

IRELAND AND THE LIDDELL RECONQUEST OF SCOTLAND

Owen Dudley Edwards

What are the profits of Sectarianism?

Our post-Thatcherite world prices its pounds of flesh, especially when burning them, and Sectarianism, like any other ancient luxury, has to justify itself economically. Culture, Intellect, Art-for-Art's Sake will no longer serve as arguments on their own. What has Sectarianism to show for its contribution to National Productivity? Can it spin for Britain?

Can it pay its way, wash its face, bring in the bacon? Is it doomed to the political lumber-room or are the ancient skills capable of rehonoring? Can we use it to enhance the Blair Project?

Let's do it justice. It won its spurs in many a fray with results gratifying in the extreme to persons who would not soil their lips with its name. The Tories had a thin majority of seats - and a popular vote minority - in 1951. Had the Ulster Unionists voted against them in the House of Commons in a snap vote, they would probably have been out. That Ulster Unionist vote owed its strength to much banging of many drums, and not a few very dubious voters, and Sectarianism welded the faithful together and silences the scruples of their personators. Naturally the Carlton Club with its aristocratic Roman Catholic members knew nothing of such things, knew indeed that it must not know of them.

Protestant Sectarianism has shot its political bolt. But that is all the more reason to keep its memory green - very green. The green fathers ate the sour grapes: the green children set their teeth on edge, and bit. (Not green as in nice Mr Robin Harper, MSP; green as in much less nice Mr Gerry Adams, MP, ex?-IRA.) Now that support of Protestant Sectarianism is more than anyone's political life is worth - even his Reverence Dr Ian R K Paisley 2001 would cross the road to avoid the less Reverend Dr Ian R K Paisley 1960-69

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(for he, too, swung in the '60s) - today the cheap mileage in denouncing it carries you much farther and faster than any Orange walk.

Politically speaking, this is not mileage to surrender. All the more now that Protestant Sectarianism is politically dead, it must be hung in effigy at every opportunity. Fortunately there are enough Orangemen anxious to march, to ensure that doubtful votes of self-styled Catholics are kept in line. In Northern Ireland, the more vociferous the Orangeman, the greener the Papist. Mr Adams may lose popularity by the violence of his former friends and by his own former violence, but he hopes to regain it by holding the highest green ground when the Orangemen unfurl their tattered Billy banners.

The Scottish origin of Ulster Protestantism's most distinctive identity naturally has its counterpart among the anti-Orangemen. Catholics have established phenomenally close Ulster-Scotland links, all the more because it has often meant seasonal migration. When Mr Gerry Adams was wont to expose the hair on his political chest as vehemently as he now exposes that on his face, his secular arm was restrained from killing and maiming the citizenry of Caledonia, unless they were in England at the wrong time. The IRA were much quicker on the uptake than many Protestants in seeing how Catholic 'Protestant Scotland' had now become.

The Blair Project is ready enough to learn from Mr Adams. Mr Adams, indeed, has found it an apter pupil in private than so austere and old-fashioned a teacher can admit to in public. But in certain respects, the Labour party in Scotland long antedates the Blair Project in nursing the Catholic vote. Thirty years ago I remarked to Robin Cook that Scottish nationalism had attractive aspects. Without a moment's hesitation he replied that Billy Wolfe was a Freemason. I was left realising that, to such a mind, an Irish Roman Catholic is indistinguishable from a Pavlov dog.

Or perhaps I should vary my zoological classification. George Orwell's **Animal Farm** may be our text. 'Surely, Comrades, you do not want Jones back' becomes 'Jones hates the Pope', 'Jones supports Rangers', 'Jones doesn't hire Catholics'.

But who is Jones? Jones was, of course, Sir Torquil MacJones, Laird of the Hunt, scion of that Scottish aristocracy Oliver Brown remarked as extinguished in Flodden, Eton and Harrow. That Jones was (in those days) readily distinguishable from Labour parliamentary candidates, and if by some awful mischance he happened to be a Papist himself (maybe Evelyn Waugh might even be his godfather), his election agent was almost certainly in a Lodge (not always rent-free).

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But alas today the glory of Sir Torquil has departed. Mr Cook himself only comes here for the horses (apart from the sheep at election time). His hostility to devolution, never very fully quenched, expresses itself in diplomatic distant stare. He broke off formal relation by several denials that he sought the First Ministry, irrespective of nobody having asked him to take it. Scotland is now a faraway country of which he knows nothing. For him to know anything might encourage separatism since he is - isn't he? - the Foreign Secretary.

Without a Scottish Tory in a Westminster seat for Scotland (and the wretched Hague depending on the *savoir-faire* of Dr Limey Fox), there are other Joneses, not the Joneses of yesteryear, but the Once and Future Joneses. There is no point beating the old anti-Jones green drum, except perhaps in local elections. Mr David McLetchie MSP (no connection with any other party, trading under the name of Tory, *please*) can catch a Catholic and pocket a Papist with the expertise of a coalition-maker who knows the colours of the rainbow are violet, indigo, blue, green, yellow, red and no others. Catholics can also be upwardly mobile, and Mr McLetchie knows how to scatter chaff to feed gulls trying to take off.

Mr Cook may have forgotten Scotland, but his old tactics are still serviceable. But (however unkind it is to have to say it, and to say it of our Man in the F.O., too) they need refinement. It is not enough to hint at the anti-Catholicism of the SNP or to suggest that Tommy Sheridan (who was unkind enough to get married in a Catholic church) might be a Socialist or something equally frightful. Devolution itself may be the danger. Devolution has been getting steadily above itself. The power of Holyrood has increased, is increasing, and ought to be diminished. So runs the logic of Millbank.

That the issue of student fees would end with blue water between Scotland and Blairland was to be foreseen, by Dr John Reid if not by the Lords of Human Kind in Millbank. It may even be that Dr Reid would have favoured a more graceful capitulation: he was quick to proclaim the acceptability of a divergence between Scottish and Westminster Parliaments, however much he might loathe it in practice and seek to subvert it in secret. But the Blair Project is in even greater need of instruction in diplomacy than is its Foreign Secretary. Every possible opposition to the popular will of the people of Scotland was attempted, and hence every possible face was pulled, and lost. The Vice-Chancellors solicitous for handouts, the Association of University Teachers snouting for peanuts, the National Union of Students clutching at self-mirages as future Jack Straws, were paraded into individual betrayals - humiliating as they were, none so humiliating as Dr Gordon Brown's betrayal

of his lost youth in the cause of student rights. Scotland had voted for investment in its future students, and however much the Cabinet might deny to the future the opportunities that had given its own members the present, Scotland declined the share of the shame meted out to it. Westminster might doom youth to debt, Holyrood must not.

Even if the Scottish Executive should fudge and swindle on the abolition of student fees, what had happened was one case where appearance could not be destroyed by reality. Scotland had voted that Blair was wrong, a Scottish Parliament had reaffirmed that Blair was wrong, even the Scottish Executive had to appear to act as though Blair were wrong. To a politician of *realpolitik* this might not matter. To a government which had replaced substance with shadow, soul with spin, and integrity with image, it mattered everything. The Blair Project confronted the need to live with heretics against its own infallibility, heretics likely to infect its own Scottish ranks with schism, and it moved into High Inquisition.

There was an element of tragedy in this, to anyone who had rejoiced in the young political manhood of Dr Brown and even of Mr Cook, the appeal they made, the agenda they declared, and the audience they won. They, so young to have become the prophets of youth, reach middle age as the traitors against youth.

The next phase might seem tragedy also, at least for young persons of homosexual inclination made victims of witch-hunt, but when orchestrated by His Eminence Thomas Cardinal Winning it rapidly became screaming farce. Or so it now looks in retrospect, although it was grim enough at the time. The climax - or possibly the catastrophe - was the Cardinal bellowing anathema from Malta, scripting his own Aristophanes drama with appropriate allusions indistinguishable from illusions: World War II Nazi planes transmogrified into invisible media-manipulating gays. Aristophanes might have given it a chorus of angels, the RAF name for enemy aircraft.

In spite of - indeed, it may be because of - his Eminence and his busman friend whose public transport wins few hosannas in that oasis of Roman Catholicism, Portugal, Section 2a was repealed in Scotland and local government could no longer be witch-hunted on the weird charge of 'promoting' homosexuality. (And should we not pluck out first the beam in our own eye, Your Eminence, and acknowledge that quite a few promotions of homosexuals have been made to the College of Cardinals in its time (I speak only for the past of course, being a historian to trade), and that in some instances it may even have been their homosexuality which won them their promotion? - a reason for preferment I would deplore as much as would Your

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Eminence, but which neither of us can in conscience flatly deny.) And then, thanks to the House of Lords, its counterpart was rejected at Westminster, and Mr Blair himself must acknowledge blue water, Scotland proving more civilized than the undeveloped UK.

But when Principal Sir Stewart Sutherland's report on the duties of the state to the aged was deemed too demanding for the Blair project, and when the Scottish Parliament supported it, the blue water began to look a tad oceanic, and the ocean to feel a touch Arctic. Was devolved Scotland about to become the Utopia Blairism so scornfully ditched? The Scottish Parliament already has its own conscience in the blessed trinity of the Scottish Green Robin Harper, the Independent Labour Dennis Canavan and the Scottish Socialist Tommy Sheridan, each of them symbolic of a Parliament whose totality is greater than the sum of its parties, and each brandishing discarded Labour creeds. Were they to prove the bell-wethers of an independent Parliament? Would it proclaim an alternative to New Labour's gospel of greed?

It may have been that Cardinal Winning's insistence that the Scottish Parliament was immature gave a clue to the politicians, however much his vapours had been prompted by official Labour policy. What he meant was that Scottish Labour was immature in responding to Mr Blair rather than to Dr Winning - and on certain issues such as Labour's truckling to Trident he has, or at least once had, a point. (The point is still there; the Cardinal, unfortunately, does not seem to be.) If there was a Catholic vote discernible in forms that could be manipulated from the more Scottish frontiers of Millbank, the sheep would be back to their lumpen-voter fidelities of the days of Willie Ross (defined by Harold Wilson as the most desirable of all Scottish contributions to Labour). Let the Catholics be warned, then, that Protestant Sectarianism is but sleeping, and that sleep a sleepwalking, as Mr James MacMillan had so obligingly reminded them. With Donald Dewar dead, and his trespasses forgiven by His Eminence when he was no longer there to continue them, Henry McLeish would see the necessity to be dragged at His Eminence's chariot-wheels to the toe of the Supreme Pontiff.

Donald Dewar died leaving his enemies no less uncertain than his friends as to how much devolution he really wanted, but he had at least devolved himself to the extent of allowing no Whitehall or Westminster whip to take his deference for granted. Indeed the obvious affection in which he was held by his enemies in Holyrood was as marked as the obvious denigration in which he was deluged by his friends in London. The latter began with the opening of the Scottish Parliament, and it had been set up well before it. Unfortunately for his detractors, Dewar was a big man, in every sense, and

cutting him down to size diminished nobody except those who attempted it. But surely they would have more hopes of Henry McLeish MSP, Edinburgh, the pianissimo protester addressing the Meadows multitude at the 1992 Edinburgh European Summit? He only obtained his place as First Minister through Whitehall pressure. And his major rival, Jack McConnell MSP, only obtained *his* place in the Scottish Parliament by one vote in the nomination contest in Lanark Labour politics so ably ruled by such prominent Scottish Catholics as Ms Helen Liddell MP and Dr John Reid MP, with such promising apprentices in the political sorcery as Mr Frank Roy MP.

Ireland had been conspicuously the state most ready to take note of Scottish devolution (although the United States of America acknowledged its advent by somewhat belatedly cancelling its proposed closure of its Consulate). This was a revolution. Ireland had never had a Consulate, regardless of its long population mobility to and from Scotland, stretching back beyond recorded history. The cultures had mingled down the centuries from Cúchulainn and Columba to Conan Doyle and Connolly. But Sinn Féin, meaning 'we ourselves', was usually translated 'ourselves alone', and its prominence after the Easter Rising of 1916 meant that Irish nationalism, hitherto in alliance or at least negotiation with its Scots and Welsh counterparts, now cut off its British intellectual collegiality, fixing its sights on London. Negotiations nominally about Northern Ireland, actually about whatever could be wrested from Britain without Northern Ireland, assumed as an article of faith that Northern Ireland existed purely as a British puppet regime. Equally, respectable nationalism could not exist within the British state, save in the case of Northern Irish Catholics. Unspoken but firm was the assumption that Protestants could not be nationalists, save as Catholics' fellow-travellers. The very same Irish nationalist who denied the Ulster Unionist premise that the six counties of Northern Ireland consisted simply of 'a Protestant people', acquiesced whole-heartedly in the most bigoted Scots Protestant insistence on Scotland as Protestant. (Connolly was at this time assumed to have been born in Co. Monaghan, one of the more curious 1984-style rewrites of history in Sinn Féin Ireland, split though it might be among the governments of de Valera and of his opponents.)

But today, all is changed, changed utterly. The Terrible Beauty has been living far too long. Even its most substantial electoral beneficiary of the last 75 years, the Fianna Fáil party, must silently acknowledge that.

The Good Friday Agreement provided for consultation among member countries of the British-Irish Archipelago, including devolved Scotland and less devolved Wales, all the more needful if Northern Ireland ever was to

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acquire any coherent identity: as one of two parts of Ireland trafficking with a dubious and dodgy London, it had much less hope of viability than as one in a game for five players.

Ireland's enthusiasm for Scottish devolution, and its appointment as Consul-General of its most distinguished diplomat below the Ambassadorial level (to which he has in person though not, of course, in office, been subsequently raised), was a frank gesture indicating that Ireland also wanted a game for five players, and, incidentally, that it wanted to see Northern Ireland succeed as a viable entity.

From Mr Blair's point of view as a world statesman, and as premier of the United Kingdom, this was to be welcomed. From his viewpoint as a politician it should have had the same effect, on the ground that anything making for stabilization of Northern Ireland was to be politically welcomed, but Mr Blair is not a very rational politician, witness his evident doubts as to whether he had been elected by the UK voters, or by Mr Rupert Murdoch: the Nixonian inferiority complex (who, when I get right down to it, would want to elect *me*?) strikes again. Mr Blair's neuroses apart, Whitehall might have warmed to it. Whitehall has, however, a tradition of suspicion and bewilderment respecting Dublin governments, and the emergence of an efficient Irishman makes it feel like Faust as he morosely watches Mephistopheles dropping in for a friendly drink. Ireland's goodwill might mean (a) Ireland as independent might actively or passively encourage Scotland to go the same way (b) Ireland's phenomenal success as a small, independent operator in the European community was a bad example for Scotland, encouraging it to chafe under Whitehall's and England's European neuroses (c) Ireland's presence in Edinburgh encouraged the Scots to imagine that any Scot - not simply Mr Robin Cook - might begin to think about foreign policy. Thus, with or without the aid of Mr Blair and the suits in Whitehall, Dr John Reid as Secretary of State for Scotland may have decided that the stabilization of Northern Ireland was of less importance than the recall of his native country to its subordinate status. Mr Donald Dewar, that is to say the Scottish Parliament, needed to learn his place, correction, sorry, its place.

It is known that Dr Reid hinted to Mr Roy - significantly, to the well-whipped Westminster MP, not to any local representative in the Scottish Parliament - that a visit from the Irish Taoiseach might pose problems of law and order in their constituencies. The proposition itself was manifest nonsense. Anti-partitionist rabble-rousing by Eamon de Valera 50-odd years ago did not prompt riots in Glasgow for all of the great man's dulcet

suggestion that Irish Unionists might be repatriated to Scotland. (It was mere electioneering for home consumption, but it was one of the most viciously irresponsible acts in a career which had some bad scenes following such acts - again a reminder that de Valera took Scotland's Catholics no more seriously than he took Northern Ireland's - i.e. of potential value as fuel for future grievance-mongering to make hard diplomatic gains.) But sectarianism nowadays is more synthetic. Politics no longer turns on realities, but on what people may be led to believe about realities. From the spin-doctor's ethics no better means could be found to demonstrate that Scotland is unfit to play with foreign affairs, European economics, or even a separate policy from Whitehall on domestic issues. Bigoted and sectarian - was not a great composer foremost in the field in saying so? - Scotland was manifestly unfit to take its place in any council of nations. At one blow, Dr Reid would diminish the pretensions of the Scottish Parliament and show that in cold reality it was the Secretary of State for Scotland, not the First Minister of a jumped-up Scottish Parliament unable even to elect a Labour majority, who would determine the status of his country.

Of course, Dr Reid may have believed that Mr Bertie Ahern was in danger of his life. In view of its exceeding improbability - An Taoiseach was in infinitely less danger than he would be if he ventured on certain Dublin streets which his government and its predecessors appear to have written off - Dr Reid would thereby live in a fantasy world and is therefore presumably disqualified from cabinet office. Either way, Dr Reid becomes a rather odd choice for the Secretaryship of State for Northern Ireland. Or maybe the choice of a Secretary of State who will readily risk the stability of Northern Ireland for a Lanarkshire vote informs all persons at every point in the Northern Ireland spectrum how little any of them counts against the importance of British election needs. Dr Reid, for all of his primary concerns with fiddling rather than with urban conflagration, may be a logical successor to Mr Mandelson, to whom Northern Ireland was a springboard (to what proved, alas, to be an empty swimming-tank). Dr Reid had not, presumably, anticipated the fall of Mr Mandelson and his own transfer to Northern Ireland. But, since his move, he has shown himself as ready as Mr Mandelson to meddle with public concerns outside his new bailiwick, regardless of the cost to others. Presumably Ms Helen Liddell was made a welcome third in these confidences in the creation of chimera: they are all Lanarkshire Catholics and much more capable than Mr James MacMillan in judging political realities and what people can be persuaded to believe to be political realities.

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So Mr Frank Roy arose and publicly despaired of the safety in Lanark of Mr Bertie Ahern, who may for all we know be as cowardly as the rest of us but who has braved unquestionably homicidal Protestant activists in his own island and whose manner in dealing with an unknown crowd is affectionate to the point of seduction. Whoever might have had what genuine fears (was there anyone who genuinely expected violence?), Mr Ahern has got where he has got by the principle of *de l'audace, de l'audace, et encore de l'audace*. Irish common speech frequently translates this as 'brass neck' where he is concerned. (His surname in Gaelic originally meant 'horse-lord'.) But when a local legislator, albeit not of the legislative body immediately concerned with An Taoiseach's presence at Carfin Grotto, tells him he is *persona non grata* to any section of the population of which that legislator is the representative, naturally An Taoiseach has to cancel his visit. If the Irish are diplomatic wizards, they are also diplomatically ritualistic: the right thing must be done, especially when you propose to enchant your audience into useful concessions while doing it. It is a pleasing thought that Mr Roy's main credential in the matter came from the legal fiction that he embodied the wishes of Protestant sectarian constituents, however much electoral capital he thought he was making by denouncing them. That he was insulting Mr Ahern, and thereby impairing Anglo-Irish as well as Scoto-Irish relations, he may not have realised until An Taoiseach seized the first opportunity to pay his disrespects to Mr Roy when Mr Roy got completely above himself and attacked An Taoiseach's Consul-General. At that point Bertie had him over a barrel and Mr Roy learned, in his last moments in government, how Bertie Ahern has dealt with his traducers as he made his murky way forward in the Haughey nursery.

An Taoiseach, one of whose strongest weapons is a leprechaun-like sense of humour, would no doubt have privately relished the thought that his Catholicism (if any) was more unacceptable than the Pope's, in the mind, such as it is, of the Glasgow Rangers bigot. Papal blessings were OK, but not Bertie's beatitude. An Taoiseach also knew perfectly well how to whip up a false crisis on ethnic grounds, and had cut his teeth on politicians in the same business. Nor could Mr Roy be readily faulted for uniqueness in sacrificing Northern Ireland peace prospects to political considerations. Mr Ahern and his Fianna Fáil predecessors have played that game ruthlessly when it suited them. But the attack on the Consul-General by Mr Roy displayed more of the hand Mr Roy was playing and increased doubts that he was the prime player, preceded as it was by statements from Dr Reid and Ms Liddell that Mr Roy enjoyed their approval. What was clearly at stake was the reduction of Ireland's and Scotland's powers in the five-player game. Was Dr Reid capturing Can!da on the banks of the Elbe, so to say? Was Dublin being

humiliated as part of the Doctor's new orders as well as Edinburgh being diminished as part of the old? Symbolically, it could not have been more apt. It orchestrated well with Ms Liddell's own campaign to rubbish the Liberal Democrats in the hope of ending the Scottish Parliamentary ruling coalition, thus condemning the Scottish Parliament to the doldrums of a minority government.

The ease with which the Ahern government had capitulated to Mr Roy's blatant nonsense encouraged Mr Roy to overreach himself. It was a stupid misreading, born of ignorance of Irish diplomatic protocol, and he compounded it with interest. To any sovereign state, an attack on its resident official representative is an attack on itself. Mr Roy had, in effect, declared war on the Irish government, and the Irish government, coldly measuring exactly the angle of his elevation from his base, struck. And then Mr Roy discovered who his friends were, and where they were not, as Mr Ahern from personal experience knew all too well he would discover. Mr Roy may never have intended to intervene regarding An Taoiseach's visit until Dr Reid showed him that a smart boy was wanted: the sorcerer may have handed the potion to his apprentice. It is even more certain that Ms Liddell did not simply support Mr Roy's first strike with the indulgence of a nanny giving the baby its over-noisy rattle: she willed his action, even if she had not been its actual parent. But that profited him nothing. Irrespective of whether Dr Reid and Ms Liddell had handed Mr Roy the first stone he threw, or whether they merely observed that it was fine weather for stone-throwing, they unquestionably gave him the last stone, the one which they instructed him to tie to his neck preliminary to jumping into the nearest body of water: regardless of whether the water was blue, it had better be deep. And no suicide note was wanted. Any indiscretions at their expense would mean Mr Roy's instant extinction in Lanarkshire Labour politics. Like the King of Runegar in Lord Dunsany's story, he would not only cease to be, he would cease ever to have been. If he remains silent now, his ghost may or may not be permitted a future. Meanwhile, Dr Reid and Ms Liddell will be visible recipients of Irish diplomatic hospitality, of which Mr Henry McLeish will be informed when he also may partake. Mr McLeish may be perfectly willing to accept such invitations without prompting, but Ms Liddell will insist on the shadow of his subordination whether or not she can get the substance.

Meanwhile Mr Alistair Darling has now taken to informing his constituents of the closeness of his operations in tandem with the Scottish Executive, Liberal Democrats or (Ms Liddell willing) no Liberal Democrats. The Labour party in the Scottish Parliament, chosen for the most part for their deferential qualities to Millbank - as the rejection of Mr Dennis Canavan time and again

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has made all too clear - must nevertheless look with some shade of envy at Mr McLetchie and his merry Scots, children of the electoral system Labour established to ward off an SNP government. No Westminster Tory may dare dispute the rights of rule or representation allegedly exercised by the Wee Free Tories of Holyrood. Sir Malcolm Rifkind, who in the hour of doom in 1997 kicked the leadership of Scottish Toryism in the faces of those who offered it to him, must now fawn on the Holyrood brethren as he makes his first faltering fresh clutches at the greasy pole, his only base that provided by the Devolution he once championed and then betrayed.

At least Labour in Holyrood will be like their brethren in Westminster in seeing the most desirable raiment as that modelled by Tories. But the logic of this is that their political future, like that of the Holyrood Tories, depends on their ability to distance themselves from the sticky fingers gleaming with the pickings of the Southern gravy-train.

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