

a salutary lesson for any troublesome Arab country contemplating Libya's journey from rogue state to respectable *détente* with the West: that it would be unwise as you are liable to be slapped with large financial penalties as reward for compromise and renouncing your recent past, coming in under the avuncular arm of the West, and abandoning your nuclear programme – a fine incentive to any other hostile Islamic state flirting with the notion of coming in from the heat.

The people who killed in the name of the IRA were determined to use violence for political ends and would find whatever means they could to do so. Whoever could aid them in

this pursuit, in terms of finance or armaments, would be enlisted and availed of (in historical lineage the IRA visited Stalin's Soviet Union in 1925 for guns despite deep, reactionary antipathy to atheistic communism). The conflict needed weapons. That Libya stuck out its hand is incidental; if Switzerland or Western Samoa had possessed and proffered arms, the Provisional IRA would have taken up the offer.

Once again in Northern Irish society the people who perhaps most need to be consulted on this matter can be found occupying the seat of power, running branches of devolved government where once they ran the war.

Loyal sons of Ireland and Europe

In this season of remembrance Keith Brennan and Cian O'Neill remember and celebrate two forgotten European idealists and campaigners who died in the Great War of 1914-18 – Tom Kettle and Francis Ledwidge

The story of loyal sons serving King and country in the First World War is unavailable to Southern citizens. History, culture, and collective memory diverged definitively for the Union and the Republic after 1916, rendering that doomed generation so revered in the British memory lost either to memory or reclamation in the South. The question 'Who took the Kings shilling?' rings but rarely in the South now, yet has hardly lost its resentful edge and the un-interrogated pub wisdom on the matter still has some sway. The question, to some, contains the answer – mercenaries, traitors, and Protestants, applied variously to Unionists, the landed, or gentlemen of Trinity College – no proper Irishman. However the argument about the wearing of the poppy was recently rehashed by Fionnula O'Connor in the *Irish Times*, and became installed in its Letters Pages as a more thoughtful debate than previous kneejerk squabbles would have led many to expect.

O'Connor located the issue in the current and past context of inter-community flag waving in the North, the red poppy both, '[A] touching reminder of heroism and selfless deaths', and a, 'holdover from a time when Northern Catholics were repeatedly asked for proofs of "loyalty" to a state with which few identified.' O'Connor extends the debate into Unionist perceptions of the GAA, the presence or otherwise of Protestant ministers at Catholic religious ceremonies, hunger strike commemorations and such similar schisms the non-remembrance of which is made a chalk-line to be bickered across. One more chalk-line, that is, in the bomb-pocked chalk pit of our history.

Still somewhat post-colonial, the South is a near-centenary Republic sixty years gone from the Commonwealth and its war dead cannot be thought of as British, if indeed, they ever could. Nor can some of the concepts Irish volunteers fought for be deemed contemporaneous, with some no longer within the tongue of mainstream public discourse at all: blood and sacrifice *pro patria*, well, 'Maud Gonne - she dead.'



Tom Kettle

In the shifting stories that Southerners have told themselves, necessity and the evolving insecurities of a post-colonial identity have made of the dead a palimpsest. Death renders anonymous almost all individuals who have not enjoyed fame in life and most of us leave but a watermark of personality on the shroud; which created vacuum Nature may abhor, but the hagiographer finds most enticing. So, through the thousand cuts of organ-grinder nationalists who branded Great War volunteers 'traitors' to Eireann, the symbol, story, and manifold truth of their sacrifice was lost. Post-Church, post-Family, and now post-Celtic Tabby, the question of national identity is wide open and it would seem sensible that this hugely significant chapter of Irish history finally be addressed, while we peruse the family album, trying to work out who we are [again].

The key questions are these: who were these men; why did they serve; what are we remembering? Given the uneasy way that the North makes some Southerners feel, i.e. that the job was not finished, that England is still too close for comfort etc.; the death of men who fought a great enemy on behalf of ▶

an older enemy from whom they were promised liberty is too complex and troubling to be caught in the prism of that red poppy worn so carelessly about Whitehall. Add detail to the issue and the waters seem more unclear still.

A significant number of the Volunteers were broken strikers, blackballed from work in any employment on offer after the Great Strike of 1913. They signed up of urgent necessity to a British Army that would ask no questions but pay wages, becoming fodder for the cannon at Gallipoli, Ypres, the Somme and the many other locations being newly minted into national myths. Their internationalist socialism was strangled after birth by its older brother Nationalism and frozen out of the post 1922 republican state and could have produced a markedly different nation informed by more liberal ideals and laws.

In Redmond's Woodenbridge speech of September, 1914 to the Irish Volunteers, he stressed the role of masculinity, martial history and, "Defence of right, freedom and religion in this war". Referencing omnipresent anti-German propaganda, Redmond argued that a show of fealty would copper-fasten Home Rule and so every patriotic Nationalist had a duty to serve. Lloyd George, that great cuckolding crook, made the offer explicit when PM, and back then people trusted politicians a great deal more than now, so the quid pro quo drive worked.

The defence of small states was also a notion romantic enough to have currency in the Nationalist idealism of the time and those Nationalists who served on the frontline were not begrudging of their side of the bargain but rather earnest, numerous, and faithful, a complexity often unappreciated by English officers, especially post 1916. The bitter charges of treasonous collaboration with an Imperial State that rent the air back at home (twinned, at times, by a British suspicion of the Volunteers' Irishness), must have rankled amongst the tens of thousands who answered the Home Rule call, North and South. Their departures had been accompanied from the port of Kingstown (now Dun Laoghaire), by flag waving thousands and well wishers of all stripes – Unionist and Republican, Catholic and Protestant - standing cheek by jowl in an uncomfortable marriage of bipolar motives. Their return was greeted by threats or silence, even occasional murder.

Young professionals, largely Protestant men recruited from the ranks of Trinity students past and present, served, largely it seems, from a sense of loyalty felt for King and Crown and a desire to copper-fasten the Union. Yet here too, motivation varied. A certain number of recruits were white-feathered into it by friends, family, or passing brigades of young women pressing shame earnestly into the palms of strangers and as it always had, a mercenary motive also played its part, Ireland having always poured young men into the service of the British Empire as both un-enlisted men, and career officers.

Amongst Catholics though, it was primarily the bright strigil of Redmond's promised freedom that scraped the hills and towns clean of her young men. At the front, separated into the 36th and 10th divisions, the competing agendas of Unionists and Nationalists rarely met, but for a few notable exceptions including Gallipoli and Wytschaete, where these men divided by faith and political belief served side by side in



Francis Ledwidge

a shared, dreadful experience in which the actors showed good cheer and notable tolerance to each other. Regimental, Nationalist and Unionist signs and symbols were exchanged amongst these officers and men, and they messed together by invitation, fought together by necessity, and were united by experience where both tradition and policy had previously bitterly divided them.

That gave some hope to idealists like Thomas Kettle (killed on the Somme in September 1916) and the rarely remembered Francis Ledwidge, of a different Ireland post 1918. Kettle, an Irish Volunteer, Europhile, and strike supporter, had been sourcing guns in Europe in 1914 and after witnessing the outbreak of war he became a war correspondent, proselytised for the joint causes of enlistment and Home Rule, and went to the war in the name of democracy, and, as he saw it, European civilisation. In Kettle's own words:

So here, while the mad guns curse overhead
And tired men sigh, with mud for couch and floor
Know that we fools, now with the foolish dead
Died not for flag, nor King, nor Emperor,
But for a dream, born in a herdsman's shed
And for the secret Scripture of the poor

Crucified upon the rood of a continental war, men would, it seems, forget their more localised selves; though he was right to fear that the rebels at home would be remembered as heroes, and the soldiers at the front condemned as traitors.

Francis Ledwidge was a self-educated pastoral poet, labourer, Union organiser and Irish Volunteer with a strong Europhile streak and he was killed on the first day of Third Ypres and Paschendale. His monument, inscribed in English and erected in Belgium by the British Army, contains a fragment of his own poetry, his "Lament on the Death of Thomas McDonagh". The subject was one of the 1916 signatories, yet the poem could apply to Ledwidge himself:

"He shall not hear
The bitter cry
In the wild sky
Where he is lain."

Shortly before his death, Ledwidge reasoned that: "I joined the British Army because she stood between an enemy common to our civilization, and I would not have her say that she defended us while we did nothing but pass resolutions. I...am not without hope that a new Ireland will arise from her ashes

in the ruins of Dublin, with one aim, one purpose....my own country has no place amongst the Nations but the place of Cinderella'

The Irish President quoted Kettle at a co-commemoration in 1997, and spoke of the pride and humility which the memory of Irish dead evoked. This was historically overdue yet also in service of the emerging peace process, and broader European cultural and political camaraderie. Rewriting the story as a call to and exemplar of cross community co-operation is an appropriation which honours them perhaps more for what they may do for us, rather than for what they have done. Yet we have at last begun, some of us grudgingly, to scrape clean the bones of our dead and disassemble the myths with which we so foully clothed them. The dead have then, perhaps, finally found their tongues, and all should be counted amongst our cenotaph dead, whether they may be comfortably housed within any narrowly defined national identity-myth or not. In the letters pages of the *Irish Times*, the current argument goes that the Irish dead should be remembered with their own particular symbol, separate and distinct yet of a shared history with the poppy. Be such a poppy red or green, we would do well to remember them with a symbol as unique as their service, in all its specific, contradictory and awkward terms.

CORRECTION

In the article by Garret FitzGerald in our last issue (*Fortnight* 467) there were two editing errors: His reference to internment should have read:

'In both parts of Ireland internment has been used since the 1920s to limit the scale of terrorist activities and has proved effective in this respect. The abuses in Northern Ireland had the practical effect of making its introduction thereafter in Northern Ireland, and also in the Irish state, impossible in practical terms.'

Unfortunately the 1920s was printed as 1970s and the editing of the second sentence distorted the meaning. We apologise for these errors.