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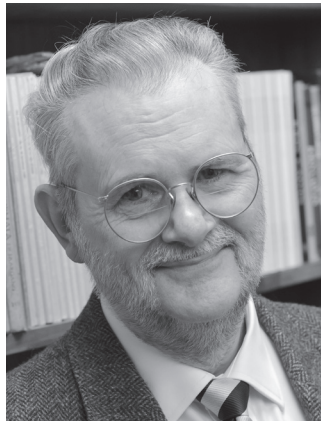
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Gladstone and Kuyper: Ireland and Revolution, Africa and War



by Keith Sewell

The “Glorious Revolution” of 1688/89 did not solve all problems.¹ The Jacobites slowly faded away, but Ireland remained. In 1938, G.M. Trevelyan acknowledged that “Ireland was the Achilles heel of the Revolution Settlement.”² However, by 1938, much had changed in Ireland. By then, the island was divided between a “Unionist” north, with Belfast as its capital, and the larger Nationalist “Irish Free State,” based on Dublin in the South. In 1937, the Free State adopted a new constitution that put further legal distance between itself, now termed “Éire,” and the United Kingdom.³

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I

After the Treaty of Limerick (1691), successive parliaments enacted a raft of statutes that had a seriously oppressive impact upon the (majority) Catholic population of Ireland. Although the English and Irish parliaments both dated back to the mid-thirteenth century, the Irish legislature had already been made subordinate to its English counterpart. Fearful of French intentions and seeing Catholics as seditious, both parliaments, after 1691, passed statutes that crippled the ecclesiastical, civil, and commercial position of Irish Catholics within their own country.

Much of this legislation explicitly favoured the minority (Anglican) Church of Ireland. Catholics and Presbyterians were disadvantaged. Accordingly, the history of Ireland in the eighteenth century is known as the era of the “Protestant Ascendancy.” The English historian Basil Williams (1867-1950) acknowledged that Anglo-Irish relations in this period were such “to which England can look back only with shame.”⁴

The perpetuation of such gross injustices disturbed not a few protestant consciences. Trevelyan mentioned four Protestant Irishmen who after 1691 advocated the amelioration and reform of Irish conditions. In *The Case of Ireland Stated* (1698), William Molyneux (1656-98) offered an early protest concerning Ireland’s subordination to England’s commercial interests.⁵ Jonathan Swift, renowned satirist (1667-1745) and author of *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726), took up this theme in

his *Short View of the State of Ireland* (1727) and *Drapier's Letters* (1734).⁶

In the course of time, the critique of the *status quo* became more wide-ranging. Henry Flood (1732-91) emerged at the heart of an Irish Patriot Party, which sought self-government under the British crown. Flood's record was decidedly mixed, but he opened the way for the endeavours of Henry Grattan (1746-1820). Grattan stood for measured reform and loyalty to the Crown, and he advocated Catholic emancipation. He leveraged events in America to press for the recognition and redress of Ireland's grievances. He argued that in Ireland no Protestant could be truly free while any Catholic lived as a slave. Thanks to his efforts, the Irish parliament finally regained its legislative independence in 1782. However, Catholics were still without the vote and barred from the Irish parliament.⁷

At this time, Edmund Burke (1729-97) was deeply burdened about the state of affairs in Ireland. In 1777 he wrote to Charles James Fox (1749-1806) stating,

Surely the state of Ireland ought forever to teach parties moderation in their victories. People crushed by law have no hopes but from power. If laws are their enemies, they will be enemies to laws; and those who have much to hope and nothing to lose will always be dangerous more or less.⁸

Burke feared that the oppression imposed on the Catholic majority would drive them to violence. Grievances when left unaddressed may fester and ferment into revolution. Therefore, the situation in Ireland required of Great Britain a measure of wisdom and magnanimity that she had *not* shown towards her American colonies.

In 1778, the exploits of the American naval commander John Paul Jones (1747-92) off the Irish coast prompted the formation of "Irish Volunteers," which soon grew into a formidable force. Originally intended for defence, the latent power of these volunteers inevitably weighed in the calculations of Westminster. Burke's reticence concerning the legislative independence acquired in 1782 arose in part from his fear that the concession had come by duress and not granted on principle.

After the start of the French Revolution

(1789), and the publication of his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), Burke felt obliged to discuss the Revolution of 1688 (which he supported) in relation to Ireland. He insisted that the right principles of 1688 were applicable to England but did *not* apply to the markedly different circumstances of Ireland.⁹

During the eighteenth century, governments that functioned on the basis of inherited aristocratic privilege received declining acceptance among those of the "middling sort," as they increased in literacy, education, and prosperity. It is possible to see this development as a long-term consequence of the Reformation itself. These "patriotic" movements in Geneva, the Netherlands, and Ireland were certainly pressing for what we today would be inclined to call "more democracy."

The pivotal question, however, remains: *on what basis* were they advocating their own increased political participation and power? Were they seeking a fuller recognition of their responsibilities as Christians, to be facilitated in part by a concomitant expansion of the franchise? Or were they asserting their (supposed) "rights" as autonomous and sovereign individuals? The one view is oriented to the sovereignty of God, the other to the sovereignty of man. Alas, these key considerations are not always adequately discerned in the historiographical literature.¹⁰

Burke was well aware that conditions in Ireland rendered the country susceptible to the French revolutionary disease. The Irish revolution broke out in 1798, the year after Burke's death. It started among the Ulster Protestants, specifically the "United Irishmen," led by Theobald Wolfe Tone (1763-98). He appealed to both Presbyterians and Catholics, and he saw Revolutionary France as the natural ally of a revolution in Ireland. For their part, the British government, with William Pitt the Younger (1759-1806) as Prime Minister, responded decisively. Westminster was against France gaining a foothold in Ireland. The Irish Revolution was crushed, and Tone perished.¹¹ A renewal of the effort under Robert Emmet (1778-1803) also failed.¹²

The close alignment of Tone and Emmet with revolutionary France is undeniable.¹³ Irish history came to exhibit a dual tendency. There were those who, admittedly under provocation, adopted a rev-

olutionary course, and those, such as Grattan and Burke, who sought reform through public advocacy and the legislative process. In this context a word of caution is in order. Irish historiography of the nationalist variety can readily lapse into assuming the legitimacy of revolutionary methods in politics.¹⁴

In the wake of 1798, Pitt responded decisively. He incorporated Ireland into the United Kingdom by the Act of Union (1801). The Grattan parliament came to an end: henceforth, Irish constituencies would be represented in Westminster.¹⁵ In

Act (1832), the Abolition of Slavery in the British Empire (1833), Factory Acts (1833), the Railways Act (1844), the Repeal of the Corn Laws (1846) and rise of free trade, the second Reform Act (1867), the Trade Unions Act (1872), and the third Reform Act (1884). Advances in the franchise benefited the Irish portion of the population.

In 1830, O'Connell established his "Repeal Association," which sought to end the 1801 union, restore "Grattan's Parliament," and introduce a Catholic electorate. However, the momentum

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the longer run, this was to be crucial, but the primary consideration initially was the security of the British state. Pitt had intended to give Catholics the vote on the same basis as Protestants, but George III held that this would be a violation of his Coronation Oath, and the matter lapsed.

II

In Great Britain, the destructive violence of the French revolution gave even mild reform a bad name. From 1790 to the 1820s, a strong reaction against all change prevailed. An indication that this situation was changing came with the success of Daniel O'Connell (1775-1847), "the Liberator," and his "Catholic Association." O'Connell was no friend of the French revolution or of the United Irishmen. He organised an immense, *peaceful* campaign across Ireland, calling for the vote for all eligible Catholics. In 1828, he was elected to parliament, but being a Catholic, he was unable to take his seat in Westminster.

This forced the issue. The Prime Minister, the Duke of Wellington (1769-1852), confronted the monarch, George IV (1762-1830), who also entertained scruples relating to his coronation oath. Wellington prevailed. Catholic emancipation became law in 1829.¹⁶

Catholic Emancipation was early in a long line of reforming enactments that transformed the United Kingdom, including: the first Reform

of events in Ireland was now running faster than the legislative processes of Westminster. In 1842, a movement developed among advocates of repeal known as "Young Ireland." Its founder was Thomas Osborne Davis (1814-45), a Protestant, who advocated the revival of the Gaelic language and Irish culture.¹⁷ It is said that the Irish tricolour flag was presented to several members of "Young Ireland" on a visit to France in support of the revolution in 1848/49. Their attempt at yet another Irish revolution failed, even as the condition of Ireland worsened during the "potato famine" of 1845 to 1852. Millions perished, and large numbers migrated to North America and Australia.

The next generation produced the "Irish Republican Brotherhood" (IRB), otherwise known as the Fenians, who were particularly strong in the United States. In June 1866, they attempted to challenge Great Britain with an invasion of Ontario, which was suppressed by the U. S. authorities. The threat posed by the Fenians strengthened the processes that led to the founding of the Dominion of Canada in 1867.

III

The following year, William Ewart Gladstone (1809-98) became Prime Minister of Great Britain. He was one of the most outstanding figures in British nineteenth-century public life. He was Prime Minister 1868-74, 1880-85, 1886, and

1892-94. Although he eschewed demagoguery, he was highly regarded by the masses and became known as “the people’s William.” A classical “high church” Anglican, he firmly resisted the claims of the Papacy.¹⁸ He was a Homeric scholar.¹⁹ In an age of increasing scepticism towards the Bible, he wrote his own defence of the Scriptures.²⁰ He was a voracious reader and an articulate speaker. He was not a pacifist. He would not live by the sword, but he could draw it if necessary. He valued the place of local government. He cherished the growth of non-state organisations with charitable and educational purposes. His attitude towards the United States, its Constitution and prospects, was positive.²¹

Upon appointment as Prime Minister, Gladstone, who declared “my mission is to pacify Ireland,” moved to disestablish the (Anglican) Church of Ireland with the Irish Church Act (1869), with the result that Irish Catholics were no longer obliged to fund a Protestant church with which they disagreed; the government also introduced secret voting by the Ballot Act (1872).²²

Gladstone’s life has received ample attention. The biography by his eminent supporter John Morley (1838-1923) was highly respectful. However, at the request of Gladstone’s family, Morley deliberately downplayed the Christian basis of Gladstone’s thought and action. Consequently, Morley’s Gladstone, while still a sincere Christian believer, could easily be viewed in secularist-rationalist terms.²³

A more recent biographer, Colin Matthew (1941-99), while respecting Morley, has acknowledged these difficulties.²⁴ Richard Shannon (1931-2022) rounded off his two-volume biography²⁵ with a further comprehensive volume, specifically on Gladstone’s Christian view of politics. Shannon explained his perspective as follows:

[Gladstone was] a statesman of almost superhuman energy and forcefulness of character [who] strove to realize God’s purposes, as he saw them, in the twisting and slippery paths of public service. ... For too long his intense religious faith has been exiled to the margins of the story... [and] denied crucial explanatory power.²⁶

In our supposedly secular age, the centrality of religion is too easily dismissed. More recently,

David Bebbington has confirmed the Christian impulse at the heart of Gladstone’s politics.²⁷

After 1918/19, much attention was given to international diplomacy, a development that tended to expose areas where Morley’s narrative required further elaboration. The American historian Paul Knaplund (1885-1964) remedied this deficiency with separate studies on foreign and colonial affairs. Gladstone’s concerns for Ireland did not fall neatly into either category and were met comprehensively by the English author J.L. Hammond (1872-1949).²⁸

Gladstone started political life as a Conservative. However, along with Robert Peel (1788-1850), whom he greatly respected, he broke with many of that party in his support for free trade. The free trade “Peelite” Conservatives gravitated towards the Whig Party, combining with them in 1859 to form the Liberal Party.²⁹ In this context, the term “liberal” did not necessarily imply notions of presumed religious autonomy, but stood for ordered steps towards a more open society. Accordingly, Gladstone was unusually willing to recognise the distinctive Irish, Scottish, and Welsh national cultures within the United Kingdom.³⁰

In the latter part of Peel’s final Prime Ministership (1841-46), Gladstone was Colonial Secretary.³¹ In this office, he became more familiar with the situation in Upper Canada. On the basis of principle and experience, he came to advocate “responsible Government”—that government ministers must have the confidence of, and be answerable to, a majority in the colonial legislature. Responsible government came to Canada, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick in 1848, and New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania, and New Zealand in 1856.

In the long run, responsible government led to self-government, which led to dominion status, which led to full independence. This was achieved by constitutional change, not violent revolution. Canada, Australia, and New Zealand were never driven to fight a war of independence against Great Britain. It took time, but British politicians came to see the wisdom and relevance of Burke’s earlier warnings about America. Gladstone acknowledged that Burke was, for him, a key inspiration in colonial policy.³² He adopted what might be called a

“*Burkean*” view of empire.

Before becoming Prime Minister, Gladstone twice held the office of Chancellor of the Exchequer (1852-55, 1859-66). His policy was “retrenchment,” caution, and tax reduction. He was not averse to intervening where “private enterprise” was inadequate. For example, he established the Post Office Savings Bank in 1861, which provided even the humblest citizen with the opportunity of opening a bank account with a low initial deposit. Gladstone’s budget speeches, lasting hours, exhibited an impressive

and imperial policy became inextricably intertwined. The issue was the formidable increase in Russian power in the Balkans and Caucuses as the Ottoman Empire (Turkey) became increasingly moribund. Disraeli and many others saw this increase in Russian power as a threat to British control of India, as the Russians were also expanding across central Asia towards the sub-continent.

A year after the Indian Mutiny (1857), the British government had taken over direct control of vast territories in India from the British East India

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command of financial matters. For him, finance was no mere technical exercise. His prudent, even parsimonious, oversight of the national finances brought about the defunding of corruption and eased the burden of taxation on everyone.

The Gladstone government was eventually confronted with the rising strength of the opposition, led by the redoubtable Benjamin Disraeli (1804-81).³³ The period 1868 to 1880 was dominated by the intense parliamentary-political duel fought out between the two men. British imperial expansion was the main issue.³⁴ In 1869/70, Disraeli and his party made an issue out of the withdrawal of British forces from New Zealand after the Maori Wars. The implication was that Gladstone did not sufficiently care about British communities overseas.

After Disraeli came into office in 1874, the pace of imperial expansion increased. In 1877, Great Britain annexed the Afrikaner-controlled Transvaal. The British then found themselves drawn into a major conflict with the Zulu nation. They eventually triumphed, but not before a major defeat at Isandlwana (1879).³⁵ Back in London, the magazine *Punch* included a cartoon with a Zulu warrior as a teacher, and “John Bull” as a student. The lesson was titled “Despise not your Enemy.”³⁶

Disraeli’s attention was primarily directed towards the “Eastern Question.” Here foreign

Company. The security of the route to India was considered paramount. In 1875, Disraeli seized the opportunity to purchase shares in the Suez Canal Company. He also introduced the Royal Titles Act, by which Queen Victoria received the title “Empress of India” (1877). Her majesty was delighted; Gladstone was appalled.

In April 1876, when the Bulgarians rose in revolt against their Turkish masters, the Turks responded with savage brutality. When Disraeli supported Turkey as a bulwark against Russia, the fate of the Bulgarian Christians at the hands of the Turks brought forth a stinging literary rebuke from Gladstone.³⁷ In June 1876, Serbia and Montenegro declared war on Turkey, but they were forced to back off early in 1877. The conflict recommenced in April, but now with Russia arraigned directly against the Turks.³⁸

Anglo-Russian tensions ran particularly high. In England, public opinion was enflamed. The music hall composer G.W. Hunt (1837-1904) produced lines that popularised the term “Jingo,” expressing a crude and bellicose patriotism:

We don’t want to fight
but *by Jingo* if we do
we’ve got the ships,
we’ve got the men,
we’ve got the money too.

However, this was light musketry in comparison with the heavy musical artillery mounted by Russian composers, specifically the “Marche Slave” (Op. 31, of 1876), by Pytor Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-93), and the implacable resolve expressed in the opening movement of the Second Symphony (of 1877) by Alexander Borodin (1833-87).

Russia triumphed over Turkey and pressed home her advantage with the Treaty of San Stefano (March 1878).³⁹ This treaty provided for a vastly expanded Bulgaria, which amounted to a Russian protectorate, granting her access to the Mediterranean. The treaty was unacceptable to the other great powers of Europe. Great Britain and Austria took the lead in response. A new settlement was negotiated and set out in the Treaty of Berlin (July 1878). By it, Russian ambition was checked, the size of Bulgaria was massively reduced, Turkey retained some territory across the central Balkans, Austria occupied Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Great Britain acquired Cyprus.⁴⁰ At this juncture, Disraeli came to personify a new (non-Burkean) idea of empire. To many Englishmen, including Free Churchmen, this new imperialism was oriental, autocratic, crass and un-British. Others embraced it with conspicuous fervour.⁴¹

In the late 1870s, the pro-Disraeli journalist Edward Dicey (1832-1911) published articles supportive of the new imperialism.⁴² These elicited some spirited replies from Gladstone. He did not advocate the abandonment of overseas responsibilities, and he warned that the new-style imperialism could prove a snare and a delusion. He insisted that the greater part of Britain’s strength lay at home:

India does not add to, but takes from, our military strength. The root and pith and substance of the material greatness of our nation lies within the compass of these islands; and is, except in trifling particulars, independent of all and every sort of dominion beyond them. This dominion adds to our fame, partly because of its moral and social grandeur, partly because foreigners ... think that in the vast aggregate of our scattered territories ... [lies] the main secret of our strength.⁴³

Gladstone was concerned that a combination of “jingoism” and oriental-style “new imperialism” would coarsen British political culture. It inclined

England towards a prideful excess and a bullying stance towards others:

It is very disagreeable for an Englishman to hint to Englishmen that the self-love and pride, which all condemn in individuals, have often lured nations to their ruin or their loss; that they are apt to entail a great deal of meanness, as well as a great deal of violence; that they begin with a forfeiture of respect abroad, and even in the loss of self-respect; that their effect is to destroy all sobriety in the estimation of human affairs, and to generate a temperament of excitability, which errs alternatively on the side of arrogance and ... unworthy fears.⁴⁴

In short, Disraeli-style new imperialism might seriously imperil the nation itself.

At this juncture the British became militarily involved in Afghanistan in order to forestall the anticipated Russian encroachment. The Russians had for decades been absorbing territory to the north of Afghanistan. From 1878 to 1880, and despite reversals, the British were victorious, imposing their will on the Afghans and excluding the Russians.⁴⁵

The events of 1876/79 spurred Gladstone into more than literary action. He came out of retirement and launched his famous “Midlothian Campaign” in Scotland as Liberal leader. On platform after platform, he condemned the policy of Disraeli in terms of a commitment to universal public righteousness:

Remember the rights of the savage, as we call him. Remember that the happiness of his humble home, remember that the sanctity of life in the hill villages of Afghanistan among the winter snows, is as inviolable in the eye of Almighty God as can be your own. Remember that He who has united you together as human beings in the same flesh and blood, has bound you by the law of mutual love; that that mutual love is not limited by the shores of this island, is not limited by the boundaries of Christian civilisation; that it passes over the whole surface of the earth, and embraces the meanest along with the greatest in its unmeasured scope.⁴⁶

In a later speech, Gladstone covered the full range of issues involved in the new imperialism, and the “jingoism” that accompanied it: Cyprus,

the Suez Canal, India, Afghanistan, and the Zulus. His conclusion made clear that the country was now at a crossroads:

I have spared no effort to mark the point at which the roads divide,—the one path which plunges into suffering, discredit, and dishonour, the other which slowly, perhaps, but surely, leads a free and a high-minded people towards the blessed ends of prosperity and justice, of liberty and peace.⁴⁷

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Gladstone was aware that his listeners knew the message of Deuteronomy: “I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life ...” (Deut. 30:19a).

IV

Disraeli lost the election of 1880. Back as Prime Minister, Gladstone strove to reverse the policies of the previous administration. He relinquished control of the Transvaal (1881/84).⁴⁸ However, previous undertakings meant that he was unable to prevent the British occupation of Egypt (1882). His Irish policy sought to suppress violence against landlords and improve the legal position of tenant farmers. Although the Cabinet repeatedly addressed the condition and affairs of Ireland, often it had to turn and deal with the consequences of the “new imperialism.” Gladstone’s critics lost no time in holding him responsible for the loss of General Gordon (1833-85) at Khartoum.⁴⁹ Even while addressing such problems, Gladstone steered a further Reform Act through parliament, further widening the franchise (1884).

Again out of office, it became known that Gladstone had become convinced of the need for a major constitutional change: Ireland should have home rule with its own parliament. This view had been promoted in Ireland by the labours of Isaac Butt (1813-79) and his Home Rule League.⁵⁰ Gladstone’s adoption of home rule brought his par-

ty back into office, thanks to the support of Irish Members of Parliament. In 1886, he introduced his (first) Irish Home Rule Bill, but it was defeated on its second vote in the House of Commons.⁵¹

The bill split Gladstone’s party: a “Liberal Unionist” faction emerged that sided and eventually merged with the Conservatives.⁵² The author William Lecky (1838-1903) gave historiographical expression to this standpoint.⁵³ The foremost figure in the breakaway was Joseph (“Joe”) Chamberlain (1836-1914). He stood for the consolidation and

expansion of British imperial power and opposed Irish Home Rule as dividing the empire at its heart. He entered parliament as a Liberal and gravitated towards the Conservatives, managing in the process to divide *both* major political parties. For many years, the most comprehensive work on Chamberlain was authored by the newspaper editor J.L. Garvin (1868-1947) and was continued by the Conservative politician Leo Amery (1873-1955).⁵⁴ Only in more recent decades have Chamberlain’s policies received more critical attention.⁵⁵

The Conservative governments of Lord Salisbury (1830-1903), from 1886 to 1892 and from 1895 to 1902, were marked by a further massive increase in the extent of the British Empire—in Africa, South Asia, and the South Pacific. In the United Kingdom, there were calls for “Imperial Federation,” and some talked grand-eloquently of a “Greater Britain.”⁵⁶ These dreams were driven by an awareness of the growing strength of Germany and the U.S.A. Imperial Federation gained little traction because Canada and the Australasian colonies cherished the rights and responsibilities of self-government.

During a brief period back in government from 1892 to 1895, Gladstone presented a (second) Irish Home Rule Bill. It passed the House of Commons, but it was rejected by the hereditary and unelected House of Lords.⁵⁷ Gladstone resigned office in 1894 and left parliament in 1895, unable to gain home

rule for Ireland. In 1898, he died. Later governments did not heed his warnings. He lived to witness the rising tide of the “new imperialism.” He did not witness its violent zenith, and he did not live to experience its terrible denouement.

Gladstone’s successor in office was Lord Rosebery (1847-1929). Rosebery was an early member of a group known as the “liberal imperialists.”⁵⁸ These men held significantly contra-Gladstonian views concerning imperial and foreign affairs. They included a future Foreign Secretary, Edward Grey (1862-1933), and a future Prime Minister, H.H. Asquith (1852-1928).

From 1895 to 1903, Chamberlain was Colonial Secretary in the Salisbury government. He was committed to imperial expansion in southern Africa. The gold of the Witwatersrand was the lure, and the Transvaal and Orange Free State the obstacles.⁵⁹ Chamberlain, along with Cecil Rhodes (1853-1902), the Prime Minister of the Cape of Good Hope; Alfred Beit (1853-1906), the minerals magnate; and others, lay behind the foiled “Jameson Raid” of 1895/96. The raid was intended to provoke a situation that would justify British intervention in the Transvaal.⁶⁰ After its failure, arch-imperialist Alfred Milner (1854-1925) was sent to Southern Africa, and he soon adopted an anti-Afrikaner policy.⁶¹

In 1899, war was finally provoked against the Transvaal and its ally, the range Free State. The part played by Chamberlain in these proceedings was long suspected and became clearer after 1949, with the opening of the British archives under the fifty-year rule. Matters became much clearer following the astute research of Ethel Drus⁶² and the impressively comprehensive account of the interactions between Chamberlain and Milner provided by J.S. Marais.⁶³ Later work has helped to fill out the picture.⁶⁴

The British eventually triumphed over the numerically inferior “Boers” (meaning “farmers”), but only after sustaining severe reverses in which the Afrikaners demonstrated their superior marksmanship and tactical skill. The world witnessed the spectacle of the mighty British Empire making heavy work of crushing two small republics.⁶⁵

Some said that Great Britain was playing the part of Ahab, when he coveted Naboth’s vineyard

(I Kings 21). In England, the outbreak of war caused intense controversy. Communities and families were deeply divided.⁶⁶ In reality, the period of full British dominance in South Africa was brief. The formation of the Union of South Africa (1910) did *not* bring about Milner’s dream of British hegemony in South Africa.⁶⁷

V

In 1874, Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) had written appreciatively of the English contribution to the historical growth of ordered constitutional liberty. He made particular reference to the parts played by Cromwell (1599-1658), Milton (1608-74), and Burke (1729-97).⁶⁸ Gladstone died in May 1898. In October 1898, Kuyper gave his renowned *Stone Lectures on Calvinism* at Princeton University. In his final lecture, he lamented Gladstone’s passing, describing him as a true “Christian statesman” and as “politically a Calvinist to the very core.”⁶⁹

Thereafter Kuyper’s tone changed markedly. Certainly, the Afrikaners had sins of their own to confess (Rom. 3:23), but at this juncture he addressed the issue of their treatment at the hands of the British. He condemned the British policies that had led to war against the Afrikaner republics, and he repeatedly named Chamberlain as their author.⁷⁰

Kuyper did not hate England. He condemned its policy towards the Transvaal. The depth of his disappointment was unmistakable. In a truly remarkable passage he declared that the English nation

... is not surpassed by any other. *If I were not a Dutchman I should like to be one of her sons.* As a rule her veracity is above all suspicion. She has an innate sense of duty and right. Her constitutional institutions have been imitated the world over. Nowhere will you find self-respect more finely developed. Her literature ... glows with a conception of life altogether serious, healthy, and profound. Even in the style of her fashions and in the care of the body she exhibits a character of dignity that compels respect. Her philanthropy knows no bounds, her morality is above the average, and in religious activity she marches at the head of all other nations.⁷¹

All this prompted the question “How is it, then, that such a nation can have come to such a fall?” Kuyper’s response was emphatic: “*Imperialism*.”⁷² His conclusion is even more powerful in retrospect than it was at the time. It speaks to the precipitate decline of Great Britain in the twentieth century:

England must come to herself again and renounce her dream of Imperialism. Otherwise, Imperialism will eventually destroy her, as it destroyed ancient Rome.⁷³

In his final lecture, [Kuyper] lamented Gladstone’s passing, describing him as a true “Christian statesman” and as “politically a Calvinist to the very core.”

This grave assessment was wholly congruent with the alternatives Gladstone had presented the British people in 1879. These warnings were powerfully prescient. However, successive British governments thereafter chose the imperialist path, even, as in 1899, to the point of war.

VI

The denouement arising from the Disraeli-Chamberlain-style new imperialism was deeply tragic—and on a vast scale. The South African War of 1899 exposed Great Britain to the many dangers of diplomatic and strategic isolation.⁷⁴ Even with an impressive navy, Great Britain found that she could no longer defend a seriously over-extended empire alone.⁷⁵

The conservative government signed an alliance with Japan (1902) and initiated a series of agreements with France (1904).⁷⁶ In 1906, the voters decisively rejected the Conservatives at the polls. In the wake of the South African War, there was in Great Britain a widespread disillusionment with imperialism. However, with liberal imperialists Asquith as Prime Minister (from 1908) and Edward Grey as Foreign Secretary, a further agreement was concluded with Russia (1907).⁷⁷

These undertakings were to shore up the defence of the over-extended empire in Africa and especially Asia. These agreements inevitably had the effect of drawing Great Britain into the conti-

ental European system of Great Power alliances. In the “July Crisis” of 1914, Edward Grey found that he was unable to act as an “honest broker.”⁷⁸ Thanks to the multiple entanglements arising from the “new imperialism,” Great Britain had lost her freedom of action and was drawn into the conflict.

In the war of 1914-18, the toll of British losses in blood and treasure was immense. She lost a minimum of 880,000 men and ceased to be a creditor nation. The Gold Standard was abandoned. The “deluge” of the Great War impacted every aspect

of national life. Ancient freedoms were lost. The scars lasted for generations. Arguably, for the follies of the “new imperialism” and its crimes in South Africa, Great Britain paid a terrible price in the trenches and shell-holes of the Western front. Her triumph was pyrrhic. The true beneficiaries of allied victory were the USA and Japan.

VII

In Ireland also the denouement was tragic. The governments of Lord Salisbury and his successor Arthur Balfour (1848-1930) had tried to “kill home rule with kindness.” They succeeded only partially and briefly. Already, when confronted by Gladstone’s (second) Home Rule Bill, the Conservative politician Randolph Churchill had declared that protestant “Ulster will fight, and Ulster will be right.” Many in Ulster were convinced that “Home Rule” meant “Rome Rule.” They turned to the British conservatives to oppose home rule as proposed by Gladstone and the Liberals. They thereby placed their political future in the hands of the British conservatives, who saw Ulster protestant resistance to “home rule” as a way of defeating the Liberals.⁷⁹

The Liberals came into office with a substantial majority in 1906. They were initially led by Henry Campbell Bannerman (1836-1908), who had strongly criticised the “methods of barbarism” used by Great Britain in the South African War.⁸⁰

H.H. Asquith became Prime Minister on the death of Campbell Bannerman.

The Conservatives found the size of their defeat hard to accept. They used their majority in the House of Lords to block crucial legislation. Following their rejection of the proposed 1909 budget, 1910 unfolded as a year of intense crisis. The Liberals emerged after two general elections that year with such a reduction in seats that they now depended on the Irish members of parliament, led by John Redmond (1856-1918), for their majority.

The Parliament Act of 1911 removed the ability of the House of Lords to permanently veto legislation. The Conservative opposition, now led by Bonar Law (1858-1923), could no longer rely on the House of Lords to prevent Irish home rule. The way was now open for the passage of a (third) Home Rule bill, which was brought forward in April 1912.

Home rule was not full independence. It would have provided Ireland with a status comparable to that of Canada (Canada and the other Dominions became more fully self-governing by the Statute of Westminster of 1931). Nevertheless, in Ulster, “home rule” was increasingly viewed as a despicable betrayal. If passed, however, the legislation would have been processed in a lawful manner by a duly elected legislature.

Faced with this reality, the *conservative* leadership was prepared to countenance *revolutionary* action. In incendiary speeches at Balmoral, Ulster, on April 9, 1912, and at Blenheim Palace, England, on July 29, 1912, Bonar Law opened the door to revolutionary violence. In April, he invoked memories of the Siege of Londonderry (1689) and the Battle of the Boyne (1690). In resisting “home rule,” he declared in July, “I can imagine no length of resistance to which Ulster can go in which I would not be prepared to support them,” and this included “all means in their power, including force.”⁸¹

With the Ulster politician James Craig (1871-1940) at the helm, Ulster Protestants were given a living symbol of defiance in the person of Edward Carson (1854-1935), an exceptionally able barrister.⁸² A man of granite visage, Carson was the embodiment of defiant resistance. Commencing September 28, 1912, he led over half a million persons in signing an *Ulster Covenant* emphati-

cally rejecting home rule. The title could bring to mind the (Scottish) *Solemn League and Covenant* of 1638. The signing process was publicised worldwide. Large numbers of “Ulster Volunteers” (UV) paraded in military fashion. However, as the prospect of home rule for all-Ireland loomed, the focus of the Unionists’ effort shifted towards exempting the north from whatever measure was to be introduced in the south.⁸³

In early 1914, the situation grew ever more threatening. In March-April, the government in London was advised that British troops could not be relied upon to take action in Ulster. In April, large quantities of arms were smuggled into Ulster from Germany. The Ulster Volunteers were now armed, increasingly well trained, and fiercely committed. Initially they had not been taken seriously. Now they were. In response, the “Irish Volunteers” were formed in the south and soon also armed.

In summer 1914, Ireland edged towards civil war. And there was the real possibility that such a conflict would spread to Great Britain itself. On July 21-24, King George V opened a conference at Buckingham Palace, with two representatives each from the government and opposition, and unionists and nationalists from Ireland. The conference failed.

On the 23rd, news was received of the Austro-Hungarian ultimatum to Serbia. The even greater tragedy of the Great War temporarily eclipsed that of Ireland. Great Britain entered the conflict on August 4, 1914. In September, the (third) Home Rule Bill became law, with special measures for Ulster, but its implementation was postponed for the duration of the war. To John Redmond, Irish leader in the House of Commons, there was granted only this empty victory.

Many Irishmen, from north and south, volunteered to serve in the Great War. However, a hard core in the south, men of the still extant IRB (Irish Republican Brotherhood), took the view that England’s peril was Ireland’s opportunity. They mounted the Easter Rising in 1916.⁸⁴ The rebellion was crushed. Although the number of resulting executions by the British was small by contemporary standards, Irish opinion was greatly offended—and the revolutionaries became martyrs.

Between 1917 and 1919, Ulster made good its claim to stand apart, even as the initiative in the

south passed to the IRB. The latter was behind the rise to prominence of *Sinn Féin* (formed in 1905). Protestant Ulster and *Sinn Féin* could now assert their legitimacy on the basis of the danger posed by the other. Ireland became increasingly polarised, even as the postponement of Home Rule and the Great War combined to diminish Redmond's moderating authority.⁸⁵

The familiar lines of the much-troubled Irish poet William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) date from and apply to this time:

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world, [...]
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

Following the Armistice, a British general election was held in December 1918. For the Irish seats, *Sinn Féin* was highly successful, but the returned members refused to take their seats in Westminster and unilaterally set up the *Dáil* in Dublin. Low-level guerrilla warfare broke out in parts of the south between the authorities and irregular Republican forces, which became increasingly ugly. In England there was strong opposition to the methods employed in response. Eventually a truce was signed in July 1921.

The British government negotiated a treaty with Irish representatives, which was finally signed on December 6, 1921. Arthur Griffiths (1871-1922), founder of *Sinn Féin*, led the Irish delegation. The treaty excluded Northern Ireland and gave a new entity, the "Irish Free State," a status comparable to Canada. This meant that Ireland was *not* to be a republic; an oath of loyalty to the British crown was required.

In Dublin, these provisions divided the ranks of *Sinn Féin*. Éamon de Valera (1882-1975) opposed the treaty and resigned as President of the *Dáil*. To the tragedies of the Great War and the Anglo-Irish conflict, there was now added those of a bitter Irish

civil war. The Irish patriot Michael Collins (1890-1922) died at the hands of his fellow-countrymen. The pro-treaty side prevailed; the ultra-republicans abandoned the fight in May 1923.⁸⁶ The Free State became a republic in 1949.

VIII

In 1935/36, George Dangerfield (1904-86) evocatively depicted the part played by Irish affairs in the constitutional crisis before 1914.⁸⁷ Dangerfield was clearly committed to the revolutionary standpoint,

The denouement arising from the Disraeli-Chamberlain-style new imperialism was deeply tragic—and on a vast scale.

and this earlier work has received both appreciation and criticism.⁸⁸ In a later and more sober work, he viewed Ireland as presenting "the damnable question."⁸⁹ On the other side, Nicholas Mansergh (1910-91), the Irish-born constitutional historian, in his last book, wrote of "the unresolved question."⁹⁰

After more than a century, the Irish situation remains unresolved. Deep divisions reaching back centuries, along with the repeated resort to revolutionary action, have left in Ireland a tragic legacy that will require much grace and wisdom to resolve. Revolutionary action, if not promptly checked, may rend asunder the processes of historical development and insert deep fissures into the lives of nations and even civilizations. The results might involve seemingly insoluble contradictions and antipathies, and it may take the forbearance and wisdom of many generations to overcome such consequences.

Shortly after the Treaty was signed in 1922, Carson declared himself a deceived man: "What a fool I was. I was only a puppet, and so was Ulster, and so was Ireland, in the political game that was to get the Conservative Party into power."⁹¹ In 1930, a rueful King George V said to the then British Prime Minister, "What fools we were not to have accepted Gladstone's Home Rule Bill."⁹² The king was right. Of course, Gladstone would have agreed; and I believe Kuyper would have agreed also.

As we confront the challenges of our own revo-

lutionary era, Gladstone and Kuyper, along with Burke and Groen, continue to merit our respectful attention.

Endnotes

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