

PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE OF IRELAND

Claiming no qualifications for the task save honesty of purpose and such sympathy and insight as may result from Irish blood, and from that personal knowledge of the land, language and people of Ireland which has come from long study and many repeated visits, I will endeavour, this Patrick's eve, to sketch Ireland's political history since the Orange gun-running at Larne, in April 1914. I hold no brief for any party in Ireland. I am neither a Unionist, Nationalist, nor Sinn Féiner. I am a Canadian. Canada is my nation, and under the King, I owe my own allegiance to none other. The ties which bind me, and most other Canadians of Irish blood, to Ireland, are profound but they are not political. Ireland I look upon as a sister nation quite as capable as Canada in managing her own affairs.

FIRST PRINCIPLES ASSUMED

Three assumptions, as regards the Irish question, and only three, underlie this historic sketch. As I wish to be frank with you, I will tell you them in advance. My first assumption is: "Ireland is an island." Geography bears witness to that fact. It sounds a truism, but in any big question it is always the truisms that are denied. It follows that, since Ireland is an island, Ulster, no matter how you delineate it, is part of Ireland. My second assumption is: "Ireland is inhabited by the Irish people." The history of the last nineteen centuries bears witness to that fact. There have been immigrants, of course, but if not in a few years, at least in a few generations, the immigrants invariably became Irishmen. The 100,000 Irish Protestant volunteers of 1782 knew no country save Ireland, and no race save the Irish race, though their remote ancestors hailed chiefly from Scotland or England. That the national unity of Ireland should be disrupted to please a religious minority (and apart from Belfast, Protestants are in a minority even in Ulster) is a preposterous idea. The fact that there is in Ireland, as there has been in every other subject nation in history, a minority planted there by the conqueror, enjoying political ascendancy and opposed to the national aspirations, does not change the fact that this minority in Ireland is Irish and hence part of the Irish nation. My third and last assumption is this: "The Irish people, like every other civilized nation, has the right of national self-determination." That is a truth of international ethics, a truth in defence of which the World-War was fought. Therefore, Ireland's abstract right to self-determination is unanswerable. How Ireland can and how Ireland should exercise this right of national self-determination are problems, not for us, but for the Irish people to decide. We may think their decision wise or unwise, but