

Irish Review (Dublin)

The Jingoism of the Gael

Author(s): Ernest A. Boyd

Source: *The Irish Review (Dublin)*, Vol. 3, No. 26 (Apr., 1913), pp. 57-62

Published by: [Irish Review \(Dublin\)](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30063711>

Accessed: 14/06/2014 21:32

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Irish Review (Dublin) is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Irish Review (Dublin)*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

THE IRISH REVIEW

*A MONTHLY MAGAZINE OF IRISH
LITERATURE. ART & SCIENCE*

APRIL, 1913

THE JINGOISM OF THE GAEL

By ERNEST A. BOYD

THE unsuspecting Irish loyalist, if questioned, would probably deny the existence of Gaelic Imperialism. Accustomed as he has grown to the sneers with which Irish Ireland invariably greets his Imperialistic demonstrations, Gael and Imperialist must seem to him mutually exclusive terms. The desire for domination, based upon a profound conviction of superiority and an inability to appreciate what is alien, is surely the trait of the Britisher which most impresses itself upon the observer. Foreigners have long complained of this attitude of mind in the true Briton, and none have suffered it less gladly than the Irish. When the Englishman has felt himself compelled to give effective outward expression to that inner feeling of greatness with which his whole being is permeated, Ireland has looked on with

THE IRISH REVIEW

a certain pitying contempt. Sometimes, indeed, the Celt has been driven to counter-demonstration by way of protest, as during the last Boer war, when circumstances were more than once propitious to these effusions of aggressively patriotic sentiment. Such explosions as "mafeeking" are not really part of the Britisher's emotional equipment, being, as it were, a rather unnecessary emphasis of what must seem to him a common-place of history—the superiority of his race. When, however, the right pressure is brought upon him in the songs of music-hall comedians, and in the columns of the Imperialistic half-penny press, he realises the glory of Empire and expresses himself in a befitting manner. To the Gael, these ebullitions are peculiarly objectionable, inasmuch as they are the outcome of a spirit which has produced the most disastrous results in Ireland. When England views with complacency the consequences of her inability to know when she has been beaten, the Irishman is revolted by the memories evoked by this self-congratulation. He describes as "jingoism" the legitimate, if somewhat vulgar, enthusiasm of Imperialistic tradesmen, and his heart goes out in quite uncalled-for sympathy to those whom he conceives as fellow-victims of Imperial aggression. However brutal and reactionary a foreign Government may be, it can count upon the moral support of Irish Ireland, provided the enemy be England. Thus it has happened that Ireland finds herself from time to time in very strange company owing to the wealth of moral indignation which anti-imperialism has placed at her disposal.

The genuine Nationalist who turns to Ireland for relief from the fever of Imperialism which consumes the various people of Europe, is doomed to bitter disappointment. The jingoism of the Gael is none the less real because it is sometimes takes the purely negative form of hostility to the British Empire. Except in so far as it is bent upon reviving the Irish language, the spirit of Gaeldom differs only in degree from that which inspires the "Rule Britannia" school of English patriots. There is everywhere that insistence upon national superiority which is usually associated with the Imperial Briton. Gaels *per se* are, it appears, infinitely higher beings than those that inhabit the Latin or Teutonic countries. Their woman-

THE JINGOISM OF THE GAEL

kind surpass in beauty, purity, and all the domestic virtues the women of any other nation. A dramatist who suggested that they were merely human had some difficulty in withstanding the onslaughts of Gaelic chauvinists. The latter regarded the suggestion as unpatriotic, just as the Briton will brand as a Socialist or a Little Englander the man who fails to share the popular enthusiasm for the exploits of Empire-builders. In fact, the indignant astonishment with which Gaeldom receives criticism has no parallel except in the blank amazement with which an Englishman listens to one who hints that all is not well with the "demi-paradise" of Shakespeare's imagination. The Irish-Irelander is convinced that there is some particular virtue in the mere fact of belonging to a race, apart altogether from its development. Sociology secures scant attention from people whose minds are concentrated upon grammar, bag-pipes and kilts. The wearing of Irish clothes and the use of the Irish language seem to be vastly more important than the individuals for whom these benefits are intended. Whatever social evils affect the Irish people are understood to be simply by-products of an alien *régime*. The social and industrial problems which engage the minds of modern thinkers weigh little with Gaelic idealists. This blind optimism and capacity for ignoring unpleasant material facts bear a striking resemblance to the attitude of the English Imperialist. He can boast of his wealthy (sic) Empire, forgetting conveniently the appalling condition of the masses of the English people. Wage-slavery flourishes while patriots assure themselves that "Britons never shall be slaves." Similarly Ireland vociferates her intention of becoming "a nation once again," without explaining in any way what will be the conditions of citizenship, surely a matter of some interest to Irishmen.

Convinced of his ethnological advantages the Celtic Imperialist, like his British colleague, is consumed with a desire to impose himself upon other races. He cannot, it is true, embark upon Imperial plundering expeditions, so he contents himself with laying claim to any territory which can be described as Celtic by however great an exercise of ingenuity. The peoples upon whom he has

THE IRISH REVIEW

conferred the blessings of Celticism increase in number as the imperial appetite of Gaeldom grows. If he cannot annex by force of arms the countries which appeal to his colonising imagination, it is not because the spirit is unwilling. Militarism is even dearer to the heart of Irish Ireland than to Imperial England, whose citizens have shown a marked indifference to the glory of bearing arms. Apart from the enthusiasm with which Irishmen have invariably fought on behalf of the English army, there are not wanting signs to show the strength of the military spirit in Ireland. The boy-scout movement, the latest attempt to imbue the youthful Briton with a taste for shedding foreign-blood, has its counterpart in the ranks of those most removed from loyal English influences. Had the anti-enlisting placards been the outcome of a more civilised impulse, they would have been a hopeful sign of regeneration. Alas, they were merely prompted by political feeling and cannot be attributed to genuine anti-militarism. This weakness for militarism, coupled with a highly developed colonising instinct, is significant. One can imagine the intolerable slavery which would result, were Gaeldom suddenly enabled to realise its ambitions. Imbued as he is with a sense of racial superiority, the Gael would set out to conquer all who refused allegiance to him, and an Empire would be established on the approved British pattern. How could it be otherwise since the jingoism of the Celt is *au fond* similar to that of the Saxon? The official organ of Gaelic Imperialism is identical in tone with its English contemporaries. Passages might be transferred from the pages of *Sinn Féin* to those of the *Daily Mail* with simply a change of certain proper names. The identification of patriotism with aggressive nationalism and the association of prosperity with racial ascendancy are features common to both English and Gaelic jingoism. Ireland has long protested against English Imperialism, but it seems as if she, in her turn, had become infected by a like spirit of overweening nationalism.

The task of Irishmen is to demonstrate that Gaelic civilisation is superior to that which has been imposed upon us from outside. Mere verbal assurance will not suffice in the absence of practical

THE JINGOISM OF THE GAEL

proof. At present there is a large section of the community which has resolutely abandoned all that is English in the life of this country. Of the loftiness of their ideals there can be no doubt, but what have they substituted in practice for those things which they have removed? Do the ordinary pastimes of the Gael show any marked advance on those of the West Briton? Is his life better? Everywhere, of course, there is a nucleus of persons capable of organising their existence upon intelligent lines. What of the rank and file? A nation is clearly nothing but the sum of the units of which it is composed. So long as the bulk of the population is mentally undeveloped, no country can be free in the true sense of the word. Have Gaels any proposals which will enable Irishmen to live more freely than is possible in other countries? Without a readjustment of social conditions it matters little, from the point of view of progress, what language or form of government prevails in Ireland. The popular illusion seems to be if Irish youths play at hurling rather than at cricket, and get drunk to the strains of "God save Ireland" rather than "God save the King," that they are superior to the youthful West Briton. The spokesmen of Gaeldom do not seem to realise that the fundamental condition of all the changes which they would bring about, is economic. Will the citizen of the future Irish State be placed upon an economic basis which will enable him to develop, and to furnish his mind with all the beautiful things of Celtic life? So far from grappling with the social question, they content themselves with distributing certificates of nationality to those whose linguistic aspirations proclaim them "good Irishmen. Irish grammar is, apparently, more important than social reconstruction. Thus it has happened that the one Irishman with a constructive idea for the re-organisation of Irish life has failed to satisfy the grammarians, who have only granted him a qualified title to Irish nationality. If Gaeldom professed only to be concerned with the Irish language, this attitude would be perfectly justifiable. But the whole movement purports to aim at the establishment of the Irish nation upon an independent and distinctive basis. This failure to grasp the importance of the economic factor is therefore most

THE IRISH REVIEW

serious. What will it avail to have a people speaking its own language and obeying its own traditions, if the individual citizens is still economically enslaved? If Ireland is to be a nation, let it be a nation of healthy intelligent people, and all the rest will be added unto them. At present it seems as if the Gael aimed at nothing better than the reproduction on a smaller scale of English conditions, even to the inclusion of the Nonconformist conscience, together with the inevitable ugliness and hopelessness of social disorganisation.