New Liberalism, J. L. Hammond and the Irish Problem, 1897–1949*

Abstract

Historians have regarded new Liberalism as an ideology primarily concerned with domestic social reform. Yet this does little justice to the intensity and longevity of new Liberals’ support of self-government in Ireland. This side of new Liberal ideology is particularly illuminated by the career of J. L. Hammond (1872–1949), especially his *Gladstone and the Irish Nation* (1938). Hammond’s historical scholarship, indeed, was heavily influenced by Liberal ideology, and can be seen as a belated effort to justify Gladstonian Liberalism’s long mission in Ireland. Fittingly therefore, Hammond’s arguments possessed the same strengths and weaknesses as earlier Liberal efforts to pacify Ireland.

J. L. Hammond’s *Gladstone and the Irish Nation*, published in 1938, still retains a high measure of esteem in the historiography of the first two home rule crises. Lord Blake, writing thirty years later from a very different political standpoint, did not attempt to question Hammond’s elucidation of Gladstone’s political wisdom and absence of ‘thought of personal or party advantage’ in his conversion to home rule in 1886.1 In the nineteen-seventies, A. B. Cooke and Professor John Vincent, as well as other writers, did challenge Hammond’s defence of Gladstone, suggesting that Hammond was an amateur historian who did not understand the political process, and who wrote with the preconceived aim of showing that Gladstone was ‘a good man’; however, this certainly underestimates the subtlety of Hammond’s thesis. More recent works in the area have largely suggested that Cooke and Vincent’s *The Governing Passion* trivializes the ideological dimension to Gladstone’s crusade for home rule which Hammond had emphasized.2

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Meanwhile, the flourishing recent historiography of the Gladstone popularity cult owes much to Hammond.\(^3\)

Whatever the historical validity of *Gladstone and the Irish Nation*, however, Hammond was a man of deep political convictions, and his work cannot be considered apart from his political context. This article will illuminate this context by considering the significance of Ireland to early twentieth-century new Liberals such as Hammond and his colleagues. It will be shown that Hammond’s book typifies many aspects of early new Liberal ideology, both strengths and weaknesses, which have been neglected by historians.

Hammond, and his wife Barbara, are probably best known today for their ‘Labourer trilogy’, published in 1911–19, and for other works in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century social and political history.\(^4\) Professor P. F. Clarke, the leading historian of new Liberalism, has shown that this trilogy, particularly *The Village Labourer*, had a resonance with the contemporary Liberal party’s campaign for land reform in England.\(^5\) Clarke’s point fits in with much of the historiography of new Liberalism, which has tended to depict it as an ‘ideology of social reform’: several historians have associated the undoubted electoral success of Edwardian Liberalism with the development and articulation of a new Liberal programme of social reform. The discourse of politicians and of the local and national press (particularly the *Manchester Guardian*) is said to have provided a point of contact with academics such as L. T. Hobhouse and J. A. Hobson, who developed a philosophical justification for such an interventionist programme.\(^6\) Thus, constituted as a modern party, barely distinguishable in its policies from the contemporary Labour party,\(^7\) Edwardian Liberalism was hardly in a spiral of inevitable decline; indeed, had it not been


for the issues raised by the First World War, some historians suggest that Liberalism's replacement by the Labour party (a net loss for the British left as a whole) would not have been necessary.8

In conjunction with this argument, it is suggested that new Liberals were comparatively little interested in issues such as foreign policy, church disestablishment and Ireland, which appealed less specifically to the working-class electorate, and which are less fundamental to the modern division between major political parties.9 In consequence, historians have tended to show little interest in new Liberal thought about such issues, imagining it to be of little significance. Superficially, the fact that Hammond actually bothered to try to justify Gladstone’s Irish policy in the nineteen-thirties might appear to contradict these assumptions. Clarke, however, has argued that Hammond’s Gladstone and the Irish Nation can be regarded as consistent with prevailing new Liberal priorities, because Hammond was really concerned to investigate why Gladstone was popular, in spite of Gladstone’s faith in laissez-faire economics.10 (Hammond largely attributed Gladstone’s popularity to populism, his faith in the political judgement of the masses, a faith which Hammond shared.)11

A key text of modern historiography touching on new Liberal thought on Irish policy is Patricia Jalland’s The Liberals and Ireland.12 While Dr. Jalland has appreciated the depth of Edwardian Liberalism’s historical commitment to Gladstonian home rule,13 she has argued that ‘creative and dynamic elements in contemporary liberalism . . . were more enthusiastic about social reform than Home Rule, [and] wanted the issue settled quickly’, so that public attention could be focused on the former, more electorally profitable, field; ‘The Liberal party had more to gain from continued emphasis on socioeconomic reform’.14 According to Jalland, the Edwardian Liberals tried to evade specific commitment on the controversial and potentially politically disastrous issue of home rule.15 When the general elections of 1910 and the

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10 Clarke, Liberals and Social Democrats, pp. 278–80.

11 Hammond, Gladstone and the Irish Nation, ch. xxxiv; idem, ‘Workmen and the army’, The Nation, xv (1914), 808–9, 5 Sept. 1914.


13 Jalland, Liberals and Ireland, pp. 23–8.


Parliament Act of 1911 reopened the issue, new Liberal ministers such as Winston Churchill and David Lloyd George, and their allies in the Liberal press, advocated an early concession to Ulster Unionism, in order to take the wind from the sails of Unionist agitation, and to provide the Liberal government's Home Rule Bill of 1912 with a swift and uncomplicated passage through parliament. Old Liberal elements in Asquith's cabinet, however, sharing more of Gladstone's 'fanatical' commitment to home rule, successfully opposed Lloyd George's and Churchill's efforts in February 1912 to secure the exclusion of four Ulster counties from the operation of home rule. They also resisted Agar-Robartes's June 1912 amendment to the Home Rule Bill, which had a similar end in view.\(^\text{16}\) As a result of its legislative efforts in 1912–14 to fulfil the 'Gladstonian Liberal dream' of home rule for a united Ireland, Asquith's government became embroiled in a series of complicated and embarrassing issues related to the maintenance of order in Ireland, in which it has found few defenders among historians.\(^\text{17}\) The Liberal party had 'appeared to be in no danger of extinction', Jalland argues, citing Clarke's work, but the Irish problem of 1911–14 demoralised the Liberal party at a critical time and contributed significantly to the party's decline . . . Home Rule highlighted Liberalism's difficulty in reconciling the "progressive" demands of the twentieth-century electorate with the traditional commitments of Gladstonian Liberalism. The long-term damage to the Liberal party might have been less serious if Asquith's government had been able to resolve the Irish question. . . . The war gave the coup de grace to the Liberal party, but the inability to meet the challenge posed by the Ulster problem was itself a symptom of chronic debility. The Liberal party was already being consumed by the Orange cancer before it was run over by the "rampant omnibus" of war.\(^\text{18}\) Much can be said in favour of Jalland's thesis that the introduction of a different type of home rule measure in April 1912 would have saved Liberalism much embarrassment, and perhaps much pain (though any alternative Irish policy at the time—including Jalland's proposals—would also have been open to serious objections).\(^\text{19}\) But the complementary hypothesis, that new Liberal journalism and academia, in their relative apathy about home rule, sensed the desirability of compromise early in 1912 along the lines proposed by Lloyd George and Churchill, can be more reasonably disputed.

First of all, the suggestion that home rule was largely an old Liberal faith,


\(^{19}\) Jalland, pp. 66–9.
about which new Liberals were relatively apathetic, can be overemphasized. As one recent book has argued, the collectivists of new Liberalism could feel an affinity to the ‘collective identity’ of the Celtic nationalisms of the United Kingdom.\textsuperscript{20} Some leading new Liberal intellectuals and journalists, such as C. P. Scott, H. W. Massingham, Hammond and Hobhouse had been committed home rulers since the time of Gladstone’s conversion.\textsuperscript{21} To such individuals, the fact that home rule caused the Liberal party many years of electoral difficulty was not, as for Lord Rosebery and others, a reason to renounce the policy. These difficulties, the delay in the achievement of home rule, rather increased the emotional capital which they invested in the policy, and seemed to increase the need to reaffirm the validity of its underlying principles. Home rule came to seem the holy grail of Liberalism, more cherished because of the obstacles in its way. Massingham noted, ‘Most of my life as a journalist has been spent in the fight for Home Rule’.\textsuperscript{22} As Dr. Trevor Wilson has argued, Scott’s suspicion of Asquith can be traced in part to the fact that during the Boer War Asquith had seemed to err towards Rosebery’s attitude to home rule:

the Liberal party in every effort that it made for justice and humanity found upon its flank men of high position in its own ranks raking its attack with a cross-fire. The culminating point was reached when it was proclaimed that the Liberal slate was to be wiped clean of its old formulae, and that in particular the Irish policy for the sake of which the party had virtually wandered in the wilderness for twenty years was to be abandoned and the central contention of its opponents to be upheld.\textsuperscript{23}

Later, in the days of Lloyd George’s coalition government, Scott’s \textit{Manchester Guardian} declared: ‘Perhaps Liberals of the latest brand no longer concern themselves about Ireland, and are quite prepared to inaugurate another twenty years of resolute government, the first twenty years having proved so gloriously successful. If so we will confess ourselves of an older faith’.\textsuperscript{24} Massingham’s \textit{Nation} agreed: ‘Liberalism could not live and see the Gladstonian flag torn to tatters before its eyes. It has declared Ireland to be a nation. That admission is final’.\textsuperscript{25}

During the Boer War, new Liberal intellectuals such as Hobson, Hammond\textsuperscript{26} and Hobhouse had defended the Boers (like the Irish, a nation struggling to be free) when other progressives, such as Roseberian

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\item \textsuperscript{22} Nation, xxii (1918), 333, 20 June 1918.
\item \textsuperscript{23} The Manchester Guardian (hereafter \textit{MG}), 6 March 1908, p. 6c, quoted in Political Diaries of Scott, P. 30.
\item \textsuperscript{24} \textit{MG}, 8 Feb. 1919, p. 8b-c.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Nation, xxi (1918), 160, 18 May 1918.
\item \textsuperscript{26} F. W. Hirst, G. G. A. Murray and J. L. Hammond, Liberalism and the Empire (1900).
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imperialists and Fabian socialists, had been expressing doubts about the 
principles of home rule in both the South African and Irish instances. Hobson 
and Hobhouse argued that the imperial rule of dependencies was inimical to 
progressive government at home.27 In 1901, Massingham told Daily News 
readers that the Irish demand for home rule would ‘never die’.28 After the 
war, self-government for the Boer areas of South Africa became the radicals’ 
policy. This, of course, was a policy similar to home rule in Ireland. Thus, by 
the time home rule once again became a live political issue in 1910–12, new 
Liberals could further reaffirm their faith in the measure with a political 
discourse sharpened by usage after the apparent success of an analogous 
policy in South Africa.29 The radical Nation, for instance, criticized the 
Liberal government’s own Irish Council Bill of 1907 because it seemed to fall 
short of the standard of its own South African policy, and thus appeared to be 
mere ‘crumbs from the table of freedom’. Liberals had to ‘drop the 
Roseberyite idea, and come back to the standard of Gladstone. The best 
elements in the party have never deserted that standard’.30 The Boer War and 
its sequel had shown ‘the political efficacy of freedom. Is there any reason to 
think that this efficacy would be less say in Ireland, or in India, than among a 
white people smarting from the recent wounds of war?’31 In justification of 
the 1912 Home Rule Bill, the radical press declared that ‘Our Empire is a 
Home Rule Empire’:32 ‘ten years hence the Tory Party will know they were 
wrong today’, argued the Daily News,33 just as they had wrongly opposed the 
grant of self-government to the Transvaal.34

Secondly, the willingness of new Liberal journalists to advocate com-
promise over home rule in the years 1912–14 was distinctly qualified. It is 
true that many, such as Massingham, were frequently more pacific on this 
point than Liberal electors; in September 1913, for instance, the Daily News 
was deluged by letters from Liberal voters opposing Lord Loreburn’s call for 
a bipartisan conference on the Irish question.35 It is also true that as the Ulster 
movement to resist home rule developed, both Massingham and Hobhouse 
felt that concession to Ulster was ‘fairly due’ and should have been ‘carried

27 L. T. Hobhouse, Democracy and Reaction (1904), pp. 28–45; idem, in the Speaker, v (1901–2), 
197–220; J. A. Hobson, Imperialism: A Study (1902), pp. 124–51; C. F. G. Masterman and others, The 
Rosebery’s escape from Houndsditch’, Nineteenth Century, 1 (1901), 371.
28 Daily News (hereafter DN), 20, 10, 13, 17, 24, 27 June 1901, p. 5.
29 DN, 17 Apr. 1907, p. 6; Nation, x (1911–12), 189–90, 4 Nov. 1911.
30 Nation, i (1907), 367, 4 May 1907; DN, 27 Apr., 22 May 1907, p. 6; MG, 23 May 1907, p. 6b-c.
31 Nation, vii (1910), 303, 28 May 1910.
32 MG, 15 Jan. 1912, p. 6c.
33 DN, 24 Apr. 1912, p. 4c.
34 DN, 15 Apr. 1912, p. 4b-c; ibid., 21 and 26 Nov. 1910, p. 6; Home Rule Problems, ed. A. F. B. 
Times, 11 Sept. 1913, pp. 7–8; DN, 13 Sept. 1913, p. 6f; ibid., 16 Sept. 1913, p. 4f; ibid., 27 Sept. 1913, 
p. 8f.
through earlier, not under coercion’, by Asquith’s government. But it is noticeable that this was largely a retrospective argument; around the time that the Home Rule Bill was actually introduced, Hobhouse, in an important passage praised by Liberals, largely dismissed the idea that ‘Belfast will deliberately and persistently demand to be left out of its scope and separated from Ireland . . . her natural position is that of a rallying point for the dispersed forces of Irish Protestantism’. Massingham’s Nation also argued that Ulster’s exemption from home rule would be ‘absurd’, and took the attitude that the Ulsterman was a simple, well-intentioned (if bigoted) ‘fine fellow, and he will be quite honestly the most surprised man in the world’ when not persecuted under home rule; ‘everyone knows’ the Ulster resistance movement was bluff. The radical Liberals’ attitude was broadly summarized by the Daily News in 1910: ‘the party has renewed its youth by returning to the fountain-head of its principles, to Home Rule, Democracy and Social Reform. Any repetition of the movement towards reaction, any paltering with Imperialism and Unionism, would be the death of Liberalism’s soul’.

Though new Liberals had little stomach for the coercion of Ulster, they were distinctly averse to any suggestion that the Liberal government should give way to the threats of Sir Edward Carson’s Ulster Unionist movement and its British Unionist allies. Massingham was moved to adopt a threatening tone after incidents such as the Curragh mutiny of March 1914, and the Larne gun-running of April 1914: ‘we do not believe that there will be a score of secessions from Liberalism if the Government stand up to the gun-runners and the paper secessionists of Belfast’. The Manchester Guardian and the Daily News were also ready to threaten to meet force with force in their editorial comments, and regretted the ‘latitude’ shown by the government to the Ulster movement. As the 1912 Home Rule Bill was being introduced to the house of commons, the Guardian declared that it had ‘become necessary for the restoration of general respect for law and civic discipline that the Carsonian conspiracy of disorder should publicly and signally fall away’.

Finally, for all their conciliatory talk, the new Liberals regarded the essential features of the Home Rule Bill as above compromise. In particular, the unity of a self-governing Ireland was always ‘vital’ to all of them. Statements made in the radical press to this effect were almost endless: ‘Nothing . . . which less deserves to be permanent can be imagined’ than

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36 Hobhouse to Scott, 2 May 1914, quoted in Political Diaries of Scott, p. 84; DN, 30 Sept. 1912, p. 6c.
38 Nation, xi (1912), 120–1, 27 Apr. 1912; ibid., 38, 13 Apr. 1912.
40 Nation, xv (1914), 4–5, 4 Apr. 1914; DN, 20 Feb. 1914, p. 6b-c.
41 Nation, xv (1914), 285, 23 May 1914.
42 DN, 10 March 1914, p. 6b-c; ibid., 24 March 1914, p. 6b-c; MG, 21 March 1914, p. 8b-d.
43 MG, 10 Apr. 1912, p. 6b-c.

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partition. Not surprisingly, even Liberals ‘who have all along been favourable to concession’ regarded the Asquith government’s Amending Act of March 1914, offering to suspend the operation of the Home Rule Bill for six years from any Ulster county voting for exclusion, as a concession too far. To the least compromising new Liberal, J. A. Hobson, every detail of the Home Rule Bill of 1912 was sacrosanct as it had been approved by three successive general elections; the Ulster resistance movement was illegal, and should be put down, with force if necessary, and any concession to it would be a concession to illegal violence which would undermine ‘the roots of law and civil government’ all over the Empire. Hammond himself later stated that Ulster’s resistance movement of 1912–14 was ‘at first not taken seriously enough and then taken too seriously’ by the government of the day; at the time, however, new Liberals criticized the Asquith government for treating Ulster at once not seriously enough and too seriously.

There is thus a continuity in new Liberal advocacy of Gladstonian and Asquithian home rule right from Gladstone’s conversion to the outbreak of the First World War. It is thus not surprising to find the radical wing of Liberalism continuing to express a fundamental sympathy with Irish nationalism (and a fundamental antipathy to Irish Unionism, especially Ulster Unionism) thereafter. In September 1914 radical Liberal journalists tried to encourage the Asquith government in its efforts to place the Home Rule Bill on the statute book. After the Easter rising of 1916, the Liberal press articulated the belief that the evil example of the Carsonite movement of 1912–14 was ‘the sole cause of the unhappy history of Ireland during the war’. During the Irish Convention of 1917–18, new Liberals advocated a home rule settlement which would incorporate Ulster, and attempted to put pressure on Ulster Unionists to agree to such a settlement, blaming its ‘negative’ attitude for the impasse. But once the Irish Convention and the Redmondite Nationalist party collapsed, new Liberals blamed the Lloyd George coalition’s policy of Irish conscription for the lack of Irish settlement, to the extent that even Lloyd George’s friend and confidant C. P. Scott thought ‘it would be far better to overthrow the Government than to allow the policy now contemplated [conscription in Ireland] to go through’.

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44 MG, 11 March 1914, p. 8b-c; ibid., 19 Nov. 1913, p. 6b-c; DN, 3 Feb. 1914, p. 6b-c; Nation, xiv (1913–14), 334–5, 22 Nov. 1913; ibid., pp. 780–1, 7 Feb. 1914.
45 DN, 10 March 1914, p. 6d, b-c; ‘A Wayfarer’ [Massingham], ‘A London Diary’, Nation, xiv (1913–14), 992, 14 March 1914; MG, 10 March 1914, p. 8b-c.
47 ‘Politicus’ [Hammond], MG, 4 Nov. 1921, p. 11a.
48 DN, 9 Sept. 1914, p. 4c; MG, 11 Aug. 1914, p. 4b. See Jalland and Stubbs, ‘Irish question’.
50 MG, 18 March 1918, p. 4a-b; ibid., 22 Jan. 1918, p. 4b; R. Lynd, ‘Ulster and the world: the need for reparation’, DN, 28 Feb. 1918, p. 2f.
51 Trinity College Dublin library, John Dillon papers, MS. 6843/61a, Scott to Dillon, 26 Apr. 1918; Nation, xxiii (1918), 80, 27 Apr. 1918.
In 1920, Lloyd George's administration did produce and pass through parliament a home rule measure, the Government of Ireland Act. In spite of the role of the Liberal intellectual and cabinet minister H. A. L. Fisher in drafting this measure, however, it did little to mollify radical sections of the Liberal party. This was principally because it fell short of the Gladstonian standard in accepting the partition of Ireland. The Act envisaged a structure for the government of Ireland consisting of two parliaments (one for six counties of north-east Ulster, the other for the remaining twenty-six counties of Ireland) and a council of Ireland to deal with matters common to the two areas. To radical Liberals, the creation of a sectarian Northern Ireland embodied a 'wrong principle', as it would stereotype sectarian divisions in Ireland: 'Ireland is one, and it must remain one. The British Empire is also one, and there is ample room within it for a united and contented Ireland'. The new Liberals preferred the idea of dominion status for a united Ireland, and long continued to regard the 1920 Act as fatal in its effects.

Radicals' hostility to their former icon Lloyd George was further galvanized by the policy of repression in nationalist Ireland in 1919–21. The new Liberal press employed some of the leading critics of government Irish policy in these years, including Hammond, C. F. G. Masterman, A. G. Gardiner, H. W. Nevinson, the Daily News correspondent Hugh Martin, the Manchester Guardian's Desmond McCarthy, and his fellow Irishman Robert Lynd, as well as the editors Scott and Massingham. Meanwhile, the Peace with Ireland Council of 1920–2, though representing a variety of political, social and religious groups, contained a significant new Liberal


53 T. C. D., Dillon papers, MS. 6843/91, Scott to Dillon, 10 Feb. 1925.

54 J. L. Hammond, The Terror in Action (1921).

55 C. F. G. Masterman, The New Liberalism (1920), pp. 170–1; idem, 'Blind stupidity', DN, 8 Sept. 1920, p. 4d; DN, 7 Oct. 1920, p. 4d; ibid., 3 Nov. 1920, p. 4d-c; ibid., 11 Apr. 1921, p. 4e; ibid., 4 May 1921, p. 4d. Masterman also contributed regularly to the Contemporary Rev. at this time.

56 Koss, Fleet Street Radical, pp. 273–86.


58 Boyce, pp. 58–9; H. Martin, Ireland in Insurrection: an Englishman's Record of Fact (1921). Martin regularly wrote about Ireland in the Daily News after the Easter rising, particularly in the years 1920–2.

59 Bodl. Libr., MS. Hammond 165 fos. 189–229, Account of a trip to Ireland in Feb. 1921 by McCarthy, J. L. and Barbara Hammond and Margaret Buckmaster. McCarthy acted as Manchester Guardian Irish correspondent in these years.

60 R. Lynd, Ireland a Nation (1919). Lynd contributed to the Daily News regularly throughout the first half of 1921, and also contributed regularly to the New Statesman.


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input, including Nevinson and Hobhouse; its parliamentary committee was formed by the Liberal Basil Williams, and was modelled on the earlier Liberal home rule committee of 1911. Historians have shown that the hostility of British public opinion to continued repression in Ireland was a crucial element behind the British government's peace overtures to Sinn Fein of mid 1921. These overtures in turn initiated the negotiations which produced the Anglo-Irish treaty of December 1921. It can thus be argued that new Liberals contributed significantly to the resolution of this stage of the Anglo-Irish conflict. Lloyd George's friend C. P. Scott (for whom Hammond occasionally wrote at the Manchester Guardian) can be singled out as having made a special contribution: Scott had been so passionately opposed to the coalition's Irish policies that he had virtually no contact with the prime minister in the first half of 1921.

J. L. Hammond in many ways personified this new Liberal Irish obsession in the years from the eighteen-nineties to 1921. In 1897 he had written in an early published essay that Ireland was 'the country to which one turns for illustrations of injustice'. At the age of twenty-seven in 1899, he became editor of the radical weekly, the Speaker, which defended Gladstonian home rule in the dark days of the Boer War, Unionist ascendancy and Roseberian 'apostacy'. He was later a supporter of the Asquith government as much for its home rule policy as for its social policy; home rule was among the most important causes of Hammond's life.

By 1919 Hammond's reputation was such that he was offered the editorship of the Daily News, the leading Liberal national daily newspaper (he declined the offer, largely owing to ill-health). He became one of the leading critics of government Irish policy in the years 1920–1. He pressed for the organization of protest 'against the Gov[ernmen]t's bloody policy . . . in Ireland', fearing 'the most hateful war in our history'.

62 On the Peace with Ireland Council, see Boyce, pp. 64–70; National Library of Ireland (Dublin), George F. H. Berkeley papers, MSS. 10,024 and 10,028, 'My experiences with the Peace with Ireland Council, 1920–1', especially chs. iv-vi, and memorandum entitled 'Proposed committee on Irish affairs'. On the Liberal Home Rule Committee, see Home Rule Problems.


64 Political Diaries of Scott, pp. 381–90.


66 Speaker, ii (1900–1), 184–5, 19 May 1900; ibid., 687–9, 29 Sept. 1900; ibid., iii. 556, 23 Feb. 1901; ibid., 663, 23 March 1901; ibid., v (1901–2), 633–4, 8 March 1902.


Peace with Ireland Council—according to its chief organizer, George Berkeley, Hammond was the council’s best pamphleteer. Hammond, his wife Barbara, and his sister-in-law, Katherine Bradby, all wrote articles on Ireland for the radical press in these years, and all visited Ireland early in 1921, even though Hammond feared ‘my name will [hardly] be a passport to official favour or the favour of the Black and Tans’, and Katherine Bradby was in fact arrested in Ireland by Crown forces.

Hammond’s writings during the ‘troubles’ appear to have been motivated by two convictions. The first was that the part being played by England in Ireland was contrary to her most cherished traditions of liberty, constitutionalism and fair play, the same ideals which had been used to legitimate British participation in the recent world war in the eyes of Liberals and others:

For two years Ministers had pursued a policy, step by step, of which this at least cannot be disputed, that if it is a wise policy, then Prussia was wiser than England, Turkey was wiser than Prussia, and the Englishmen who died in Flanders or the East died, like Cavaliers, for a mistaken sentiment.

The Lloyd George government’s repression in Ireland was the antithesis of Hammond’s ideal of Englishness; he did not see how any true Englishman could endorse it: ‘I do not advise Englishmen who want to be happy to go to Cork, for it is a place where any Englishman who is not proud to be a Prussian would be thankful to be a Hottentot’.

Additionally, Hammond and his fellow Liberals believed that the British electorate had been misled as to this reality by government propaganda, a symbol of the demoralization of politics as a result of this same war: The war created a new political art. In previous wars, combatants had used propaganda, but never on such a scale, or with such elaborate energy or to so wide an audience as the last war. Propaganda conducted under such circumstances is naturally under very little restraint. Our party politicians have discovered that

73 Bodl. Libr., MS. Gilbert Murray 140 fo. 203, Hammond to Murray, 5 Feb. 1921. Hammond was perhaps thinking here of the threats made to Hugh Martin by Crown forces at Tralee in Nov. 1920, which caused something of a scandal in the radical press (see DN, 3 Nov. 1920, p. 1a-c; Nation, xxviii (1920–1), 177, 180, 6 Nov. 1920).
76 Nation, xxviii (1920–1), 603–4, 29 Jan. 1921; ibid., p. 771, 5 March 1921.

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propaganda, so important a tool of war, may be made as important a part of peace. The Irish question is the chief example of this method.\(^\text{77}\)

Hammond’s journalistic activities did not cease with the Anglo-Irish truce of July 1921. Late in 1921 Hammond wrote a series of important *Manchester Guardian* articles, under the pseudonym ‘Politicus’, which called for the incorporation of Ulster in a self-governing Ireland,\(^\text{78}\) and opposed the resumption of Anglo-Irish hostilities in the event of a breakdown in the negotiations between Sinn Fein and the British government.\(^\text{79}\) But for Hammond, as for other new Liberals, Lloyd George’s Irish policy was redeemed by the treaty of December 1921, which was seen as the Liberal party’s aim for ‘the long years during which it wandered in the wilderness’ ‘achieved in its fullest measure’.\(^\text{80}\) Although Liberals disliked the partition of Ireland, they imagined the achievement of Irish unity could not ‘be long delayed’.\(^\text{81}\) New Liberals were not supporters of the idea of an Irish republic, and sided with the pro-treaty party against de Valera’s anti-treatyites in the Irish civil war.\(^\text{82}\) In fact, many years later, Hammond found it impossible to forgive the Irish republican leaders de Valera and Childers for the Irish civil war of 1922–3, regarding them as responsible for ‘Irish bloodshed for bloodshed’s sake’.\(^\text{83}\)

In this context, it would clearly be misleading to suggest that, even over a decade after the treaty, Hammond could write his *Gladstone and the Irish Nation* from a position of ideological neutrality. In fact, as Hammond admitted to Murray, ‘that old man [Gladstone] fascinates me still. My father made him a sort of fourth person of the Trinity’.\(^\text{84}\) Hammond’s *Gladstone and the Irish Nation* was commissioned by Baron Gladstone of Hawarden shortly after the appearance of two important publications which had dealt in some detail with Gladstone’s relations with other protagonists of the first two home rule crises: J. L. Garvin’s three biographical volumes on Joseph Chamberlain (1932–4), and Henry Harrison’s *Parnell Vindicated* (1931). Lord Gladstone was clearly concerned to protect the reputation of his distinguished father.\(^\text{85}\) Hammond had just been working with his wife on


\(^{78}\) *MG*, 16 Nov. 1921, p. 7c.

\(^{79}\) *MG*, 28 Nov. 1921, p. 7a-b; *ibid.*, 2 Dec. 1921, p. 9d-e. For Hammond’s authorship of these articles, see Nat. Libr. Ireland, Berkeley papers, MS. 10,920/5, B. C. Waller to Berkeley, 8 Dec. 1921.

\(^{80}\) *MG*, 8 Dec. 1921, p. 6b-c; *ibid.*, 7 Dec. 1921, p. 10c.

\(^{81}\) ‘Politicus’ [Hammond] in *MG*, 8 Dec. 1921, p. 10a-b; *ibid.*, 7 Dec. 1921, p. 6b-c; *Nation*, xxx (1921–2), 455, 17 Dec. 1921; H. Martin in *DN*, 11 Aug. 1922, pp. 3a, 4b.

\(^{82}\) *Nation*, xxx (1921–2), 523–4, 31 Dec. 1921; *DN*, 10 Apr. 1922, p. 4b.

\(^{83}\) Bodl. Libr., MS. Gilbert Murray 141 fos. 216–18, Hammond to Murray, 28 Nov. 1948; *ibid.*, MS. Gilbert Murray 549 fos. 82–3, Hammond to Lady Mary Murray, 4 Feb. 1932.


biographies of two other Liberal home rulers, James Stansfeld and C. P. Scott. Hammond's wife also assisted him with *Gladstone and the Irish Nation*, as did Edith Stopford, ex-secretary of the Peace with Ireland Council. Hammond was closely advised by the veteran Liberal Lord Crewe, who informed him that Irish home rule was in no way fundamental to Liberalism: 'what made most Liberals accept the scheme of Home Rule was their conviction that Ireland was not really self-governing, added to their belief that a national demand ought to be [conceded] unless some paramount reason of public safety forbids it.' Hammond certainly shared this, the view of 'most Liberals'.

Hammond's book was in fact an effort to vindicate Gladstone and Liberalism in a highly unfavourable political context. The post-war world was uncongenial to the generation of progressive Liberals who had hoped for a progressive alliance between Liberal brains and leadership on the one hand, and the numerical strength provided by Labour on the other. Many other institutions valued by new Liberals were under threat; not just the Liberal party, but progressive government, liberal democracy, capitalism, the British commonwealth and the League of Nations, all seemed in decline. In the years when Hammond completed the book, the British empire suffered three serious blows: its position in Africa was challenged by the Italian invasion of Abyssinia, its safety in Europe was disturbed by the rise of Hitler's Germany, and the Anglo-Irish treaty itself seemed to have been wiped out by the policies of the Taoiseach, Eamon de Valera.

In this context, Hammond's wish was that an appropriate Liberal leader had been in place to save the peace of the world by means of a 'Gladstonian gesture': not a concession from weakness such as those of the Baldwin and Chamberlain governments, but a concession such as might have been suggested by Gladstone's spirit of internationalism and sense of justice. In

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89 DN, 24 Jan. 1920, p. 4d-e; Bodl. Libr., MS. Gilbert Murray 549 fos. 13–15, Barbara Hammond to Lady Mary Murray, 10 Jan. 1924; MG, 29 Apr. 1938, p. 10b–c; Blaazer, *passim*.
the nineteen-thirties, Hammond declared that 'half a century of disaster' to England's global position resulted from 1886:

If England had then followed Mr. G[ladstone], and given Ireland Home Rule, we should have averted the very grave consequences of being forced to violence in 1921. To the rest of the world we must seem to have given up Ireland, Egypt and India because we were too weak of will or otherwise to keep them.  

Home rule would have strengthened the empire more than Unionist policy ever could:

Does anybody doubt that if the Great War had come, not in 1914 when there was a Home Rule Bill on the Statute book, but in 1904, Ireland, instead of sending a quarter of a million of Nationalist soldiers to fight for the Allies, would have been from the first day of the war to the last a greater danger to the British Empire than she was a few weeks in 1796 when Hoche's army was tossing on the seas?  

The Unionist resistance to Gladstone had thus cost the empire dear. Hammond believed it was based primarily on two irrational factors. First, there was hypocrisy. England postured as the 'mother of free institutions; the friend of Italy in her struggle', yet oppressed Irish nationality: 'Great Britain could not expect that there should be one law in history for Europe and another for the British Empire'.  

Second, there was the 'intense national pride of the ruling classes', their 'purely nationalist outlook' compounded of 'insolence of race', militarism and 'Prussianism'. Hammond tried to show that these factors lay at the heart of Unionism by citing Salisbury's famous 'Hottentot' speech of 1 May 1886, and The Times of 11 February 1886, a favourite quotation of Hammond's which drew an analogy between Unionist attitudes and Bismarck's repressive policy in Poland, declaring the latter a fine example to the British empire. Hammond's co-worker, Edith Stopford, similarly regarded the Unionist leader Joseph Chamberlain as a 'spiritual father of the Nazis'.  

Hammond's hypothesis thus had the same strength as Liberal policy in Ireland itself; like Gladstone, Hammond was capable of an eloquent appeal to popular ideals of justice. But Liberals had always tended to shirk the details and difficulties of home rule; Gladstone and his party had avoided tying their case for home rule to a specific measure as much as possible.  

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94 Ibid., p. 733.
95 Ibid., pp. 730, 521.
96 Ibid., p. 470.
97 Ibid., pp. 468–9: Cooke and Vincent, pp. 79–82.
100 DN, 1 Feb. 1912, p. 4c.
101 M. Barker, Gladstone and Radicalism: the Reconstruction of Liberal Policy in Britain, 1885–94 (Hassocks, 1975), pp. 54–75.

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and the *Manchester Guardian* had been similarly confused in 1886, supporting Gladstone’s Home Rule Bill in spite of its opposition to Gladstone’s proposed exclusion of the Irish M.P.s from Westminster. Hammond criticized Gladstone’s ‘method and procedure’ in 1885–6, believing that his treatment of Chamberlain ‘revealed Gladstone at his worst’. Hammond also recognized Gladstone’s limitations over the Ulster difficulty: ‘nobody would deny the claim of Ulster to separate treatment’. But to some extent, Hammond shared the Liberals’ propensity to gloss over this flaw in home rule, and he echoed Hobhouse’s 1912 dismissal of partition:

The difficulty was that the hostility of Ulster was to the whole scheme of Home Rule and that the Ulster opponents wanted, not concessions to their special circumstances, but the destruction of the Bill . . . they were not ready to consider any plan for securing their own liberties . . . Ulster was indeed just the kind of problem that was insoluble until there was agreement on the principle of Home Rule.

British home rulers had also for long been troubled by the task of predicting the nature of Irish politics under self-government. Many of their anticipations were very wide of the mark: the *Manchester Guardian* typically suggested that the ‘division of Ireland into Protestants and Catholics, Nationalists and Unionists’ would die out under home rule, thus producing a state of amity between Ireland and Britain. Liberals expected a ‘new Ireland’ to emerge under home rule, with new parties and new party political divisions. In particular, they anticipated that an all-Ireland labour party would emerge, cutting across sectarian divisions with an appeal to the working class of both Catholic and Protestant denominations: ‘The Union is dead, and cannot be revived, and when the Protestant corner realises that fact, it is very probable that it will become not the right but the left wing of a reconstituted Irish Nationalism’. Of course, in the event, no strong non-sectarian labour movement emerged in Ireland after the treaty.

Relations between Britain and nationalist Ireland after self-government had eventually been granted were also often less than friendly—a fact which Hammond felt uneasy about dealing with in his book. In 1932, Hammond had indicated a desire to include a ‘brief epilogue . . . bringing up to date the legislative history of Ireland’. De Valera’s revision of the treaty settlement in the next six years seems to have forced him to reconsider. For all his

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102 *MG*, 5 Apr. 1886, p. 5b-c; *ibid.*, 9 Apr. 1886, p. 5a-b.
104 Bodl. Libr., MS. Hammond 25 fos. 112c, 113, Crewe to Hammond, 25 Jan., 1 Feb. 1937. Recent historians have agreed with Hammond here (see Loughlin, *passim*).
106 *MG*, 12 Aug. 1912, p. 6b-c.
107 *DN*, 10, 13, 17, 20, 24, 27 June 1901, p. 5; *ibid.*, 14 Nov. 1913, p. 8d; *ibid.*, 22 Nov. 1913, p. 6b-c.
108 *Nation*, xii (1912–13), 90, 12 Oct. 1912; *ibid.*, xi (1912), 148–9, 4 May 1912.
Liberalism, Hammond seems to have regarded the maintenance of the British empire/commonwealth, and Ireland's place within it, as a 'paramount reason of public safety'.

The suggestion that the Irish people regarded their own sense of nationality as fundamentally antipathetic to the commonwealth, and were prepared to go to extreme lengths to express this, thus led such Liberals to adopt a rather Salisburian discourse, and ponder the 'strain of ruthless cruelty in the Irish character'. Aspects of the experience of self-government in Ireland did in fact appear, as The Observer noted, to confirm 'the worst forecast of the most inflexible school of Unionism', rather than Liberal predictions.

But Hammond managed to ignore this practical experience in Gladstone and the Irish Nation, with the aid of an argument which seems rather like sleight of hand. He supposed that home rule in 1886 was the same concession shown by the treaty of 1921 to have been inevitable. Yet he also suggested that the undoing of the treaty settlement in 1932–8 cast no aspersions on the accuracy of Gladstone's belief that a demonstration of goodwill would produce amity in Anglo-Irish relations. Gladstone had sought to create a self-governing Ireland in circumstances 'more favourable for co-operation' than those of 1921: 'everything that has happened since has vindicated his belief that Great Britain was losing her best opportunity of creating friendship and mutual respect between the two peoples'.

The Liberals had after all seen their imperial policy of self-government vindicated by events in South Africa. They were confident that human nature everywhere was equally sane. They thus had to attribute the fact that the same policy seemed to fail in Ireland to an error in its execution for which they blamed their opponents:

If Home Rule had been granted, as [Gladstone] wished to grant it, freely instead of grudgingly, before instead of after the rise of Sinn Fein, its results would have been more satisfactory. If free institutions are to produce their full healing effect they must be given in the right spirit and at the right time.

With this language of the lost 'opportunity', derived from a perspective which distorted the complex reality of Anglo-Irish relations by simplifying them into a single question, Hammond was able to justify Gladstone's, and other Liberals', attitudes to Irish politics.

Hammond's wider purpose in writing Gladstone and the Irish Nation was wholly consistent with the Grand Old Man's Irish mission. Gladstone had
tried to form a ‘union of hearts’ between Britain and Ireland. Hammond attempted to revive this project through the medium of a defence of Gladstone. He had a suspicion that Ireland was ‘ungrateful’ towards English Liberals’ long efforts for the country, whereas, ‘if Gladstone’s efforts were well understood, if it were known in Ireland with what single-minded devotion he pursued the great purpose of her freedom, if there were no shred of suspicion of his motives and methods, he would be remembered only with gratitude’.

As Gladstone and the Irish Nation appeared on bookshelves, this might have seemed a realistic possibility. Thanks to one widely applauded piece of ‘appeasement’ by Neville Chamberlain, Anglo-Irish relations had taken a turn for the better; the quarrel of 1932–8 had been resolved. But this proved to be another in a long series of false dawns: once Eire stayed neutral during the Second World War, this latest celebration of a ‘new atmosphere of appeasement’ in Anglo-Irish relations was shown to be as premature as those of December 1921 and December 1925.

In 1948, the year before his death, Hammond was thus disappointed, but not surprised, to hear from his friend Gilbert Murray that the Irish preferred ‘Salisbury to Gladstone because “They preferred the old fox who couldn’t be fooled to the old fool who could always be foxed”’. Hammond observed: ‘Their ingratitude to Liberals is certainly an unpleasant quality. Crewe said to me that it was painful to think the Gladstone Memorial Committee, having made four statues of Gladstone, were warned that it would not be safe to put up one of them as they had meant in Ireland.’

Southern Ireland soon confirmed its status as a republic outside the commonwealth, and the British government legislatively reaffirmed the hated principle of partition. Perhaps even Hammond would then have agreed with Murray that the Irish were ‘only important as a bad example to others’. Liberals must have thought it a poor end to over half a century of endeavour on behalf of ‘that ungrateful country’.

It has been shown that Gladstone and the Irish Nation must be seen as an effort to justify Liberalism in general, and Liberal Irish policy in particular, in a world that had not turned the Liberals’ way. Hammond’s book was squarely in the new Liberal tradition as much because it dealt with Ireland as for any other reason. But Hammond’s life-long efforts for Anglo-Irish amity

118 Hammond, Gladstone and the Irish Nation, p. ix.
119 McMahon, pp. 218–82; The Times, 26 Apr. 1938, p. 17b-c; MG, 26 Apr. 1938, p. 10b.
120 MG, 8 Dec. 1921, p. 6b-c; ibid., 9 Dec. 1925, p. 10b-c.
122 Ibid., MS. Gilbert Murray 141 fos. 216–18, Hammond to Murray, 28 Nov. 1948.
experienced frequent disappointment, if not disillusionment. Like most Liberals, he never really got to grips with the way collective identity in Ireland, unlike that in contemporary England, was generated by negative and not positive points of association. As events were to demonstrate, Irish nationalists desired independence from Britain as much for its own sake, as much for the symbolism of ridding their country of as many Anglicized elements as possible, as for any practical benefits it would bring. Hammond was unquestionably an English patriot, whose patriotism was based on a sincere belief in the distinct contribution of English heritage to global ideas of freedom, toleration and democracy. He could never understand that the strongest focus of Irish nationalism was often simple hostility to England, just as he could not grasp the fact that the strongest focus of Ulster Unionism was distrust and fear of ‘the other lot’.

Liberal efforts for political compromise in Ireland were thus destined to be far more difficult than Hammond and others imagined.126 As Hammond wrote *Gladstone and the Irish Nation*, neither the present nor the future of Anglo-Irish relations offered him much consolation; the past remained. Hammond’s friend, C. P. Scott, that other grand old man of Liberalism with a long-term Irish ‘mission’, who formed the object of another Hammond biography, had at least died at a time when the union of hearts might have appeared close to its achievement, in January 1932. Hammond lived on to fight the cause in another difficult era. By 1938, new Liberalism had fallen into a deep sleep, perhaps never to awake; it was left to dream of what might have been.