the man to whom many of the Independent Orangemen look up as the truest and noblest Irishman of the nineteenth century is Thomas Davis.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE AVERAGE NATIONALIST AND THE AVERAGE UNION ST.

Apart from a few fine names like this, however, how is the average Nationalist to be distinguished from the average Unionist? Is he more sober, more gentle, more unselfish, more tolerant, more honest? If you attend ordinary "Nationalist demonstrations," do you notice any marked difference between the behaviour of the speakers and the crowd, and that of the speakers and crowd on the other side when they come together to cheer for the Union, and keep what they call "the old flag" flying? There are differences, certainly, but not wide and deep differences. Many of the speakers on both sides make the same insincere kind of speeches. Both flatter the crowd with meaningless words and falsehoods, instead of telling them vital and necessary truths. The rank and file of both crowds are allowed to go home in the delusion that a fine nation—or whatever the Orangemen substitute for a nation—can be built up with sticks and stones and broken skulls, instead of patient hearts and loving hands. Both are intolerant, and would just as soon knock their opponents down or shout them down as convert them. *They rely for victory on the strength of their fists and lungs.* As for their characters, they are satisfied that they are just as good as the other side anyhow, and they grow angry if you suggest that they ought to compare themselves, not with men

whose principles they think wrong and contemptible, but with the heroic and gentle people who have from time to time appeared both in Ireland and other parts of the world, and whose names they cheer so noisily when their orators mention them. It is all very absurd. If an impartial spectator were to go to an ordinary Green demonstration in Ireland he would come away inclined to be an Orangeman. If he were to attend an ordinary Orange demonstration, he would come away feeling strangely sympathetic towards Nationalism.

ALL DEPENDS UPON DETERMINATION.

The success of the Sinn Fein policy, then, depends upon the determination of Irish men and women to become, so far as it lies in their power, a comely and heroic and self-sacrificing and lovable race. It is only by doing and thinking lovely things that we shall ever make our ideals attractive to the mass of our people. We may talk Irish and wear Irish clothes, and be teetotallers, non-smokers, and everything else that is bad for the British revenue, and we may be all those things in such a violent intolerant way as to alienate people from us rather than win them over. Many individual Sinn Feiners need to be reminded that the Irishman who cannot see eye to eye with them is not necessarily therefore the enemy of Ireland. *No honest Irishman is the enemy of Ireland*, whether he be a Unionist, a United Irish Leaguer or a Sinn Feiner. Every Irishman who loves Ireland is a Sinn Feiner in the making, and, where he is not a Sinn Feiner already, we should make it our business to reason with him and to help him to see the light rather than blind him with blows, or deafen him with contemptuous words.

BRUTE FORCE *versus* MORAL PERSUASION.

Whatever is to be said in favour of the use of physical force against England, there is nothing to be said in favour of Irishmen making use of it against each other. It would be as wrong, for instance, for Sinn Feiners to wreck a meeting of Parliamentarians as it would be for Parliamentarians forcibly to break up a meeting of Sinn Feiners. You might compel timid people to join you in this way, and you would win the support of that great body of people that likes always to be on the stronger side. But it is not in the hands of the timid and the selfish that the destinies of Ireland are. *The destinies of Ireland are in the hands of the free and noble men and women of Ireland whom you can persuade, but could never compel to join you.* It is your right to compel your tailor, if he is unwilling, to make your coat of Irish cloth, to compel your grocer to send you Irish eggs, to compel your public servants to acquire some knowledge of the Irish language and help Irish industries.

Though you may compel a man to act like a Nationalist, however, you can compel no man to be a Nationalist—to love Ireland deep in his heart and soul, and to serve her in all his acts and thoughts. If you had all the force of all the Empires in the world at your back, you could not increase the number of genuine Nationalists in Ireland by one. Half-and-half Nationalists may be better than no Nationalists at all, but the Nationalists who matter to Ireland are those who serve Ireland, not because they have to, but because they see her beauty and her desolation, and feel towards her as children feel towards their mother. Men and women of this sort you can always appeal to with reasonable and quiet words. They cannot help being good Irish men and women if only someone shows them the way.

SELF-SACRIFICE.

When all is said and done, however, all the virtues required of the good Sinn Feiner may be summed up in the one word—self-sacrifice. I do not mean self-sacrifice in the narrow sense of the word—the willingness, for example, to die for one's country. That is a great thing—one of the greatest things in the world, indeed—but it is not everything. The Apostle Paul put the truth of the matter clearly when he said that, though he gave his body to be burned, yet if he had not charity he was nothing. Genuine self-sacrifice means the love of one's God, one's country, one's friends, more than one's self, and it begins with one's awaking in the morning, and is a part of one's blood and breath through every moment of the day. Self-sacrificing patriotism would forbid a man ever to be vain or to seek his own praise or glory. It would enable him to endure criticism patiently and never to say or do anything that would injure the cause in which he believes. It would prevent him from ever harbouring a sense of personal wrong, for his country would be everything to him—himself less than nothing. Quarrels, like that between Flood and Grattan, would become impossible. Envy, malice, evil speaking, personal ambition—all these things would cease to exist, as the seeds of disease die away before the clear air and sunlight. To a true patriot, to be indolent would be as shameful as to be a coward. Having so few hours to spend under the sun, he will wish to make them full of meaning, crowded with labour—labour on behalf of the things that are excellent.

THE SELFISH POLICY.

Some people declare that Ireland does not appeal to them in this way—that sacrificial patriotism is barbarous and out of date—that what they have got to do is to make a living as honestly as possible, and so do their duty to their families. I do not think the average unspoiled man, however, believes that so narrow and

comparatively selfish an existence is the best thing the world has to offer. As far back as the human memory goes, men have been for ever striving to establish on earth some ideal kingdom. Worshipping that ideal they have lived and died, and their names have come down to us. The poets who tried to make perfect songs and the artists who tried to make perfect pictures are remembered by us, but their names do not thrill us like those of the heroes and reformers and saints who attempted to make perfect men and women—to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. In order to establish that kingdom in Ireland there is no shame and no labour and no pain from which we should shrink. And, if our patriotism burns with a pure unselfish flame, there is none of them from which we will shrink.

THE REMEDY IS IN OUR OWN HANDS.

We are always telling the Parliamentarians that we need not wait for the Act of the British Parliament to make Ireland a Nation. We ought equally to remember that we do not require an Act of the British Parliament in order ourselves to become pure or temperate, or diligent or unselfish. Our liberty—our real liberty—the liberty both of ourselves and our country—is in our own hands. England cannot crush or kill it, or even seriously injure it. England can only remain in Ireland, indeed, as long as our character is weaker than her guns. Guns are stronger than middling character. Against real character, passionate, determined, and organised, they are less availing than children's catapults. English domination feeds and thrives on weak character. When every Nationalist makes his or her character strong and self-reliant and beautiful, English domination will die from sheer lack of sustenance. If you are weak of will or base in your character, you are as valuable a support to the English garrison in Ireland as though you hated the Irish language and imported all your clothes from Yorkshire. *The only way to be a patriotic Irishman is to do your best to become a perfect man.*

September, 1917.

**ISSUED BY THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF SINN FEIN,
6 Harcourt Street, DUBLIN.**

(1s. per dozen copies, cash with order.)