

England's  
Fair Words  
and-Ireland

1919

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Prior to the outbreak of war in 1914 the British Empire was admired by many and hated by more. Its admirers looked at its vast extent, saw its ships on every sea, and its merchants in every port. They said: "Let us praise the adventurous spirit of this people; let us praise their prowess and efficiency. They have taken up the 'White Man's Burden.' They have made the ends of the earth and their resources available for civilisation."

While those who did not admire the Empire compared it to the Sipo Matador, the murderer creeper, which grows upon other trees and draws its nourishment from them until at last they perish in its embrace. They said: "The English ships are on every sea because they have made the ocean, which should be a common, free highway for all peoples, into a British preserve. They have brought more than a quarter of the people of the world under their sway, not for the betterment of those people, but for the aggrandisement of the Englishman. Their merchants are in every port exploiting the resources of all countries in England's interests. It cannot be said that they labour in the interest of civilisation in uncivilised lands, for all the time they hold Ireland, an ancient civilised European country, also in their grasp.

Both admirer and hater recognised that the British Empire had been built up as the result of bloody conquest and cunning intrigue; the one asserting that such a means had been justified by the result, and the other asserting the contrary.

And then, when England entered the Great War in August, 1914, the Empire's apologists and antagonists must all have been equally confounded by the statements of her Ministers. These Ministers adopted a high ethical tone. They, the rulers of the greatest of Empires, denounced Imperialism. They declared not only that small nations possessed rights, but also they pledged themselves to make any and every sacrifice in defence of those rights.

Mr. Asquith, then Prime Minister of England, speaking at the Guildhall Banquet, November 10th, 1914, said:

"We shall not sheathe the sword, which we have not lightly drawn, until Belgium recovers in full measure all, and more than all, she has sacrificed; until France is adequately secured against the menace of aggression; until the rights of the smaller nationalities of Europe are placed upon an unassailable foundation, and until the military domination of Prussia is wholly and finally destroyed. . . .

"We shall not pause nor falter until we have secured for the smaller States of Europe their charter of independence. . . . This is a war. . . . Perhaps I might say primarily a war for the emancipation of the smaller States. . . .

"The peace must be such as will build upon a sure and stable foundation the security of the weak, the liberties of Europe, and the free future of the world."

Again, at Leeds, 29th September, 1917, Mr. Asquith stated that the aim of the peace for which England was fighting was:

"An international system in which there will be a place for great and for small States, and under which both alike can be assured a stable foundation and an independent development."

And in the same speech he said:

"The governing principle is that you must proceed on the lines of racial affinity, of historic tradition—above all, of the actual wishes and aspirations of the inhabitants."

Mr. Asquith spoke as Prime Minister of England, and afterwards as the leader of English Liberalism. But such statements were not confined to one party or to one section of English political thought. Lord Robert Cecil, a leader of the Conservative Party, and speaking as a member of the Coalition Government, said (23rd May, 1917):

"I laid special stress on the fact that our aims and aspirations were dictated solely by our determination to secure a peace founded on national liberty and international amity, and that all Imperialistic aims based on force or conquest were completely absent from our programme."

In the House of Commons, 24th July, 1917, he stated:

"We want a . . . peace, resting not on conflict or domination, but on some national principle, so far as may be, which would secure that the settlement to be arrived at, so far as any settlement could be, should be secure from change or alteration in the future."

Mr. Winston Churchill, also a member of the Government, at the London Opera House, 11th September, 1914, was equally explicit as to the objects for which England was fighting. He said:

"Let us . . . fight for great and sound principles of the European system. The first is the principle of nationality—that is to say, not the conquest or subjugation of any great community or any strong race of men, but the setting free of those races which have been subjugated. And if doubt arises about disputed areas of country, we should try to settle their ultimate destination . . . with a fair regard to the wishes of the people who live in them."

Again, in an interview with Sgr. Calza-Bedolo, 24th September, 1915, he stated:

"We want this war to settle the map of Europe on national lines, and according to the true wishes of the people who dwell in the disputed areas. . . . We want a natural and harmonious settlement which liberates races, restores the integrity of nations and subjugates no one. . . . Let us war against the principle of one set of Europeans holding down, by force and conquest, against their wills, another section."

Lord Crewe, in the Queen's Hall, 5th August, 1917, declared:

"The changes in the map must be based on . . . race, or the avowed preference of the inhabitants of each area."

Mr. Bonar Law, leader of the Conservative Party, and member of the Coalition Government, stated in the House of Commons (26th July, 1917):

"We are not only fighting for the freedom of ourselves—we are fighting for the rights of other nations . . . to live their own way . . . The one thing we are fighting for is peace, and security for peace, in the time to come."

Lord Grey, at a banquet at Lancaster House, 23rd February, 1917, said, in the course of his speech:

"This war . . . will secure to Europe . . . a peace in which each nation will be able to live its own life."

And in his preface to collection of statements made by President Wilson, he writes:

"The defeat of the Prussian will to power, however it is brought about, will not by itself be enough. Out of that defeat must come something constructive, some moral change in international relations."

War was declared by the Liberal Government, under Mr. Asquith, in August, 1914. It was carried on by the Coalition Government, also under Mr. Asquith, and it was brought to its conclusion by the Coalition Government, under Mr. Lloyd George. But so far as pronouncements and promises went, each of these Governments waged war for the same noble ideals. Mr. Lloyd George, not less than Mr. Asquith, declared his devotion to the rights of nations, small as well as great, and to the principle of self-determination.

On 15th December, 1916, he wired to Baron de Brouqueville:

"His Majesty's Government adhere to all pledges given to Belgium by my predecessor."

Speaking at Glasgow (29th June, 1917), he stated:

"The wishes, the desires, and the interests of the peoples of these countries—i.e., German Colonies,—themselves must be the dominant factor in settling their future government. . . . They will have to be guaranteed first of all by the conditions of peace."

At the Labour Conference (5th January, 1918), after having declared that he spoke, "not merely the mind of the Government, but of the nation, of the Empire as a whole," he said:

"The sanctity of treaties must be established; a territorial settlement must be secured, based on the right of self-determination, or the consent of the governed."

At luncheon at Castle Hotel (9th August, 1918), he said:

"When he saw an organised and insolent bully trampling on the weak, he felt he was pursuing his ideals in his endeavour to combat that oppression."

"The world is a world for the weak as well as for the strong. If not, why did God make little nations?"

His message, read at all places of entertainment on the occasion of the fourth anniversary of the declaration of war, states that:

"We are in this war for no selfish ends. We are in it to recover freedom for the nations who have been brutally attacked."

Speaking at Carnarvon (4th February, 1917), he stated:

"The Liberal Party has special interest in the causes for which we are struggling in this great war, and the principle that the rights of nations, however small, are as sacred as the rights of the biggest Empires."

The British Government was associated with the other Allied Governments in their reply to the German Peace Note, reported in the "Times," 1st January, 1917. In this they stated:

Once again the Allies declare that no peace is possible as long as they have not secured reparation of the violated rights and liberties, recognition of the principle of nationalities, and of the free existence of small States."

While the joint reply of the Allied Governments to President Wilson's Note, reported in the "Times," 12th January, 1917, declared that:

"The Allied Nations are confident that they are fighting, not for selfish interests, but above all to safeguard the independence of peoples, right and humanity. . . ."

"Moreover, they state that their war aims necessarily imply—  
"The re-organisation of Europe, guaranteed by a stable regime, and based at once on respect for nationalities and liberty of economic development possessed by all peoples, small and great."

"They desire above all to ensure peace on the principles of liberty and justice."

Mr. Lloyd George, speaking in the House of Commons some five months after the cessation of hostilities (16th April, 1919), still maintains his high ethical tone. In the debate upon the Russian situation, he said:

"Supposing you . . . re-organised Russia, what manner of government would you set up there?"

"You must set up a Government which the people want; otherwise it would be an outrage on all the principles for which we fought in the war."

And the British Ministers committed themselves and their people to these principles, not only by their pronouncements, but also by their acceptance and corroboration of the same principles as declared by non-British statesmen and pre-eminently by President Wilson.

While America was still a neutral, and after she was in a state of actual warfare with the Central Powers, President Wilson stated the essentials of a just peace, and the cause for which America entered the war and fought, in unmistakable terms.

Speaking at Washington at the League to Enforce Peace, as reported in the London "Times," 28th May, 1916, he said:

"We believe these fundamental things—

1. That every people has the right to choose the sovereignty under which they shall live like other nations.
2. That the small States of the world have the right to enjoy the same respect for their sovereignty, and for their territorial integrity that the great and powerful nations insist upon.
3. That the world has the right to be free from every disturbance to its peace that has its origin in aggression and the disregard of the rights of peoples and nations."

In his address to Senate, 22nd January, 1917, he states:

"I am proposing, as it were, that the nations should with one accord adopt the doctrine of President Monroe as the doctrine of the world; that no nation should seek to extend its polity over any other nation or people, but that every people should be left free to determine its own polity, its own way of development, unhindered, unthreatened, unafraid, the little with the great and powerful."

"I am proposing government by the consent of the governed. . . .

"These are American principles. American policies. We could stand for no others. . . . They are the principles of mankind, and must prevail."

And Mr. Bonar Law, member of British War Cabinet, the day after these American principles were published in the London "Times," declared:

"What President Wilson is longing for, we are fighting for."

President Wilson enunciated and accentuated these principles, and in speech after speech he reiterated them during the whole course of the war. And after each speech British statesmen reiterated their approval and support.

In his statement to Congress, in which he asked for a declaration that a state of war existed between the United States and Germany (2nd April, 1917), the American President said:

"We are glad thus to fight for the ultimate peace of the world, for the liberation of its peoples. . . . The right of nations, great and small, and the privilege of men everywhere to choose their way of life and obedience. This world must be safe for democracy. Its peace must be planted on trusted foundations of political liberty. . . . We are but one of the champions of the rights of mankind, and shall be satisfied when these rights are as secure as fact and the freedom of nations can make them."

Again Mr. Bonar Law hastened to identify the British Government with these noble objects. Speaking in the House of Commons (19th April, 1917), he stated:

"America's aims and ideals are those of the Allies."

While Mr. Lloyd George, in the Message to America from the British War Cabinet, which he read to a group of American Correspondents (reported "Times," 17th April, 1917), said:

"The glowing phrases of the President's noble deliverance illumine the horizon, and make clearer than ever the goal we are striving to reach. . . . These words represent the faith which inspires and sustains our people in the tremendous sacrifices they have made, and are still making. They also believe that the unity and peace of mankind can only rest upon democracy; upon the right of those who submit to authority to have a voice in their own government; upon the rights and liberties of nations, both great and small, and upon the universal dominion of public right."

In his message to the Russian Provisional Government (9th June, 1917), President Wilson wrote:

"We are fighting for the liberty, the self-government, and the undictated development of all peoples, and every feature of the settlement that concludes this war must be conceived and executed for that purpose. . . . No people must be forced to live under a sovereignty under which it does not wish to live."

And in his speech at Washington's Tomb (4th July, 1918), the President said:

"On the one hand stand the peoples of the world, and not only the peoples actually engaged, but many others also who suffer under mastery, but cannot act—peoples of many races in every part of the world. . . . These are the ends for which the associated peoples are fighting, and which must be conceded them before there can be peace. . . . The settlement of every question, whether of territory, of sovereignty, of economic arrangement, or of political relationship, upon the basis of the free acceptance of that settlement by the people immediately concerned, and not upon the basis of the material interest or advantage of any other nation or people which may desire a different settlement for the sake of its own exterior influence or mastery. . . . What we seek is the reign of law based upon the consent of the governed, and sustained by the organised opinion of mankind."

The next day (5th July, 1918), Mr. Lloyd George, addressing the American troops in France, said:

"President Wilson yesterday made it clear what we are fighting for. If the Kaiser and his advisers will accept the conditions voiced by the President, they can have peace with America, peace with France, and peace with Great Britain, to-morrow."

Towards the end of the war, Mr. Wilson, speaking at New York (27th September, 1918), addressed not only America's enemies, but also her associates. He said:

.... It will be necessary that all who sit at the Peace Table shall come ready and willing to pay the price, the only price that will secure it. .... That price is impartial justice in every form of the settlement, no matter whose interest is crossed, and not only impartial justice, but also the satisfaction of the several peoples whose fortunes are dealt with. .... The impartial justice meted out must involve no discrimination between those to whom we wish to be just and those to whom we do not wish to be just. It must be a justice that knows no favourites and knows no standards but the equal rights of the several peoples concerned.

.... Shall the military power of any nation or group of nations be suffered to determine the fortunes of peoples over whom they have no right to rule except the right of force? Shall strong nations be free to wrong weak nations and make them subject to their purpose and interest? Shall peoples be ruled and dominated even in their own internal affairs by arbitrary and irresponsible force, or by their own free will, and the weak suffer without redress? Shall the assertion of right be haphazard and by casual alliance, or shall there be a common concert to oblige the observance of common right?"

The war ended. On October the 12th, 1918, the German Foreign Secretary informed the President of America that:

"The German Government has accepted the terms laid down by President Wilson in his address of January 8th, 1918, and in his subsequent addresses on the foundation of a permanent peace of justice."

The Allied Governments declared:

"Their willingness to make peace with the Government of Germany on the terms laid down in the President's address of January 8th, 1918, and the principle of settlement enunciated in his subsequent addresses."

They stipulated, however, that they must reserve the right to place their own interpretation upon "what is usually described as the 'freedom of the seas'" and that Germany must pay compensation "for all damage done to the civilian population of the Allies and their property by the aggression of Germany by land, by sea, and from the air."

With these two stipulations, however, the British Government undertook to stand by all their own pronouncements and to accept the principles laid down by President Wilson. They accepted without demur the 5th of his Fourteen Points, which demanded:

"A free, open-minded, and absolutely impartial adjustment of all Colonial claims, based upon a strict observance of the principle that in determining all such questions of sovereignty the interests of the populations concerned must have equal weight with the equitable claims of the Government whose title is to be determined."

Nor did they question the 10th of the Fourteen Points, demanding:

"That a general association of nations must be formed under specific covenants for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike."

All during the war England maintained her high ethical tone. The world read the noble principles propounded by the British Ministers in the name of the British people. All people saw that the British Government assented to and confirmed without demur the unequivocal statements of President Wilson as to the objects of the war. On every platform it was declared that England fought for Right and Justice, for equality amongst peoples great and small. The world was impressed as it could not but be impressed. England held the ear of the world. Those who had admired the strength and

efficiency of the English thought: "How splendid it is that this great Empire is actuated by such pure and noble motives! Here we see Strength and Power given up entirely to the service of Justice and Right!"

Whereas those lovers of Justice and humanity who had disliked and distrusted the Empire were necessarily rejoiced to think that even the great Empire was converted from Imperial ways, and that the crusher of nationalities had become the great champion of the oppressed, and was prepared to risk all and to sacrifice all on their behalf.

But, coming from the words and hopes and pious phrases of the British statesmen, what are the facts?

The war is over, and many of the oppressed nationalities are free, or are about to receive their freedom. But these are not the nations who have been absorbed by the British Empire. The rights of those nationalities who were held in subjection by Germany, Austria, and Turkey are now recognised. America has given freedom to the Philippines. But the British Empire is diminished by not one jot or tittle.

That Empire still holds "Ireland quivering in her grasp" (Letters of Queen Victoria, vol. II., p. 287). Ireland, the one European nation which remains enslaved when all other European nations are free.

Ireland belongs to Europe. She has given much to European civilisation. Her individuality cannot be questioned. Her boundaries, being the ocean itself, cannot be contested or be the cause of future strife.

And this European nation is still held by England. The rights of the smaller nations, so carefully set forth and so frequently reiterated by English statesmen while the war was in progress are not to apply to Ireland.

"Ireland turned into a cemetery: Poland transported to Siberia: all Italy a galley—there is where we stand in this month of November, 1831." So Victor Hugo wrote nearly ninety years ago.

And now, in 1919, Poland is no longer transported to Siberia; she is an independent State. Italy is no longer a galley; she is one of the great nations settling the destiny of Europe.

And Ireland? Ireland is still a graveyard, and a prison. Since Hugo wrote her population has diminished by one half. Three times in that period she has attempted to win her freedom by force of arms. But England's grip on her does not relax.

Is Ireland content, or ever likely to be content, to be governed by England? The history of the last few years is sufficiently clear to answer this.

In 1916 she rose in arms against England. The Rising was crushed by military force; the leaders were executed; the participants sentenced to penal servitude, and some thousands of suspects were deported to England.

In 1917 Mr. Lloyd George, speaking as Prime Minister of England, said:

"There remains the one invincible fact to-day that Ireland is no more reconciled to British rule than she was in the days of Cromwell."

In 1918, while most of the Irish Republican leaders were in English prisons, while men were daily imprisoned for speaking in favour of self-determination for Ireland, and while the whole country was being systematically terrorised by British militarism, the Irish people declared their desire for independence by returning an overwhelming majority of Republican candidates at the General Election.

In an article on "The State of Ireland," the London "Daily Telegraph" of 21st May, 1919, writes:

"We are keeping a large body of troops in Ireland. The force has recently been reinforced, and more may be required. .... Every day in the City of Dublin one sees troops on guard and escort duty, wearing steel helmets; a battalion is encamped in Phoenix Park, and in the country there are more tanks, aeroplanes, and machine-guns battalions ready for service to prevent a revolt than the people of England dream of. .... Another rebellion like that of 1916 is not expected so long as a powerful force of troops is kept in Ireland."

A Press Association message of 8th May, 1919, speaks of:

"Ireland, where quite recently fresh troops have been sent in response to a serious demand from the Government of Ireland."

It should be remarked that the "Government of Ireland" referred to here is in no way responsible to the people of Ireland, but consists of English officials appointed by the British Government.

Mr. Winston Churchill, in the House of Commons, 29th April, 1919, replying to the accusation that he was keeping more men than were necessary in the army, declared:

"That the situation in India, Egypt, and Ireland made drains upon them."

An article entitled "The Irish Danger: Effects of Military Rule," in the London "Times," 30th April, 1919, says:

"Demonstrations of England's military might have become common. . . . The city itself (Limerick) was subjected to armed occupation. It was made impossible to enter without a military permit. A tank—H.M.T. 'Scotch and Soda'—was posted on the Sarsfield Bridge. Barbed-wire entanglements were set up; armoured cars whirled about the town; aeroplanes hummed overhead; machine-guns were carried hither and thither, and the streets were patrolled night and day by squads of soldiers wearing their steel trench helmets and carrying bayonets. . . . Yet the population behaved with the utmost good humour. One heard sneers about the Great Powers and the 'right of small nationalities,' but there was no disturbance. The sneers were intended for the Government. . . . It is told how an aeroplane flew over a funeral to prevent the mourners from forming fours. Beneath the humour lay a hatred of the country which attempted to govern a people by the force of every modern belligerent device."

"In Dublin there were further demonstrations of military strength. On the anniversary of the Rebellion of 1916 tanks were taken through the streets. . . . The police made frequent raids on stationers' shops. . . . They confiscated also quantities of newspapers and books and pieces of music—many of which had been 'passed by the Censor,' and were in many cases innocuous."

The "Daily News" (14th May, 1919), also refers to the military terrorism prevailing in Ireland. It says:

"Government by tanks is only a temporary expedient, and the policy of drift cannot be indefinitely prolonged. There are limits to the most grotesque comedy, and in the end we shall have to give up either the hypocrisy of pretending to concern ourselves about freedom in Czechoslovakia, or the infamy of stamping on the freedom of Ireland."

Lord Curzon, member of the British War Cabinet, speaking in the British House of Lords, said:

"If the noble lord could show the Government how to govern Ireland without maintaining 40,000 men in that country, he would be conferring a great favour on them."

Ireland is struggling, in the grip of English militarism. Every day the Irish papers contain lists of raids, arrests, and sentences on men whose only crime is that they do really believe in the principles which English Ministers voiced with such effect during the war.

John Richard Green, the English historian, once contemplated writing a

history of Ireland, "but abandoned the idea because the continuous record of misery and misgovernment was too painful to contemplate."

And this record of misery and misgovernment is to continue because it is part of England's Imperial policy. She denounced the Imperial policies of others, but her own she will maintain, though it be necessary to slay the last Irishman to maintain it.

England has held Ireland for seven hundred years, and during that seven hundred years she has used force and guile alternately in her endeavour to destroy the Irish Nation. But the Irish Nation remains.

"We have believed, and we have maintained from the first day of the war, that we are fighting for no selfish purposes, but in the general service of civilisation and humanity,"

announced Mr. Asquith (7th January, 1917).

"What President Wilson is longing for, we are fighting for," said Mr. Bonar Law, in confirmation of Mr. Wilson's proposal that:

"No nation should seek to extend its polity over any other nation or people, and that every people should be left free to determine its own polity. . . ."

And that government should be by consent of the governed.

"President Wilson yesterday made it clear what we are fighting for," said Mr. Lloyd George to the American troops.

Speaking at Buckingham Palace, 26th December, 1918, President Wilson said:

"We have used great words, all of us; we have used the words Right and Justice, and now we have to prove whether or not we understand those words."

The English Ministers had used those words often indeed. But had they and meant—any reality in fact? If they were intended to enlighten, and not to delude, the people of the world; if they were truths, and not lies; if their utterers were honest men, and not cheats—then Ireland must be freed from the British yoke.

Ireland has shown that her desire is for independence by the armed rising of 1916, by the constitutional means of a general election in 1918, and by her continued heroic resistance to British rule, in spite of military terrorism and every form of tyranny that the British Government have so far been able to invent.

The world can judge the sincerity and honesty of the British Government and the British statesmen, who all during the war declared that theirs were no selfish ends, that their concern was solely for the rights of small nations, while they themselves were actively engaged in crushing the Irish Nation; who denounced militarism while they held Ireland by military force, and by that alone; who have demanded the assistance and the support of the whole world to succour the weak, while they have directly, or indirectly, used that support to crush still further the small nations within their own grasp.

the first edition was published in 1891, and the second in 1893. The author's name is given as J. H. C. G. van der Linde, and the title is "A History of the South African War, 1899-1902". The book is divided into four main parts: "The Boer War", "The British War", "The Siege of Mafeking", and "The Peace Conference". The book is written in a narrative style, with a focus on the military aspects of the war. It includes numerous maps and illustrations, and is a valuable historical resource.