A TERRIBLE BEAUTY IS BORN

I. THE RISING OF THE MOON

A. LLOYD-GEORGE’S LAST CHANCE

The smoke was still curling up from the ruins of downtown Dublin.

The Rising had fallen.
Already the dead were starting to live forever.

Now, if ever, was the time for the Welsh wizard to show a little of his magic.

And, for just a few days, it looked as if Lloyd-George would do it.

Dickering and wheedling behind the scenes, he brought the top Conservatives round to a compromise on Home Rule...

Home Rule now, not after the war, not five years hence, but now

26 southern counties got it at once.
The six counties of Ulster would be excluded.

... and only six — not the nine that the
1914 Home Rule bill had protected\(^1\)

And, to make it sweeter, Ireland didn’t have to give up its
MP’s in the Westminster Parliament – not a one of them.

As soon as the war was over, an Imperial Conference would work out

\(^1\) This was, beyond question, a very bitter bolus for the Unionists to swallow, and Carson gave in only reluctantlly – only on the assurance that exclusion would be permanent, and that by doing so, the excluded counties would have a firmer Protestant majority, sure for all time. Because if the three non-excluded Ulster counties (Donegal, Cavan and Monaghan – were added to the excluded ones, Protestants there would have a margin of 900,000 to 700,000. That wasn’t enough for safety. The six, by themselves, would have a majority of 825,000 to 430,000 – and that could keep Brother Taig down for good.

It should be added that the Home Rulers weren’t happy about the six, either. They had – all along – wanted the excluded to be FOUR counties. Fermanagh and Tyrone, they argued, ought to be kept in Home Rule. But Lloyd George knew that if you didn’t give the Ulster Protestants those two, the compromise was as good as dead: deader, even. Nicholas Mansergh, *The Unresolved Question: The Anglo-Irish Settlement and Its Undoing 1912-1972* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 93-94.
a lasting settlement for Ireland.

... which might well mean a government by all Ireland for all Ireland.²

² Except that, as George Dangerfield notes, any such prospect was an illusion. At the very time, in mid-late June, that Lloyd George had induced Redmond and Devlin to go along with temporary exclusion of Ulster, the press teemed with reports that Edward Carson had been promised permanent exclusion, and Arthur Balfour was circulating a memo to the Unionists in the Cabinet assuring them that the Lloyd George scheme would mean a permanent place in the United Kingdom to the six Ulster counties. So from the first, L-G was able to sell the deal by telling different sides different, irreconcilable things on the most important point at dispute. See George Dangerfield, The Damnable Question: A Study in Anglo-Irish Relations, 231-33.

This sounds devious. It wasn’t as devious as Dangerfield makes out. Lloyd George probably reasoned this way, because this is how other nationalists, with common sense, reasoned it: “temporary” and “permanent” exclusion were different only in being spelled differently. Of course it made a difference – on paper. But let’s say Ulster got five years free time, excluded from Home Rule. Do you think it would sit on its hands? Or would it lobby Parliament – build up its army – and get ready to make the military display of 1914 look like a Quaker prayer-meeting? Would there be any possible, practical way without bloody war, to force them into Home Rule if they had five years to arm against it?

It was so plain that even Edward Carson should have seen it. And if he did, how could he make a fuss about a simple word like “temporary”? Didn’t he know the Ulster men were winning the substance?

But, alas! Magicians do their miracles by illusions.

And this last hope for a peaceful end to Ireland’s troubles melted into thin air.

No sooner was the plan published than the Conservatives pulled the rug from under it.

Their leaders had no right to pledge them!
Several members of the Cabinet threatened to resign.

In the end, the Conservatives declared that they would accept it only with two changes:

– Ulster would sit in Parliament, but not southern Ireland
– Ulster would be excluded from the Home Rule plan for good.\(^3\)

These were poison pills, and they knew it.

There was no way that John Redmond could accept them.

But of course, many Unionists didn’t want him to accept him.

They didn’t want ANY kind of partition.
They didn’t want ANY kind of Home Rule.

And they had the votes to stop it – as long as they used the partition issue as a wedge.\(^4\)

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\(^3\) George Dangerfield, *The Damnable Question: A Study in Anglo-Irish Relations*, 237-39. The death-blow was given by Lord Lansdowne on July 11\(^{th}\) in a speech to the House of Lords.

\(^4\) Nicholas Mansergh, *The Unresolved Question: The Anglo-Irish Settlement and Its Undoing 1912-1972* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 95-96. We’d better see that Lord Lansdowne and the right wing of the Tories weren’t concerned at all with how many counties would be excluded or wouldn’t. Their opposition was to
Lloyd-George had promised Redmond that if the Irish Party would only stand by this measure, he would stand by it – stand or fall.

Now, if ever, he should have made the fight – or resigned in protest.

He did neither one. And lurking in the minds of the Irish people – even in the rather slow mind of John Redmond – must have been the suspicion that he never meant to...

That the whole scheme was meant to buy time with while tempers in Ireland cooled –

Home Rule itself, and they were entirely frank about that.
and then to be dropped.\footnote{George Dangerfield, \textit{The Damnable Question: A Study in Anglo-Irish Relations} (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1976), 223-242. Dangerfield, of course, suspects that Lloyd George was playing false all the time, that from June 11\textsuperscript{th} on, he wanted to keep negotiations going with the Irish nationalists only so that when the arrangements collapsed, some other hand would have performed the deed – such as, for instance, Lord Lansdowne. After all, Lloyd George’s first and chiefest desire that summer had nothing to do with Ireland. It was to be put in command of the War Office, the necessary first step on his way to chairmanship of an all-powerful small War Council that could give real direction – winning direction – to the terrible war in Flanders. In getting the War Office, he would need help from Tories and Unionists in general. A Home Rule bill wouldn’t do that. Its success (if such a miracle happened) would only make them angry at him; they would blame him for selling out Ireland and the War Office would flit beyond his reach. No, for his purposes, a failure to get Home Rule through – with some Irish belief that he \textit{woulda}, meant to, and \textit{wanted} to, if only – was what he most wanted. But the failure must not come at his hand.}

It’s an interesting notion, but it misses the real question: why would Lloyd George bother to start negotiations at all, especially negotiations he expected to see fail? What would there be in it for him? And if he was telling people contradictory – obviously contradictory things – then he must have known from the first that it would all come out, and his own deviousness would be on full display. And how would THAT help him with the Unionists that he needed, in order to get in command of the Government? Wouldn’t the smarter, safer thing be to leave Ireland to others, to find a solution?

The only other possibility is that Lloyd George really saw Ireland as in crisis, and felt that at least a show of trying to do something was necessary; and if he could even move along the two sides’ positions a little – say, to the negotiating position that six counties would definitely be excluded, but no more than six – then even if the
B. SINN FEIN ASCENDANT

For John Redmond and for the Irish Party, it was a political death-sentence.

Not against the shot-marked wall of the Kilmainham prison

but in the Cabinet-chamber, Home Rule had been shown up for the mirage it was.

Redmond had given in, and given in, and given in ... and then been hung out to dry.

He would die before the next election, a sick, exhausted, tired old man,
but not before that last bitter experience, of having a son

negotiations failed, the next time the talks picked up, there’d be more of a basis for working out some kind of deal. See Nicholas Mansergh, *The Unresolved Question: The Anglo-Irish Settlement and Its Undoing 1912-1972* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 99-100, for a less elaborate leaning in this direction.
killed in the war.6

Things never mended. They got worse:

a) the coming of America into the war brought an Allied win within reach.

But it also gave heart to the nationalists.

America had been the paymaster for Fenians and Parnellites.

Its cash bought the dynamite and the cop-killing guns.

It had always been for a free, independent Ireland.

Now it would be at the peace table, a strong force to make England unloose her grasp on Ireland.7

b) England needed men. 17% of the male population was in uniform.

But in Ireland? Less than 5%.

Again and again the Cabinet talked of applying the draft to Ireland....

6 Dangerfield, The Damnable Question, 266-68.

or even dragooning Irish workers to do farm work in France.\textsuperscript{8}

Maybe in return for another promise of Home Rule.

Ireland wasn’t buying. Rather than accept it, even Redmond’s own Home-rulers would walk out of Parliament.

And that, in April 1918 is just what they did.

They walked out, never to come back.

Behind them they had the voice of the church,
and the trade unions
and even the most conservative of the County councils.

And for one day, Ireland shut down completely, in a general strike.

By the last year of the war, the militants had a new stronger voice –

The Sinn Fein had woven together all the nationalist groups into a political party, one with no place for compromises.

\textsuperscript{8} But this needs a big caution. Ireland wasn’t sitting out the war. Lots and lots of Irish soldiers served. In proportion to the total size of the army from one end of the 1800s to the other, and up into the 1910s, a “British” soldier was more likely to be Irish than English, and more likely to be Catholic Irish than Protestant.

It was London Irish Territorials at Loos in 1914 who dribbled a soccer ball in front of them and shouted “Goal!” every time one reached a German trench. Irish contemporaries told how, when a Fusilier’s body came back from the front for a funeral in Dublin, or a person from the Dublin slums came back wounded, it spurred on recruiting wonderfully. The widow felt pride in the display; where else did they get the ceremony, the honor, the pomp, than this?

Nor did the Sinn Fein get anywhere recruiting Irish “green redcoats.” Many of them signed up for another tour of duty with the army after the war, and very few became IRA members, if any. British army life, whatever it did, didn’t radicalize or republicanize the Irish soldiers. Peter Karsten, “Irish Soldiers in the British Army, 1792-1922: Suborned or Subordinate?” \textit{Journal of Social History}, 17 (Fall 1983): 44-45, 46-47.
Ireland must be free, not Home Rule free, but independence free.

Sinn Feiners elected to Parliament wouldn’t go there.

They would set up a Parliament all their own, in Ireland.  

The further from cities you were, the hardier the bloom of nationalism.

For one thing, there were fewer cops or soldiers.

Neighbors were likelier to shelter outlaws, and of course, with no street lights, nights were a whole lot blacker.

For another, folks in the countryside were likelier than those in the city to join political movements.

This was where the nationalist clubs and societies were founded.

After all, country life is bor-r-r-r-r-ing. And a group activity gives you something to do.

A Sinn Fein Club isn’t just where you hear the same old harangues.
You get music and dancing and lectures and plays.

There’s a chance to drink together, and smoke, and talk things through, and also fight.

The places where the Land League had thriven, the Sinn Fein became the inheritor.

The more agricultural the area, the stronger the connexion.  

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10 For a far more sophisticated and thorough analysis, covering not just violence but fraternalism and politics, see David Fitzpatrick, “The Geography of Irish Nationalism, 1910-1921,” *Past & Present*, 78 (February 1978): 113-37. This correlation with the countryside may seem to fly against the study of Peter Hart, who didn’t find much correlation. But Hart wasn’t dealing with nationalism in all its phases. He was dealing strictly with violence. And the
Alongside them another party was growing, building, spreading, and it didn’t believe in politics at all: the Irish Republican Brotherhood.

The IRB believed in war.

When the general election came in late 1918, the Irish Party was wiped out.
It took just six seats in all Ireland.\(^{11}\)

Two thirds of the voters had never voted before.

And, outside of Ulster, 2/3ds is about what share of the vote Sinn Fein got.

**II. THE TIME OF TROUBLES, 1919-21**

**A. DAIL EIREANN, 1919**

Sinn Fein’s MP’s didn’t go to Westminster.

They held a parliament all their own, a national assembly, in Dublin.

It was a gathering of young men, most of them newcomers to government.

And most of them were city-dwellers, Dubliners mostly, and from the professional and middle classes.

At their head was Eamon de Valera, who they elected President of the Republic.

In his cabinet were nationalist names to conjure with...

Arthur Griffith (Home Affairs)

Michael Collins (Finance)

W. T. Cosgrave (Local Government)

Countess Markievicz (Labour)

They weren’t out for a republic. But they wanted something more than the Home Rule bill of 1914.

And these were names to set British teeth on edge.

De Valera, Cosgrave and the Countess had all sat in prison under sentence of death for their part in the Rising.

Collins had been among the fighters holding the Dublin Post Office that Easter week.

Any hopes of a happy outcome weren’t high, though.

Of the 69 members of the Dail (the new legislature), 34 were in prison without trial.

It took two months of pleading before the Government let them out.\textsuperscript{12}

The Dail set about making a court system for Ireland all its own.

In September 1919, the British government outlawed the Dail.

And it never recognized the courts.

\textsuperscript{12} Dangerfield, \textit{The Dammable Question}, 308-09.
Already, though, a separate fight was in the works.

De Valera might be more interested in getting American recognition of an Irish Republic, than in starting a war.

But when he left for the United States, to make Ireland’s case, he left the physical-force wing of Sinn Fein in command of the field.

That was an invitation to open war.\(^{13}\)

The Irish Volunteers had a new director of intelligence: Michael Collins.

He was a charming, brave, utterly ruthless killer.

He also was president of the supreme council for the IRB.\(^{14}\)

For two years, he had been building up his networks.

For nearly that long, he had been convinced that the Volunteers should drop their games ... their parading with guns and pikes ... and get the discipline of a real army.

They should also start doing what real armies do: kill their enemies.


\(^{14}\) Dangerfield, *The Damnable Question*, 294. The IRB is not the IRA. The Irish Republican Brotherhood stayed in the 19th century in its thinking. Its vision of victory was to take government buildings over, and have a great big revolution in the streets. Guerrila warfare? Absurd! Unmanly! Un-English! But De Valera and Griffith and their kind weren’t IRB at all; and they were the ones that set the pace for the revolutionary movement after 1916. They were connected to the Volunteers, instead.
The first order of business was to demoralize the police.

There were two kinds of cops in Ireland:
Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC)

Dublin Metropolitan Police

What Collins wanted wasn’t a conventional war. He wanted a military confrontation where the terms were unequal.

You paralyze the British machine by striking at individuals...

British “spies”

British servants — and any policeman, by keeping order, is a British servant.

Any policeman is a British ‘spy.’

Because without the police throughout Ireland, how could the British find any of them men on their “wanted” list?

Without them, the British government will be blind.

Collins started with simple intimidation and ostracism, to make the police resign.

It worked with some.

But others held firm. And they were marked for death.

Before the year was out, Collins had set up “the Squad”
They were a unit of full-time gunmen.

Their mission: to kill any detective involved in political work against the revolution, or anyone else helping them.

Twelve belonged. The “Twelve Apostles,” they came to be known.

C. THE IRA

Who Were IRA?

Let’s start out with a simple definition.

The IRA was the new name for the Volunteers.

Not all Volunteers stayed with it. But the members were the core of the IRA.

[the IRB wasn’t]

IRA was big, though it ebbed and flowed.

On paper, maybe 100,000 in 1918 and over 70,000 when the truce came in 1921.

By October, about ninety percent of them had dropped off the rolls. The IRA had split badly.

Most members were in the IRA as volunteers for only a few months.
Who were likeliest to be IRA?

– urban
– educated
– skilled

– at the start of their career.

You could find clerks and people who worked at a desk a lot more often than day-laborers.

There were some from the farms, but not a lot.

Most of them were in their late teens or twenties.

No more than one in 20 was over forty years old.

Most were unmarried, too. No more than about a tenth, perhaps.

They came from the first generation where schools taught the Irish language.

The more schools in their area that taught Irish, the more IRA members a neighborhood seemed to have.

But it was more than that. Many of them spoke no Irish at all.

What made them likelier to be in the IRA was the milieu of the city – more folks to talk and argue with.

You could be exposed to ideas and were easier for organizations
Later writers would talk about the IRA as a tightly organized military machine by 1920, and one that was really the Irish people armed.

The facts ain’t any such thing.

Most people in Ireland – most Catholics – didn’t belong to the IRA, and most of

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them weren’t at all sympathetic with it.\textsuperscript{16}

It was every county, every town for itself.

The members often didn’t know a thing about organization.  
They had no systematic training.

Quite a few members dropped out early.  
Others were kept in by threats and intimidation.

Their intelligence networks were legendary.  
“Mythical” might be a better word.

Usually, out in the sticks, the local IRA went it entirely blind.

The central command found it impossible to find what was going  
on, and often when it acted, went out gunning after  
the wrong man.

Remember this lack of central control.

It’s one reason why, when a Treaty was signed, the nationalists  
couldn’t bring the IRA to heel.

\textbf{BLACK AND TANS}

On the other side, as it became clear that the police couldn’t keep the peace,  
British authorities relied on a new and more uncontrolled force.

The Black & Tans were most of them army vets.

\textsuperscript{16} Charles Townshend, “The Irish Republican Army and th Development of Guerrilla Warfare, 1916-1921,”  
They were very Protestant, and very tough.

Four years of war can harden just about anybody.  They had fought England’s enemies abroad.

Now they fought a much less honorable enemy here – one who fought without uniforms ... went after unarmed people ... attacked the defenseless, women included... and ran away after it.\(^{17}\)

Soon, they got help from the Auxi’s – the Auxiliary Division, that was to be an extra branch of the RIC.

There were 2,214 of them before The Troubles ended.

An elite corps.\(^{18}\)

They got more pay than the Black & Tans.


\(^{18}\) We can get a pretty good sense of them from the Public Records. 281 of them had been decorated for gallantry in the war, which doesn’t make them much above the average for officers. But there were real war heroes among them. Three held the Victoria Cross. One other had the French medaille militaire. You had to do remarkable feats of courage to get that, if you were a junior ranker (which he was). Thirty one others were decorated for gallantry twice; seven had been three times decorated; two were decorated four times.

But the Auxis were a rough bunch. Yes, in the records, you can find mention of those who were killed in action. But far more of them are noted in the records as being dismissed for misconduct. In fact, by November 1920, fifty had been sacked that way. And some didn’t last a month. About forty others deserted. They had bad habits, like very heavy drinking. The Auxis was just the kind of profession a soldier would go into who had no job or who missed the good old days of fun in the war – and that, necessarily, meant people who’d had a chance to be officers and push people around, more often than not. See A. D. Harvey, “Who Were the Auxiliaries?” *Historical Journal*, 35 (September 1992): 665-669.
And they had dressed differently.\textsuperscript{19}

But they had the same reputation for cruelty.

Against that sort, you don’t play by gentleman’s rules.

\textbf{D. REVOLUTION}

We shouldn’t miss the horror.

Here is an island where murder is very rare indeed.

But between 1917 and June 1923, there would be

3,269 people killed
4,318 wounded

... by bombs or bullets alone

\textsuperscript{19} Dress code: Black & Tans wear the R. I. C. dark green trousers and caps, and army khaki for their coats. Auxis have better style: tam o’ shanters, khaki tunics, and puttees (officer’s gaiters, don’t you know). Later it changes to a dark blue tunic and Glengarry caps.
And that doesn’t count shootings in New York or mainland Britain – nor the 118 shootings done for agrarian rebellion, or the 43 during robberies or the 21 in labor disputes or the hundreds of accidental and self-inflicted casualties.

Add in the Easter Uprising, and the dead and wounded total over ten thousand.

Thousands more lost their homes or livelihoods.²⁰

The so-called war of independence had three stages:

1. Up to March 1920, most of the killing was done by Volunteers, against Irish cops who were simply doing their duty and not trying to do anything

provocative or fancy.\textsuperscript{21}

More than 20 serving in the RIC lost their lives and 40 more were wounded.

As new English recruits replaced the dead and those who resigned, they came with a tougher fibre and a keen readiness to pay injury with injury.

In this stage, the militant Fenians of the Michael Collins kind, took control of the non-revolutionary element still involved in politics.

They pushed the country into something that most Irish people hadn’t expected, and hadn’t wanted – open war with Britain and a fight for freedom.

Michael Collins had wanted this.\textsuperscript{22}

In doing so, he knew, the country would be forced to choose between submission and independence, and would go for independence.

\textsuperscript{21} Robert Kee, \textit{The Green Flag}, 698.

\textsuperscript{22} George Dangerfield, \textit{The Damnable Question: A Study in Anglo-Irish Relations}, 316. Police were not the only victims. Among the others killed, in reprisal, was Thomas MacCurtain, the Lord Mayor of Cork, who was shot down at his bedroom door.
2. The second phase went from spring through early fall of 1920.

   It was a time of anarchy.\textsuperscript{23}

   Law and order, imposed by the government, fell apart.

   Volunteers made it too unsafe for police to carry out their work.

   In its place, the rebels created their own law and order.

   To uphold themselves, the forces of British law sometimes countered with terror of their own – the Black and Tan recruits and the Auxiliaries.

   Even so, this happened sporadically, not generally.

   As late as October, you couldn’t find more than 1,500 Black and Tans in Ireland, and a mere 500 Auxiliaries.

\begin{center}
\textsuperscript{23} Robert Kee, \textit{The Green Flag}, 698.
\end{center}

3. Then came the third phase, the last – the worst.

   British presence was beefed up.

   So were the Black and Tans – a thousand more recruits every month.
By March 1921, there were 1,500 Auxiliaries in the field, too.\textsuperscript{24}

They succeeded in suppressing the rebel administration, and forcing it back underground.

But the IRA responded by new methods and more vicious ones.

Ambushes got bigger, and there were more of them.

The casualty figures tell how the second phase and the third phase differed.

In the first nine months of 1920, there were 125 people killed, 235 wounded among soldiers and police alone.

The next nine months? 400 killed and 700 wounded.

As for civilian casualties, neither side made a count of those.

Who was a civilian? A member of the IRA?

They wore no uniforms; but they were an army in the field.

\textsuperscript{24} Robert Kee, \textit{The Green Flag}, 698-99.
The best guess is that in the first half of 1921, 700 civilians were killed and more than 750 wounded.

Many of them were Irish Catholics friendly to the British government, shot by the IRA.

Many more were killed in cold blood by the forces of the Crown.

And quite a few were innocent bystanders in gun-battles between the IRA and the Crown.

It was a vicious, dirty war, with no gallantry and no rules.
A police inspector, standing with his wife outside a railroad depot.

Both were felled in a hail of bullets.

Three railwaymen, gunned down in retaliation by the Black & Tans...

Women were killed now, not just men.

Passengers on trains at the wrong time died in an ambush.

Or ladies coming back from a tennis game.

Police barracks were stormed.

Trains were stopped and patrolmen killed.\(^{25}\)

And in one case, IRA gunmen captured two Black and Tans and threw them, unwounded and alive, into the blazing furnace of an

Irish gas-works.\textsuperscript{26}

It is an open question whether the Black and Tans or the IRA killed more Irishmen, and more Catholic Irishmen.

But most experts say that of all the people killed or wounded, that we can attribute a killer to, the IRA did 71\% of the work.\textsuperscript{27}

And even if we include in all the Protestant violence against Catholics in Ulster in the early 1920s, the pattern holds.

In only one of the six counties did the violence even reach as high as six in the ten thousand people.

But in just about all of southern Ireland it was many times that high.

The further south the county, the more violent it was.

Go to just one district in County Cork, and you find 190 casualties – that’s eleven times as many as in the whole Protestant county of Antrim.

\textsuperscript{26} Patrick Riddell, \textit{Fire Over Ulster}, 37. This atrocity can be found in Edgar Holt, \textit{Protest in Arms}, 226.

And when you consider it in terms of violent acts per capita, that’s 128 times more violent.  

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Let’s start with Leinster province – southeast and eastern Ireland.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Longford</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louth</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westmeath</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queen’s</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilkenny</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King’s</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wexford</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlow</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kildare</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meath</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dublin</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wicklow</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Now go southward to Munster.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cork</td>
<td>39.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limerick</td>
<td>28.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tipperary</td>
<td>27.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerry</td>
<td>23.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clare</td>
<td>21.8 – the furthest north, along the borders of the Connaught province</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waterford</td>
<td>13.6 – the furthest east, along the borders of the Leinster province</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Now try Ulster. There are 9 counties in the traditional province. The worst by far are the most Catholic of them all.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monaghan</td>
<td>11.8 (75% Catholic, as of 1911)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Londonderry</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fermanagh</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armagh</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cavan</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyrone</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cavan</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Down</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antrim</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The puzzle is why some places were more violent than others. Lots of reasons. If there were no Protestants, the IRA didn’t have that many targets. If there were too many Protestants, the IRA didn’t have any place to hide. In some areas, there may have been a link between rugged landscape – hills and marshes – and the IRA; flatlands, wide open ones, just aren’t all that conducive to guerrilla warfare. But ultimately, as Peter Hart, “The Geography of Revolution in Ireland, 1917-1923,” Past & Present, 155 (May 1997): 160-73 makes clear, just about every correlation you think would work only works feebly, and works well in some places but not in others. In the end, it has a lot to do with the local ethos, political and cultural.
Laborers, farmers, and even schoolboys were swept up, accused of being British spies, and killed.

When one worker filled up a trench that the IRA had dug near his home, he was shot dead.

The manager of a catering company was found dead with an envelope pinned to him reading, “Beware of the IRA.”

His crime? He had been justice of the peace some years before.

Another man, shot on the roads by civilians.

His crime? He once had belonged to the British army.  

When Crown forces made reprisals, they picked just about anybody.

It was as if every Irish inhabitant was, automatically, an enemy now.

... a postmaster
... a county councillor
... a justice of the peace who had once been for Home Rule, because he made an affidavit

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in certain rebels’ favor.  

And always, the same rules applied:

– catch them in bed

– get them when they are asleep and can’t fight back

– don’t give them a chance to escape or know what’s coming.

In one incident, the IRA raided an infirmary and grabbed an unconscious man, a patient recovering from wounds he’d got, when the first attempt on his life was botched.

They finished the job right this time.  

An 80-year old Protestant clergyman was told that the Auxiliaries meant to take over his house.

Nobody asked his permission.

Nobody asked his permission right after that, before shooting him.

The IRA did that.

Then they burned down the house.

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30 This one being a JP in Cork; the Black & Tans did him on the night of Sunday, July 10th, 1921 – one of the last killings before the truce went into effect. Robert Kee, The Green Flag, 717.

31 He was a recruiting sergeant, and he was in the Cork South Infirmary. Robert Kee, The Green Flag, 703.
The war went beyond killing.

As 1921 started, the Army started making it official policy to burn houses near any place where an ambush had taken place.

It started taking civilian hostages along on its convoys, when it thought there was a chance of the IRA making an ambush.

And it took the power to arrest and jail suspects without trial.

Well over a thousand people were chucked into internment camps within a month.

All rebels taken in arms were to be shot on arrest.

There would be no prisoners.

... only executions by firing squad.

And what of the common run of Irish people, caught in the middle?

An Irish farmer might be taken out at gunpoint by the IRA and ordered to dig a trench, for sabotaging a military transport headed that way.

Next day, he might be taken out at gunpoint by the Black & Tans to fill it up again –

and be visited and shot, and his wife, too, when the IRA heard about it.
**Bloody Sunday**

November 21\textsuperscript{st}, 1920 opened when Michael Collins set out his hit squads to kill 12 British officers. They were shot dead in their bedrooms, on landings, and in front of their family.

One man was caught in the presence of his young, pregnant wife

His fate was sealed; he knew that.

All he asked was that his wife be allowed to go into another room and close the door, before the gunmen killed him.

The request was ignored.\textsuperscript{32}

By accident, they also shot a veterinarian, who was sitting up in bed in his hotel room, reading the newspaper.

Two Black and Tanners, passing by the house, were grabbed and shot in cold blood.\textsuperscript{33}


\textsuperscript{33} Later republicans would argue that Michael Collins knew what he was doing: that the victims were all members of the secret service group that was about to put Collins’ organization “on the spot.” Therefore, eliminating them was essential.

But the best evidence suggests that the IRA’s intelligence on many of the victims – and the veterinarian corps officer, Captain MacCormack, wasn’t the only one – was just plain faulty. Here is what Collins himself wrote to Captain MacCormack’s mother: “you will remember that I stated on a former occasion that we had no evidence that he was a Secret Service agent. You will also remember that several of the 21\textsuperscript{st} November cases were just regular officers. Some of the names were put on by the Dublin Brigade. So far as I remember, MacCormack’s name was one of these.”

Clearly, Collins had acted on names he had been given, and as he was implying, the Dublin Brigade was very unclear in who it thought a fit target. See Charles Townshend, “The Irish Republican Army and the Development of Guerrilla Warfare, 1916-1921,” *English Historical Review* 94 (April 1979): 327.
That afternoon, British forces surrounded a football match to search for IRA gunmen. When there was a row, they opened fire, killing a dozen civilians, including a woman and a child.

That night the Auxiliaries killed two of Collins’s top gunmen and a bystander...

shot trying to escape, of course.  

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III. THE PATRIOT GAME, 1921-22

A. TREATY

By May 1921, peace never looked further away. Really, it was nearer than anyone expected, because winning was so out of the question on both sides.

Talk though they might of driving the British out of Ireland, the IRA had not even been able to drive them out of a police barracks.

Given a test of strength, the IRA could never win a war.

Indeed, if the war went on, England might very well up the ante... sending in a quarter million soldiers

blockading Ireland.

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By the summer of 1921, the IRA was on the ropes. It had less than 3000 men in the field. Arms and ammunition were running low.35

And, as its reports from the field suggested, people, Catholic as well as Protestant, were getting sick of the whole thing.

They were less likely to cooperate...

or hide IRA soldiers...

And they were likelier to turn them in.

It wasn’t the IRA that was getting stronger out in the countryside;

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it was the forces of law and order sent after them.  

But any cold-eyed observer could have told you that England was in a war it couldn’t possibly win either.

It could drive the IRA underground.

But their army still ranged across the countryside, and, it seemed, at will.

The blood of martyrs for a republic had sanctified their cause for a minority – possibly a majority.

As Irish Catholics outside of Ulster province watched the fighting, a dangerously large number had come to see madmen as heroes...

captured killers as martyrs.

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36 Charles Townshend, “The Irish Republican Army and th Development of Guerrila Warfare, 1916-1921,” English Historical Review 94 (April 1979): 328-29. This, naturally, is one reason why the IRA killed so many Catholic civilians in the outback: they weren’t cooperating, and it took some killings to make the others see their duty better.

This doesn’t fit the nationalist claptrap. But you find it in the reports sent back to the IRA high command, and the Irish historical manuscripts are full of them.
At last – at long last – most of the nationalists in Ireland, and not just those in arms, were thinking in terms of a free, independent Ireland...

It wasn’t just thinkable.

It seemed the end for which they had been fighting all along.

Fifty years before, that would not have been so.

Nor ten.

Nor even at the time of the Easter Rebellion.

But it was so now.

We can’t say that independence was the majority’s will.

But it didn’t have to be, to let the IRA keep a big enough force in the field to drag the war out for who knows how long.

There would never be peace on terms of the old Union.

B. THE ‘CONSTRUCTIVE PROGRAM’

Nor would there be peace on terms of a new Ireland.

Already, in 1920, as the fighting was just beginning, northern Ireland had been cut loose by law.

The Government of Ireland Act arranged for TWO Parliaments to be
elected in 1921 –

One for Ulster
One for the rest of Ireland

From that time on, Irish republicans had a choice.

They could have control of the whole island.
They could have independence.

But they couldn’t have both.37

The fighting had polarized Ireland more bitterly than ever, and it had coarsened the way both sides felt about means to an end.

The IRA could win a peace.

They could win the right to make a government for southern Ireland.

But they could no more smother the Protestant armies of the north than the Crown could suppress them.

Anybody with half an eye could see that.

It wasn’t the gunmen, though, who ended the war. It was the voters.

37 R. F. Foster, Modern Ireland, 1600-1972 (London: Penguin Press, 1988), 503-04. On the making of the Government in Ireland Act, see Nicholas Mansergh, The Unresolved Question: The Anglo-Irish Settlement and Its Undoing 1912-1972 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 120-37. Again, let it be noted that the Northern Parliament would cover the six counties – not the nine that Ulstermen had originally clamored for. A Boundary Commission would settle the exact lines of demarcation, as well. And notice this, too: this is A HOME RULE BILL for the first time for NORTHERN Ireland. Till now, the idea was Home Rule for southern Ireland; and northern Ireland stays under Westminster’s control. Now Britain was saying that northern Ireland, too, would get a Parliament and would govern itself.
In May 1921, the first elections were held for two Parliaments,

one for southern Ireland
one for northern Ireland.

The Dail accepted the electoral machinery for southern Ireland and took over the election.

Twenty six counties ... 128 seats

The Sinn Fein carried 124 of them – nobody ran against them.
In the six counties of the north, the Unionists carried 40 seats out of 52.\textsuperscript{38}

Say what either side would, the elections partitioned Ireland.

The one thing the Sinn Fein had been fighting for hardest, it was no nearer to than when it had begun the killing two years and 1,500 lives ago.

Not all the fighting in the world would change that.\textsuperscript{39}

For Prime Minister Lloyd-George, the elections simplified his own problems wonderfully.

\textsuperscript{38} Robert Kee, \textit{The Green Flag}, 713.

\textsuperscript{39} George Dangerfield, \textit{The Damnable Question: A Study in Anglo-Irish Relations}, 327.
Till now, making peace would have been political suicide.

The Tories would have shouted that he was selling out Protestant Ireland to Catholics and revolutionaries.

But now he WASN’T selling the Protestants out ... not those of the north, anyway.

Nothing could do that. They had their own government, their own power, and, soon, their own army.

In fact, the only hope that the Irish revolution down south had of ever getting them back lay in the good services of the British Government.

Ulster wasn’t going to heed a Michael Collins or an Eamon de Valera.

But a Winston Churchill, son of the man who once had shouted, “Ulster would fight and Ulster would be right!”...

A Lloyd-George, or, better still, a King George...

The peace terms THEY made, the north might just abide by.

The guns had spoken. Now the guns had nothing more to say.

Early that summer, all sides agreed to a truce, and the truce held.
Now came the negotiations, to mete out terms.

– how far toward complete independence could southern Ireland go?

    Would it be a free Ireland within the empire or out of it?

    Would it swear allegiance to the British Crown, or not?

– how big would West Britain be?

    Where did Ireland end and Ulster start?

Later, Irish revolutionaries would nurse their own disappointments with one more myth, as fabulous as St. Patrick driving out the snakes.

    England’s negotiators had outfoxed and bullied the Irish ones. They gave Ireland a poor, miserable excuse for peace – denied it full independence and a united Ireland.

Make no mistake; this is fantasy.

There was already a separate Parliament for Northern Ireland.

    It could reject any settlement made, if the terms were too hard to bear.

A united Ireland on any lasting terms would have taken another war, bloodier and longer than either side wanted.

    It would have happened without a single English soldier, a single Black & Tan lifting a hand.
Ulster would fight every bit as hard as Collins’ gunmen had fought.\textsuperscript{40}

The one thing that really counted was what England was willing to give up.

Ireland would control its own tariffs, customs, taxes, and economic policy.

It would run its own police, judiciary, administration and army.

It would elect its own president and its own parliament on any terms it liked.

The most that England got was the right to keep two of its naval bases on the southern coast, and a third elsewhere.

It wanted – and didn’t get – the right to post its soldiers on Irish soil.

The sticking place on the first point was just a matter of words, but words loaded with dynamite.

On the one hand, most Irish people probably didn’t want to leave the Empire or disown the King.

\textsuperscript{40}Robert Kee, \textit{The Green Flag}, 725-26.
And many top revolutionaries knew that this was one point where English negotiators just wouldn’t budge.

A completely independent Ireland was a loaded gun, pointed at England across a narrow sea.

Having an enemy so close was something no Prime Minister would accept.

If he did, he’d just be cutting his political throat.

On the other hand, a small but well-armed minority of the IRA had made this a war for a republic.

Give in on that point, and they were ready to pick up arms and fight their own allies, friends, and kinsmen.

The certainty of a bloody war or the likelihood of a bloody peace: that was what lay at stake.

Eamon De Valera tried to play off one demand against the other:

– Dominion status for all Ireland, Ulster and all under one government

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– or else a partition, with southern Ireland completely independent.

But De Valera wasn’t at the negotiating table. He chose not to go.

It was other Irish republicans who went to London to work out peace.

Facing them across the table was the wiliest politician of his day, Prime Minister David Lloyd-George...

charming
ruthless
eloquent
and more dangerous than a battalion of Black & Tans.

They were canny, practical men, but they were no match for the PM.

Only De Valera could have given him tit for tat.

Lloyd George once said that negotiating with De Valera was like trying to pick up mercury with a fork.

{Someone told him. De Valera wasn’t fazed.
“Why doesn’t he use a spoon?” he asked}[^42]

Lloyd-George swept the problem of Ulster away with an ingenious solution:

– the best way to settle it was not to settle it at all.

– give Ulster what it wanted, and make what it wanted not worth having.

What they agreed on was this:

There WOULD be a united Ireland: one Ireland.

But ... and here was the kicker:

Ulster would be allowed a year’s time to opt out.

Supposing it did. Then its borders would be defined by a special boundary commission.

It looks like a pretty hollow victory. Protestant Ulster was sure to cut itself loose, first chance it had.

But that was where the Commission came in.

It wouldn’t hand over all of Ulster province to the Orangemen.

It would draw borders to put the Catholic counties into the Irish Free State, and a lot of the Catholic bits of the other counties, too.

... about one third of all Ulster.

Many an Ulster Protestant might think twice about seeing that happened.

The remnant he was left with might not be big enough to be self-supporting.
It would be an economic basket-case.\textsuperscript{43}

Even if Ulster voted to go out of a united Ireland now,
its people, when they went broke, might well change
their minds and come back in.

So Lloyd-George’s solution held out the best deal that the Irish Revolution
had...

-- a year’s time to bring Ulster round

-- the hope, faint though it was, but still the hope that Ireland
would stay one country forever.

-- the chance to make that hope into something stronger, by making an
Ulster that would have good reasons to work out a common
destiny with the 26 counties to the south.

That left only the matter of the Crown, and the wording of an oath of allegiance.

Here, too, England gave what it thought was a generous package:

Ireland would be a Dominion.

It would have every right any other British dominion had.

Any further rights given to any other – Canada, say, or South Africa – automatically would go to Ireland, too.

Ireland didn’t have to swear allegiance to the Empire; not even to the King.

They only had to swear allegiance to their own Irish Free State and pledge “faithfulness” to the King –

and what, after all, was that?

You pledge faithfulness not just to a master;

you can do that to an ally – an equal.

Was that too much to ask?

If it was, then Ireland was declaring outright that it would not just be free, but kept the right to become an enemy when it pleased.44

After all the arguments, it came to this –

Dominion status

or

Both sides reaching for their guns again.

Maybe the negotiators could have held out.

Maybe England was too tired to fight any more. Maybe the talk that they would was all a bluff.

But supposing it wasn’t; could the revolutionaries hold out?

Nobody knew, and some – like Michael Collins – thought they couldn’t.

Could these men who had won so much, afford to risk it all, to win a little more?

Lloyd-George held out two letters, one of which he had to send to the military commander that very night:

Do I tell him we have a settlement, or that we can’t agree?

“If I send this letter it is war, and war within three days. Which letter am I to send?”

Put on the spot, the Irish delegation broke down.

In the wee hours of December 6, 1921, they fixed their names to the agreement, and without consulting their allies back home.

Never had winning so much felt so like losing.45

“Think – what have I got for Ireland?” Michael Collins wrote a friend.

“Something which she has wanted these past 700 years. Will anyone be satisfied at the bargain? Will anyone? – I tell you this: early this morning I signed my death warrant.”

**B. CIVIL WAR**

Eamon de Valera, president of the new Irish Free State, repudiated the Treaty.

The Dail didn’t dare.

It ratified.

As Michael Collins told them, what they had won was not simply freedom from British troops and British occupation.

It was the chance to start down the road to full independence, with nobody able to stop them:

‘the freedom to win freedom.’  

But enemies of the Treaty had guns, and used them.

They shot into crowds.

They sent out assassins.

And in a classic-hits production, they took over the Four Courts of

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Dublin in a new Easter Rising.

This time it was Irish Free Staters who fought them out.

In nine days of fighting, 654 Dubliners were killed.

The Four Courts, a gorgeous 18th-century building with the Public Record Office in it and the biggest, best collection of documents about Ireland’s history, was shelled by government troops, and blown up by the Irregulars before they evacuated it.

Much of Ireland’s heritage was lost beyond recall – more than England had ever done.

By mid-June, Ireland had plunged into a fresh civil war.

It would go on for nine more harsh months.

The Government would win it.

Bit by bit, they took a firm hold on Ireland’s bigger cities and on all the ports.

The revolutionaries couldn’t smuggle in more arms or ammunition — ran out of places to get food or to hide.

While the Irish Free State got all the guns it needed overseas... from England.47

Collins was killed from ambush on the road near his home.

Free State forces arrested Erskine Childers, tried him by court martial.

His crime: he was carrying a small pearl-handled revolver that Michael Collins had given him as a personal gift years before.

Nobody ever showed that he’d fired it, or meant to.

But it was still bearing arms against the state.

A week later he was taken from his cell and shot at dawn.

It had to be done quickly; his lawyers were trying to get a writ of habeas corpus, and there was a real danger that he would be let off, if the Government didn’t kill him immediately.  

Altogether, in six months the new Free State government executed 77 Republicans by shooting.

That was three times what the British government had killed in

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48 Patrick Riddell, *Fire Over Ulster*, 38.
two years of war.

The war itself killed thousands more.

Towns were set on fire. Villages were burnt to the ground.

Fathers and uncles of leaders were killed because of who their relatives were.

One reprisal was paid back with another.

Torture became standard procedure.¹⁴⁹

It was an ugly war, of Irish Catholics against Irish Catholics, and all in the name of Ireland.

One sample will stand for all. Some Irregulars were captured by government forces. Nine of them were taken by lorry to Ballyseedy Cross, near Tralee.

The prisoners’ hands were tied – which since one of them had a broken wrist, another a broken arm, and one unable to walk because of spinal injuries, seemed a waste of effort.

Their injuries had come after their capture, when they were questioned by Government officers.

The officers had used hammers to persuade the men to express themselves better.

Each prisoner was tied by arms and legs to the man beside him and a rope ringed round them all.

A landmine was put in the center of the ring of men.

The Government exploded the mine, sending bits of the prisoners in every direction.  

How could you improve on that method?

Actually, it didn’t work perfectly. By some miracle, one of the victims was blown into a ditch and lived to escape.

Next time the Government thought to shoot all of its prisoners in the leg so that they couldn’t run, before it set off the land mine.

Naturally, while fighting like that went on the Provisional Government was not going to have much time to turn the charm on northern Ireland.

And Protestants in northern Ireland got a pretty good look at what was happening across the partition line.

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Patrick Riddell, *Fire Over Ulster*, 36-37.
It didn’t take a genius to think:

If this is how the Free State treats its own people, what will they do to us?

But of course there was no need to ask that question.

It was already happening.

With a wink from the Irish Free State, the IRA unleashed itself against the Protestants of Ulster, to scare and kill them into accepting a lasting Union – the very worst possible way of making them feel secure.

Anybody could be a victim.

Irish Republicans would hide on rooftops, and snipe at civilians.

... an old woman going out to get the week’s groceries –

... shipyard workers coming off the job and reading the paper on a streetcar

... traffic cops directing the cars

... off-duty policemen entering church with their families.

Shoppers in the city centers were favorite targets.

But crowds of children made good sport, too.

You get a street where the kids are playing a game –

toss a grenade in – and watch the fun.\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{51} Patrick Riddell, \textit{Fire Over Ulster}, 50.
Of course there were plenty of attempts to kill James Craig and his Cabinet ministers.

(And, let it be noted, there were never any Ulster attempts to kill leaders of the Irish Free State – never the same move across the borders to deal out reprisals in the southern Irish counties).\(^{52}\)

If Ulster Unionism had thriven before on feeling like a state under siege, how could it feel now?

That one year, 232 people killed ...

Two Unionist MP’s assassinated.

1,000 people wounded.\(^{53}\)

How can you want to get into closer union with THAT?

\(^{52}\) Patrick Riddell, *Fire Over Ulster*, 54-55, 59-63.