

# SIR EDWARD CARSON

BY 'A STUDENT OF POLITICS'

From *The London Times*, May 9

(NORTHCLIFFE PRESS)

Of all the great men in English history, Gladstone was surely the worst judge of political human nature. Before he introduced his first Home Rule Bill he is said to have felt quite sure about Chamberlain and very doubtful about Harcourt. Some overtures for support he did make to English Conservatives, but Irish Conservatives he ignored and, what was still more remarkable, he forgot Ulster, then a Liberal stronghold.

To an ordinary man, it would have been an obvious counsel of prudence to sound Ulster and, if possible, persuade her beforehand. Had he done so and met with any measure of success, the first Home Rule Bill would have been a better Bill than his own, and had even more Home Rule in it; for the only way of reconciling Ulster to the idea of Home Rule for Ireland was then, as now, by the offer of Home Rule to herself. In fact, it would have been a Bill on the same general lines as the Act now in force. Had such a Bill been introduced a generation ago, the North and South would by this time have composed their differences; Irish politics would have been running on the same wholesome differences between Liberal, Labor, and Conservative that divide opinion in other countries, instead of following the wholly unnatural divisions of geography and religious faith; there would have been no rebellions; and Sir Edward Carson, if he had not developed into a Grattan, would have been, at any rate, Lord Chancellor of a united Ireland.

Alas, the Conservatives were the first to understand Ulster, and Mr. Balfour was the first to recognize the gifts of Sir Edward Carson.

The mean and unworthy estimate of Sir Edward Carson's character, though it can be made to fit in with a great many facts, is the wrong one, and it is not, in reality, that of Ireland generally. He is not an Ulsterman, though he sits for an Ulster division; though narrow he can be generous; he is free from the religious bigotry which is the curse of Northern Ireland; he has the brogue, not of Belfast, but of Galway, the most beautiful of all the monuments of melancholy in Ireland; and he loves his country—not part of it merely, but the whole. It is one of the tragedies of Irish history that his gifts should have been at the service of half a province instead of the cause of a united Ireland, and there are times when one suspects that he feels it as a tragedy of his own life too. For no one can hear him replying to Mr. Asquith on a question of Irish policy without suspecting that, apart from the specific disagreement of the moment, there is deep down in his nature a feeling of personal resentment against official Liberalism for warping his nature and twisting the sort of work that he might have done for Ireland.

Between him and the remnant of Irish Nationalists in the House there is no such gulf. They belabor each other, but with it all there is some understanding and a great deal of respect; and of Sir Edward Carson, when he was organizing rebellion in Ulster, there was

far more popular admiration even in the rest of Ireland than there was in all England, outside Liverpool and the Carlton Club. But in every gesture towards the official Liberal benches there is the same accusation of faithlessness — 'We were yours and you cast us off' — a charge that cannot be brought against Nationalism or Sinn Fein.

One ought not to ignore this grievance of Sir Edward Carson as a good Irishman against the blundering tactics of Gladstone which presented him with it, for, rightly handled, the question of Home Rule in 1886 was far easier than now, and might have been solved. But if he has a grievance, so have others — England and Ireland both — against him. He did not teach Ireland to rebel, but he led the only successful rebellion she has made, and the lesson was not lost. Ireland as a whole, too, has a grievance against him as a lost leader of union.

The most dramatic apparition to be seen in the House is that of Sir Edward Carson at the door when an Irish debate is proceeding. Especially now, with the Irish Nationalist Party a mere twittering ghost of its former greatness, there is always an element of theatricality in Irish debates; someone said once that there ought to be a row of foot-lights all round the Irish coast. It may be the theatricality of Irish debate or there may be some positive suggestion in the tall, lank figure, the straight black hair, the hollow cheeks, and the lengthened chin, but one cannot help thinking of Mephisto in the play at such times.

And the impression is not removed by the rich brogue and is deepened by the corrosion and negation of what he says. Nothing in politics seems worth while when he speaks; Irish ideals are balloons blown up with gas; a new thought or hope is treated like a hostile witness; the great world pines to

the dimensions of a poky court of justice, and nothing seems to matter but what is concrete enough to be put into an affidavit. It is all magnificently done, for Sir Edward Carson has not risen on nothing to the position of perhaps the most famous of living advocates. He has in a supreme degree the faculty of dissolving a state of mind into little crystals of fact and holding each up to the light that is appropriate to his purpose. No one in our time at the Bar has had his power of unexpected thrust and stab in cross-examination, and he has so cultivated the habit of always speaking at the greatest common measure of intelligence in a jury that he has lost the power of rising above it. Outside Irish affairs — for example, on labor topics — he speaks occasionally with flashes of originality and sentimental insight, but ordinarily on politics he is a barrister whose rare distinction of manner cannot disguise the mediocrity and dullness of what he has to say.

If Sir Edward Carson had never turned rebel, popular opinion would have neglected him as a politician; but his organization of the contingent rebellion in the North of Ireland made him a scoundrel in the eyes of many and a hero with others, and with nearly all profoundly modified the estimates of his character. A few, indeed, there were who still refused to take his politics seriously; to them he was still a stage Irishman only, bedadding and bejabbering, even when he was talking hypothetical treason and civil war.

In fact, his action at this time proved the exact contrary. It may not have been a great thing for him at his time of life to throw up an exceedingly lucrative practice and devote himself entirely to the work of organizing resistance to the enforcing of the Home Rule Act. But it was a great thing for him to run the risk of arrest and the social dis-

grace, not to speak of the physical danger, of being a rebel. It was proof that he really cared, that his denunciation of Home Rule was the outcome of real conviction, and even that he had the stuff of martyrdom in him. There is no exaggerating the mischief that was done to the country by the formation of the Ulster army; but when all is said it is a test of sincerity that a man should in the last resort be prepared to fight in a cause of conscience when he is convinced that no other honorable issue is possible. And by that test the Government of the day which did not arrest Sir Edward Carson stands condemned in its Irish policy. Whatever Irish policy was to be adopted later, it must inevitably after that be a policy that did not involve the coercion of Ulster, and to have established that principle, if a negative achievement, redeems his political career from barrenness and contempt.

Sir Edward Carson might have done still more and achieved political greatness had he, after this victory, known how to use it for the service of all Ireland. For now — *because*, rather than *in spite of*, the war — was the time to achieve the unity of Ireland, and Sir Edward Carson, by close coöperation with the Unionists of the rest of Ireland, if not with the Nationalists too, might have achieved that end. The opportunity was neglected and Sir Edward Carson remained the leader of a province when he might have been so much

more. The truth was — and his brief tenure of office during the war confirms it — that he is quite without constructive ability of any kind. Absolutely dependent on others for his general ideas, he might have served a greater cause than that of Ulster had he fallen early under the right influences. But the official Liberal party first neglected him and then abused him, as it did Chamberlain and later Mr. Lloyd George; and he never realized all that of which he might have been capable. There were also faults of temperament as well as of mind.

For all that has been said of his personal kindness and good-nature, there are hundreds of instances that might be quoted in support, and the caricaturists who see the man in the Red Indian profile and the combative jaws see less than strangers who, meeting him for the first time, are fascinated by the deep melancholy of the eyes. He is a man of a deep emotional nature, and the appearance of truculence is a carapace for a skin that is more tender than most people's. But there are some humans — perhaps more numerous in Ireland than elsewhere — whose devotion to those who depend on them takes the form of intense distrust and ferocity toward every one else. They rend and tear, not out of cruelty, but out of a too restricted and as it were provincial range of affection. Sir Edward Carson was of these, and the fact has ruined him as a national politician.

# BOLSHEVIST POET-MYSTICS

BY HÉLÈNE ISVOLSKY

From *La Revue de France*, April 15  
(POLITICAL AND LITERARY FORTNIGHTLY)

FOR the last three years, the most profound mystery has veiled Russia — a mystery that should be explained, were it only to aid in comprehending the Bolshevik menace, which weighs so heavily upon the civilized world. One must seek first to understand the soul of a people violently shaken by Revolution, for Bolshevism is not merely a social and economic phenomenon, but is also — and perhaps especially — a psychological phenomenon of extreme complexity.

The mysterious soul of the real Russia is not at all incomprehensible. It is taking form, little by little, giving outward manifestations of itself, notably through the written word. There is a Bolshevik literature and (what especially concerns us here) a Bolshevik poetry. 'Moscow,' the Russian publishing house, is about to issue in Berlin the first number of a literary review, *The Russian Book*, edited by M. Jastchenko, the former professor of international law. This brochure offers a curious approach to Russian literary life under the communist régime, from which we may gain some precious information.

Russian men of letters are divided into two groups, one of which has settled itself abroad, M. M. Mereskovsky, Bounin, Kuprin, Count Alexis Tolstoy, and others, all distinguished writers; whilst the other group has remained in Russia and has attached itself, more or less, to the Bolsheviks. We say 'more or less,' for it would be a blunder to think that all of those who live and work in Russia are of necessity active Bolsheviks.

Without doubt there are Bolshevik writers, pure and simple, who serve the cause of the Soviets; but there are also literary men who live and write under the new régime, which is quite another matter; and who are often kept in Russia by force. Finally, there are those to whom Bolshevism is a bad dream, a passing cloud, but who live within themselves, afar from all political agitation. We might accuse them of indifference; Dante would have placed them between Heaven and Hell.

In spite of the appalling economic conditions of Russia, the lot of literary men is relatively pleasanter than that of the other subjects of the Republic of Soviets. No doubt because they have no desire whatever to imitate Plato's example, the Bolsheviks have not driven the poets from the Communist Paradise and have, quite the contrary, offered them refuge and protection. But, on the other hand, they keep a vigilant watch upon all their literary work, and the liberty of the press is dead in Russia, along with all the other liberal 'prejudices' of the old order of things. A play of Gorky's was withdrawn from the repertory because of its anti-revolutionary character, and it is the group of so-called 'Proletarian Poets' who enjoy all the favors of the governments. 'Proletarian Poets,' 'Imaginists,' 'Scythians,' — thus are the canes of the Bolshevik Parnassus entitled. This has aided an extraordinary poetical flowering during the last three years.

Professor Jastchenko writes:

'In an epoch when the complete ab-