Chapter VII

The Creation of the Heterogeneous Nation

The problem of a federal empire founded on the sole foundation that is firm and secure, the creation of a true psychological unity, — an empire that has to combine heterogeneous elements, — resolves itself into two different factors, the question of the form and the question of the reality which the form is intended to serve. The former is of great practical importance, but the latter alone is vital. A form of unity may render possible, may favour or even help actively to create the corresponding reality, but it can never replace it. And, as we have seen, the true reality is in this order of Nature the psychological, since the mere physical fact of political and administrative union may be nothing more than a temporary and artificial creation destined to collapse irretrievably as soon as its immediate usefulness is over or the circumstances that favoured its continuance are radically or even seriously altered. The first question, then, that we have to consider is what this reality may be which it is intended to create in the form of a federal empire; and especially we have to consider whether it is to be merely an enlargement of the nation-type, the largest successful human aggregate yet evolved by Nature, or a new type of aggregate which is to exceed and must tend to supersede the nation, as that has replaced the tribe, the clan and the city or regional state.

The first natural idea of the human mind in facing such a problem is to favour the idea which most flatters and seems to continue its familiar notions. For the human mind is, in the mass, averse to a radical change of conception. It accepts change most easily when its reality is veiled by the continuation of a habitual form of things or else by a ceremonial, legal, intellectual or sentimental fiction. It is such a fiction that some think to
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create as a bridge from the nation-idea to the empire-idea of political unity. That which unites men most securely now is the physical unity of a common country to live in and defend, a common economic life dependent on that geographical oneness and the sentiment of the motherland which grows up around the physical and economic fact and either creates a political and administrative unity or keeps it to a secure permanence once it has been created. Let us then extend this powerful sentiment by a fiction; let us demand of the heterogeneous constituents of the empire that each shall regard not his own physical motherland but the empire as the mother or at least, if he clings to the old sentiment, learn to regard the empire first and foremost as the greater mother. A variation of this idea is the French notion of the mother country, France; all the other possessions of the empire, although in English phraseology they would rather be classed as dependencies in spite of the large share of political rights conceded to them, are to be regarded as colonies of the mother country, grouped together in idea as France beyond the seas and educated to centre their national sentiments around the greatness, glory and lovelableness of France the common mother. It is a notion natural to the Celtic-Latin temperament, though alien to the Teutonic, and it is supported by a comparative weakness of race and colour prejudice and by that remarkable power of attraction and assimilation which the French share with all the Celtic nations.

The power, the often miraculous power of such fictions ought not for a moment to be ignored. They constitute Nature’s most common and effective method when she has to deal with her own ingrained resistance to change in her mentalised animal, man. Still, there are conditions without which a fiction cannot succeed. It must in the first place be based on a plausible superficial resemblance. It must lead to a realisable fact strong enough either to replace the fiction itself or eventually to justify it. And this realisable fact must progressively realise itself and not remain too long in the stage of the formless nebula. There was a time when these conditions were less insistently necessary, a time when the mass of men were more imaginative,
unsophisticated, satisfied with a sentiment or an appearance; but as the race advances, it becomes more mentally alive, self-conscious, critical and quick to seize dissonances between fact and pretension. Moreover, the thinker is abroad; his words are listened to and understood to an extent unprecedented in the known history of mankind: and the thinker tends to become more and more an inquisitor, a critic, an enemy of fictions.

Is then this fiction based upon a realisable parallel,— in other words, is it true that the true imperial unity when realised will be only an enlarged national unity? or, if not, what is the realisable fact which this fiction is intended to prepare? There have been plenty of instances in history of the composite nation and, if this parallel is to be accepted as effective, it is such a composite nation on a large scale which it is the business of the federal empire to create. We must, therefore, cast a glance at the most typical instances of the successful composite nation and see how far the parallel applies and whether there are difficulties in the way which point rather to the necessity of a new evolution than to the variation of an old success. To have a just idea of the difficulties may help us to see how they can be overcome.

The instance most before our eyes both of the successfully evolved composite or heterogeneous nation and of the fortunately evolving heterogeneous empire is that of the British nation in the past and the British Empire in the present,— successfully, but, fortunately, with a qualification; for it is subject to the perils of a mass of problems yet unsolved.¹ The British nation has been composed of an English-speaking Anglo-Norman England, a Welsh-speaking Cymric Wales, a half-Saxon, half-Gaelic English-speaking Scotland and, very imperfectly, very partially, of a Gaelic Ireland with a mainly Anglo-Scotch colony that held it indeed by force to the united body but was never able to compel a true union. Ireland was, until recently, the element of failure in this formation and it is only now and under another form and other circumstances than its other members that

¹ It must be remembered that this was written some decades ago and circumstances and the Empire itself have wholly changed; the problem, as it was then, no longer poses itself.
some kind of unity with the whole, still precarious and with
the empire, not with the British nation, is becoming possible,
although even yet it has hardly begun to be real. What were
the determining circumstances of this general success and this
partial failure and what light do they shed on the possibilities
of the larger problem?

In building up her human aggregates, Nature has followed
in general principle the same law that she observes in her physical
aggregates. She has provided first a natural body, next, a com-
mon life and vital interest for the constituents of the body, last, a
conscious mind or sense of unity and a centre or governing organ
through which that common ego-sense can realise itself and act.
There must be in her ordinary process either a common bond of
descent or past association that will enable like to adhere to like
and distinguish itself from unlike and a common habitation,
a country so disposed that all who inhabit within its natural
boundaries are under a sort of geographical necessity to unite.
In earlier times when communities were less firmly rooted to
the soil, the first of these conditions was the more important. In
settled modern communities the second predominates; but the
unity of the race, pure or mixed — for it need not have been
one in its origin — remains a factor of importance, and strong
disparity and difference may easily create serious difficulties in
the way of the geographical necessity imposing itself with any
permanence. In order that it may impose itself, there must be
a considerable force of the second natural condition, that is to
say, a necessity of economic unity or habit of common suste-
nance and a necessity of political unity or habit of common vital
organisation for survival, functioning and aggrandisement. And
in order that this second condition may fulfil itself in complete
force, there must be nothing to depress or destroy the third in
its creation or its continuance. Nothing must be done which
will have the result of emphasising disunity in sentiment or
perpetuating the feeling of separateness from the totality of the

2 This was written when Home Rule seemed to be a possible solution; the failure has
now become a settled fact and Ireland has become the independent Republic of Ireland.
rest of the organism; for that will tend to make the centre or
governing organ psychologically unrepresentative of the whole
and therefore not a true centre of its ego-sense. But we must
remember that separatism is not the same thing as particularism
which may well coexist with unity; it is the sentiment of the
impossibility of true union that separates, not the mere fact of
difference.

The geographical necessity of union was obviously present
in the forming of the British nation; the conquest of Wales and
Ireland and the union with Scotland were historical events which
merely represented the working of this necessity; but the unity
of race and past association were wholly absent and had with
greater or less difficulty to be created. It was effected successfully
with Wales and Scotland in a greater or less lapse of time, not at
all with Ireland. Geographical necessity is only a relative force;
it can be overridden by a powerful sentiment of disunion when
nothing is done effectively to dissolve the disintegrating impul-
sion. Even when the union has been politically effected, it tends
to be destroyed, especially when there is within the geographical
unity a physical barrier or line of division sufficiently strong to
be the base of conflicting economic interests,—as in that which
divides Belgium and Holland, Sweden and Norway, Ireland and
Great Britain. In the case of Ireland, the British rulers not only
did nothing to bridge over or dissolve this line of economic
division and counteract the sentiment of a separate body, a
separate physical country, in the Irish mind, but by a violent
miscalculation of cause and effect they emphasised both in the
strongest possible manner.

In the first place, the economic life and prosperity of Ireland
were deliberately crushed in the interests of British trade and
commerce. After that it was of little use to bring about, by means
which one shrinks from scrutinising, the political “union” of the
two islands in a common legislature, a common governing or-
gan; for that governing organ was not a centre of psychological
unity. Where the most vital interests were not only different but
in conflict, it could only represent the continued control and
assertion of the interests of the “predominant partner” and the
continued subjection and denial of the interests of the foreign body bound by legislative fetters to the larger mass but not united through a real fusion. The famine which depopulated Ireland while England thrrove and prospered was Nature’s terrible testimony to the sinister character of this “union” which was not unity but the sharpest opposition of the most essential interests. The Irish movements of Home Rule and separatism were the natural and inevitable expression of Ireland’s will to survive; they amounted to nothing more than the instinct of self-preservation divining and insisting on the one obvious means of self-preservation.

In human life economic interests are those which are, ordinarily, violated with the least impunity; for they are bound up with the life itself and the persistent violation of them, if it does not destroy the oppressed organism, provokes necessarily the bitterest revolt and ends in one of Nature’s inexorable retaliations. But in the third order of the natural conditions also British statesmanship in Ireland committed an equally radical mistake in its attempt to get rid by violence of all elements of Irish particularism. Wales like Ireland was acquired by conquest, but no such elaborate attempt was made to assimilate it; after the first unease that follows a process of violence, after one or two abortive attempts at resistance, Wales was left to undergo the peaceful pressure of natural conditions and its preservation of its own race and language has been no obstacle to the gradual union of the Cymric race and the Saxon in a common British nationality. A similar non-interference, apart from the minor problem of the Highland clans, has resulted in a still more rapid fusion of the Scotch race with the English. There is now in the island of Great Britain a composite British race with a common country bound together by the community of mingled blood, by a settled past association in oneness, by geographical necessity, by a common political and economic interest, by the realisation of a common ego. The opposite process in Ireland, the attempt to substitute an artificial process where the working of natural conditions with a little help of management and conciliation would have sufficed, the application of old-world methods to a
new set of circumstances has resulted in the opposite effect. And when the error was discovered, the result of the past Karma had to be recognised and the union has had to be effected through the method demanded by Irish interests and Irish particularist sentiments, first by the offer of Home Rule and then by the creation of the Free State and not under a complete legislative union.

This result may well reach beyond itself; it may create the necessity of an eventual remodelling of the British Empire and perhaps of the whole Anglo-Celtic nation on new lines with the principle of federation at the base. For Wales and Scotland have not been fused into England with the same completeness as Breton, Alsatian, Basque and Provençal were fused into the indivisible unity of France. Although no economic interest, no pressing physical necessity demands the application of the federative principle to Wales and Scotland, yet a sufficient though minor particularist sentiment remains that may yet feel hereafter the repercussion of the Irish settlement and awake to the satisfaction and convenience of a similar recognition for the provincial separateness of these two countries. And this sentiment is bound to receive fresh strength and encouragement by the practical working out of the federative principle in the reorganisation, which one day may become inevitable, of the colonial empire hitherto governed by Great Britain on the basis of Home Rule without federation. The peculiar circumstances both of the national and the colonial formation and expansion of the races inhabiting the British Isles have indeed been such as to make it almost appear that this Empire has throughout been intended and prepared by Nature in her workings to be the great field of experiment for the creation of this new type in the history of human aggregates, the heterogeneous federal empire.

3 Home Rule now replaced by Dominion Status which means a confederation in fact though not yet in form.