

opposite pole, that unless rudely thrust on by a strong force behind him, he was apt to end to the rear of the point from which he started. The Conference began on the morrow, very tense, very earnest. MacDonald was temporising as ever. He said that the men who were responsible for the recruiting campaign were responsible for the imposition of Conscription, for the recruiting campaign had encouraged the Government to undertake policies which could not be carried through except by Conscription. The delegates knew that he himself had sent a letter to the Mayor of Leicester to be read in furtherance of the recruiting campaign.

Many of the delegates were Conscientious Objectors, at large for a brief space pending their appeals for exemption. James Maxton and others sent greetings from prison, others from barracks.

The much talked-of Bermondsey resolution, sponsored by Dr. Salter, that Socialists should refuse support to every war, had been shelved by a majority of one vote the year before. It was now adopted with but three dissentients. Henceforth it represented the policy of the I.L.P.<sup>1</sup> Yet C. H. Norman was induced to withdraw a proposal to give immediate practical application to it, by instructing I.L.P. Members of Parliament to vote against any further increase in the British Army.

Margaret Bondfield's suggestion that the Munitions Act should be amended rather than repealed, was swept aside.

A rift displayed itself in relation to Conscription and the Conscientious Objectors. Clement Bundock and Morgan Jones complained that the members of the I.L.P. executive had flinched from their original position. Before Conscription was enacted they had pledged themselves to resist it, and had called on the members of the party to do likewise. They had also expressed the hope that the I.L.P. might provide financial support for Objectors and their families. Later they had decided it would be inadvisable to establish a fund for this purpose, and when the Military Service Act became law, they had warned members and branches that any expressions or acts on their part which could be construed as an incitement to disobey the order for military service, might render those concerned, and the Party itself, liable under the Military Service Act and the D.O.R.A.

Such divisions and failings notwithstanding, the spirit of the gathering was that of a band of comrades facing great odds. "One half the manhood of the I.L.P. will be in prison before we meet again. We shall require to stand very near one another," Bruce Glasier said, in closing the conference.

<sup>1</sup> At Leeds, a year later, Dr. Salter moved a similar resolution in the form of a proposition to be laid before the Socialist International. Though Ramsay MacDonald opposed it with all his strategy, it was carried by 226 votes. Again practical application was rejected, by the shelving, by 178 votes to 62, of a resolution of the City of London branch that the I.L.P. members should henceforth vote against the war credits, as had been done by the German Minority Socialists. I had moved this resolution in the City of London branch of the I.L.P., which I had rejoined that year, having drifted away from it in the Suffragette struggles.

## CHAPTER XL

EASTER WEEK, 1916

WHILST still we were in Newcastle we opened the newspapers, and learnt that the Irish rebellion had taken place. The hopeless bravery of it, the coercion and the executions which followed, to me were a grief cutting deep as a personal sorrow. Connolly on the Albert Hall platform, in the days of the Dublin lock-out of 1913, quiet-mannered and serious, came back to my eyes; his voice, restrained and deep, with its undercurrent of strong emotion, rang in my ears. I mourned him as one who had lived laborious days in the service of human welfare; a man of pity and tenderness, driven to violent means, from belief that they alone would serve to win through to a better life for the people.

Tied up in my mind with Eva Gore Booth, her pacifist sister, strove thoughts of Constance Markiewicz, the brilliant dilettante; dabbling in art with her Polish count; driving a four-in-hand at Winston Churchill's Manchester bye-election in defence of the barmaids' right to serve behind the bar; ladling out soup to the starving poor in the Dublin lock-out; drilling her company of Boy Scouts.

Day by day came news of amazing doings: the little Republic of a week, established by a tiny majority, with promises of "equal rights and opportunities" for all citizens; the suppression of the rebels, with their "job lot" of old arms, by machine-guns, bombs, bayonets, and poison gas, massacres, imprisonments, executions.

Amid the destruction and the carnage shone the pure fire of idealism and bravery; Connolly, mortally wounded, carried out on a stretcher and strapped in position to be shot; the young lovers, beautiful Grace Gifford, art student, painted by Orpen as "Young Ireland," married in the prison to her poet, Joseph Plunkett,<sup>1</sup> on the morning of his execution.

Grave P. H. Pearse, the scholar and teacher of St. Enda's, Thomas MacDonagh, Tom Clark, Con Colbert,—fifteen of the company of young poets, glorious and radiant in their fervour for the renaissance of their national literature, of the old lovers of Ireland and the lads who burned to die for her were executed. Save Constance Markiewicz, all the signatories to the Republican Proclamation were gone to the death they had chosen, embracing her as a bride.

Their flame of romance extinguished, the world seemed darker, more sordidly ruthless in materialism and the rule of might. I felt it as a wound in the great comity of life, a dishonouring blot on our human escutcheon

<sup>1</sup> Son of Count George Plunkett.



that this had been. All that had happened in Ireland was but the logical issue of the great war-time propaganda that the small nations should take up the sword against their oppressors, and of the postponement of the Home Rule Act, which had been fairly won according to the Parliamentary constitution of our land.

Cutting across the tragic scene, with a fantastic recklessness which seemed to belong to another age, came the adventure of Roger Casement, landing from a German submarine off the Kerry coast, being captured, tried in London for high treason, and hung, on August 3rd. It was a strange fate for one who had been British Consul in Portuguese West Africa and the Congo Free State, and British Consul-General at Rio de Janeiro, who had been sent by the Government to investigate the atrocities practised upon the Indian labourers in the rubber forests of Peru, and who had been made a knight, G.C.M.G., for his services. Yet this was not stranger than that Carson, whom Casement had imitated in treasonable dealings with Germany, should have been made a British peer.

To me the death of James Connolly was more grievous than any, because his rebellion struck deeper than mere nationalism. It is a truism that countries held under an alien dominance remain politically stagnant, and to a large extent are culturally repressed. Recognition of this made me a supporter of Irish nationalism. Yet after national self-government had been attained, the social problems, with which we in England were wrestling, would still be present in Ireland. Some of the Irish deceived themselves with dreams that their compatriots had a keener sense of human solidarity, a greater esteem for liberty than other peoples, that the possessing classes were more altruistic, the workers more courageous and intelligent in their green isle of the west, than in any other part of the world. Were English rule but removed—they asserted—happy fraternity, without social strife, would readily establish itself. I was under no such illusions. I saw Ireland as she was; backward, politically, industrially, culturally. Connolly was of another order than these dreamers. He had engaged in the hard effort to organise Irish workers, whose status in most of the essential things of life was beneath that of the workers in this country. He was fully aware that the large conditions governing the position of the working class on both sides of the Irish Channel were of world extent. He had learnt this under the sharp tooth of experience, as a worker here and in the United States. He had buttressed experience by economic study. Though he had thrown in his lot with the Sinn Féin patriots, he remained an internationalist. By far the ablest personality in the Irish Labour movement, he was fitted to take a substantial share in developing Ireland's part in the world-wide social changes which slowly, and at times imperceptibly, are advancing to transform the face of human society. I knew that the Easter Monday rebellion was the first blow in an intensified struggle, which would end in Irish self-government, a necessary step in Irish evolution. I knew that the execution of the rebels had irrevocably ensured the ultimate success of their uprising. Yet Connolly was needed so seriously for the after-building; him at least, it seemed, Fate should have spared.

The sense of grief for it all, the passionate longing that this thing had not been, that the executions had been averted, were overwhelming. I wanted a gesture of love and solidarity, an act of humility under a common sorrow, from those of us, citizens of the more powerful nation, who felt shame that it should dominate. I thought of the joining by British lovers of Irish freedom with Irish, to raise a memorial, a fund to be settled upon the children of the dead. I broached the idea to Eva Gore Booth; she replied that the Irish would spurn such charity from British hands. Sadly I accepted her dictum.

Beside the central fact of the officially determined executions were the hideous by-products of the struggle: the suffering of helpless non-combatants, the sinister figure of Bowen Colthurst, the murder of Sheehy Skeffington and others in Portobello Barracks.

"Skeffy" as he was called, half in affection, half in derision, a little man in sandals, with a red beard, had been outstanding before the War and since, more outstanding in Dublin than he would have been in London, though he must have been essentially a minority man here too; a Socialist, an Internationalist, a Pacifist, an active upholder of women's right to equality, political, social, economic. His organ, the *Irish Citizen*, was the only women's suffrage paper in Ireland. He had opposed the War from its inception, and Conscription since first it was mooted. He had been sent to prison under the D.O.R.A., and had secured release by the hunger strike. A month before the rebellion he had written a pregnant letter to the English Press, predicting a rebellion by the Irish Nationalists should the oppressive attitude of the Dublin Castle administration be maintained, declaring that the militarists were goading the Irish Volunteers and Citizen Army to resistance, and preparing for a pogrom. This warning was not published in any English paper save the *New Statesman*. Skeffington had no part in the Easter rebellion, and was not in the confidence of the rebels. When the fighting broke out swarms of children and irresponsibles arose from deeply submerged poverty, to loot deserted buildings, broken open by shell fire. To check this, Skeffington invited men and women who would volunteer to prevent looting, to meet at the office of the Women's Franchise League, and posted a notice to this effect outside. Before his arrest he had actually saved several shops from being robbed, and had enlisted the help of many volunteers. His arrest was deliberate; for his description as a wanted man had been circulated at the bridge-heads he must pass on his way home. That he was accused of no illegal action, was proved at the subsequent official inquiry, for the charge sheet was produced, showing the words: "No charge" against his name; but he had already been imprisoned during the War for pacifist propaganda; he was regarded as a dangerous man, best under lock and key. What followed, as revealed at the subsequent trial and Royal Commission, and pieced together painfully by his widow from the evidence brought to her, seems a nightmare. He was taken out by Colthurst and some of his subordinates, and marched through the city as a hostage, with hands bound. A youth named Coade and another lad were coming out of church; Colthurst accosted them, telling them that martial law had been



proclaimed and he could shoot them like dogs. As Coade turned away Colthurst cried: "Bash him!" A subordinate officer felled the youth by a blow on the jaw with the butt end of his rifle. Then Colthurst shot him with his revolver as he lay. Skeffington, bound and helpless, older, braver, more human than his captors, protested with grief and horror at sight of this awful deed. Colthurst retorted ominously, with a warning to say his prayers, as he would probably be the next to die. Coade was left lying in his blood, and later was removed by ambulance to the barracks, where he died that night, without regaining consciousness. Further on the march another murder was committed by the war-maddened Colthurst. Again the pinioned hostage, whose hands had never been used for violence, voiced in impotent sorrow his agony and wrath. Poor Skeffington, the kindly lover of freedom, in his sandals and his knee-breeches, with his dialectic enthusiasms; he was not made for hideous scenes like this!

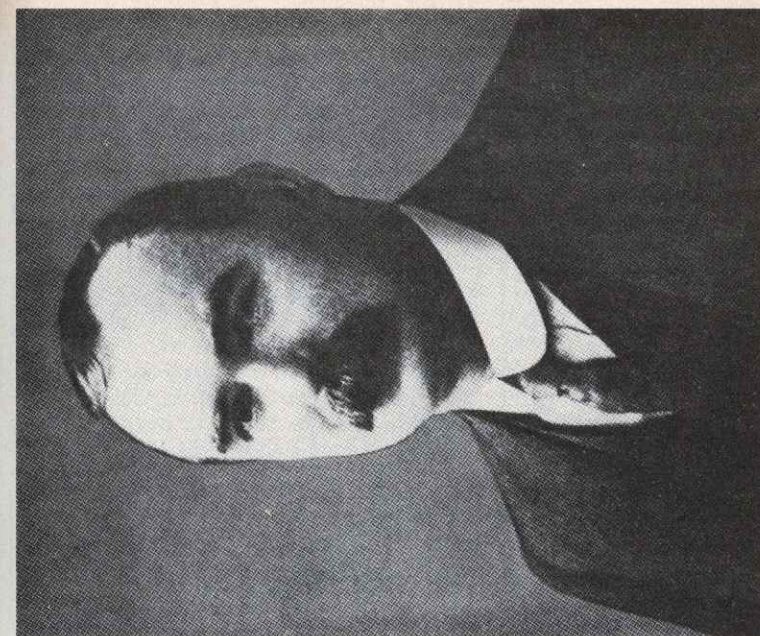
When, at the order of Colthurst, Skeffington and two other men were taken from their cells to be executed, the firing party shot him in the back without warning. He did not die then; but when later he was found to be alive, he was shot and killed by Colthurst's order.

Dickson and McIntyre, who were shot with him, were editors of loyalist papers, but they had been found on the premises of Alderman James Kelly, whom Colthurst mistook for Alderman Tom Kelly, a Sinn Féiner. Rough justice—it is all one may expect under martial law!

Major Sir Francis Vane, whose boast that he was creating a revolutionary "People's Army" before the War might have led one to anticipate otherwise, was one of the commanders of the British Army engaged in quelling the rebellion. He had forgotten his revolutionary sentiments when war broke out, and was prepared to serve the Army obediently, either in France or Ireland, as his superiors might direct. When apprised of the murders, he went to the officer commanding the barracks and demanded Colthurst's arrest. Instead he was presently directed to hand over his command to Colthurst. Rebuffed at Dublin Castle, he went to London and reported the matter to Kitchener. Kitchener telegraphed to General Maxwell, who refused to act. Vane was dismissed from service.<sup>1</sup>

Under pressure of public opinion and the brave persistence of the widow, Hannah Sheehy Skeffington, whose courage was proof against raids and firing into her home, the imprisonment of her servant, and countless attempts to terrorise her, Colthurst was brought to trial and found guilty but insane.

In the meantime other murders had been disclosed. Men who had taken no part in the rebellion were murdered in their homes, or led out by soldiers, and shot before their doors. A poor old father died of grief when his son, innocent of all offence, was shot with a companion, their bodies



JAMES CONNOLLY

By kind permission of Mrs. Sheehy Skeffington  
FRANCIS SHEEHY SKEFFINGTON

<sup>1</sup> On August 1st, 1916, King, Lynch, and O'Donnell alleged in Parliament that Sir J. Maxwell had discontinued the services of Sir Francis Vane, because he had reported the murders in Portobello Barracks, though General Maconochie reported he had rendered valuable service, and should be permitted to return to the Front.