

Sinn Fein

Originally published in the September 1917 edition of The International under the pseudonym of Sheamus O'Brien.

"We do hereby declare war upon England until such time as our demands being granted, our rights recognized, and our power firmly established in our own country, from which we are now exiled, we may see fit to restore to her the blessings of peace and extend to her the privilege of friendship."

The Declaration of Independence of Ireland

On his accession to the throne of England, it did not escape the observant eye of King Edward VII that the grounds of Balmoral Castle were somewhat conspicuously decorated with a statue of the late John Brown.

This John Brown is to be carefully distinguished from the abolitionist hero of the same name; for we here write of the gillie who is said to have been morganatically married to the Queen of England.

Now Edward VII had no personal feeling about John Brown, so far as we know; and we are not told whether he disliked the statue on aesthetic grounds, though if it pleased Victoria, there may have been some reason for a very hearty abhorrence. But he expressed no such sentiments as you or I might have done; he simply ordered it to be removed to a part of the forest where deer and grouse were likely to be the only persons shocked.

Dirt has been well defined as "matter in the wrong place"; for instance, raspberry jam in one's hair. It may be the most excellent raspberry jam; but so long as it remains in one's hair, one is annoyed by it. One quite

stupidly calls it bad names, and one adopts divers expedients for removing it.

If I were a young girl, I might be exceedingly in love with some fine stalwart man. I might think him simply perfect — and yet you might hear me speak quite sharply to him if he chanced by some inadvertence to be standing, with his nailed shooting boots on, upon my face. Nor, I fancy, would an extension of this process over seven centuries, varied by a war-dance whenever I protested, acclimatize me.

Whenever and wherever Irish and English meet as equals they are the best of friends. Their natures are opposite, but they fit delightfully, better, I think, than any two other races in the world. It has been England's salvation that she has always had Normans or Celts for her real rulers. There is hardly a "Sassenach" in the government today. Yet no government has proved capable of dealing with the Irish question, for the perfectly simple reason that its simplicity has been misunderstood. Even Irishmen have misunderstood it. All sorts of nostrums have been tried; the land question has been tinkered for generations; the experiment of this and that statesman begins with applause, continues with irritation, ends in failure. It is like the woman with the issue of blood who had spent all her living on physicians, and was nothing bettered but rather grew worse. On the whole, the most satisfactory plan — as philosophers have pointed out — has been the policy of rape and murder, starvation, forced emigration, wholesale massacre. It was considered a good joke in my boyhood to say that the Irish question could be settled quite easily — by submerging the island for four-and-twenty hours. (The kind of mind that thinks that funny is hardly like to be of much assistance, perhaps.) Yet the question was and is perfectly simple. All Irish protests, whatever their appearance meant one thing and one thing only: "Get off my face!"

I have no patience with those Sinn Feiners who are out of temper, and regard the English as monsters and devils. They are the most charming people in the world, and merely become monsters and devils when they try to deal with Ireland.

The British rule in India has been a miracle of beneficence, under the most appalling difficulties of climate, race, language and religion. I have lived long enough in India to know that. But India is not Ireland; for some uncanny reason, in Ireland, England always does the wrong thing at the wrong time. I wish to avoid rancour and recrimination; I wish to cover England with my charity — which is proverbially capable of the task. I impute no blame. I wish to treat all that has happened as misunderstanding. Even England admits that she has blundered. It is really almost a case of sheer mental deficiency. Think of all the imbecility of the Piggott forgeries! The whole story is simply incredible. Even G. K. Chesterton, writing a formal apology for England, can only urge that the outrages — which he deliberately parallels with those alleged of the Germans in Belgium — were committed not by England, but by England's Prussian soldiers!

Even pro-Ally Americans were shocked into indignation by the appalling tactlessness of murdering the revolutionists of Easter, 1916; and when, not content with hanging Sir Roger Casement, who was, at the very worst, an unbalanced crank to defile his memory by circulating — in secret, so that no man could challenge and refute it — an alleged diary attributing to him just that very vice for which their own gang at Dublin Castle, the men who stole the crown jewels, were notorious, we simply concluded that the last trace of reason or of common sense had left the authorities for ever.

They capped it, however, by sending over "Bloody Balfour" — so that the President could simply not avoid asking: "What are you going to do about Ireland?" The reply is the "all-Irish convention." It is to laugh.

Redmond and Company were discredited once and for all when they agreed to the hanging-up of the Home Rule Act.

The party is dead as mutton; it's sheep's bleat and its sheep's brains and its sheep's sheepishness have not saved it. Ireland is Sinn Fein, eleven men in, twelve, maybe more.

Will we come to the convention? What — talk again? We only want one thing of England: "Get off my face."

The moment we are an independent republic like Canada or Australia or the South African Union there can be no further grievance. "We may fight among ourselves?" Well, that's our business, not yours. (Besides, it's a pleasure.)

Until that day of freedom we can do nothing whatever but fight for it. We have had seven centuries of England on our face, and we are desperate. We will use every means; all's fair in love and war. Quoth the genius of Ierne: "No, I don't want you to lend me money; I don't want you to protect my commerce; I don't want you to assist me to overcome my own digestive troubles; I want you to get off my face."

When that day of freedom dawns, the situation will dissolve like a dream. Free Ireland will see — with one glance at the map — that she can have only one friend, one ally — England. We are intermarried with the English quite inextricably. The attempt to revive Gaelic is quite on a par with the German reaction toward Gothic type — does any sane Sinn Feiner expect his American cousins to learn Erse?

I for one, am ready to fight on England's side to day, against any foe but Ireland. Why should we be foes? It is lunacy, it is against nature.

Get off my face! Let me up, and I'll fight side by side with you. I'll lead your armies to victory, as in the past; I'll replace your dummy officers with men of brains. I have imagination, courage, wisdom — every-

thing you lack — and it's all at your service. But I can do nothing while you are standing on my face.

Cannot England try the experiment, at least? Things cannot well be worse — and yet they grow worse inevitably with the induration of time.

Once a republic, shall we not help our sister France? What grudge have we against you but the one grudge? We do not wish to annex Lancashire; in fact, God forbid! We shall not try to starve you with submarines; on the contrary, we can help each other with food. But we'll treat as friends and equals; Britons have not a monopoly of "never will be slaves."

You are so stupid in all that concerns Ireland that I fear you may not see that I am not uttering a pious wish, but stating an apodeictic proposition, declaring the inexorable logic of events.

But after all, even if our republic doesn't work as I say it will, and know it will, would you be worse off than you are now? And surely we can talk better arm in arm — Oh, do get off my face!