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THE IRISH QUESTION IN LIBERAL POLITICS
1911-1914

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ABSTRACT

Patricia Jalland: The Irish Question in Liberal Politics 1911-14.

This thesis explores the role of the Irish question as a dominant force testing and weakening the British Liberal party in the years immediately preceding the First World War. The period 1911-14 is crucial in the development of Anglo-Irish relations, yet it has previously been almost entirely neglected. And though the decline of the Liberal Party has been the subject of considerable historical controversy, the part played by the Irish question has been largely overlooked.

My thesis provides a detailed, analytical study of the Liberal government’s response to the Irish crisis from 1911-14. The main emphasis is placed on the activities of the Liberal cabinet at the centre of power in Westminster, giving particular attention to the influential roles of Asquith, Birrell, Lloyd George and Churchill.

My sources have included cabinet and parliamentary papers, newspapers, Hansard, and relevant secondary material. The thesis is mainly based on about fifty collections of the private papers of leading politicians, backbenchers, and newspaper editors, including several not previously consulted by scholars.

Though the Liberals shelved Home Rule from 1895 until the passage of the Parliament Act in 1911, the party retained a genuine commitment to Irish self-government. During 1911, the cabinet aimlessly considered United Kingdom devolution as a way to settle the Irish question. The scheme was finally abandoned as too ambitious and impracticable, but it remained a convenient panacea which could be used at points of deadlock in 1913-14, when conciliatory negotiations seemed tactically expedient. The cabinet turned instead to the Gladstonian Home Rule bill of 1893, largely by default, and this provided the somewhat inadequate basis for the 1912 bill.
The central theme of the thesis is the inability of Asquith's government to deal effectively with the Ulster problem. Asquith's failure was all the more tragic, since the years between the Parliament Act and the Easter Rebellion offered a unique opportunity to settle the Irish question. The Parliament Act at last made it a practical possibility, and its provisions allowed Asquith to incorporate special terms for Ulster into the bill during the first parliamentary circuit, without requiring Opposition agreement. But Asquith ignored the Ulster problem while the bill was being drafted, and rejected the appeal of Churchill and Lloyd George in February 1912 that Ulster should be excluded. The majority of the cabinet followed Asquith's lead in refusing to treat Ulster's resistance to Home Rule seriously until autumn 1913, when it was too late to avert the growing crisis.

The parliamentary debates on Home Rule from April 1912 to January 1913 have been analysed thoroughly for the first time, concentrating especially on the reaction to the two significant Ulster exclusion amendments. The thesis then examines the various pressures leading towards conciliation by autumn 1913, and the secret negotiations between the party leaders from September 1913 to March 1914. Asquith's Ulster policy was finally wrecked by the Curragh incident in March 1914, since the government believed thereafter that it could not use the army to impose Home Rule on Ulster.

Asquith's weaknesses as a war-time leader were already fore-shadowed in his mismanagement of the Ulster crisis before the war. He relied throughout on a high-risk policy of prevarication, which had clearly failed by May 1914, though the utter hopelessness of the Irish situation was partially concealed by the European conflagration. The Irish problem of 1911-14 also highlighted the essential problem for Liberalism of coming to grips with the 'progressive' demands of the twentieth century electorate, while still haunted by the traditional constitutional commitments of nineteenth century Gladstonian Liberalism.
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THE IRISH QUESTION

IN

LIBERAL POLITICS, 1911 - 14

PATRICIA JALLAND

A Thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of Toronto.

PATRICIA JALLAND 1976
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PREFACE

This thesis aims to explore the nature and role of the Irish question as a dominant force testing and weakening the British Liberal party in the years immediately preceding the First World War. The period 1911-14 is crucial in the development of Anglo-Irish relations. The Irish question had a significant impact on the decline of the Liberal party, yet this impact has previously been surprisingly neglected.

Irish historians have preferred to concentrate on the specifically Irish aspects of the period, minimising Irish involvement in British affairs. Thus, the more dramatic events in Ulster and at the Curragh from 1912-14 have been analysed in depth, as have the problems of the southern Unionists, the growth of Sinn Fein, and the 1916 Easter rebellion. The failure of John Redmond’s Nationalist party, aiming for a limited form of Irish Home Rule by constitutional and peaceful methods, has attracted less attention, despite the excellent biographies of Redmond and Dillon.

The decline of the Liberal party has been the subject of considerable and recurrent controversy among British historians ever since George Dangerfield’s brilliant and impressionistic Strange Death of Liberal England in 1935. He argued that Liberalism was already moribund by 1909, unable to accommodate the new working class electorate. Liberalism finally collapsed between 1910-14, under the combined assault from the infant Labour party, industrial agitation, the militant suffragettes, the constitutional crisis over the Lords, and impending civil war in Ireland.

Dangerfield’s thesis has been thoroughly re-assessed in recent scholarly research, in almost every aspect except Ireland. The contribution of Peter Clarke and Trevor Wilson has been particularly influential. Peter Clarke has argued convincingly that by 1910 the Liberal party had proved its ability to adapt to meet the social and economic demands of an increasingly powerful working class electorate. Trevor Wilson attacked Dangerfield’s position...
from a different perspective, with his powerful thesis that the First World War was mainly responsible for the death of a Liberal party which had been healthy when the war broke out. The arguments of Clarke and Wilson have in turn been questioned by Henry Pelling, Ross McKibbin and Paul Thompson, who sympathise with Dangerfield at least in his emphasis on the crucial role of the infant Labour party. Dangerfield's ideas have also been subjected to rigorous re-evaluation in relation to the part played by the suffragettes, the constitutional crisis, and the industrial unrest.

The role of the Irish question in the decline of the Liberal party has, however, received little attention, apart from fragmentary treatment in most biographies and textbooks. Roy Jenkins and Robert Blake have provided more detailed studies of the policies of Asquith and Bonar Law respectively, but these have understandably been rather one-sided in their treatment. Jenkins' masterly life of Asquith has included a powerful defence of Asquith's Irish policy, which raises new issues about the Liberal party's treatment of the Ulster question. Cameron Hazlehurst suggested in 1970 that:

--- the record of a prime minister under whom the nation goes to the brink of civil war must be subjected to the severest scrutiny. And, after fifty years, with almost all the relevant evidence now available, a new generation of scholars can attempt the searching examination of Asquith's career which has long been overdue.

My thesis contributes to this reassessment by providing a detailed, analytical study of the Liberal government's response to the growing crisis over Irish Home Rule from 1911-14. The main emphasis is placed on the activities of the Liberal cabinet at the centre of power in Westminster, since ministers initiated all the major policy decisions on Ireland in these years. The influential roles of Asquith, Augustine Birrell, Lloyd George and Winston Churchill are examined particularly closely, showing how Lloyd George gradually replaced Birrell as the prime minister's second-in-command on Irish policy. The Irish Nationalists were generally passive allies of the Liberal government, who acquiesced in a series of concessions they disliked in order to reach their goal of Home Rule. The part played by Redmond and
Dillon has already been thoroughly described and analysed by Denis Gwynn and F.S.L. Lyons. Consequently, it will only be considered here in terms of their particular influence on individual ministers and specific policy decisions, attempting as far as possible to avoid covering the same ground.

Historical misconceptions about the Irish question in British politics have too easily arisen in the past because sources have been examined for only one side in the controversy. Therefore, though this thesis is primarily concerned with the Liberals, considerable attention has also been given to the Unionist Opposition to avoid this danger. Unionist reactions to ministerial policies, and Opposition assessment of Liberal aims, motives and potential weaknesses, are analysed to provide a more complete context for cabinet discussions.

Public opinion and the press will be considered only where they can be shown to have influenced cabinet policy directly. The private papers of politicians on both sides strongly suggest that the impact of public opinion on the government's Irish policy was far less important for this earlier period than it became after 1918. Politicians generally believed that British voters, from 1910 to the early months of 1914, were apathetic and ignorant on Irish affairs. They were convinced that the electorate cared more for economic than for constitutional questions like Home Rule, which had been traditionally more important electoral issues in the nineteenth century. Hostility to Lloyd George's Insurance Act was undoubtedly a powerful issue in by-election campaigns from 1911-13, whereas feelings about Home Rule appeared to play little part. Liberal voters only began to concern themselves with Home Rule in 1914 - and even then, their interest took the form of criticism of the government's mismanagement and apparent weakness.

The Ulster question provides the focal point of the thesis. It is argued that Asquith's government missed one of the best opportunities ever offered for the solution of this intractable problem. The Unionist party's fanatical obsession with the Ulster question contrasted sharply with the casual manner in which the Liberal cabinet entirely ignored it. Ulster was overlooked by the government when the Home Rule bill was being drafted in
1911, but it dominated the debate from the time the measure was introduced in April 1912.

The detailed analysis essentially falls into two parts. The first concentrates on the parliamentary debates from April 1912 to January 1913, and the second on the secret negotiations between the party leaders from September 1913 to March 1914. The debates on Home Rule in the Commons have been examined thoroughly for the first time. Back bench attitudes and influence have been considered as far as source material allows, suggesting that the influence of the rank and file on the cabinet was almost negligible. This was partly a consequence of Asquith's style of politics, since his concept of government was fundamentally paternalistic and elitist. The prime minister's contacts with his own backbenchers were limited, and control of the rank and file was left to the party whips. His cabinet operated in a highly departmentalised manner, so that Irish policy was dominated by a few prominent ministers. This was illustrated most strikingly by the secrecy surrounding the Irish negotiations of 1913-14. The majority of the cabinet were kept in the dark as much as the British public, the press and the members of parliament.

Asquith's Ulster policy was finally wrecked by the Curragh incident in March 1914. For that reason the thesis concludes with an analysis of the consequences of the Curragh crisis from March to May 1914. In their discussions of Asquith's Home Rule policy, historians have been mesmerized by the last three months before the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914. What really mattered were the developments from early 1911 to March 1914, when Asquith still had some control of his policy. Up to March 1914, he could choose between a political compromise making special provision for Ulster, and the enforcement of his original Home Rule bill for the whole of Ireland. The Curragh crisis made the effective execution of this second option almost impossible, since the government believed that it could not use the army to coerce Ulster. Asquith was forced to face the consequences of his policy in the spring of 1914, when his options had run out. He relied throughout on a high-risk policy of procrastination, which had clearly failed by May 1914. Thus total deadlock over Home Rule and Ulster was reached several months before
the European war broke out. The conflagration in Europe partially concealed the hopelessness of Asquith's Irish policy in the months after March 1914.

I am extremely grateful to my supervisor, Professor Trevor O. Lloyd, to Dr. John Stubbs, and to Mr. John P. Hooper, for their generous help in reading the entire manuscript. Their detailed comments and suggestions proved immensely valuable in making the final revisions. I am deeply indebted to Dr. Cameron Hazlehurst, who gave unfailing encouragement in the earlier stages of research, helping me to locate numerous manuscript sources, and kindly allowing me to read many of his own transcripts. My thanks are also due to Dr. Peter F. Clarke for his stimulating suggestions in the course of several discussions, and for his helpful comments on reading the final typescript. Finally, I wish to thank all the librarians, archivists and historians, who have assisted in the preparation of this thesis.

Abbreviations

B. L. Add. MS. | British Library, Additional Manuscript
B. L. P. | Bonar Law Papers
N. L. I. | National Library of Ireland
N. L. S. | National Library of Scotland
P. R. O. | Public Record Office
Hansard | The Parliamentary Debates (Official Report), Fifth Series. House of Commons. (Specific reference will be made in the case of a different Series, or the House of Lords' Reports).

Place of publication is London unless cited otherwise.

2. Denis Gwynn, *The Life of John Redmond* (1932), remains a classic, despite its age. F.S.L. Lyons has benefitted from the use of more archival material in his excellent work, *John Dillon: A Biography* (1968), though his assessment remains very close to that of Gwynn.


10. To avoid confusion, the term 'Opposition' will be capitalised throughout the thesis, when it refers to the Unionist party, though lower case will otherwise generally be used for 'government', 'cabinet' etc.

11. This thesis obviously does not attempt to provide an in-depth analysis of the part played by the Unionist party and its leaders. Even less attention will be devoted to the Unionists of the south and west of Ireland, since they have been examined in depth by P. J. Buckland in Irish Unionism, I, and Southern Unionism 1885-1922 (unpublished doctoral thesis, Queens' College Belfast, 1969).


13. See e.g. Walter Long's memorandum, N.D. [early 1912], Bonar Law Papers, 26/1/76; Sir Courtenay Ilbert's diary, 11 April 1912; Ilbert to Bryce, 20 Feb. 1912, MS. Bryce 14, fos. 46-9; Max Green to Lord Aberdeen, 26 Feb. 1910, Aberdeen Papers, 1/5; Wolverhampton to Crewe, 9 March 1910, Crewe Papers, C/54; A. V. Dicey to St. Loe Strachey, 7 Jan. 1912, Strachey Papers, S/5/6/2.

INTRODUCTION

GLADSTONIAN HOME RULE AND THE CONSEQUENCES FOR LIBERALISM

From the twelfth century until the end of the eighteenth century, Britain treated Ireland as a conquered nation, sending in troops and settlers to dominate and subjugate. In 1801 Britain attempted instead to control Ireland by political integration within the United Kingdom. This Act of Union was only successful in the Protestant dominated north-east province of Ulster, yet it became a fundamental issue in Ireland's subsequent struggle for independence. For the Irish Unionists, the Act of Union guaranteed the Protestant political and social ascendancy within Ireland, and they acquired valued privileges as an integral economic unit of the United Kingdom. For the British Conservative party, the Act of Union gradually became an almost mystical part of their political creed, representing the symbolic vanguard of the inevitable forward march of Empire. Any threat to the Union with Ireland was interpreted as a challenge to the integrity of the British Empire. This belief dominated the Conservative party so much after 1886 that the term 'Unionist' was incorporated into the party's title and was the name commonly used when the Home Rule danger was most acute. Even the limited goal of Home Rule in Irish internal affairs, sought by the Irish Nationalist parliamentary party, involved altering an Act of Union which rapidly became treated as sacrosanct. Such a repeal was practically impossible until the 1911 Parliament Act removed the permanent veto power of the Unionist dominated House of Lords.¹

Up to 1885, the Liberal party tried to settle the endemic unrest in Ireland through a policy of coercion combined with economic, social and religious concessions, intended to secure Ireland's loyalty to Britain. The Liberal party under Gladstone overcame fierce Conservative resistance to grant reforms relating especially to land and religion, only to discover that such reforms did not dispel disaffection. By 1885 Gladstone finally became convinced that Britain could only pacify Ireland by coming to terms with the demands of Irish nationalism.² These demands had been presented to the British parliament far more forcefully since 1880, when Parnell seized control of the Irish parliamentary party and
rapidly transformed it into a formidable, highly-disciplined machine. The power of the Irish Nationalist party to disrupt parliamentary proceedings was increased by the effects of the 1884-5 Reform Acts. At the 1885 election, Ireland for the first time was able to return an overwhelming majority of Nationalist members to the Westminster parliament.

Gladstone's recognition of the need to give Home Rule to Ireland changed the fortunes of his party. He was converted to Home Rule in 1885, and his fanatical zeal for the Irish cause dominated and wrecked his last two ministries, in 1886 and 1893-4. In a practical sense, Gladstone's two Home-Rule bills of 1886 and 1893 could be no more than dry runs, since the House of Lords would inevitably block their passage. Yet they succeeded in establishing Home Rule as a major plank in the party's platform, despite immense initial opposition, and the bills themselves formed the basis for Asquith's Irish bill in 1912.

The 1886 Home Rule bill was drafted under great pressure in the short period between late January 1886, when Gladstone formed his third ministry, and the introduction of the measure on 8 April 1886. Consequently, the bill was only twenty-two pages long, and somewhat clumsy in style. It established a single 'Legislative Body' in Ireland, composed of two 'Orders' generally sitting together and each possessing a suspensory veto to protect the interests of Irish minorities. The scope of the Irish assembly was strictly limited by enumerating those powers specifically reserved to the Imperial parliament, including defence, police, trade and foreign policy. A further list of restrictions, relating chiefly to religion, was designed to safeguard the rights of the Irish Protestant minority. Gladstone's first bill inserted a controversial provision excluding Irish representatives from the Westminster parliament, to avoid Irish interference in the internal affairs of Great Britain, once the Irish had their own parliament. However, since the imperial exchequer retained control over Irish customs and excise, this decision raised the ancient cry of 'no taxation without representation'.

The defection of Joseph Chamberlain and the Whigs caused the defeat of the First Home Rule bill on Second Reading, and helped the Conservatives to electoral victory later in 1886. The Liberals were out of power for the greater
part of the next two decades, returning only briefly from 1892–5. Gladstone used
this last opportunity to throw all his energies into the Home Rule bill of 1893,
which was longer than its predecessor and more carefully constructed. The
single 'Legislative Body' of 1886 was replaced by an Irish 'Parliament',
composed of two 'Houses' meeting separately, except for occasional joint
sessions to decide issues of longstanding disagreement. The 'Legislative
Council' of forty-eight members would be elected on a restricted franchise
designed to protect Protestant minority rights, while the 'Legislative Assembly'
of 103 members would be returned by existing constituencies. The powers granted
to the Irish parliament were limited as in the earlier bill, except for the
concession that the Irish police should ultimately be transferred to Irish control.
The most important difference between Gladstone's bill's concerned the thorny
question of Irish representation at Westminster. The 1893 bill initially allowed
Irish members to vote at Westminster only on Irish and Imperial subjects, but
this 'in and out' scheme was abandoned in Committee as too impractical. Instead,
the provision was amended to allow a reduced number of eighty Irish representatives
full voting rights in the British parliament, despite the problems this might
prove...

The Home Rule issue had a profound effect on the development of
both British political parties after 1886. It helped to fortify the Conservative
party, because it rallied the forces of Imperialism and the defenders of property.
The Liberal party, on the other hand, was reduced in strength and bitterly divided
in the twenty years after Home Rule was first introduced. Gladstone's fanatical
devotion to the Irish cause induced him to stay on as leader, when the party might
have benefitted from a change. Joseph Chamberlain was lost to the Liberal party
as a potential radical leader, capable of making a powerful appeal to the working
classes a decade earlier than Lloyd George and Churchill. The secession of the
Whigs was inevitable in any case, though the Home Rule issue hastened their
departure. In electoral terms the Irish crisis weakened the Liberals until at
least 1900. The defection of the Liberal Unionists, the disruption of the Liberal
electoral organization, and the abstentions of former Liberal voters, enabled the
Conservatives to increase their proportion of the total United Kingdom vote in
1886 from 38% to 54%. 7

From 1886 to 1894, Gladstone stubbornly maintained Home Rule as the focal point of his leadership, paralysing the party's development in other areas by lack of direction. It has been maintained that Home Rule acted as a useful substitute for the fundamental unifying programme which the party lacked, disguising factional dissensions over domestic reform priorities. 8 It can be more logically argued, however, that the preoccupation with Home Rule was itself responsible for diverting time, energy, and manpower from the reforming aims listed in the 1891 Newcastle programme. This gradually alienated left-wing radicals and a section of the working classes, who sought social and economic reforms with a more direct relevance to the needs of the British masses. The Irish question probably also accelerated the gradual movement of middle class voters from the Liberal to the Conservative party. Irish agrarian violence always alarmed the English property classes. They became still more dismayed when Gladstone tried to solve rural unrest by interference with Irish property rights, thereby establishing a dangerous precedent. Moreover, the Home Rule campaign offended the rapidly growing patriotic fervour of the middle class desire for imperial strength and unity. 9

After the defeat of the 1893 Home Rule bill by the House of Lords, and Gladstone's subsequent retirement, Home Rule remained a divisive issue in the Liberal party. Sectionalism was rampant, and the party was paralysed by the personal feuds involved in the struggle for Gladstone's mantle. 10 The feud between Lord Rosebery, John Morley, and Sir William Harcourt ended when Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman became leader in 1896, as a compromise candidate expected to exercise a conciliatory influence.

Before the 1900 election, Campbell-Bannerman and Herbert Gladstone, the Liberal chief whip, decided for the moment to shelve Home Rule as a major electoral issue. Herbert Gladstone was more realistic about the Irish cause than his father. He argued that the Liberal party as a whole had supported Home Rule in the 1895 election; yet the country gave a great majority to the Unionists, with their alternative policy of 'Local Government and Land Acts which are to kill Home Rule on the lines of "kindness and firmness".' Given
the feeling in the country, and the need to place the Liberal party 'on a broader basis', Gladstone suggested that Home Rule should 'not rank for the time being, as a practical question of politics'. This decision was reinforced by the chaos in the Irish Nationalist party, which split into three feuding sections after the fall of Parnell in 1891. Between 1895 and 1905 the Nationalists themselves allowed their alliance with the Liberals to lapse, as active hostility developed on issues such as education and the Boer war.

From 1899 to 1905, then, Home Rule was relegated to a less prominent position at Herbert Gladstone's suggestion. However, friction between the Liberal Imperialist and Gladstonian wings of the party continued to focus on the issue of Home Rule from 1900 to 1905. Lord Rosebery, former Liberal premier and leader of the Liberal Imperialists, increasingly adopted a Unionist view of the Irish question. He advocated a 'clean slate' policy, wiping Home Rule from the party programme. Rosebery's chief lieutenants, Asquith, Haldane and Grey, were less extreme, though Haldane appeared at times to find Rosebery's reasoning persuasive. Gradually, however, Asquith and Haldane adopted the gradualist policy suggested by Sir Edward Grey: 'Things must advance towards Home Rule, but I think it must be step by step.' The Gladstonian wing of the party, led by Campbell-Bannerman and John Morley, had tended to make Home Rule a prominent issue again, partly in reaction to Rosebery's attitude. But when it became necessary to prepare for another election in 1905, Campbell-Bannerman recognised that Home Rule presented a major obstacle to party unity, and he determined to rally the party around Grey's 'step by step' policy. In November 1905, Campbell-Bannerman announced a vague compromise formula at Stirling, which did not specifically disavow Home Rule, but implied that a full measure of Irish self-government would not be introduced in the next parliament. The Irish Nationalists must meanwhile be satisfied with 'an instalment of representative control', which would lead up to their larger aim.

Home Rule consequently played little part in the landslide electoral victory of 1905-6, which returned the Liberal party to power. Asquith agreed with Campbell-Bannerman that they would only obtain a good majority if it was made perfectly clear to the electors that 'it will be no part of the policy
of the new Liberal Government to introduce a Home Rule Bill in the new Parliament. The reasons for their postponement were largely practical rather than ideological. As Asquith pointed out, a Home Rule bill ‘will be at once chuck out by the House of Lords, and will wreck the fortunes of the party for another 20 years.’ Lord Crewe examined the arguments for deferment very thoughtfully in a long letter to Campbell-Bannerman in November 1905. High on his list was the certainty that the Upper House would ‘throw out any Bill that reached them’, precipitating another election like those of 1886 and 1895, in which the Home Rule cause was likely to suffer along with the Liberal party. Crewe believed there were fewer British Home Rulers among the Liberals’ voters in 1905, than in either 1886 or 1892, as a consequence of the decline and disunity in both the Liberal and Nationalist parties. Crewe advanced another argument, which he considered even more important than the Lords’ veto:

More than ever before the Liberal party is on its trial as an engine for securing social reform – taxation, land, housing etc. It has to resist the ILP [Independent Labour Party] claim to be the only friends of the workers. Can it do this, & attempt Home Rule as well?16

The Liberal government has been accused of abandoning Home Rule in 1906, simply because they had a massive majority independent of the Irish Nationalists. Yet the Nationalists had nothing to gain from the introduction of a Home Rule bill in 1906–9, if the government was in no position to carry it. The Lords’ veto made Home Rule a practical impossibility, and there was no point in repeating the 1892–5 experience. If Home Rule was ever to pass, the Lords’ veto power must first be reduced, but the Irish question was scarcely a popular issue on which to force a constitutional showdown with their Lordships. It was likely that the government would have to stand or fall over Home Rule when they did eventually introduce it for the third time. Therefore, it made good sense to wait until the Lords’ veto could be overthrown, meanwhile building up unity and confidence in the parliamentary party, and increasing support in the country through social and economic reforms.

James Bryce, Irish secretary in 1906, admittedly entertained a faint hope that the Irish might be satisfied with less than full Home Rule, in
view of the land reforms and local government reforms introduced by the Unionists. This hope was as short-lived as Bryce's term of office. He attempted to carry out Campbell-Bannerman's Stirling pledge through an Irish Council bill of 1906, which proposed to establish an administrative council with limited powers. This raised a storm of Irish protest. John Redmond and John Dillon, the leaders of the Irish Nationalist party, were shocked by its inadequacy, and convinced that it was a device to bury Home Rule altogether. The Liberals' compromise formula was abandoned, and Augustine Birrell replaced Bryce at the Irish office.

Despite the long postponement, the majority of the Liberal cabinet were not seeking the opportunity to abandon Home Rule entirely. The party had a genuine commitment to Home Rule. This pledge had only been deferred in unpropitious circumstances. The fanatical zeal of Gladstone, and the crusading spirit of the early Liberal converts, were replaced by a more stolid spirit of obligation. Enthusiasm and passion inevitably declined as the years passed, and constant repetition gave the Home Rule arguments the familiar ring of a well-known psalm. A few Liberals retained the old enthusiasm; John Morley was not entirely jesting when he remarked to Rosebery in 1905:

You will find me very slack about One Man One Vote, Land Values, and Welsh Church. The only thing about which my ardent soul is still ready to blaze is Irish Home Rule!!! Your Vesuvius is nothing to it.\(^{17}\)

At the other extreme, some Liberals inclined towards Rosebery's hostile view. Henry Fowler, Lord Wolverhampton, believed that Home Rule was more unpopular than ever in March 1910, and gloomily predicted that it would be 'more bitterly fought than it was in Mr. Gladstone's time and I am afraid will break up the Liberal Party.\(^{18}\)

After 1895, however, the most characteristic attitude among Liberals was a quiet commitment, which should not be mistaken for apathy. Home Rule took its place besides Free Trade as a fundamental item of faith in the Liberal creed. This became very clear when Herbert Gladstone, acting as 'a kind of telephone exchange', elicited the views of his colleagues on the subject between 1899 and 1905. Lord Ripon expressed the hope that:
Sir Edward Grey remarked that Liberals had learnt a good deal about Irish history since the Home Rule controversy began, and this knowledge had filled us with the spirit of forbearance & sympathy & a deep sense of obligation towards Ireland. Asquith replied firmly that there was no question of those of us who have for 13 years advocated Home Rule abandoning our position. The Liberal chief whip was himself convinced in 1899 that the Party is loyal to Home Rule with individual exceptions but it is not disposed to commit itself at present to any pledge as to method or time. Six years later, Gladstone noted that, though Home Rule was not made an issue in the 1905-6 election, 'it was definitely and generally accepted as an essential part of Liberal policy.' Lord Crewe agreed in 1905 that 'the Liberal party stands by H. Rule as its ultimate object,' and by January 1910 he was adamant that Home Rule:

"has never ceased to be the policy of the Lib. Party since 1886 though there have been differences of opinion as to methods, & as to whether self govt should come about gradually or by a single measure."

Without some such obligation to fulfil a historic pledge, some sense of commitment to a firm principle, the Liberal party would surely have abandoned Home Rule entirely in the years after 1893. The reasons advanced for postponing it would have provided ample excuse for dropping it altogether. But Gladstone had committed his party too deeply and the Liberals had suffered too much in the cause of Home Rule. The Stirling announcement of 1905 implied that the government would feel free to introduce Home Rule after a further election. The subsequent failure of the 1906-7 Irish Council bill was crucial, because it demonstrated that half measures would not satisfy the Irish.

From 1907 to 1911, Augustine Birrell conducted a most effective holding operation on Home Rule, while at the same time reassuring the Irish leaders of the Liberal party's long-term commitment to Irish self-government. He won the respect and friendship of the Irish leaders, and restored their confidence in the government's good will, at a time when Irish
self-government was very low on the list of Liberal priorities. This achievement was partly due to Birrell’s personality and talents, which were well suited to his formidable task. He combined native ability with unfailing common sense and humour, and his growing love of Ireland also helped him to establish a shrewd and sympathetic working relationship with the Nationalists. Birrell’s skilful settlement of the longstanding Irish Universities’ question in 1908 and his valuable Land Act of 1909 further helped to appease the Irish while they awaited Home Rule.

It was fairly clear that the Liberals would introduce a full Home Rule bill once the veto of the Lords was overcome, and when they won a further election. This was confirmed by Asquith’s Albert Hall declaration, which preceded the election of January 1910. The prime minister stated that a full Home Rule policy was the only solution to the Irish problem. He ended the moratorium of 1906 to 1909: ‘— in the new House of Commons the hands of the Liberal majority will be in this matter entirely free.’ The chief secretary assured Redmond that the cabinet had agreed on the need for a clear statement that Home Rule was ‘the live policy of the Party, without limitation or restriction.’ Morley also informed the Irish leader that:

— almost everybody, if not quite, believes in the importance of taking a definite line upon H.R., on the merits, and apart from the points of temporary expediency, marked as the latter may be. Personally — and I am not over easy to please upon this subject — I was entirely satisfied with the sincerity of the Cabinet.

The Liberal government’s decision to introduce a third Home Rule bill in 1912, then, was the logical consequence of a long-standing commitment. The veto of the House of Lords had previously been the chief obstacle, but that was removed by the passage of the Parliament Act in 1911. From 1906–9, the Unionist Opposition had continually used its huge majority in the Upper House to reject or substantially amend important Liberal legislation. In 1909, however, the Lords went too far, when they threw out the controversial budget introduced by Lloyd George, the ambitious young Welsh radical, who had become chancellor of the exchequer the previous year. The budget provided an excellent issue for
a showdown between the Liberals and the Lords, though this had not been the deliberate intention. This was a 'popular' budget, in the sense that it was designed to provide a modest redistribution of income, to help pay for social reforms and battleships. By tradition, the Upper House was not expected to reject money bills. Battle was joined in a highly complex constitutional crisis, which involved two successive elections in January and December 1910, to determine the voters' attitude to the Lords' veto.

The results were not as conclusive as the Liberals had hoped. The government lost its massive majority of 1905-6, not a surprising consequence of four controversial years in office. The government won a narrow victory in both elections, with results which were almost identical. In the December election the Liberals secured 272 seats. The support of the 42 Labour members and the 84 Irish Nationalists produced a ministerial coalition total of 338. The British Unionists won 255 seats, and could rely on the 17 Irish Unionists to vote with them consistently. If the Irish members on both sides are omitted from the calculation, the Liberals had a clear majority of 17 over the British Unionists, and could increase this to 59 as a result of their alliance with the infant Labour party. This point requires emphasis, since Unionist propaganda helped to create the myth that the Liberal government was entirely dependent on the Irish after 1910. The Liberals did not need Irish votes to maintain their majority. Assuming that the Irish Unionists would vote with the British Conservatives, and Labour members with the Liberals, then the government could rely on a majority of 42, even if the 84 Irish Nationalists abstained.

As Walter Runciman reported after the January election: '--- we shall exist without the Irish support but only so long as Redmond refrains from voting against us', though he judged the latter to be a remote risk.

The two Liberal victories enabled the government to pass their Parliament Act, limiting the veto power of the House of Lords. This legislation was only forced through both Houses by August 1911, after two heated elections, and after Asquith threatened to activate George V's promise to create sufficient Liberal peers to swamp the Conservative Upper House. The Parliament Act was linked with Home Rule from the first, and had a critical effect on the development of the Irish issue in the next three years.
The most significant provision was that bills other than money bills, which were passed by the Commons in three successive sessions (not necessarily of the same parliament), and which were rejected each time by the Lords, should automatically receive the royal assent. Two years must elapse between the first introduction of such a bill and its Final Reading in the Commons. Amendments could be made in the normal way during the first parliamentary circuit in the Commons. Changes could only be made thereafter, however, by means of 'suggestions', which required the agreement of both Houses, but which were otherwise ill-defined. The Parliament Act also stipulated that the Upper House could not reject money bills, and that the maximum duration of a parliament would be reduced from seven to five years. The government's ultimate aim of reforming the House of Lords along more representative lines was expressed in a preamble, which provoked subsequent Unionist charges that the Constitution was meanwhile in suspense.

The passing of the Parliament Act made the introduction of a Home Rule bill inevitable, for reasons both of principle and expediency. The Liberals emphasized the former and the Opposition the latter. The Liberals argued, with considerable justification, that they were fulfilling a long-standing party pledge, which the Lords' veto had previously made impossible. The Unionists preferred to dwell on the reduced Liberal majority and the inflated value of Nationalist support in the Commons. The Opposition accused the government of having made a 'corrupt bargain' with Redmond, whereby the Nationalists supported Lloyd George's 1909-10 budget and the Parliament bill, in return for the promise of an immediate Home Rule bill. Even if a specific bargain of this nature was made, which appears not to have been the case, a general understanding along these lines was surely the natural result of the long history of Liberal commitment to Home Rule.

More justification existed for the associated Unionist charge that the Liberals sought and obtained no mandate for Home Rule in the 1910 elections. Home Rule was given little prominence in the Liberal electoral campaigns, partly because they wanted to concentrate attention on the constitutional issue, but the doubtful electoral value of Home Rule no doubt
also contributed. However, as Asquith subsequently pointed out, it was well known that the government wanted to curb the Lords' veto, in order to pass a Home Rule bill. In any case, their opponents ensured that the electorate was under no illusions concerning the Irish implications of a Liberal victory.

In their more objective moments, the Unionists acknowledged that the Liberals were not simply being opportunists. Walter Long admitted privately in 1913 that the government as a whole had been committed to Home Rule in some shape or form since 1906.

Most Liberals were not seriously worried by charges that their return to Home Rule was governed purely by political expediency. Their commitment was too obvious. Alfred Emmott, the deputy Speaker, noted after the second 1910 election that 'nearly every Liberal is pledged to Home Rule & the Govt to a man'. The long ordeal of an attempt to pass Home Rule through three parliamentary sessions was a heavy price to pay simply for the sake of eighty-four Nationalist votes. Naturally those votes had some influence on the situation, particularly as regards timing, but they were far from being the sole consideration.

The Liberal party had more to lose than gain from introducing a Home Rule bill in 1912, possibly more so than in 1886 and 1893. Many of the younger and more radical backbenchers viewed the restoration of Home Rule to the centre of the political stage in 1911–14 with misgivings and mixed feelings. They had inherited the sense of obligation to carry out Home Rule, but they frequently lacked the emotional enthusiasm of John Morley's generation. The more creative and dynamic elements in contemporary Liberalism wanted the traditional pledges discharged as rapidly as possible, to allow the social reforming impulses of New Liberalism to resume their progress. Sir Courtenay Ilbert, the clerk of the Commons, recognized that for many Liberal and Labour members, Home Rule blocked the way for all the other measures for which they cared more deeply. Radicals such as Lloyd George, Charles Masterman, Charles Trevelyan and Arthur Ponsonby, consequently took a rather impatient, if long-suffering, attitude to Home Rule. The Liberal weekly, the Nation, expressed these sentiments fairly accurately.
regretting in December 1911 that 'we are to work at questions which were ripe for settlement twenty years ago.' If it was indeed true, as D. A. Hamer has suggested, that Home Rule in the 1890's provided a unifying crusade which helped to obscure the factional feuds in other policy areas, this was certainly not the case in 1910-14. The Liberal party was likely to gain in strength, unity and ideological coherence, from pushing ahead with the socio-economic reforms started in the years 1906-10, and which reached their climax with Lloyd George's 1911 Insurance Act. Further reforms in areas such as land, housing, education and the poor law were under discussion, and were likely to win popular support where Home Rule might be a liability.

In 1886 and 1893 Gladstone and John Morley established the precedent that the prime minister and the Irish secretary shared joint responsibility for directing Home Rule policy. Since this precedent was not followed in 1911-14, the roles played by Asquith and Birrell require definition. Augustine Birrell had been notably successful as Irish secretary during the first half of his administration, but by contrast he played a strangely subsidiary part in Home Rule policy after 1912. His public career and private life suffered an agonizing decline from about 1912, for reasons almost completely beyond his own control. Birrell's contemporaries were evidently aware of this deterioration. In August 1912, Lloyd George complained furiously that Birrell 'makes a mess of everything', and fourteen months later the chancellor concluded that 'Ireland will require a big man at the Irish Office. Birrell is not the man ---'. At a dinner party in October 1912, John Burns observed the effects of severe strain on Birrell, who was 'blurtling out brusque witticisms alternating with obvious irritation, indicating the way his work played on his nerves. Five months later, William O'Brien, leader of the small contingent of independent Nationalists from Cork, stated publicly that no hope of any bold initiative was to be expected from Birrell, as his difficulties were too well known.

The chief secretary was well aware that his temperament and abilities were ill-suited to the impossible task he was expected to perform from
1912, and he was quite ready to resign. Just before the Home Rule bill was introduced, Birrell confided to the Viceroy's wife that he was 'often disposed to chuck the whole thing in disgust.'45 His desire to leave the Irish office reached a climax in November 1913, when he implored the prime minister to relieve him of an office which had become extraordinarily distasteful.46 Even this cri de coeur was overruled, and Birrell became more fatalistic, whilst playing an increasingly reluctant and passive part in the subsequent Home Rule struggle.

Birrell's increasing ineffectiveness and growing dislike of his position after 1912 had several causes. The nature of the Irish secretary's role altered with the introduction of the Home Rule bill, becoming more ill-defined, yet more extensive, than ever before. Ideally from 1912 the chief secretary should have combined the talents of an able administrator, capable of managing the massive daily problems of governing Ireland, with those of a forceful trouble-shooter, who could pilot the Home Rule bill through the crises ahead. But Asquith was unlikely to find a man who combined the very different qualities demanded by the two roles - with the possible exception of Lloyd George, who could hardly be asked to move from the seniority of the Exchequer to Ireland.47 It was, in any case, unreasonable to expect any one man to perform both functions. Unable to call on the services of Lloyd George, in 1910 the prime minister had offered the Irish office to the other rising young Liberal star, Winston Churchill. The prime minister evidently hoped that the abundant energies and talents of the brilliant and rather unpredictable ex-Tory might be effectively channelled into this double task. Yet even Churchill was only prepared to accept that part of the work which might bring the glory of passing a Home Rule bill; he did not want the additional encumbrance of running the Irish administration.48

Failing to secure the services of a superman, Asquith might have been better advised to establish a formal division of power from 1911, appointing two ministers with separate responsibilities for the Irish administration and the Home Rule bill. Instead, the prime minister relied on piece-meal compromises, which made the post of chief secretary increasingly intolerable. Birrell was left in charge of the Irish administration, during a period when acute internal crises in Ireland required his full concentration, if they were not to damage
Home Rule prospects. The outbreak of cattle disease in 1912-13, and the spread of industrial agitation in Dublin in the autumn of 1913, under the militant leadership of James Larkin, created immense problems for Birrell. Added to these was the constant anxiety caused by the growth of an armed resistance movement in the north to challenge the Home Rule bill.

In practice, then, while Birrell was preoccupied in Ireland, the Home Rule campaign in Britain was divided between several leading ministers, including Asquith, Lloyd George, Churchill, Herbert Samuel, Sir John Simon, and Birrell himself. The Irish secretary was merely to be the mediator between the Nationalists and the Liberals, the spokesman for the Irish in the cabinet, and the scapegoat if the Home Rule policy misfired. He was not granted supreme control of Irish policy in the years after 1912, and his precise function remained conveniently vague. Birrell was to bear the public responsibility, but not the power.

Birrell's difficulties as Irish secretary were made almost intolerable because he disagreed with the cabinet's crucial policy decisions on Ulster and Irish finance, which proved to be the most controversial aspects of the Home Rule question. In addition, Birrell was subjected to the severe personal strain caused by his wife's prolonged illness with an inoperable brain tumour, from 1911 until her death in 1915. At the height of the Ulster crisis in 1913-14, Birrell suffered intensely from the demands of a post which forced him to spend months in Ireland, away from his ailing wife. Consequently, the Irish secretary appeared increasingly ineffective and irrelevant as the Irish crisis mounted from 1912 to 1914. By the second half of 1913, initiative in Irish Home Rule policy almost entirely passed into the hands of Asquith and Lloyd George, while Birrell played little more than a reluctant, passive role in the escalating crises of 1914. Under the circumstances, Asquith would have been better advised to accept Birrell's resignation. Birrell himself did not force the issue because of his exceptional loyalty to Asquith, his profound sense of public duty, and his growing commitment to Ireland and the Nationalists.

Clearly it was the prime minister's responsibility to decide whether Birrell was the right man for the Irish office after 1911. Asquith had
several reasons for retaining his services. No obvious alternative was available, who was likely to be any better suited to the task than Birrell, particularly after Churchill refused the post. Further, in 1911-12 the prime minister vastly underestimated the potential gravity of the Ulster question, and continued to hope that Birrell would be equal to any crises which might arise. Moreover, as Churchill pointed out in 1910, it was in the government's interests that Birrell should stand to his post. The Nationalists respect him & trust him. He has all the threads in his hands. He has been through the unpleasant process of being disillusioned. Asquith knew full well, in any case, that it would not be easy to find anyone else with the same ability to win the necessary concessions from the Nationalists.

In practical terms, then, the government's Home Rule policy from 1911-14 was controlled by the prime minister, in a manner that contrasted strongly with the complete delegation of authority to the ministers responsible in most other areas. The Ulster policy was peculiarly the prime minister's own responsibility, since it was forcefully opposed by three of the ministers most concerned with Ireland - Churchill, Lloyd George and Birrell. In view of the central role played by Asquith, some comments on the strengths and weaknesses of his character will prepare the way for the detailed evaluation of his Irish policy.

Herbert Henry Asquith came from a Yorkshire middle-class family, and gained a First in Classics at Balliol, as a preliminary to a brilliant career in politics and the law. He first entered the Commons in 1886, just missing Gladstone's first attempt to introduce Home Rule, and represented East Fife consistently thereafter, until 1918. His rapid rise to prominence marked him out early in his career as a potential prime minister; even his private life accorded well with his political prospects after his second marriage in 1894 to Margot Tennant, a celebrated socialite. Asquith became a Queen's Counsel in 1890, and was appointed home secretary during Gladstone's final administration. When the Liberals were returned to power in 1905, Asquith was chancellor of the exchequer until he succeeded Campbell-Bannerman as prime minister in April 1908. To the mass of Liberal voters and the party rank and file, Asquith frequently appeared cool, distant and reserved. Indeed, this is the impression of Asquith gained from the severe economy of style used
in most of his letters, which give the historian a rather one-dimensional view. Yet he won the loyalty and even the devotion of the widely different personalities who came to know him well in cabinet. Charles Masterman, a junior minister successively at the home office and the treasury, commented that 'you never realised Asquith's stature till you got into the cabinet.' Asquith was serene and imperturbable by temperament, remaining calm and philosophical in the face of political crises. In many respects he was the ideal leader for a cabinet composed of so many brilliant, but very different, individualists, for he was remarkably adept at reducing his colleagues to a harmonious whole. Even Asquith's critics were prepared to admit, with Alfred Emmott, that 'intellectually of course he is a marvel.' He possessed an easy mastery of political affairs, outstanding dialectical skill, and an unchallenged authority in cabinet. He was a first-rate chairman, with a talent for reducing a complex, detailed problem to the bare essentials, and for adjudicating impartially between conflicting views. Late in 1913, Churchill told Austen Chamberlain that Asquith was 'supreme' in the cabinet, but 'very self-contained, reserved and slow to speak, and thought it unfair to use his casting vote until all had spoken.'

John Burns praised Asquith's 'commanding decisiveness' and quiet mastery, attributing the unity of the cabinet to the tact, temper and wisdom of the prime minister. Jack Pease was even more eulogistic in his admiration for the 'consummate quiet masterhand' of 'our great leader'; by August 1914 he rated Asquith 'the greatest statesman of the Age.' After the hard session of 1913, the chief whip, Percy Illingworth, paid tribute to Asquith's amazing qualities of discernment, decision and courage, which had earned the admiration and affection of his colleagues. The prime minister gave his talented ministers great freedom within their own departments, with impressive results in most fields during his peace-time administration. From 1908 to 1911 his government produced an outstanding series of social reforms, culminating in the 1911 Insurance Act, and presided over a major constitutional reform.

Asquith also had his faults. He had a capacity to concentrate intensely for short, effective periods, and then to turn equally successfully to
enjoy his leisure hours. He himself observed that he possessed 'energy under the guise of lethargy', but some critics interpreted his temperament differently. When Asquith told the Tories to 'wait and see' in March 1910, he unwittingly provided them with a catch-phrase which symbolised his limitations. His tendency to prevaricate and to create ambiguities in his statements through careful qualifications, often seemed like wilful evasion. John Morley in 1912 criticised Asquith's procrastination and indolence in shirking difficulties, confident 'in his ability to furnish at least some provisional solution when the situation created by neglect threatens to get out of hand.' Sir Courtenay Ilbert considered Asquith too easy-going, and not inclined to maintain a sufficiently tight control over some of his colleagues. Even the faithful John Burns regretted his hero's 'ingrained indisposition to take risks and incur the responsibility of the moment.'

This style of leadership, however, worked well in most areas of government in peace-time, given Asquith's capable team of colleagues. Before the Irish crisis of 1913-14, the only ominous sign of potential trouble came when Asquith temporarily appeared to lose his nerve during the constitutional crisis. In spring 1910, Walter Runciman feared that the prime minister was losing any faculty of decision he ever had. The lapse was forgotten after Asquith regained control, but a similar inertia in critical emergencies revealed itself more dangerously during the Ulster crisis and the European war.

Another limitation possibly also influenced his management of the Irish question. R. B. Haldane, for many years a close friend of Asquith, war minister from 1906-12 and subsequently lord chancellor, commented many years later that Asquith was only partially endowed for the premiership. His great intellectual apparatus was restricted to grasp, understanding and judgement; he stated other peoples' ideas perfectly, but was not himself a man of imagination. Consequently, Lloyd George and Churchill were perfect foils for Asquith's talents, so long as he was acknowledged master, and agreement existed over aims and method. But potential for division and drift existed when their paths diverged, as sometimes happened over Ireland.

Moreover, Asquith had a well-ordered legal mind, which did not
instinctively relate to the play of passions in others. The *Nation* thought his

ministry 'a little soul less', lacking Gladstone's 'impassioned energy':

Mr. Asquith had not always suggested to friendly critics that larger kind of intellectual resource which yokes the device of the hour to long views of policy and broad conceptions of national honor [sic] and interest. 68

He had difficulty in taking Irish Nationalism and Ulster Unionism entirely seriously, since they involved such a large element of emotional commitment. His temperament and his legal training convinced him that the Irish problem could be solved by the usual constitutional procedures of British parliamentary politics. The Irish, in turn, were suspicious of Asquith's wholly rational approach to the Home Rule cause. His temperament did not allow for passionate enthusiasm, but in any case, it was some time before he could allay the mistrust aroused by his earlier links with Rosebery's anti-Home Rule policy. 69

Asquith's style of government contained further pitfalls, because of the rather ill-defined manner in which responsibility for the third Home Rule bill in parliament was divided among various ministers. Despite impressive intellectual force and superb oratorical skill, Asquith lacked personal magnetism over his rank and file. He ruled through his command in the cabinet and tended to rely on able colleagues and the whips for his control over his party. The *Nation* remarked in 1912 that, on the parliamentary stage, the prime minister left to Lloyd George and Churchill 'the wide area of persuasion, agitation, the mustering and direction of popular forces, the maintenance of the old fire in Liberalism'. Even before he became prime minister, his wife admonished him to make more effort to impress the common man, and attend more frequently in the House. 70 Asquith did not noticeably improve in these respects after he succeeded to the premiership. He 'left his colleagues more alone than a Prime Minister should'. He was disinclined to cultivate either the party rank and file or the press, thereby incurring the risk of losing touch with changing shifts of opinion in his party. 71

For the most part, Asquith's strengths were more obvious than his weaknesses, until the outbreak of the European war in August 1914. Before
the war, only the Irish question had a similar tendency to expose his limitations so mercilessly. But since many people in Britain only noticed Ireland whenever emergencies erupted, Asquith's failings in Irish policy have attracted less attention than his inadequacies in wartime. Even his colleagues, immersed in the business of their own departments, had more reason to notice Asquith's undoubted abilities in other areas, than his lack of direction in the Home Rule crisis.

2. See e.g. J. L. Hammond, Gladstone and the Irish Nation (1938); N. Mansergh, The Irish Question, 1840-1921 (Toronto, 1965; first published in 1940 under the title Ireland in the Age of Reform and Revolution).

3. See e.g. C. Cruise O'Brien, Parnell and His Party 1880-1890 (Oxford, 1957). The Act of Union had given Ireland 100 members in the British parliament of 650, but by 1900 Ireland was considerably over-represented, because of the reduction of her population by famine and emigration. Up to 1880, the Irish members tended to support the two major British political parties, except in the 1830's, when O'Connell's Irish party controlled a third of the Irish constituencies.

4. For a rather cynical view of Gladstone's intentions in 1885-6, see J. Vincent and A. B. Cooke, The Governing Passion: Cabinet Government and Party Politics in 1885-86 (1974). Gladstone himself, however, was prepared for a battle with the Lords over the 1893 bill, but his colleagues recognized that such a major constitutional struggle should be undertaken only on an issue with more appeal to the electorate than Home Rule.

5. Government of Ireland Bill, 13 April 1886, Lloyd George Papers, C/19/1. See also 3 Hansard, CCIV, 1055-6 (Gladstone); Ibid., CCCIV, 1816-17, and CCCVI, 681, 699, for Chamberlain's objections to the exclusion provisions. For the significance of Chamberlain's method and motive in opposing this and other aspects of the 1886 bill, see my Toronto University M.A. paper: 'Joseph Chamberlain, Irish Home Rule and the Ulster Question, 1885-6' (1969).

6. Government of Ireland Bill, as brought from the Commons, printed 1 Sept. 1893 (33 pp.), Lloyd George Papers, C/19/1.


suggests that Hamer pressed an interesting theory too far (M. Barker, Gladstone and Radicalism: The Reconstruction of Liberal Policy in Britain 1885-1894, 1975). See also review of Barker by K.O. Morgan, T.L.S., 22 Aug. 1975, arguing that Ireland did not unify Liberalism after 1886, but generated immense divisions among Liberals.


12. See e.g. Asquith to H. Gladstone, 8 Jan. 1900, H. Gladstone Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 45989, fos. 28-9; Gladstone's memorandum, 8 Dec. 1899, Campbell-Bannerman Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 41215, fos. 162-4.


16. Crewe to Campbell-Bannerman, 19 Nov. 1905, Crewe Papers, C/5.


18. Wolverhampton (died 1911) to Crewe, 9 March 1910, Crewe Papers, C/54.


23. H. Gladstone's autobiographical sketch, H. Gladstone Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 46118, fos. 102-3.

24. Crewe to Campbell-Bannerman, 19 Nov. 1905, Crewe Papers, C/5; Campbell-Bannerman Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 41213, fo. 337. Crewe to Lord Arran, 15 Jan. 1910; Crewe Papers, C/1.

25. See e.g. A. Ponsonby to Bryce, 24 May 1907, uncatalogued Bryce Papers.


30. See Jenkins, Mr. Ba'fure's Poodle, for a good detailed account of the constitutional crisis over the budget and the Lords' veto.


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(n.b. In these calculations, the one Irish Liberal is balanced by the one Irish Nationalist who held an English seat). For a detailed account of the 1910 elections, see Blewett, Peers, Parties and People: General Elections of 1910.

33. For a detailed account of the provisions of the Parliament Act, and the struggle to secure its passage, see Jenkins, Mr. Balfour's Poodle. The number of Liberal peers considered necessary varied from 70 to 500, though the cabinet would probably have felt obliged to create 250 to achieve their purpose.

34. See e.g. Blake, Bonar Law, pp. 63, 131; Hansard, XXIX, 826-7 (7 Aug. 1911); Bonar Law’s speech at Bootle, The Times, 23 March 1911.

35. At each 1910 election, 9 of the 16 ministers who issued election addresses made no reference of any kind to Home Rule, the culprits’ including Asquith and Birrell. Those ministers who did mention Home Rule made only brief guarded comments, none of which actually promised that a Home Rule bill would be introduced during the next parliament (see detailed analysis in Home Rule and the General Elections of 1910, prepared for use of Unionist speakers, B. L. P. 40/1/52 (N. D.); see also W. J. Marshall (Conservative National Union) to Law, 11 March 1914, B. L. P. 40/4/65). Only 84 out of 272 successful Liberal candidates in Great Britain actually mentioned Home Rule in their Dec. 1910 election addresses (Hansard, XXIX, 826-7, 7 Aug. 1911). See also Blewett, General Elections of 1910, p. 326, showing that only 41% of Liberal addresses mentioned Home Rule in Dec. 1910, compared with 88% of Unionist addresses.

36. See e.g. Asquith to king, 1 Oct. 1913, MS. Asquith 38, fos. 216-7.

37. This point exasperated F. E. Smith: The only argument these scoundrels ever use to show that Home Rule was before the country is that—we said so' (F. E. Smith to Law, 9 Oct. 1912, B. L. P. 27/3/26).

38. Long to Law, 2 May 1913, B. L. P. 29/4/3. See also 'The Ulster Covenant', Quarterly Review, CCXVII, 578-9, for the view of an anonymous Unionist, absolving the government from the charge.


43. M. Lockwood to Law, 22 Aug. 1912, B. L. P. 27/1/50; Lord Riddell, More Pages from my Diary, 1908-1914 (1934), p. 188.
44. John Burns diary, 16 Oct. 1912, B.L.—Add. MS. 46334, fo. 192; The Times, 22 March 1913. See also Hibbert to Bryce, 5 Sept. 1912, MS. Bryce 14, fos. 56-8.

45. Birrell to Lady Aberdeen, 12 March 1912, Aberdeen Papers, 1/42.


47. Lloyd George's rather low view of the chief secretary's status is revealed in Riddell, More Pages, p. 188. It is significant that, after the Easter Rising in 1916, Asquith considered appointing Lloyd George secretary of state for Ireland, thus creating a new position to replace both chief secretary and viceroy (P.R.O. Cab. 37/148, 21 May 1916).

48. Churchill to Asquith, 5 Feb. 1910; R.S. Churchill, Winston S. Churchill, Volume II. Young Statesman 1901-1914 (Boston, 1967), 531; W.S. Blunt, My Diaries. Being a Personal Narrative of Events 1888-1914 (2 vols, New York, 1921-3), II, 300. Birrell was relieved at Churchill's refusal, especially as Birrell had 'none too much faith in W.C. Thinks he'll make too much splash' (Birrell to Asquith, 1 Feb. 1910, MS. Asquith 36, fo. 4; Munro-Ferguson to wife, 4 Nov. 1911, Novar Papers, file 40.)

49. On the effects of the outbreak of foot and mouth disease among Irish store cattle, and the pressures put on the Nationalist leaders by the Irish farmers, see e.g. Birrell to Runciman, 29 Sept. 1912, Runciman Papers, R 1/39; Henry Chaplin to Law, 29 Sept. and 5 Oct. 1912, B.L.P. 27/2/24 and 27/3/9.


52. See A. Birrell, Things Past Redress, (1937), p. 193; Birrell to Redmond, Dec. 1915, quoted by Gwynn, Redmond, p. 463. In May 1915, the chief secretary told Redmond: 'I owe a double loyalty (always a dubious position) first to the Prime Minister, who has always treated me like a brother, and second to Ireland; the Nationalist Party having also always treated me with the utmost consideration, and I don't see how I can properly --- desert either' (quoted by Gwynn, Redmond, p. 427.)


54. Asquith wrote: more freely to a few women friends, as will almost certainly be revealed when his letters to Venetia Stanley have been edited.
Mr. M.G. Brock. However, Asquith confided to Jack Pease, that he had tried to guard against potential biographies; he covered up his tracks, writing to people in accordance with the prospect of letters being retained or destroyed (Pease diary, II, fo. 61, 1 Dec. 1912).


56. See e.g. Ilbert to Bryce, 28 March and 6 June 1913, MS. Bryce 14, fos. 79-82, 87-90. Birrell’s affectionate character sketch of Asquith in his memoir, Things past Redress (pp. 246-54), was qualified by the revealing comment that ‘I was never able to find any fault with Asquith as a human being except that he was always very much the same.’

57. See e.g. Birrell to Asquith, 3 Oct. 1913, MS. Asquith 38, fo. 220.


60. See e.g. John Burns diary, 16 March 1912, B. L. Add. MS. 46334, fo. 67; 27 Jan. 1913, ibid., MS. 46335, fo. 39; 6 Nov. 1913, ibid., fo. 183; 9 Dec. 1913, ibid., fo. 197; 3 March 1914, ibid., MS. 46336, fo. 55.

61. See e.g. Pease diary, II, fo. 65, 15 Jan. 1913; see also entries for 2 Dec. 1909, 31 March and 7 Aug. 1914.


63. See the little classical play Asquith composed about himself in March 1915, quoted in full in Jenkins, Asquith, pp. 334-5.

64. Fitzroy, Memoirs, II, 475 (diary, 17 Jan. 1912).

65. Ilbert to Bryce, 20 Feb., and 5 Sept. 1912, MS. Bryce 14, fos. 46-9, 56-58; Burns diary, 26 March 1912, B. L. Add. MS. 46334, fo. 72.


69. Lord Edmund Fitzmaurice commented to Bryce on 10 Feb. 1901: 'It is a great misfortune that Asquith cannot be induced to give his attention more than he does to Irish affairs. He does not know what is going on' (uncatalogued Bryce Papers.)

70. Nation, 27 Jan. 1912; Margot Asquith to J.A. Spender, 29 Aug. 1906, Spender Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 46388, fo. 149.

71. See e.g. Fitzroy, Memoirs, II, 513 (9 June 1913), on Asquith's constant absence from the House; Birrell, Things Past Redress, p. 250.
CHAPTER I

THE THIRD HOME RULE BILL IN PREPARATION:

A GLADSTONIAN SOLUTION OR HOME RULE, ALL ROUND?

Early in 1911, the government prepared to carry out its promise of Irish Home Rule, after so many years of defeat, frustration and postponement. On 29 January, the cabinet appointed a committee of seven ministers to consider the entire Home Rule question, and a second committee of experts to examine its financial aspects. The Home Rule committee agreed that finance and Irish representation were the major problems which might wreck their bill, particularly as these were the gravest weaknesses in Gladstone's measures. The question of Ulster was scarcely even discussed in 1911. There was considerable controversy as to the form the measure should take to deal most effectively with the problem areas. The most obvious approach was a modification of Gladstonian Home Rule, advocated by the Irish secretaries himself in March 1911: 'The Bill would be like Mr. Gladstone's Bill of 1893, subject to the alterations and modifications which time had shown to be wise'. 'Home Rule all round' was the only serious alternative to the Gladstonian approach under consideration in 1911. It won considerable support from influential ministers, and subsequently became a recurring theme, whenever Irish negotiations reached an impasse.

'Home Rule all round', otherwise known as 'federalism' or 'United Kingdom devolution', was generally understood to mean the granting of subordinate assemblies for England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. These would control essentially local affairs, under the supreme control of the Imperial parliament, which would be responsible for national questions such as foreign policy, defence, trade and customs. Such a scheme was expected to solve the Irish Home Rule question, increase local efficiency within the United Kingdom, and relieve the congestion of business at Westminster. Home Rule all round also had the advantage of providing a logical solution to the thorny problem of Irish representation at
Westminster. Irish exclusion from the imperial parliament, as in the 1886 bill, was inconsistent with the taxation of Ireland; the 'in and out' plan of 1893 involved enormous technical difficulties, and Irish inclusion seemed unfair, since the Irish members would retain a voice in the local affairs of Great Britain. In 1911, C. P. Scott, editor of the Manchester Guardian commented on 'the crucial difficulty of the Irish representation which had baffled Gladstone', and Sir Courtenay Ilbert described it as the 'Gordian Knot' which was so familiar in 1892-3. The Home Rule committee was extremely preoccupied with this representation problem, and therefore all the more eager to consider Home Rule all round, which offered a potential solution.

THE ORIGINS OF HOME RULE ALL ROUND, AND THE LIBERAL FEDERALISTS, 1886-1911.

The origins of Home Rule all round lay in the federal proposals of Isaac Butt in the 1860's, and the discussions over the Canadian constitution in 1867. Joseph Chamberlain was the first British politician, though not the last, to exploit the tactical advantages of federalism. It seems likely that Chamberlain flew the federal kite, during the 1886 Home Rule debate, to divert attention from his basic aim of smashing the bill; it also helped to persuade his puzzled Radical supporters that he approved the principle of Irish self-determination. His few public references to Home Rule all round were deceptive. Privately and anonymously he emphasised the impracticability of such an ambitious scheme, which involved the destruction of the existing British constitution.

Home Rule all round was advocated by two groups among the Liberals in the 1890's. It appealed, on the one hand, to the Roseberyite Liberal Imperialists, for whom the retention of the Irish representatives at Westminster was essential. In 1889, Rosebery told Gladstone he hoped that the proposed Home Rule scheme would 'approximate to the federal principle'. Three years later Asquith wrote to Rosebery:

--- continued centralisation [at Westminster] means congestion, decay & ultimately death; devolution is essential to free activity and permanent vitality ---
It is only from this point of view that (as I think) H.R. can be shown to be both imperial (in the true sense) & democratic — If the issue is contracts, (as Mr. Gladstone & J. Morley would narrow it) to one which is local, exceptional, & anomalous, we are hopelessly shut in.

The Liberal Imperialists believed that the close identification of Liberalism with a narrow Irish Home Rule policy was politically damaging, and that the 'separatist' element in the 1886 bill was dangerous to the empire. They wanted to place Irish Home Rule in the wider context of imperial federation, which combined the advantages of closer imperial unity with the relief of the imperial parliament from the congestion of local, domestic problems. Asquith's later claim that he had always presented the case for Irish Home Rule as the first stage in a more comprehensive federal scheme does have some validity. The desire to remove Gladstone's Irish dream from the centre of Liberal politics was also, however, a distinct element in Liberal Imperialist thought in the 1890's.

The Welsh and Scottish Nationalists also favoured Home Rule all round, to ensure that their countries received equality of treatment with Ireland. They naturally resented the priority given by the Liberal party to the solution of Ireland's national demands. The young Lloyd George was the most forceful exponent of the Welsh Nationalist point of view. He drew the parallel between Wales and Ireland, both treated like 'the niggers of the Saxon household', and suggested that Welsh members should take the Irish party's parliamentary strategy as a model. He loyally supported Gladstone's second Home Rule bill, but increasingly resented the fact that the Irish cause blocked Welsh reforms. 'All round devolution' provided a perfect solution, for it did not involve abandonment of Irish Home Rule, but ensured that Wales would no longer be 'sent empty away'.

Lloyd George's campaign for Home Rule all round gained momentum after Gladstone's Irish bill was defeated in September 1893. Soon afterwards, the Scottish federalist, Munro-Ferguson, announced that 'H.R. is thrown over. Everyone talks now of Devolution'. In March 1895, the Scottish and Welsh members united in support of a Commons' resolution 'to devolve upon Legislatures in Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England, respectively, the management and control of their domestic affairs'. The question
was widely discussed during the 1895 election, especially in Scotland. After the Liberal defeat, Lloyd George demanded that federalism should replace Irish Home Rule in the forefront of the Liberal programme. As he explained to a Welsh audience, Home Rule all round was in the abstract not only the best Home Rule, but, under the circumstances, the only Home Rule that we are likely to get for a very long time.

The Liberal Home Rule all round movement lost its vitality between 1896 and 1910, along with the disintegration of Welsh and Scottish nationalism and the temporary chaos within the Liberal party. Lloyd George and a few Liberal Imperialists, such as Munro-Ferguson and T.A. Brussey, ensured that Home Rule all round was not entirely forgot. Churchill flirted briefly with 'administrative devolution' after his break with the Conservatives in 1904. This was a foretaste of his later federalist enthusiasm, though in 1904 Churchill was probably also aware that it offered a fairly safe stepping-stone between his previous Unionist position and the Liberal Home Rule policy he was to adopt by 1908. For the most part, however, apathy, opposition and scepticism were more in evidence in this period. The staunchest critics of Home Rule all round were those Liberals, like Morley and Birrell, who were most devoted to the Irish Nationalist cause. In 1898, John Morley denounced Home Rule all round as a meaningless maxim; but he warned that if it was seriously intended, it was impracticable and unnecessary, since Ireland's needs were entirely different from those of Scotland and Wales. The Nationalists were especially hostile, well aware that a federal scheme could easily serve to postpone Irish Home Rule to the distant future.

Home Rule all round revived in popularity during the 1910-11 constitutional crisis over the Lords' veto. It gained support in both main parties as a compromise solution which might form part of a major constitutional settlement, incidentally solving both the House of Lords' problem and the Irish question. The Unionist advocates of federalism have received far more attention than the Liberals. The Unionist Round Table movement, inspired by Lionel Curtis and Philip Kerr, proved to be a highly influential federalist pressure group. They soon attracted other former members of Lord Milner's 'Kindergarten', besides a number of influential outsiders, including F.S. Oliver, Leopold Amery, and Lord Robert Cecil.
The Round Table group turned its attention in 1910 from imperial federation to constitutional reform in the United Kingdom, because the constitutional crisis appeared to threaten the welfare of the empire. When an abortive constitutional conference was called in 1910 in a desperate attempt to settle the crisis, the Round Table aimed to persuade the participants to adopt a federal solution. They tried to influence the politicians through private correspondence, and the public through their articles in the Round Table and F.S. Oliver's 'Pacificus' letters to The Times. The Unionist press were very sympathetic to their cause. Major campaigns were launched by J.L. Garvin in the Observer and Lord Northcliffe in The Times and the Daily Mail.

Several individuals pursued parallel, but independent, courses towards a federal settlement - the more prominent including the fourth Earl Grey, T.A. Brassey, and Moreton Frawen. As governor-general of Canada from 1904-11, Lord Grey had been much impressed by his first-hand experience of federalism in operation, and he had a profound early influence on the Round Table group. He also worked persistently through the years 1911 to 1914 to win federalist converts from both parties, through his correspondence with men like Sir Edward Grey, Bonar Law, R.B. Haldane and James Bryce.

The views of the Unionist federalists attracted many rank and file party members, but they failed in their primary aim of converting the Unionist leaders. The only support from the front rank of the party leadership came from Austen Chamberlain. Otherwise the Unionist leaders were sceptical or openly opposed. Despite a barrage of voluminous letters from Garvin and F.S. Oliver, A.J. Balfour remained convinced that a federal scheme represented a movement away from unification towards separation, leading to the ultimate dissolution of the empire. Lord Lansdowne was even more sceptical of the prospects for a federal scheme: '--- when it is formulated - if ever it be - I shall be surprised if the effect of the revelation be not to bring the whole fabric down about the ears of the builders.'

Historians have concentrated on the Unionist federalists, especially as Home Rule all round held more obvious appeal for Unionists, who opposed Irish Home Rule on principle. The considerable interest which Home Rule all round
evoked in Liberal circles from 1910-14 has tended to be overlooked. Yet it won far more sympathy from Liberal than from Unionist leaders, and gained strong support from the Liberal backbenches, especially among the Scottish Nationalists.

Liberal enthusiasm for Home Rule all round revived in 1910, stimulated by the constitutional crisis. While the conference was in progress, Lloyd George privately suggested the formation of a coalition government to promote a major settlement of all outstanding party disputes. The Irish problem was undoubtedly one of the major obstacles to such a coalition, and Lloyd George resurrected his pet federal scheme of the 1890's as a possible solution. However, Home Rule all round was only vaguely mentioned in connection with the coalition proposal, so that Austen Chamberlain did not initially realize that 'Home Rule in some form was a condition of the agreement.' When he discussed his coalition plan with Balfour on 12 October 1910, Lloyd George 'mentioned (in his airy way) that he thought something would have to be done for Ireland, probably as part of a general scheme of Devolution.' Lloyd George provided no further details in two draft memoranda on his coalition scheme, and neither coalition nor Home Rule all round were formally discussed at the constitutional conference. However, the chancellor encouraged rumours that federalism was a prominent feature of his coalition plan, and was also a cause of friction at the conference. The Unionists indignantly concluded that Lloyd George was trying to gain their consent to coalition by disguising Irish Home Rule under the more palatable title of federalism. Lloyd George's more devious intrigues failed, along with his coalition plan and the constitutional conference.

While Lloyd George was using federalism for tactical purposes, a more serious federalist revival was taking place among the Liberal rank and file, led by the Scottish nationalists. By 1910, Celtic nationalism had revived in Scotland, and to a lesser extent in Wales. It was encouraged by the 1910 election results, which demonstrated that the Celtic fringe represented the backbone of the Liberal party. Since the 1890's, Welsh radicalism tended to follow Lloyd George's lead, becoming more closely linked with the fortunes of the British Liberal party. The Scottish Home Rulers, however, were more independently aggressive, and
eager to use the renewed Liberal interest in Irish Home Rule as a lever for pressing Scotland’s demands. According to Captain D. V. Pirie, one of the more ardent Scottish nationalists, as many as sixty out of the seventy-two Scottish Liberal members favoured Scottish Home Rule. 34 Even if Pirie’s estimate was inflated, the Scots members were undoubtedly enthusiastic about the devolution of legislative and administrative powers to a Scottish assembly at Edinburgh.

The increasing interest in Scottish Home Rule was accompanied by a growth of Scottish Liberal support for Home Rule all round. In most cases this probably represented an astute recognition that the federal bandwagon could advance the Scottish cause alongside that of Ireland. Certainly Scottish Home Rule took priority for the majority of Scottish members. Their enthusiasm for Home Rule all round was strongest in the months preceding April 1912, when they hoped to persuade the government to substitute a federal scheme for a purely Irish bill. Many Scottish Liberals resented the priority given to Irish Home Rule and saw a federal scheme as a means of rapidly promoting Scotland’s prospects. Others were less certain that Home Rule all round would achieve this end. They feared that the future chances of a purely Scottish Home Rule bill might be prejudiced, if its fortunes were linked too closely with those of a utopian federal scheme. 35

Another group of Scottish Liberals, however, were enthusiastic champions of Home Rule all round on its merits, irrespective of the advantages it might involve for Scotland. They included Captain D. V. Pirie, W. H. Cowan, Arthur Ponsonby, Alexander MacCallum Scott, Munro-Ferguson, J. Cathcart Wason, and J. A. Murray Macdonald. In July 1911, an article by Murray Macdonald in the Nineteenth Century indicated the other considerations which influenced these Scottish Liberals in their advocacy of Home Rule all round. The relief of parliamentary congestion at Westminster was Macdonald’s major concern. He also believed that a federal system would advance local efficiency, solve the problem of the Upper House, and facilitate the future federation of the empire. 36 Munro-Ferguson favoured a more direct form of influence. He exercised his persuasive powers on four out of the seven members of the Home Rule sub-committee, even before its first meeting, flattering himself that he was thereby advancing the federal cause. 37
THE CABINET COMMITTEE OF 1911: HOME RULE, OR HOME RULE ALL AROUND?

This revival of interest in Home Rule all round in 1910-11 ensured that a federal scheme was high on the agenda of the cabinet committee, when it commenced its deliberations in February 1911. The members of the committee were Birrell, Lloyd George, Churchill, R.B. Haldane, Herbert Samuel and Sir Edward Grey, with Lord Loreburn as chairman. The Irish secretary was the only member who actively opposed Home Rule all round. Churchill, Lloyd George, and Haldane were enthusiastic federalists, Grey was moderately keen, and Loreburn and Samuel were sympathetic. It seems unlikely that the prime minister deliberately selected his sub-committee to ensure the promotion of Home Rule all round. Asquith himself was no more than cautiously sympathetic to administrative devolution, and the chosen ministers were well qualified for their task on other grounds. The result, however, was a committee which regarded Home Rule all round very favourably, and devoted a substantial part of its time to discussion of a possible federal scheme.

The former Liberal Imperialists, Grey and Haldane, had retained their interest in Home Rule all round, though Haldane was more enthusiastic. In a speech at East Lothian, early in December 1910, Haldane emphasized the need to delegate to provincial assemblies the mass of local business overwhelming the Commons. Later in the month, with Asquith's sanction, Haldane began preparing a memorandum on constitutional reform; this included Home Rule all round, and reform of the House of Lords, as part of one great scheme. Sir Edward Grey was also interested in a federal plan which might be associated with reform of the Upper House. In January 1911, he informed the federal enthusiast, Earl Grey, that the prospects for Home Rule all round appeared favourable:

We shall, I hope, save the House of Commons by delegating local affairs within the limits of the United Kingdom. The working out of a practical scheme presents many difficulties, but if possible we shall prepare a scheme this year, and proceed to carry it out next year. We shall then have before us a great constitutional Reform; which will include Home Rule for the different parts of the United Kingdom,
the reform of the Second Chamber, and a permanent adjustment of the relations between the two Houses. 41

Lord Loreburn was also sympathetic to the federal cause, and, as chairman of the Home Rule committee, he was in a position of potential influence. But he was deeply committed to Irish Home Rule, and would only support a federal scheme if it did not harm the Irish cause. Loreburn agreed with C. P. Scott, editor of the Manchester Guardian, that the right principle was Home Rule all round, though not necessarily on the same lines for each part of the United Kingdom. Loreburn believed, however, that an Irish Home Rule bill should be introduced first:

but avowedly only as the first part of the larger scheme & that the rest of the scheme ought to be prepared in advance so that it could be produced on challenge or at least that we should know exactly where we were going. 42

An article by Loreburn, which first appeared in 1892, was republished in the March 1911 issue of the Contemporary Review. The views expressed were as idiosyncratic as the timing. Loreburn suggested that it was possible to have more than one executive existing concurrently, but responsible to the one parliament at Westminster. 43 This could be interpreted as an unusual form of devolution, but its relevance to the main issues was not clear. Loreburn's influence on the committee seems to have been minimal, in any case, since he was tired, disheartened and eager to resign.

Churchill and Lloyd George were the only members who actually presented federal proposals to the committee. Churchill's mild support for a modest measure of administrative devolution in 1904, had by February 1911 escalated into enthusiasm for a full-blown scheme of Home Rule all round. He had evidently been thinking over the problem of Irish representation before the cabinet committee began its deliberations. When the first meeting was held on 24 February, Churchill circulated a memorandum, examining the problems posed by federalism, to anticipate objections and propose his own solutions.

In Churchill's opinion, the most overwhelming difficulty to be faced in creating a federal system was the treatment to be given to England. If separate parliaments were established in Scotland, Ireland and Wales, was England also to
be given one or more assemblies, or were English affairs to be dealt with by the imperial parliament? Churchill was convinced that it was absolutely impossible for an English parliament and executive to exist side by side with an imperial parliament and executive. It would be impracticable to have two different groups of politicians responsible for internal and external affairs. The two sets of issues were inextricably connected, and such a division of power might easily lead to violent political collision.

Churchill produced a second memorandum for the cabinet on 2 March 1911, which attempted to provide a solution to the problem of English devolution. He suggested the rather drastic method of dividing the United Kingdom into ten segments, each with its own assembly for legislative and administrative purposes. These assemblies should be given parliamentary form in Scotland, Ireland and Wales; the seven English assemblies would have more limited powers over local affairs such as education, land, housing and police. The imperial parliament would remain unaltered, and would retain all powers not specifically devolved. Churchill suggested that the proposals for the rest of the United Kingdom might be announced at the same time as the Irish Home Rule bill, in preparation for their introduction in a separate bill the following year.

A few days later, Churchill had a long talk with Sir Courtenay Ilbert, the clerk of the Commons, and asked his opinion of the federal scheme outlined in the second memorandum. Ilbert was a first-rate parliamentary draftsman, with a wide knowledge of procedure. He was also a courteous and considerate man, normally reluctant to press his own opinions. But on this occasion he felt sufficiently strongly to write a memorandum for the sub-committee in criticism of Churchill's proposals. Ilbert believed that a simultaneous announcement of bills for the rest of the United Kingdom, as well as Ireland, would distract the public mind and confuse the immediate Irish issues:

Nor am I satisfied that the kind of devolution suggested would be either expedient or practicable. I think that devolution for Ireland and devolution for Great Britain should run on different lines.

Ilbert pointed out that Scotland and Wales mainly demanded administrative rather than legislative devolution. Their needs would accordingly be satisfied by
increasing the administrative powers of local authorities, and by altering parliamentary procedure relating to regional legislation. He was extremely sceptical about the division of England into seven regions, whether for administrative or legislative purposes, since there was no evidence of any such English provincial demand, homogeneity, or sentiment.\textsuperscript{47}

Ibert's critique acted, as intended, as a 'cold water douche' on the cabinet's enthusiasm for Churchill's ambitious scheme of Home Rule all round. Sirrell informed Ibert, with considerable relief, that his note introduced a refreshing breeze of common sense into the discussion.\textsuperscript{48} Ibert's arguments increased the reservations of Lloyd George and Asquith concerning a full-blown federal scheme. Lloyd George believed that devolution might work well enough for Scotland and Wales, but it could not be applied to England; the progressive North would never submit to be placed under the control of the semi-feudal south. Moreover, if England were to be divided up as Churchill suggested, at least six separate units would be required. The difficulties were enormous, and the English people were wholly unprepared for such a scheme.\textsuperscript{49} Asquith's response was very similar, as he revealed to C. P. Scott in July. The prime minister agreed that Scotland and Wales were both ready for Home Rule all round:

\textquote{... the difficulty was England & England could not be divided, we could not go back to the Heptarchy. The vast mass & political dominance of England had prevented a grievance from being felt & there was no demand for separate treatment. That was the obstacle. But he welcomed discussion & propaganda on that line.}\textsuperscript{50}

Asquith may well have been rather grateful for this English 'obstacle'. It allowed him to bless federalism in principle, secure in the knowledge that he was unlikely to have to put it into practice.

Ibert's arguments demonstrated the impracticability of Churchill's grandiose scheme, which was quietly dropped. Churchill himself continued to brood over his 'heptarchy' plan, until he suddenly caused a minor sensation by publicising it in September 1912.\textsuperscript{51} Meanwhile, the Committee gave considerable approval to a more limited compromise drafted by Lloyd George on 27 February.
1911. The Chancellor suggested that a complete Home Rule measure should be introduced first for Ireland alone. It should be accompanied by the promise that the government would next proceed to introduce similar legislation for England, Scotland and Wales:

But in order to obviate the inconvenience & injustice which w'd arise in the interregnum owing to Irish Members interfering in purely English, Scottish & Welsh affairs a system of Grand Committees must be set up simultaneously with Irish HR Bill with full & final legislative powers in English Scottish & Welsh affairs of same character as those delegated to Irish Parl. 52

There was some justification for Herbert's anxiety, in March 1911, that the cabinet committee was still flirting with 'some wild cat scheme' of Home Rule all round. 53 The first draft of the Home Rule bill, printed in June 1911, was closely based on the final version of the 1893 bill. But the second printed draft of 1 August was significantly altered by the addition of Lloyd George's 'grand committee' scheme, included as a very brief 'Part II'. This stated that, until United Kingdom devolution was established, bills relating exclusively to England, Scotland or Wales, should be dealt with at all stages by grand committees consisting only of the members for the region concerned. The Home Rule bill accordingly acquired the grander title: 'Government of Ireland and House of Commons (Devolution of Business) Bill'. 54 Herbert Samuel described the plan as 'an ingenious & bold feature'. 55

FEDERALISM REJECTED

The Irish secretary and the Nationalist leaders were adamantly opposed to any form of Home Rule all round, whether of the Churchill or the Lloyd George variety. They knew the history of the federalist movement, and feared its implications for Ireland. Birrell shared the conviction of Redmond and Dillon that federalism would 'complicate the Irish part of the question', and possibly delay or wreck Home Rule altogether. 56 Apart from the doubtful motives of some of its supporters, Birrell and the Nationalists recognized the enormous practical problems involved in the implementation of Home Rule all round, which
would be immensely complicated and time-consuming. Birrell aimed to pave the way for Home Rule (on more or less Gladstonian lines), and to do all that in me lay to make any other solution of the problem impossible. 57

The Nationalist leaders were excluded from the deliberations of the cabinet committee for almost a year, though Birrell and Churchill both felt they should have been consulted much sooner. The chief secretary considered that the committee’s discussions were essentially unrealistic in the absence of the men who would have to run the new Irish government. 58 Up to the end of 1911, then, Birrell acted as watch-dog for Irish interests. He was concerned that the committee should follow the terms of the second Gladstonian Home Rule bill as far as possible; that was broadly acceptable to the Nationalists, and had already received the Commons’ assent in 1893. Birrell was determined to resist the plans of Churchill and Lloyd George, but he gave them free rein for a few months, possibly hoping they would tire of their federalist visions. The chief secretary made his own position absolutely clear at a full cabinet in mid-August 1911: 4—protesting against Irish H.R. being included in a devolution Federal scheme for Wales & Scotland which the country had never discussed. 59

Ten days later, Birrell expressed his fears more fully in an important letter to Churchill, which was also intended to influence Lloyd George, to whom it was shown:

I wish I felt happier than I do about the Bill but I am very unhappy about it --- If it should turn out that we & our Irish friends & allies, & what staunch allies they have been, don’t mean the same thing, & that Home Rule for Ireland is to be put in the same bag with some kind of Home Rule for England Scotland & Wales, I believe the crash will be prodigious --- & I fear the ruin may be complete. 60

Churchill responded with a defence of Lloyd George’s grand committee provisions, if his own grandiose scheme was not to be adopted. He considered Lloyd George’s compromise ‘the least we can do to make the case square for Scotland & Wales’.

Having made his token protest, however, Churchill’s concluding remark suggested that he might yet be won over: ‘if everything else fails, I will go in on the old
Gladstonian ticket. But will the Cabinet? 61

Birrell’s quiet, but persistent, stand against Home Rule all round helped to prevent the cabinet committing itself to federalism. He found support for the traditional Gladstonian approach from colleagues who were not members of the sub-committee. After the full cabinet discussed Home Rule all round on 7 December, John Burns commented: ‘Scotland may come. Wales must wait. England does not want it. What was not needed was a welter of parochialism’. 62 John Morley was the only other Irish expert in the cabinet, besides Birrell, and he was equally opposed to a federal solution. McKinnon Wood and Charles Hobhouse were also unenthusiastic about Home Rule all round. 63 But the strongest attack on the Lloyd George scheme was delivered by Reginald McKenna, shortly after this meeting. The home secretary circulated a memorandum to the cabinet, proposing to restore the ‘in and out’ plan of 1893, excluding Irish members from all but debates on Irish matters, since he objected to Irish interference at Westminster. He considered this vastly preferable to Lloyd George’s ‘grand committee’ plan, which had not been adequately developed and could well prove impracticable. 64

Birrell gained firm support from the Nationalist leaders, when he finally informed them of the ‘grand committee’ proposals, shortly after the December cabinet. The reaction of Redmond and Dillon was expressed in a critical memorandum which came before the cabinet on 25 January 1912. 65 They demanded that the ‘grand committee’ clauses should be eliminated altogether:

The inclusion of such provisions will lead to attempts by at least Scotch and Welsh to enlarge Scotch and Welsh provisions on the proposed Irish lines, and consequently to prolonged debates and the possible killing of the Bill, with the inevitable consequence that Home Rule for Ireland will again be postponed indefinitely.

The Nationalist leaders believed that the problem of the continued Irish representation at Westminster could be dealt with informally through Standing Orders. But if the ‘grand committee’ plan was formally incorporated into the Irish measure, it would ‘absolutely shatter the chance of the Bill becoming law in the immediate future’. 66
Despite the criticisms of Birrell, McKenna and the Nationalists, it was another two months before Lloyd George's 'grand committees' were abandoned. Indeed the cabinet appeared still to favour the plan on 6 February 1912, as Asquith reported to the king:

A large majority of the Cabinet are of opinion that the principle of devolution will have to be carried further, and that meanwhile the Irish should not be permitted to vote on English, Welsh or Scottish questions.

John Morley objected to the 'grand committee' scheme, suggesting instead that the Irish should have full voting powers but greatly reduced numbers. The cabinet adjourned before discussion on this point was completed, as was so often the case, and continued to hesitate throughout March. IIbert was still afraid that the temptations of federalism might persuade ministers to force the Irish bill into a pattern more suitable for England and Wales. The draft Home Rule bill, printed on 5 March, again included Part II containing the 'grand committee' plan, and retained 'devolution' in the title. However, the Nationalist leaders' objections of 29 January were duly noted in the interleaved pages of comments provided with this draft.

Consequently the Irish leaders renewed their pressure for the removal of the 'grand committees' later in March, when they met the Liberal leaders for a series of discussions. The Nationalists outlined the changes they considered crucial, stating simply that Part II must be eliminated. Birrell and the Irish leaders finally won their point. After a cabinet on 2 April, Birrell reported jubilantly to Dillon that 'Part Two has disappeared'. The final draft of the 1912 Home Rule bill omitted the 'grand committee' plan entirely, and no reference was made in the text to any future federal scheme. The federalist majority in the cabinet was evidently reconciled to its defeat. Burns commented after the final meeting before the introduction of the bill: 'Federalism stronger than a year ago but content with outline of PM'.

The rejection of the 'grand committees' scheme also involved an alteration in the final decision about Irish representation at Westminster. The cabinet had decided in August 1911 that an undefined number of Irish members
should attend the imperial parliament, thus ruling out the 1886 solution. The
August 1911 draft of the bill had provisionally suggested that Ireland should send
sixty-three members to Westminster. In April 1912, however, this was reduced
to forty-two, since there was no further need to compensate the Irish for the lack
of full voting powers involved in the 'grand committees' plan. This was a compromise,
since Ireland was entitled to sixty-four representatives on a strict population basis
in 1914. This was explained in the Notes to Clauses, printed later for cabinet
guidance on the bill's provisions:

The number 42 has not been fixed on any very logical principle. Any in-and-out arrangement is agreed to
be impossible, and in order to compensate for the
fact that the interest of Irish members in matters
dealt with by the House cannot now be so wide as
that of other members of the House, it has been
thought right not to give Ireland full representation
on a population basis.  

Moreover, Ireland could not expect full representation, since she would have control
of her own affairs in the Dublin parliament. The federalists could at least take
comfort from the fact that the retention of even a reduced number of Irish members
at Westminster left open a federal solution for the future.

Asquith made a token gesture to the federal idea when he introduced
the Home Rule bill in the Commons on 11 April. He claimed that he had always
presented the Irish case as only the first step in a larger and more comprehensive
policy. He emphasized the urgent need to emancipate the imperial parliament from
the crushing burden of the local concerns of the various parts of the United Kingdom.
But the Irish claim came first, and must be dealt with separately. United Kingdom
devolution was too complex, and individual conditions too varied, for it to be
accomplished in one blow. Yet he promised that the Irish measure should be
carried through 'with the distinct and direct purpose of these further and fuller
applications of the principle.'

The advantages of this approach were obvious, from the prime
minister's point of view. In order to secure Nationalist support and avoid endless
complications which might easily wreck Irish Home Rule, he produced a purely
Irish bill and disavowed immediate plans for home Rule all round. But it was
useful to pay lip-service to the federal principle, to retain the support of the Welsh and Scottish nationalists and those Liberals who were lukewarm about Irish Home Rule. As The Times suggested on 16 April, Asquith's federal suggestions 'may be mere lures intended to bring coy Liberals fluttering into the Nationalist nets.' The Unionists, Sir John Marrick, admired Asquith's ingenuity in providing 'a crumb of comfort for the Federalist', even though there was no federalism in the text of the bill and little more in its structure. Sir George Kemp, a dissident Liberal critic of Home Rule, denounced federalism as a new lever to gain support for Irish Home Rule, and to induce the Scots and the Welsh to agree.

The prime minister naturally sought to retain the support of the Liberal federalists in the Commons, since they numbered about eighty. Asquith's success in this depended on how effectively he convinced them of the reality of his promises. The Liberal federalists were led by the Scottish members who initially tended to accept Asquith's promise at face value. Their speeches on the Home Rule bill in May 1912 accepted the Irish bill as a first step to Home Rule all round, which must be established as soon as possible. D.V. Pirie was more cautious from the start, abstaining on the First Reading because no reference was made to a federal scheme in the text of the bill. The disillusionment of the Scottish Liberals tended to increase. On 6 May, Murray Macdonald, Munro-Ferguson, Pirie, Cowan and Pensonby, led a Scottish Liberal deputation to the prime minister. They explained that they did not oppose Irish Home Rule, but felt that Scotland also had claims. They asked the government to introduce a Scottish Home Rule bill in the 1913 session, in view of the increasing public interest in a general scheme of devolution. The deputation obtained little encouragement from Asquith's reply that the United Kingdom must be dealt with in gradual stages, and the Irish case was currently of paramount urgency.

Unionist speakers in the Home Rule debate emphasized that Asquith's Irish bill was not, as he claimed, a first step to a federal system. Sir John Lonsdale, for instance, observed that Redmond's repudiation of Home Rule all round completely shattered the grand pretence of the government. These arguments were not lost
HOME RULE FOR SCOTLAND: A FORECAST.

"It's true I promised you I wouldn't let the grass grow under my feet, but well, you know what grass is!"

Prime Minister: "We believe very highly in the value of grass.

In a delegation of Scots Members who deplored Home Rule for Scotland Mr. Asquith gave a promise that he would not let grass grow under his feet!"
on the Scottish members. By 11 June, MacCallum Scott was far more sceptical of Asquithian platitudes than he had been a month earlier. He was now convinced that the Irish bill was not a measure to establish a federal system, as he had previously believed. To underline this, he introduced his own Home Rule all round bill in July 1912, supported by Murray Macdonald, Munro-Ferguson and Captain Pirie. 84

The government experienced increasing difficulty in sustaining its argument that the Home Rule measure was indeed intended as a first instalment of a federal scheme. By November 1912, even the sympathetic Manchester Guardian noted Asquith's difficulties in maintaining credibility on the federalist front. 85 Clearly the very weak line on federalism adopted in the Irish bill could not hope to retain any strong appeal for the Scottish Liberals. It did not alter the enthusiasm of the truly devoted advocates of Home Rule all round, such as Murray Macdonald, Ponsonby, Pirie, and Munro-Ferguson. But their disillusionment with Asquith's federal promises tended to make them extremely critical of the weaker features of the Irish Home Rule bill, especially those provisions which were inconsistent with a federal scheme. Scottish federalists were among the more vocal Liberal critics of Asquith's Ulster policy, and they led a backbench revolt against the financial provisions of the Irish bill in November 1912. However, the majority of Scottish Liberals gradually lost interest in Home Rule all round once they realized that the Irish bill was unlikely to promote a wider scheme. Scottish nationalism was a persistent undercurrent in the federalism of most Scottish Liberals. They tended to equate Home Rule all round with Scottish Home Rule, and were less interested in other aspects of a comprehensive federal scheme. Inevitably, then, the majority of Scottish Liberals returned to their campaign for a Scottish Home Rule bill. 86

A second function of the government's avowed federal intentions was to leave open a line of approach to the Unionists, in case deadlock over the Irish bill at any stage made compromise negotiations a tactical necessity. Thus the government never entirely rejected the federal idea after April 1912, because its tactical advantages remained significant. By 1912, Home Rule all round had
ceased to provide a serious alternative to a purely Irish Home Rule measure for the Liberals. Yet it remained a powerful negotiating counter, capable of winning support from all the different federalist groups. The failure of most federalists to produce any detailed, practicable scheme, added to the attractions of the federal idea as a negotiating gambit, whilst also discouraging party leaders from taking it more seriously.

A GLADSTONIAN SOLUTION BY DEFAULT: DRAFTING AND FINAL PROVISIONS

Meanwhile, with federalism abandoned, the cabinet could no longer avoid the task of determining the final shape of the 1912 Irish Home Rule bill. The Gladstonian approach was adopted largely by default, in the absence of any clearly defined alternative. Lloyd George's 'grand committee' plan was the only concrete proposal on federal lines actually submitted to the cabinet committee. Even that was never developed very far. Once it was abandoned, there was little time or inclination to look further afield than the second Home Rule bill of 1893.

The cabinet committee on Home Rule was not inclined to constructive hard work. In the eleven months before the Nationalists were finally brought into consultation, the committee made almost no progress towards drafting a new measure, federal or otherwise. The Unionist, P.S. Oliver, considered the behaviour of the committee so casual, that he later observed to Eton Law:

When they came to prepare their Bill the impression given to various people whom they consulted was that, with the exception of the eager Samuel and the callow Simon no one was in earnest, or thought it much worth while bothering about a measure which would never come into force —

Two supposedly new drafts of the third Home Rule bill were printed in June and August 1911, but they reproduced the 1893 bill so faithfully that the schedules were not even amended to take account of Queen Victoria's death. There was considerable justification for using as a starting-point the final version of the 1893 bill, since this had been debated at length before it finally passed the
Commons. Considerable alteration was necessary, however, after nearly twenty years, but this problem did not unduly disturb the leisurely committee. The first draft, which appeared on 21 June 1911, was almost identical to the 1893 bill, so much so that there seemed little point in printing it. There were very few alterations worthy of note. Terminology was changed, so that 'Parliament' replaced 'Legislature', the 'Legislative Council' became the 'Irish Senate', and the 'Legislative Assembly' the 'Irish House of Commons'.

Only two changes were significant. The Irish Senate was now to be nominated by the lord lieutenant on the advice of the Irish cabinet, rather than elected on a property franchise as in 1893, and its number was to be reduced from forty-eight to twenty-four. Gladstone's bill had given general powers to the Irish parliament to make all laws affecting the peace, order and good government of Ireland, except for those subjects specifically excluded. The June 1911 draft operated on opposite lines, by enumerating the powers actually granted to the Irish parliament. These included property, land, justice, civil rights and local government. The excluded powers were mentioned more briefly than in 1893, though the lengthy list of 'restrictions' remained the same. 90 Haldane and Loreburn opposed this change, but they gave way under pressure from committee members who wished to define, and thereby to limit, the powers of the Irish parliament. 91

The two major alterations in the second draft, printed on 1 August 1911, were the product of Lloyd George's inventive mind, but neither survived to become a permanent part of the final bill. The 'grand committee' plan was not abandoned until early April 1912, but the second brain wave made its only appearance in the draft of August 1911. This involved a rather complex arrangement for the veto of Irish bills by the imperial parliament rather than the lord lieutenant. Lloyd George's main aim was to allay nonconformist suspicions of Home Rule, by making the Irish parliament very definitely subordinate. When it was discussed in cabinet on 16 August, Jack Pease noted the prime minister's distaste for Lloyd George's suggestion. Asquith protested against the implied 'mark of servitude', and commented that the imperial supremacy could be enforced in a less extreme manner. 92 The only other modification in this
second draft concerned the appointment of an Irish boundary commission to arrange the redistribution of Irish constituencies.

With the exception of Lloyd George's embellishments, the nominated senate, and the new method of determining the Irish parliament's powers, the two drafts of 1911 were practically identical to the 1893 bill. The cabinet committee did not even have to examine the crucial question of finance, since that was being examined separately by Herbert Samuel and the Primrose committee. Samuel rather overstated the case in September 1911, when he confided to Herbert Gladstone that 'The Home Rule Bill is in being, but with a good many blanks and square brackets'. Perhaps Samuel was too immersed in Irish finance to realize that his colleagues were less conscientious than he was. Little progress was made in the next few months. The Times reported with considerable accuracy on 2 February 1912 that a draft of the new bill existed:

--- a reproduction, more or less in skeleton form, of the Home Rule Bill of 1893. Some of the provisions have become obsolete since 1893, and there are gaps in the scheme which have yet to be filled in. Some decisions already taken may, possibly, have to be revised.

Thus, when the Nationalist leaders were finally allowed to see the second draft in December 1911, they were informed that it 'was not the result of serious consideration, but had been hurriedly thrown together', and was not to be regarded as expressing the settled view of the Cabinet. This remarkable admission was a damning indictment of the supposed labours of the Home Rule committee over the previous year. The third Home Rule bill only began to take final shape after January 1912, and the committee played little further part. Birrell at last assumed a leading role, since federalist aspirations were abandoned, and he was allowed to work closely with the Nationalist leaders. He thrashed out the detailed provisions of the measure in the course of frequent discussions with Redmond and Dillon, who visited him almost daily while he was in London.

Redmond and Dillon criticised the two 1911 drafts in a scathing memorandum, which was circulated to the cabinet at the end of January 1912. They strongly condemned the few innovations introduced in 1911, including the
THE OLD ORDER CHANGES.

CALL FOR 
When: "IRISH PIG READY"

MANAGER QUICK: "NOT YET. NOBODY SHALL SAY WE RUSHED THIS STAR TURN BEFORE WE' D THOUGHT IT OUT. SEND THE WELSH RABBIT ON TO KEEP 'EM QUIET."
grand committee scheme and Samuel's financial provisions. They also stated that 'it would be a serious blot on the Bill', if the government insisted on departing from Gladstonian precedent by specifying all 'included' powers granted to the Irish parliament. This would degrade the Irish parliament, offend Irish sentiment, and present numerous opportunities for attack at Committee stage. Redmond and Dillon considered Lloyd George's proposal for direct veto of Irish bills by the imperial parliament equally inadmissible: 'The Bill might as well never be introduced if it contained those provisions'. However, they had already been informed that the offending clause would eventually be withdrawn and the lord lieutenant's veto restored. The Nationalist leaders further objected that several 'restrictions' on the powers of the Irish parliament were, by 1912, 'unnecessary, illusory, and needlessly offensive'. They also suggested increasing the numbers in each Irish House, and changing the senators' terms from eight to ten years. Finally, they protested fiercely at the retention of the 1893 clauses providing that local police forces should replace the Royal Irish Constabulary. They requested that the R.I.C. should be retained, and fairly rapidly handed over to the Irish government's control.

The Nationalist critique was fairly effective. The innovations of 1911 were abandoned one by one, between February and April 1912, but the process was slow. This was partly due to the decline in cabinet morale in the early months of 1912, reaching its nadir in March. Government confidence had been temporarily undermined by the coal strike, the by-election reverses, and the activities of the suffragettes. John Morley and John Burns were equally gloomy about Home Rule prospects. Morley feared that the government's authority was too weak for the important measures in hand, and Burns complained that 'the outlook is dark and the potentialities of disaster ominous'.

The cabinet even discussed the possibility of resignation on 6 March. Asquith said they must consider their position very carefully in the light of the by-election figures, particularly as they had major measures still to carry through. It was the seventh year of their existence, and they did not want to be charged with clinging to office when they were losing moral authority. Asquith's
unusually pessimistic remarks may have been deliberately intended to arouse his gloomy colleagues from their lethargy. They certainly stimulated a much-needed fighting spirit, and ministers' reactions on the Irish issue were most significant. Morley warned that they must consider the Irish response in the event of their resignation. They were pledged to the Nationalists, and bound to pursue Home Rule, as they did in 1893 with a smaller majority. Lloyd George, Haldane and Churchill advocated pressing on with Home Rule for the sake of the Irish. Loreburn thought they 'must stay & go down fighting', and Birrell pointed out that 'we are bound to the Irish'. This response encouraged Asquith to decide that they should at least introduce their bills, though their dwindling popularity offered little prospect of getting them passed. 100 This account by Harcourt confirms Asquith's conviction that, despite the anxious times, there were no internal dissensions within the cabinet: 'Its members agree to hold different opinions on important points, but they are on friendly terms with each other and are loyal to their leader. 101

The day before this cabinet meeting, a new draft of the Home Rule bill was printed, but it served only to increase the frustrations of Birrell and the Nationalists. The text scarcely differed from that of August 1911, except that the Westminster veto over Irish legislation was abandoned, as the January memorandum had promised. Samuel's financial provisions also filled the previously blank pages on finance. However, twenty-eight interleaved pages of commentary on the text were inserted, chiefly outlining the criticisms and suggestions put forward in the Nationalists' January memorandum. The general tone of the commentary was at least sympathetic to the Irish demands, which was encouraging. 102

Birrell shared his colleagues' depression early in March, and this new draft did little to improve his mood. He complained that his efforts to get the Home Rule bill drafted were being thwarted by the coal strike and his colleagues' illnesses. 103 The Irish secretary rarely indulged in self-pity for long, however, and soon became more constructive. On 14 March, he requested in cabinet that the prime minister and some of his colleagues should meet Redmond and Dillon to discuss the questions which were still unresolved. 104 In consequence, a series of conferences was held later in March, between Asquith, Lloyd George, Samuel
and Birrell on the Liberal side, and Redmond, Dillon, T. P. O'Connor and J. J. Clancy on the Irish side. The Irish members summarised the conclusions of these discussions in a memorandum which specified the alterations they sought in the bill. The main emphasis of their demands was placed on the financial provisions and the controversial 'grand committees'.

In contrast to the leisurely progress of the past year, Birrell, Samuel and Asquith worked exceptionally long hours on the final draft, in the last two weeks before the introduction of the bill. Several points were decided in the last few days. Birrell kept the Irish leaders closely informed of all developments, and attempted to accommodate their preferences wherever possible. Most of these last minute discussions related to finance, which was Samuel's preserve, but Birrell and Asquith also worked extraordinarily hard. The chief secretary commented that 'the P.M. will want a certain amount of Reading Up & Coaching, but he is a Wonderful Man'. However, Birrell shared Margot Asquith's concern that Henry was 'very brain fagged', and the prime minister admitted to Morley on 10 April that he felt exhausted. This probably explains why Asquith also relied fairly heavily on Sir John Simon, the solicitor general, for help in the final stages of drafting. Simon was a brilliant young barrister, who combined a love of hard work with a genuine commitment to political life. Simon might have been disconcerted by Asquith's request, on 3 April, to 'bring a sort of summarised statement of the proposed new Constitution both as it affects Ireland & the U.K. with some comparison of what was proposed in 1893.' He visited Asquith twice during the recess to help prepare his speech for the introduction of the bill.

Even as late as 6 April, when Birrell sent Redmond the most recent draft of the bill, he added that 'there are a good many rough edges yet and blanks'. Frantic last minute meetings were held on 9 and 10 April, chiefly between Birrell, Asquith, Redmond and Samuel, to decide final drafting points and polish up those rough edges. The day before the bill was introduced, Birrell and Samuel each participated in three conferences and a cabinet, all on the subject of Home Rule. Birrell even found time afterwards to write a long letter of reassurance to Redmond, concluding: 'I pray Heaven we may have a good send off.' Fortunately for the
Liberals, the Home Rule debate began in a more favourable political climate, since the coal strike was over and Asquith's reputation was higher than ever. 111

The prime minister introduced the Home Rule bill on 11 April. The final draft was substantially complete by then, though it was not printed until four days later. 112 The shorter title, Government of Ireland Bill, was restored, since the 'grand committee' plan had been dropped. The most outstanding feature of the bill, except for the financial provisions, was the remarkable similarity to the 1893 bill as amended in Committee. Indeed, the cabinet took pains to retain the exact format and terminology of the earlier bill. Any changes had to be firmly justified, as 'a departure from precedent would probably lead to debate in the House. Ministers were provided with a commentary on every clause, in a memorandum entitled Notes to Clauses. This indicated precisely how far each provision followed the 1893 precedent, and presented arguments to justify any alterations. 113

The main provisions will be examined briefly here, and the debate will be considered in subsequent chapters. Clause one provided for the establishment of an Irish parliament, consisting of a nominated senate and an elected House of Commons, subject to the supremacy of the United Kingdom parliament. The Nationalists won their point in the second clause, dealing with the legislative powers of the Irish parliament. The method used in the two Gladstonian bills was restored. The Irish parliament was granted general powers to legislate for the 'peace, order and good government of Ireland', subject to the exceptions specifically listed. The method adopted in the earlier drafts of 1911-12, whereby the 'included', powers had been enumerated, was obviously more restrictive; it was now finally dropped, under the barrage of Irish protest. The Gladstonian method presented the new Irish parliament in a more dignified and independent light; it was also easier to draft, and less controversial. The list of powers specifically excluded from the Irish parliament's control followed the 1893 bill very closely. These powers included matters concerning the 'crown, the making of peace and war, the army and navy, defence, treaties and foreign trade. 114

Samuel's financial scheme, combined with the various socio-economic reforms since 1893, made it necessary to add a completely new set
of exceptions to the 1893 list. These were the new 'reserved matters'. These were different in character from the other excepted powers, since they were subjects of purely Irish concern, which in most cases might ultimately be transferred to the Irish government's control. They included Irish land purchase, old age pensions, national insurance, the collection of taxes, and control of the Royal Irish Constabulary. This latter point represented another substantial concession to the views of the Irish leaders. The management of the R.D.C. was to be taken over by the Irish government after six years, and the Gladstonian plan to develop local police forces was not mentioned. Land purchase was to remain permanently under imperial control until the transfer of ownership from landlords to tenants was finally completed. This decision was strongly contested by the Irish Nationalists, especially William O'Brien, who wanted land purchase transferred to Irish control within a few years. The government was unable to concede this, since they needed assurance that the immense commitments of the imperial exchequer would be secure. Birrell could only appease the Nationalists by promising to accelerate and complete the land purchase process.

A further concession was made to Nationalist demands in clause three. The list of 'restrictions' on the Irish government's powers was now very much shorter than in the 1893 bill or the earlier 1911-12 drafts. The remaining restrictions were concerned solely to protect religious equality. They repeated the 1893 provisions which forbade the Irish parliament to establish or endow any religion; no laws could be passed to prevent the free exercise of any religion, or to give privileges or impose disabilities on account of religious belief. This was the only provision made to deal with the problem of the Ulster Protestant minority. Most of the very detailed restrictions of 1893 were abandoned. Notes to Clauses suggested that the protests made by the Irish leaders in their January memorandum had some effect on this decision:

The affirmation of the principle of Home Rule presupposes the capacity of the Irish Government to govern without committing any of the outrages against which the restrictions of clause 4 of the 1893 Bill are aimed.
Clause four defined the functions of the executive authority in Ireland more precisely than the brief, vague provisions of the earlier bills. The lord-lieutenant would be the head of the Irish executive, representing the crown. His office was deliberately made non-political by the stipulation that he was to be appointed for a fixed term of six years, unaffected by any change of ministry. The lord lieutenant would be advised on Irish matters by the "executive committee of the privy council," which would be the Irish equivalent of the English cabinet. Irish ministers would normally be heads of the various government departments, and could be dismissed if they lost the confidence of parliament.

Clauses six to twelve dealt with the Irish parliament and the constitution of the two Houses. Following the 1893 bill and the draft of 5 March 1912, the lord lieutenant's veto on Irish bills was retained. Nationalist opposition to Lloyd George's suggestion of an explicit Westminster veto had ensured that an express declaration was dropped. Wide powers of veto still existed in practice, however. The United Kingdom parliament could always override any Irish Act by virtue of its supremacy, and a stipulation to this effect would serve no purpose except to offend Nationalist susceptibilities. Moreover, the provision that the lord lieutenant "shall comply with any instructions given by His Majesty in respect of any such [Irish Bill]," effectively granted power of veto over Irish legislation to the United Kingdom cabinet.

As in the 1893 bill, provision was made for a joint session in cases of disagreement between the two Irish Houses. The nominated senate of the two 1911 drafts was retained, but its number was fixed at forty, instead of twenty-four, in accordance with Nationalist suggestions. This clause aroused considerable controversy. The Unionists claimed that it virtually ensured a senate nominated by a Nationalist government, though the cabinet had intended that it should provide a larger representation for Irish Unionists. The Senate was forbidden to reject money bills, which could only originate in the Commons, giving the latter the same control over the executive as the British House of Commons possessed. The number of members of the Irish Commons had remained undecided in the drafts of August 1911 and March 1912, because the question was connected with
the projected boundary commission and the uncertainty over Irish representation at Westminster. A cabinet paper of 14 March 1912 proposed that the boundary commission of the August 1911 draft should be replaced by a scheme of representation, which would distribute members among the existing constituencies on a population basis. This suggestion was adopted in the final bill, and the Irish House of Commons was fixed at 164 members. However, the Irish Commons could arrange for a redistribution of the constituencies electing its own members, after three years had elapsed.

The result was a measure which followed the Gladstonian bill of 1893 as closely as the changed circumstances of the later period allowed, in all respects except finance. The new bill was essentially a very limited revision of the previous one. From January 1912, when Birrell assumed a prominent role, the main innovations of 1911 were dropped and the framework of the Gladstonian bill was largely restored. The chief secretary made every effort to ensure that the final draft was acceptable to the Irish leaders. Birrell's colleagues were probably eager to co-operate because of the uncertainty of their political position in the early months of 1912. In any case, so long as the Nationalists were demanding nothing more revolutionary than a reversion to the 1893 bill, the government could safely accede with a good grace. Most of the concessions made to the Irish leaders were of this nature. They had the double advantage for the Liberals of gaining Nationalist approval, as well as promising the security of a measure already passed by the Commons. The wishes of the Irish leaders were also granted over relatively minor matters involving alterations in the 1893 bill, such as the deletion of unnecessary 'restrictions' on the Irish parliament's powers. Even the more important concession over the Irish police scarcely affected the powers of the imperial government; it was a sensible amendment, which was considered vital by the Irish. The Nationalist leaders rarely insisted on anything more radical, knowing well the limits of their powers, and fearing that too marked a departure from the 1893 precedent might arouse renewed enthusiasm for the federal alternative. When they did express a preference for a fundamental change which was unwelcome in Great Britain, such as fiscal autonomy, they
were refused. Asquith’s cabinet was by no means the slave of the Nationalist leaders, as the Unionists claimed.

THE FINANCIAL PROVISIONS OF THE BILL\textsuperscript{124}

The financial clauses of the Home Rule bill were drawn up independently, and were not incorporated into the drafts of the measure until 5 March 1912. The fiscal aspects of Home Rule were not examined by the Home Rule sub-committee in 1911, but first by a specialist committee of financial experts under Sir Henry Primrose, and later by Herbert Samuel. This method of procedure had distinct disadvantages, since the men working on the main provisions of the bill were not acting in close coordination with the financial experts. The latter seemed to assume that the final bill would follow the lines of the 1893 measure and devised their financial schemes accordingly. But if the cabinet had decided to make special provision for Protestant Ulster, or to establish Home Rule all round, then the financial provisions would have required total revision.

The financial provisions were a vital aspect of the Home Rule settlement, and constituted the only major section of the 1893 bill to be entirely transformed. Finance, rather than Ulster, was considered the most serious problem in 1911, and the most likely obstacle to block the path of Home Rule. The Primrose committee was appointed in January 1911, to examine the financial relations between England and Ireland, and to recommend a fiscal scheme for the third Home Rule bill.\textsuperscript{125}

The Primrose committee naturally started by examining the financial provisions of Gladstone’s bills. Gladstone had devoted considerable personal attention to the fiscal aspects of Home Rule. Unlike the Liberal cabinet of 1911, he was always fascinated by public finance. The 1886 bill provided that the Irish parliament should receive all the revenue collected in Ireland, and should pay one-fifteenth of the common imperial expenditure out of this revenue. This raised the cry that it was ‘taxation without representation’, since the Irish were
to have no members at Westminster. The Irish fought tenaciously to pay no more than one-twentieth of the total budget for imperial purposes, and John Morley believed the bill might have been wrecked on this issue, and it ever reached Committee stage.\textsuperscript{127} The 1886 bill also provided that customs and excise, which were the principal sources of taxation, should continue to be imposed and controlled by the imperial government. The Irish were left only with power to impose direct taxes, but they felt less strongly on this issue in 1836, than in 1911-12.\textsuperscript{128}

The original finance scheme of the 1893 bill had to be drastically amended in Committee when it was found to be based on faulty calculations. The revised plan provided that two-thirds of Ireland's revenue would cover local Irish charges, while the remaining one-third would constitute Ireland's contribution to imperial expenditure. For a provisional period of six years, the imposition and collection of all Irish taxes would be retained by the imperial government, and arrangements would be revised thereafter.\textsuperscript{129} Redmond expressed the common criticism that this bill did nothing to solve the finance problem, since the scheme was merely provisional.\textsuperscript{130}

Birrell commented that the financial difficulty was almost insuperable even in Gladstone's day, but by 1911 it was a far greater obstacle, since the balance of indebtedness had moved against Ireland.\textsuperscript{131} In 1886 Irishmen contributed in taxes to the United Kingdom exchequer well over £2 million more than they received from government expenditure.\textsuperscript{132} By 1910-11, Irishmen received over £1 million more in benefits, mainly for old age pensions and land purchase, than they paid in taxes. Irish revenue had increased by only 28% between 1896 and 1911, whereas government expenditure in Ireland had soared by 91%. The Primrose committee and most Irish Nationalist economists disapproved of this steadily rising expenditure, which made Irish self-sufficiency and financial autonomy increasingly unattainable. The financial link with Great Britain entailed in Ireland a scale of expenditure which was beyond the requirements of a largely rural population and beyond the natural resources of the country to supply.\textsuperscript{133}

The Primrose committee rejected Gladstone's financial schemes,
and proposed instead a bold, simple plan. The Irish government should be given full control over all her own revenue and expenditure, except that the imperial exchequer should meet the Irish deficit by assuming liability for all Irish pensions already granted. This would be a temporary charge on the British exchequer, which would steadily diminish with the deaths of existing pensioners, forcing Ireland to reduce her inflated expenditure. Moreover, Ireland should not be asked to contribute to imperial expenditure until she had reduced her annual deficit. The committee believed that the granting of full powers of taxation, combined with complete control of expenditure, would remove most points of potential financial friction between the two countries. This plan was expected to promote 'an autonomous Ireland, self contained and self-sufficient, so far as its own local administration and finances are concerned.'

The Primrose committee's report was printed for cabinet use in October 1911, after six months of careful study of Anglo-Irish finance. Its recommendations were very similar to those proposed by Irish Nationalist financial experts, such as Thomas Kettle, C.H. Oldham, Thomas Lough and Erskine Childers. A vigorous public campaign for fiscal autonomy was waged in Ireland, placing particular emphasis on the demand for Irish control over customs and excise. It was obvious that Ireland would suffer financially from fiscal independence, but she would learn to shoulder her own responsibilities, instead of being 'demoralised by British doles.' The chief secretary also agreed with the Primrose committee's proposals. Birrell made several speeches favouring a generous settlement, and told Churchill that he believed Ireland should be given 'very full powers over her own revenue taxation & expenditure.' However, as early as January 1911, Birrell anticipated great difficulties in persuading certain sections of the Liberal party to concede a generous finance scheme.

Unfortunately for the Nationalists, the Irish secretary was the only minister to support the Primrose committee's recommendation of Irish financial independence. The Primrose committee was merely advisory, and it was not Birrell, but Herbert Samuel, who was delegated to frame the financial provisions of the bill. The postmaster-general was another of Asquith's brilliant young protégés, like Simon, and he was highly respected in the cabinet for his quick
mastery of complex material and his general quiet efficiency. The other members of the Home Rule committee were only too pleased to leave the financial aspects in Samuel's capable hands. Loreburn, the chairman, admitted to C. P. Scott that he had 'not gone much into the financial problems of the bill. Consequently, finance was the only aspect of the forthcoming Home Rule bill which was thoroughly and efficiently examined in 1911.

In October 1911, Samuel studied the Primrose Report, utilised most of its statistics, but entirely rejected its fundamental proposition regarding Irish fiscal autonomy. From the autumn of 1911, he devoted much of his remarkable energy and concentration to his finance scheme, and deluged the leisurely Home Rule committee with detailed memoranda on finance. But the scheme he ultimately produced was so complicated that it baffled many of his colleagues.

Samuel finally presented his proposals to the cabinet on 4 December 1911, and they were incorporated into the latest draft of the Home Rule bill on 5 March 1912, though very few changes were made in the interim. Samuel's scheme was extraordinary elaborate, and involved a far greater degree of British control over Irish finance than the Primrose proposals. Until the £2 million Irish deficit was extinguished, the entire proceeds of all Irish taxes, including customs and excise, were to be paid into the imperial exchequer. A block grant of about £6 million would be transferred annually from the imperial to the Irish exchequer, to cover all purely Irish expenditure, other than the 'reserved services'. The imperial government was to control and pay for the 'reserved services', including old age pensions, national insurance, land purchase and collection of taxes. If the Irish government chose to take over any of the 'reserved services', then the block grant, generally termed the 'transferred sum', would be increased accordingly. The transferred sum would include a surplus of £500,000 p.a. for the first three years, to provide a working margin for the Irish government. This surplus would be reduced gradually during the next six years, until it reached £200,000 p.a., at which point it would remain fixed. The financial scheme should be re-examined when
Irish revenue exceeded expenditure for three consecutive years. Once Irish solvency was thus established, the imperial parliament would consider imposing a fair Irish contribution to common imperial expenditure. Samuel's decision that Irish customs and excise should remain under imperial control, as in Gladstone's bills, was one of the more controversial points. However, the Irish parliament was granted very limited powers to vary customs and excise duties imposed by the imperial parliament, and could also levy any entirely new taxes other than customs duties. 141

Birrell had circulated a memorandum to the cabinet in November 1911, criticising Samuel's proposals. But he failed in his attempt to persuade his colleagues to 'give Ireland the Primrose Report and thus secure her support.' 142 Birrell barely managed to conceal his disappointment, when he sent an untypically terse memorandum to Redmond in December informing him that the Primrose report had been rejected. Birrell explained rather weakly that the decision was due to 'public considerations outside the purely financial aspect of the Irish problem'. He mentioned in particular that complete fiscal autonomy for Ireland would involve the total exclusion of the Irish members from the imperial parliament. 143 Irish exclusion would be opposed on principle by the federalists and would undermine any federal aspirations in the bill. As The Times pointed out in February 1912: '--- there is a strong Federalist element in the Cabinet which sees in Irish fiscal autonomy a bar to the ultimate establishment of a Federal system'. 144 Irish exclusion would also reduce the voting strength of the Liberals in the Commons. The Nation subsequently tried to explain the rejection of the Primrose report in terms of:

--- the strong opposition in England, the violence opposition in Ulster, the reluctance of some Liberal members to agree to any scheme not reducible to federal terms, or seeming to threaten in the remotest way the security of Free Trade --- 145

Some Liberals undoubtedly feared also that financial autonomy would eventually lead to demands for an independent foreign policy, and ultimately to complete separation.
Strong objections to the Primrose report certainly existed. Yet it was not the most sensible procedure to appoint a committee of financial experts to advise the government, only to reject their recommendations so completely, especially when they won so much Irish support. Samuel might at least have worked in cooperation with some of the Primrose committee members, in an attempt to reach a compromise settlement likely to be more acceptable in Ireland. Instead, Samuel developed a plan entirely independently of the Primrose committee, based on completely different aims and assumptions.

The Samuel scheme presented just as many difficulties as the Primrose plan, without providing a final solution to the question of Irish finance. It was so complicated that few people other than Samuel ever understood it. The Times complained that its chief characteristics were 'complexity, entanglement, and obscurity.' The financial scheme provided an easy target for Unionist attacks and ridicule. Sir John Marriott declared in the Nineteenth Century that 'constitutional independence and financial dependence cannot permanently coexist.' If Ireland wanted to enjoy the advantages of a large degree of self-government, then she should shoulder her own financial responsibilities. The most scathing attacks came from Leopold Amery, in the Commons and the press. He declared that Ireland should have been given either full fiscal autonomy on Primrose lines, or no taxing powers at all. The worst feature of Samuel's bill was that it provided endless causes of friction between England and Ireland. The Unionists also complained that the scheme could not possibly be final, because the humiliating restrictions and dual control of finance would prove intolerable to the Dublin parliament.

The Irish Nationalists detested Samuel's financial provisions. In their memorandum of January 1912, they objected forcefully to imperial control of Irish finance as a 'distinctly retrograde step', and demanded that Ireland be given the power to impose all taxes. However, Redmond and Dillon finally decided that they must tolerate Samuel's scheme, rather than risk wrecking Home Rule prospects at this late stage. Understandably, then, the Nationalists contributed little to the Committee debate on the financial provisions, since their criticisms could only have embarrassed the government.
Samuel's intricate system of checks and balances did not even satisfy the Liberal members. He had made minimal concessions to the Irish demands for fiscal autonomy by allowing the Irish parliament to retain extremely limited powers to vary customs and excise duties. These were sufficient to provoke a back-bench revolt during the Committee debate on the financial provisions, in November 1912. Between seventy and eighty Liberal members signed a memorandum, early in November, protesting that Ireland's power to vary customs duties blocked the way to a unified federal system. A large proportion of the Liberals who consistently abstained or voted against the taxing provisions represented Scottish constituencies. The objections of men like Cathcart Wason, Munro-Ferguson and D.V. Pirje seem to have been genuinely inspired by a conviction that the Irish fiscal provisions could not be reconciled with the future federal organization of the United Kingdom. Among some of the other speeches, there was more than a hint of resentment at the prospect of Irish people enjoying tea or tobacco taxed at lower levels than in England or Scotland.

The attacks of the dissident Liberals on the Irish government's taxing powers were humiliating for the Nationalists, but they refrained from embarrassing counter-attack during the debate on the Finance Resolution on 19 November. However, the following day The Times alleged that the government intended to revoke the Irish parliament's power to reduce customs and excise duties, to meet the criticisms of 'a formidable section of the party'. Redmond immediately warned Birrell that there would be an outburst of dissatisfaction in Ireland if the power to reduce customs duties was withdrawn:

*If, in the first instance, we had been deprived of this power, Irish public opinion would probably have swallowed it; but to take it from us now, and in consequence of the threatened rev. of some of the Liberal Members, would have a very serious effect.*

Despite Redmond's appeal, the cabinet revoked the Irish parliament's power to reduce customs duties, as a necessary concession to the Liberal dissentients. Birrell explained regretfully to Redmond, that Asquith, Lloyd George and
Samuel:

were fully persuaded that a parliamentary Situation had arisen, which cannot be fairly estimated simply by counting votes in the Lobby — & that the concession is really necessary if we are to carry the brains of our English party with us. 157

Redmond reluctantly agreed, but he had good reason for bitterness. The Nationalists had cooperated with the government, despite their opposition to the finance scheme. Yet the first serious attack from the Liberal backbenches led the cabinet to demand still further concessions, which made such 'fiscal autonomy' as was granted by the bill illusory in the extreme. 158 This backbench revolt was responsible for one of the very few amendments of any importance inserted in the bill at Committee stage.

The serious problems involved in Samuel's finance scheme were, however, obscured by the increasing emphasis on the Ulster question. As Sir Almeric Fitzroy noted in July 1913: 'the Government have escaped substantial criticism on the financial claims which constitute the real flaw in their constructive statesmanship, and might, if properly exposed, have upset their plans. 159

In terms of the actual events of 1912-14, then, the most fundamental weakness in Samuel's scheme was that it increased the government's difficulties in making subsequent provision for Ulster. It tied the Liberals even more firmly to the original Home Rule bill of April 1912, which ignored the Ulster problem. It was clear that Samuel's complicated system of checks and balances would automatically break down if Ulster had to be excluded at any stage. Samuel himself claimed that: 'It is difficult to see how any workable financial scheme, of any kind, can be evolved, based upon a fiscal separation between Ulster and the rest of Ireland'. 160 Evidently, Asquith and Lloyd George did not share this view when they agreed to Ulster exclusion in 1914, but the complexities of Samuel's scheme added immensely to their problems in revising the financial provisions. 161 Hostile critics claimed that '— freedom for Ulster walks hand in hand with financial chaos in this particular Bill', and even interpreted the finance scheme as a 'crafty device to — create a dilemma from which Ulster
CONCLUSIONS

Home Rule all round was never officially adopted by party leaders on either side as a serious policy. Asquith was prepared to allow his cabinet committee to consider federal possibilities in 1911, but he was no doubt relieved when they were abandoned in favour of Gladstonian Home Rule. Carson and Bonar Law, on the Unionist side, were not opposed to federalism on general principle, but rather on grounds of strategy. In December 1911, Bonar Law firmly rejected Lord Grey's proposal of a federal scheme: "It seems to me a hopeless thing to in any way suggest compromise at a time when any one is beginning to fight."

The majority of Unionists shared this view, or supported Lansdowne and Balfour in rejecting any departure from the simple maintenance of the Union.

Home Rule all round was a sufficiently vague and all-embracing formula to mean all things to all men. In some cases its appeal was clearly dependent on federalism remaining an abstraction. It could masquerade as the universal panacea for all political ills. It appealed to faint-hearted Liberals as a device to submerge Irish Home Rule in a massive theoretical scheme, which might postpone the Irish measure indefinitely. It could be adopted, also, as a means to promote constitutional efficiency, or to ensure that the demands of Wales and Scotland were not forgotten. The doubtful motives of many federalists ensured that most orthodox Unionists and devoted Liberal Home Rulers regarded Home Rule all round with some suspicion. This situation was not improved by the fact that the more enthusiastic federalists, such as Lord Grey or Murray Macdonald, tended to be on the fringes of real political power. The federalists were far from united, and their underlying motives were sometimes in conflict. A united front was rarely maintained for long because of the divisions between the disparate federalist groups, their lack of firm leadership and grass-roots support, and their failure to produce a detailed, viable scheme. Their momentum was lost after the introduction of the Irish Home Rule bill in April 1912, and was
only artificially revised as a tactical manoeuvre thereafter. 165

The Liberal government was well advised, then, to dismiss Home
Rule all round and to concentrate on the immediate problem of Irish Home Rule. 166
It is less certain that the decision to follow the Gladstonian model rigidly, in all
but finance, was equally wise. The result was a measure which combined a
reproduction of the 1893 bill with a totally revised financial scheme. The
separate examination of the two sections of the bill was unwise, given the
interdependence between financial and other aspects of Home Rule. A complete
re-appraisal of the entire measure, such as Samuel applied to the financial
provisions, might have been more effective. It might even have induced the
cabinet to consider the implications of the Ulster question, rather than being
mesmerised by federalism. Instead, the bill of April 1912 ignored Ulster, and
put forward a complicated fiscal scheme which infuriated enemies and allies alike.

Reactions to the 1912 bill were mixed, though it was generally seen
as a compromise, attempting to reconcile 'conflicting forces'. 167 The Unionists
naturally focused attack on as many points as possible, though the Ulster question
quickly came to dominate all else. The other provisions which aroused the strongest
Opposition criticism were the financial clauses, the composition of the senate, Irish
representation at Westminster, and the arrangements for the administration of the
reserved services. 168 The Unionists won their point regarding the senate. Instead
of a nominated senate, the Upper House was to be elected by proportional represen-
tation after the first term, and senators were to sit for eight years instead of five.
This was the only alteration of any importance which was passed in Committee,
other than the government's own amendment of the customs provisions. 169 A
favourite Unionist charge that the bill would never satisfy the Nationalists
ignored the Irish leaders' participation in the framing of the measure. The
Quarterly Review summarised the Unionist case against the bill:

The Home Rule Bill of 1912 is a labyrinth of intricate
and complicated provisions. It attempts to combine
in a rococo constitution a compromise of incompatible
principles — its provisions will be found so intolerable
in Ireland that it will inevitably lead on to total
separation. 171
Sir John Marriott condemned the bill as 'grotesquely lacking in consistency of principle, in unity of design, and coherence of construction'.

Liberal apologists naturally tended to go too far in the opposite direction. Professor J.H. Morgan stoutly defended the bill in the Nineteenth Century. He considered it 'a singular triumph of empiricism', which represented 'a remarkably successful piece of draftsmanship', outstanding for its flexibility.

In Morgan's view, it was a remarkable tribute to Asquith's government that the bill was so little altered by the end of its first parliamentary session, in January 1913. This tribute overlooked the fact that the bill was pushed through Committee under closure, with the benefit of a large parliamentary majority. It also failed to mention that the 1912 bill had already profited substantially from the technical alterations made in Committee twenty years earlier. Many detailed drafting problems had been overcome by the simple device of following the 1893 text.

The leisurely manner in which the 1912 Home Rule bill was prepared was quite remarkable. Some explanation can be found for the lethargy of the Home Rule committee throughout 1911. Loreburn gave no lead, since he was out of sympathy with the cabinet, and retired in 1912. Birrell took little active part in the committee's rather aimless deliberations up to December 1911, because he objected to the federal emphasis, and the refusal to consult the Nationalists. Samuel was preoccupied with Home Rule finance, Grey with foreign affairs, Lloyd George with insurance, and Churchill with his navy. 1911 was dominated by anxiety over the Parliament bill crisis, industrial disputes, the Insurance legislation, and diplomatic difficulties. These other concerns may help to explain the lethargy of the Home Rule committee, but they do not entirely justify it.

1911 was a year of drift on matters Irish, setting an unfortunate precedent for the next two years. The important decisions about the Home Rule bill were left until the very last minute in 1912. Time which should have been spent in constructive preparation for a major piece of legislation, which was to dominate the political scene for the next three years, was frittered away. The
prime minister may well have decided from the start that a revised version of the 1893 bill would be adequate. He gave the committee little guidance in 1911, and may have used it as a harmless way to ventilate potentially embarrassing ideas on Home Rule all round. This was certainly Asquith’s common practice:

The committee device, as Asquith employed it, was not only an administrative convenience but a way of both siphoning controversy out of the cabinet and prolonging discussion of matters upon which public opinion, sectional interests, or forceful ministers sought quick decisions.

By delegating responsibility for the Home Rule bill to this committee, the cabinet was left free to forget about it until 1912; federalism was exhaustively aired and discarded, and Ulster was ignored altogether. The finance of the bill only received comprehensive treatment because Samuel was a thorough minister. If this hypothesis is correct, the prime minister’s procrastination and preference for avoiding the hard decisions in 1911-12, accurately foreshadowed his method of dealing with the mounting Irish crisis from 1912-14.
CHAPTER I

NOTES

1. Cabinet letter to king, 26 Jan. 1911, MS. Asquith 6, fo.1; Pease diary, fo. 137, 10 Jan. 1911; Runciman's cabinet note, 25 Jan. 1911, Runciman Papers, R 11/5.

2. Birrell at the Oxford Union, The Times, 4 March 1911.

3. Liberals used the term 'federalism' almost as often as 'devolution' in 1910–14, though it was recognized that 'federalism' was technically inaccurate when applied in this way to the United Kingdom (see e.g. C.R. Oldham's opinion in Nation, 27 Jan. 1912). 'Federalism' was used very loosely by Edwards to mean the same as Home Rule all round, and will be used in this way throughout the thesis. Captain D.V. Pirrie explained in the Commons, on 7 May 1912, that the word federalism is gramatically misused — it has now become recognized as meaning Home Rule all round. It conveys a perfectly clear meaning of what has now come to be used in this country as a delegation of powers from this House to subordinate assemblies in the United Kingdom (Hansard, XXXVIII, 331).

4. See Ilbert's memorandum, 9 March 1911, Birrell Papers, Bodleian, dep. c. 301, fos. 5–6; Lloyd George's comments in C. P. Scott diary, 15 June 1911, B. L. Add. MS. 50901, fos. 13–16.

5. C. P. Scott diary, 21 June 1911, B. L. Add. MS. 50901, fos. 17–20; Ilbert to Bryce, 19 March 1911, MS. Bryce 14, fos. 15–18. See also Scott diary, ibid., 15 June 1911, fos. 13–16, for Lloyd George's views on the representation problem.

6. 3 Hansard, CCCIV, 1204–6; ibid., CCCVI, 697; Chamberlain's speeches at Edinburgh and Stornoway, The Times, 16 and 25 April 1887.

7. 'A Radical View of the Irish Crisis' (anon.), Fortnightly Review, N.S. XXXIX (Feb. 1886), 277; Chamberlain to Morley, 28 Dec. 1885, quoted by P. Fraser, Joseph Chamberlain: Radicalism and Empire (1968), p. 84. For the misleading view that Chamberlain was the ardent prophet of Home Rule all round, see J. L. Garvin, Chamberlain, II (1933) 4, 8, 75, 154, 179. Garvin's account influenced subsequent historians, including N. Mansergh, The Irish Question (Toronto, 1965), pp. 161–4, and P. Fraser, Chamberlain, passim.


10. See e.g. Asquith’s reply to Scottish Liberal deputation, 6 May 1912, MS. Asquith 89, fos. 1-12; Asquith’s First Reading speech, 11 April 1912, *Hansard*, XXXVI, 1389-1426.


12. Lloyd George at Carnarvon, 12 Feb. 1889, Lloyd George Papers, A/5/3/2; at Treharris, 23 Nov. 1895, ibid., A/8/1/50.


14. 4 *Hansard*, XXXII, 523-60 (29 March 1895).


16. Lloyd George at Treharris, 23 Nov. 1895, Lloyd George Papers, A/8/1/50; see also speech at Forest of Dean, 18 June 1897, ibid., A/8/3/13.

17. See e.g. Lloyd George at Bradford, 15 May 1901, Lloyd George Papers, A/10/1/11; and at Cardiff, 27 May 1904, ibid., A/12/1/63. Munro-Ferguson at Leith, Scotsman, 10 Oct. 1901. Asquith at Ladybank, *The Times*, 28 Sept. 1901. T.A. Brassey, *Federal Government for the United Kingdom* (1902), and *Problems of Empire* (1904); Brassey, later Lord Hythe, became a Unionist in 1903, but remained an enthusiastic advocate of imperial federation.

18. See e.g. Churchill at Carnarvon, 18 Oct. 1904, Carnarvon Herald, 21 Oct. 1904, asking for an expansion of local self-government, to meet the demands of ‘cramped nationalities’ and to deal with congestion at Westminster.


20. Redmond moved an amendment to the 1895 federalist resolution, proposing that devolution to other parts of the U.K. should wait until an Irish parliament was established (4 *Hansard*, XXXII, 506; 29 March 1895).

21. On Unionist federalists, see e.g. J.E. Kendle, ‘The Round Table Movement and Home Rule all Round’, *Historical Journal*, XI, 2 (1968), 332-53;
A. J. Ward, 'Frewen's Anglo-American Campaign for Federalism, 1910-21',
*Irish Historical Studies*, XV (March, 1967), 255-275. See also forthcoming
article by J.O. Stubbs and D.G. Boyce, 'F. S. Oliver, Lord Selborne and
Federalism', to be published in *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth
History* in 1977. I am grateful to Dr. John Stubbs for allowing me to read
this important paper.

22. See works cited in note 21. See also F. S. Oliver's letters under the
pseudonym 'Pacificus' in *The Times*, Oct. 20, 22, 24, 26, 28, 31, and 2 Nov.
1910; J. L. Garvin's letters to Balfour on federalism, Balfour Papers, B.L.
Add. MS. 49795, fos. 86-93 ff.; *Observer*, 31 July and 16 Oct. 1919; Lord
Grey to T.A. Brassey, 5 March 1916; St. Loë Strachey Papers, S/21/1/4;

23. See e.g. A. Lyttleton to Balfour, 16 Oct. 1910, Balfour Papers, B. L.
Add. MS. 49775, fos. 65-6; J. A. Murray Macdonald, 'The Constitutional
Controversy and Federal Home Rule', *Nineteenth Century*, LXX (July, 1911), 34.

24. See e.g. Chamberlain to Garvin, 21 Oct. 1910, quoted in A. Chamberlain,
*Politics from Inside* (1936), pp. 281-3.

25. See e.g. Balfour to Lyttleton, 20 Oct. 1910, Balfour Papers, B. L. Add.

26. Lansdowne to Balfour, 24 Oct. 1910, Balfour Papers, B. L. Add. MS. 49730,
fos. 129-31. Other Unionist opponents of federalism included A. V. Dicey,
Lord Hugh Cecil, St. Loë Strachey of the *Spectator*, the *Morning Post*, and
the Ulster Unionists. (see e.g. Strachey to Dicey, 22 and 24 Nov. 1910,
Strachey Papers, S/5/5/20.)

27. Chamberlain to Lansdowne, 26 Aug. 1912, quoted in *Chamberlain, Politics
from Inside*, p. 292.

28. Balfour to Chamberlain, 22 Oct. 1910, Balfour Papers, Add. MS. 49736,
fos. 97-9.

29. Memorandum on coalition, Oct. 1910, Elbank Papers, N. L. S. MS. 8802,
fos. 123-7; see also comments by Lucy Masterman, *C.F.G. Masterman
(1939)*, p. 170. An earlier draft memorandum of 17 Aug. 1910 (Lloyd George
Papers, C/3/14/8) made no specific reference to Home Rule at all round.

30. Balfour to Lyttleton, 20 Oct. 1910, Balfour Papers, B. L. Add. MS. 49736,
fo. 108; Muriro-Ferguson to wife, 15 Nov. 1910, Novar Papers.

Lyttleton to Balfour, 16 Oct. 1910, Balfour Papers, B. L. Add. MS. 49775,
fos. 65-6.

33. E. T. John claimed that Welsh nationalism had been subordinated to the need for Liberal unity since the 1890's (Hansard, XXXVIII, 661, 9 May 1912).

34. Hansard, XXXVIII, 646 (Pirie interrupted Kemp).

35. On this conflict of opinions, see e.g. Nation, 27 May and 10 June 1913, for views of J. M. Hogge and James Falconer. See also MacCallum Scott diary, e.g. 7-8 March and 21 April 1911, 22 Feb. 1912.


37. Munro-Ferguson to wife, 26 Feb. 1911, Novar Papers. During his 'run around the House', Munro-Ferguson talked to Lloyd George, Haldane, Churchill and Loreburn.

38. There is no evidence that Samuel held strong views either way, though he gave mild support to the federal principle on 15 April 1912 (Hansard, XXXVII, 57-80). Other prominent Liberals who supported Home Rule all round in 1910-11 included Lord Emmott and the Master of Elbank (Emmott diary, I, 277-8, 12 March 1911; Elbank at Belfast, The Times, 18 Oct 1910; see also A. M. Gollin, The Observer and J. L. Carvin, 1908-14 (1960), pp. 200-202, for Elbank's plans for federalising the constitution.


41. Sir Edward Grey to Lord Grey, 27 Jan. 1911, Grey Papers, P.R.O., F.O. 800/107/381-2. See also E. Grey to Asquith, 26 Oct. 1910, MS. Asquith 12, fo. 198. According to Munro-Ferguson, Grey was also 'heard to say' that only a coalition could settle Ireland, preferably by means of a federal plan on the Canadian model (Munro-Ferguson to wife, 15, 22 Nov. 1910, Novar Papers).

42. C. P. Scott diary, 6-8 Sept. 1911, B.L. Add. MS. 50901, fos. 37-40.

43. Loreburn, 'Forms of Home Rule', Contemporary Review, XCIX (March, 1911), 259-73. See J. H. Morgan's criticisms in 'Home Rule and Federalism', Nineteenth Century, LXXI (June, 1912), 1941. Evidently, Loreburn strongly believed there should be only one legislature and one
set of representatives, regardless of the number of executives
(Munro-Ferguson to wife, 26 Feb. 1911, Novar Papers).

44. Printed cabinet memorandum, Devolution, 24 Feb. 1911, signed W.S.C.,
MS. Asquith 105, fos. 5-6; P.R.O. Cab. 37/105/16. Critics of federalism
had probably already raised the problem of English devolution in discussions
with Churchill. Balfour certainly emphasized this issue in the 1910
discussions; see e.g. Balfour to Garvin, 22 Oct. 1910, Balfour Papers,
B.L. Add., MS. 49795, fos. 86-93.

45. Churchill's second printed cabinet memorandum on Devolution, 1 March 1911,
MS. Asquith 105, fo. 7; P.R.O. Cab. 37/105/18; early draft in Crewe
Papers, C/31.

46. Sir Courtenay Ilbert's diary, 7 March 1911.

47. Printed cabinet paper, 9 March 1911, signed C. P. I, Birrell Papers,
Bodleian, Dep. c. 301, fos. 5-6; P.R.O. Cab. 37/105/23; copy enclosed
in Ilbert to Bryce, 26 April 1911, MS. Bryce 14, fos. 27-31. See also 3p.
TS. memorandum headed 'Federal Home Rule', undated and anon., but
possibly sent to Ilbert by Bryce (MS. Ilbert 13, fos. 177-9).

48. Ilbert to Bryce, 26 April 1911 and 24 Oct. 1912, MS. Bryce 14, fo. 23 and
MS. 40, fos. 63-6.

49. C. P. Scott diary, 15 and 21 June 1911, B.L. Add. MS. 50901, fos. 13-16,
17-20. In 1911, C.P. Scott was busy promoting Home Rule all round among
the Liberal leaders, as Garvin had done among their opponents the previous
year. Unlike Garvin, Scott's main goal was Irish Home Rule, but for a while
he shared Loreburn's view that it might best be secured through Home Rule
ever round. By April 1914, Scott was still a devoted Irish Home Ruler, but
was markedly sceptical of the federal idea, 'which is far too much in the
air & too large & doubtfully practicable' (Scott diary, 13 April 1914, ibid.,
fos. 110-111).

50. C. P. Scott diary, 22 July 1911, B.L. Add. MS. 50901, fos. 23-30.

51. See Ilbert's comment to this effect (to Bryce), 24 Oct. 1912, MS. Bryce
40, fos. 63-6.

52. Pencilled cabinet note by Lloyd George, headed Home Rule: Suggestion,
27 Feb. 1911, Lloyd George Papers, C/12/2. T.W. Russell had originally
suggested the extension of the principle of Grand Committees in the 1890's.
(T.A. Brassey, Federal Government for the United Kingdom and the Empire,
1902, p.11). The proposal mentioned in Ilbert's cabinet memorandum (note
47 above) for alterations of parliamentary procedure was similar in nature,
though far more limited in scope. Ilbert suggested increased control by
Scottish members over Scottish bills at Committee stage, and greater scope
for Scottish private bills.
53. Ilbert to Bryce, 19 March 1911, MS. Bryce 14, fos. 15-12.

54. Printed draft bill of 1 August 1911, Lloyd George Papers, C/19/2/2; see also Lloyd George's remarks, C.P. Scott diary, 22 July 1911, B.L. Add. MS. 50901, fos. 23-30.

55. Samuel to Gladstone, 15 Sept. 1911, H. Gladstone Papers, P.L. Add. MS. 45992, fos. 259-66

56. C.P. Scott diary, 20 July 1911, B.L. Add. MS. 50901, fos. 21-2.


59. Pease diary, II, fo. 28, 16 Aug. 1911.


63. Ibid., 5 Feb. 1912, B.L. Add. MS. 46334, fo. 46; G.P. Gooch, Historical Surveys and Portraits (1966), p. 202. See also D.V. Pirie's comments, 16 Jan. 1913, that Morley 'has been an avowed and bitter opponent of a federal system' (Hansard, XLVI, 2348).

64. Memorandum, Home Rule Bill, printed 11 Dec. 1911, Lloyd George Papers, C/19/3/1; P.R.O. Cab. 37/108/176.


66. Memorandum on Clauses of the Home Rule Bill, printed 29 Jan. 1912, MS. Asquith 106, fos. 6-8; P.R.O. Cab. 37/109/8. For similar proposals of the use of Standing Orders, see e.g. J.H. Morgan, 'Home Rule and Federalism', Nineteenth Century, LXXI (June, 1912), 1241; and Ilbert's memorandum, 9 March 1911, Birrell Papers, Bodleian, dep. c. 301, fos. 5-6. But the difficulty of effecting the 'grand committee' plan through Standing Orders was that the latter required at least one stage of each bill to pass through the whole House, so that the Irish could not be entirely excluded from English, Scottish and Welsh legislation.

67. Asquith's cabinet letter to King, 6 Feb. 1912, MS. Asquith 6, fos. 95-6.

68. Ilbert to Bryce, 6 March 1912, MS. Bryce 14, fo. 50. Bryce was equally opposed to a federal scheme (Bryce to Dicey, 26 Feb. 1913, MS. Bryce 4, fo. 52.)
69. Printed draft of Home Rule bill, 5 March 1912, MS. Asquith 106, fos. 30-62 (esp. pp. 26, 28a, 27.)


71. Birrell to Dillon, 2 April 1912, Redmond Papers, N.L.I. Add. MS. 15, 182 (Bodleian, MS. film 1063).


73. Burns diary, 10 April 1912, B.L. Add. MS. 46334, fo. 80.

74. Asquith's cabinet letter to king, 16 Aug. 1911, MS. Asquith 6, fos. 68-9; Peace diary, II, fo. 28, 16 Aug. 1911.

75. Government of Ireland Bill. Notes to Clauses, (clause 13, p.42), printed 17 May 1912, MS. Asquith 107, fos. 22-47. The final version of the 1893 bill had provided for 80 Irish members at Westminster.

76. Hansard, XXXVI, 1418-19 (Asquith, 17 April 1912). Asquith estimated that 34 out of the 42 Irish members would be Nationalist, and 8 Unionist.

77. Hansard, XXXVI, 1403-4 (Asquith, 11 April 1912). The Nation had advocated this approach since Nov. 1911 (Nation, 4 Nov. 1911, 6 Jan., 10 and 24 Feb. 1912).


79. Hansard, XXXVIII, 645 (Kemp, 7 May 1912).

80. A good indication of the size of the Liberal federalist group is provided by the list of names attached to the appeal for a federal settlement of the Irish crisis in May 1914. 78 Liberals signed, including Cowan, Murray Macdonald, Pirie and Ponsonby (MS. Asquith 39; fo. 139).

81. See e.g. Hansard, XXXVII, 2113-8 (Munro-Ferguson, 2 May 1912); ibid., XXXVII, 2137-48 (G. Greenwood, 2 May 1912); ibid., XXXVIII, 334-41 (D.V. Pirie, 7 May 1912).

82. Memorandum of Scottish deputation, 6 May 1912, MS. Asquith 89, fos. 1-12; The Times, 7 May 1912. The deputation of 32 members also included Cathcart Wason, Morton, Chapple, Jardine, Eugene Wason, Molteno and Dalziel.
83. *Hansard*, XL, 1042 (Lonsdale, 2 July 1912).

84. MacCallum Scott diary, 11 June, 25 June, 2-3 July 1912 (c.f. entry for 2 May 1912); *Hansard*, XL, 1155-62 (3 July 1912). Scott obtained a majority of 52 for his devolution bill; voting followed straight party lines, with strong attendance in the Liberal lobbies by the Welsh, Scots and Irish members.

85. Manchester Guardian, 7 Nov. 1912, reporting F.E. Smith's accusation that the government's sole object was 'to deceive the simple-minded Scots people'.

86. On 30 May 1913, W.H. Cowan and Murray Macdonald introduced a Scottish Home Rule bill as a private member's bill, which was dropped after passing Second Reading (Nation, 7 June 1913). Scottish hopes were raised in Nov. 1913, when McKinnon Wood announced that the government intended to draft a Scottish measure. (Scotsman, 10 Nov. 1913). Hopes were subsequently dashed by Asquith in March 1914, and another private members' bill for Scottish Home Rule was talked out in May 1914.

87. Murray Macdonald eventually put forward detailed proposals, but not until May 1914 (MS. Asquith 41, fos. 87-96).

88. F.S. Oliver to Law, 20 Aug. 1912, B.L.P. 27/1/47.

89. Printed draft texts of the Home Rule bill, dated 21 June and 1 Aug. 1911, Lloyd George Papers, C/19/2/1-2.

90. Draft of a Bill to Amend the Provision for the Government of Ireland, printed 21 June 1911, Lloyd George Papers, C/19/2/1.

91. C.P. Scott diary, 6-8 Sept. 1911, B.L. Add. MS. 50901, fos. 37-40.

92. Printed draft of 1 August 1911, Lloyd George Papers, C/19/2/2; Pease diary, II, fo. 28, 16 Aug. 1911; Asquith's cabinet letter to King, 16 Aug. 1911, MS. Asquith 6, fos. 68-9.


94. The Times, 2 Feb. 1912.


93. I am indebted to the late Sir Harry Verney for this information about the frequent meetings between Birrell and the Nationalists.

98. Morley to Carnegie, 9 March 1912, Bodleian, MS. film 569 ; Burns diary, 2 March 1912, B. L. Add. MS. 46334, fo. 61. See also, Sir George Murray (Treasury) to Gladstone, 8 March 1912, H. Gladstone Papers, B. L. Add. MS. 46072, fos. 199-200; Jlbert to Bryce, 6 March 1912, MS. Bryce 14, fo. 50; Samuel to mother, 10 March 1912, Samuel Papers, A/156/401. The government lost seats at Oldham, S. Somerset, and N. Ayrshire in Nov.-Dec. 1911, but the loss of N. Manchester on 5 March 1912 was the worst blow.

99. Pencilled note by Lewis Harcourt on cabinet meeting, 6 March 1912 (presumably used as basis for his diary entries), Harcourt Papers.

100. Ibid. See also Pease diary, II, fo. 33, 6 March 1912, for comment on Morley.

101. Jlbert to Bryce, 6 March 1912, MS. Bryce 14, fo. 50.


103. Birrell to Lady Aberdeen, 12 March 1912, Aberdeen Papers, T/42.

104. Harcourt's pencilled notes on cabinet meeting, 14 March 1912, Harcourt Papers; Asquith's cabinet letter to king, 14 March 1912, MS. Asquith 6, fo. 118.


106. See e.g. Birrell to Redmond, 31 March and 6 April 1912, and Redmond to Birrell, 3 April 1912, Redmond Papers, N. L. L. Add. MS. 15,169 (Bodleian, MS. film 1969); Birrell to Dillon, 2 April 1912, ibid., MS. 15,182 (MS. film 1063).

107. Birrell to Redmond, 31 March 1912, Redmond Papers, N. L. L. Add. MS. 15,169 (Bodleian, MS. film 1059); Birrell to Dillon, 2 April 1912, ibid., MS. 15,182 (MS. film 1063); Pease diary, II, fo. 41, 10 April 1912; Burns diary, 10 April 1912, B. L. Add. MS. 46334, fo. 80.

108. Asquith to Simon, 3 April 1912, Simon Papers; Simon to Buxton, 3 April 1912, Buxton Papers.

110. Birrell to Redmond, 10 April 1912, ibid.; Samuel to wife, 9 and 10 April, Samuel Papers, A/157/609.

111. See e.g. Lord Esher to Lord Fisher, 3 April 1912, Journals and Letters of Reginald Viscount Esher (1938), III, 57; Lord Sandhurst to Gladstone, 7 April 1912, H. Gladstone Papers, R.L. Add. MS. 46072, fo. 255.

112. Government of Ireland Bill, printed 15 April 1912, 42 pp., MS. Asquith 106, fos. 199-222; Lloyd George Papers, C/19/2/5. See also Asquith's cabinet letter to king, 10 April 1912, MS. Asquith 6, fo. 130.

113. The Government of Ireland Bill, Notes to Clauses, printed 7 May 1912, MS. Asquith 107, fos. 22-47 (probably drawn up by Birrell and the Irish office; see Birrell's speech, 6 May 1912, Hansard, XXXVII, 446-7). It was considered wise 'to avoid using arguments or language which contradict too obviously the arguments and language used by the Government in 1893' (p. 2).

114. The post office was not among the excluded powers, though the Irish parliament only controlled those postal services wholly within Ireland. Some Liberals disliked this, especially those who wanted a uniform postal service for a future federal system, but they failed in their attempt to reverse it in Committee.

115. Old age pensions, national insurance, and labour exchanges were the chief reserved services which could be transferred at any time from Westminster by resolution of the Dublin parliament. The only service which would be automatically transferred (after 6 years) was the R.I.C. The collection of taxes would remain with the imperial government pending possible future revision of the financial arrangements. (Government of Ireland Bill, 15 April 1912, pp. 2-3, 4-5).

116. For Birrell's contribution to the land purchase programme 1907-11, see Jalland, 'A Liberal Chief Secretary and the Irish Question: Augustine Birrell, 1907-14', Historical Journal, XIX, 2 (1976), pp. 431-4; on the 1912 controversy, see e.g. Irish office memoranda: Reservation of Land Purchase under the Government of Ireland Bill, Clause 2 (11), 25 July 1912, MS. Asquith 107, fos. 114-7; P.R.O. Cab. 37/111/93; and Memorandum suggesting a scheme to facilitate Irish Land Purchase, 2 Sept. 1912, MS. Asquith 108, fos. 9-10; P.R.O. Cab. 37/112/102. See also O'Brien to Asquith, 13 June 1912, MS. Asquith 36, fos. 20-21; Birrell to Dillon, 2 April 1912, Redmond Papers, N.L.I./Add. MS. 15, 182 (Bodleian, MS. Add. 1653). A new Land Purchase bill to speed up the process was introduced in July 1912, but had to be withdrawn the following year (for details see two memoranda by Birrell and McKenna, Irish Land Purchase, 23 June, and 14 July 1913, MS. Mottistone 15, fos. 315-22.)
Notes to Clauses, (p. 18), 17 May 1912, MS. Asquith 106, fos. 199-222. Birrell carefully examined the detailed provisions and the debates relating to these safeguards in the two previous bills, excluding in 1912 those which had been most ridiculed by the Opposition (Hansard, XXXVIII, 446-7, 8 May 1912).

The details of his term of office were actually laid down in clause 31. One of the very few changes made at Committee stage (4 Dec. 1912) extended this clause, to define the lord lieutenant's status even more explicitly as analogous to that of a governor of one of the overseas dominions. This made no essential difference, except to emphasize the non-political nature of the position more strongly. In August 1913, Asquith suggested to Harcourt that Herbert Gladstone should take the lord lieutenantcy of Ireland in 1914, to inaugurate Home Rule. Harcourt agreed that it would be 'romantic' for Gladstone 'to put the crown on your father's Home Rule policy' (Harcourt to Gladstone, 5 Aug. and 4 Sept. 1913, H. Gladstone Papers, B. L. Add. MS. 46000, fos. 193, 237-8.) Gladstone found the prospect of 'being a constitutional figure head through a period of disorder' --- 'in many ways distasteful', and the suggestion was dropped by Oct. 1913 (H. Gladstone to Harcourt, 1, 18 and 25 Sept. 1913, Harcourt Papers; Harcourt to Asquith, 4, 8 and 14 Oct. 1913, ibid.).

See Government of Ireland Bill, 15 April 1912, p. 5 (clause 7[1]), MS. Asquith 106, fos. 199-222. On the imperial government's effective power to veto or postpone Irish legislation, see Hansard, XXXVI, 1407, 11 April 1912, Asquith.

The 1912 provision for a joint session if the Irish senate rejected a bill in two successive sessions was slightly different from the 1893 provision, where a joint session only took place if a bill had been twice rejected after a dissolution or after two years had elapsed since the first rejection.

See Memorandum on Clauses of the Home Rule Bill, 29 Jan. 1912, MS. Asquith 106, fos. 6-8 (p. 2). However, the Irish suggestion that the senators' term of office should be ten rather than eight years was not put into effect.

Unionist Central Office pamphlet, giving text and comments on the bill, B. L. P. 40/1/59.

Scheme for Representation (Ireland), 14 March 1912, MS. Asquith 106, fos. 58-9. The boundary commission was abandoned because it would involve Irish redistribution without a corresponding revision for the rest of the United Kingdom.

Initially I wrote a complete chapter on Home Rule finance, but finally decided to reduce it, because the subject is immensely complex and tedious, and, though important, has only an indirect relevance to the main themes of the rest of the thesis.
125. Pease Diary, I, fo. 137, 20 Jan. 1911 (for views of Asquith and Birrell); Birrell's speech at the Oxford Union, The Times, 4 March 1911; Emmott diary, II, fo. 135, 1 Sept. 1911 (for Runciman's view that Home Rule would break down over finance); W. O'Brien to Asquith, 4 Nov. 1211, MS. Asquith 36, fo. 9 ('Finance will either make or mar the Bill'); Morley to Carnegie, 25 Oct. 1911, Bodleian, MS. film 569.

126. Pease diary, fo. 137, 20 Jan. 1911. The members of the committee were mainly English financial experts, with no strong political views. The two Irish representatives were Lord Pirrie, the Liberal chairman of Harland and Wolff, the Belfast shipbuilding firm, and Bishop Denis Kelly, Catholic bishop of Ross and a staunch Nationalist.


128. Government of Ireland Bill, 13 April 1886 (pp. 6-12), Lloyd George Papers, C/19/1.

129. Government of Ireland Bill, 1 Sept. 1893 (pp. 6-7), Lloyd George Papers, C/19/1.

130. 4 Hansard, VIII, 1476-8 (14 Feb. 1893); XI, 233-5 (13 April 1893).

131. C.P. Scott diary, 2 Feb. 1911, B.L. Add. MS. 50901, fos. 1-2.

132. The Financial Relations between Great Britain and Ireland, Royal Commission of 1896, Cd. 8262, XXXIII.

133. Report of the Committee on Irish Finance [hereafter cited as Primrose Report], CE. 6153, H.C. 1912-13, XXXIV; evidence, Cd. 6799, H.C. 1913, XXX. (see esp. Primrose Report, pp. 6-7, 25-26). The total increase in government expenditure since 1896 was c. £5.4 millions; nearly half of this (£2.4 millions) was accounted for by old age pensions, which amounted to 1/3 of government spending in Ireland.

134. Primrose Report, pp. 29-31, 44.

135. See e.g. T.M. Kettle, Home Rule Finance (Dublin, 1911); E. Childers, The Framework of Home Rule (1911); Lough's letters to the Nation, 30 Sept. and 11 Nov. 1911; Frank MacDermot to Nation, 11 Nov. 1911.

Mrs. Lucy Asterman recently commented that Samuel was not a very good handler of the house. He did well in the complex financial matters, not fully understood by other people, but he didn’t manage people well, nor was he particularly sympathetic to their feelings (interview, 3 Feb. 1912).

C. P. Scott diary, 7 Jan. 1912, B. L. Add. MS. 56901, fos. 38-9.

See e.g. six memoranda on Irish Finance, 6, 13, 14, 22 (?), 23 Nov. 1911, Lloyd George Papers, C/20/1/5; P.R.O. Cab. 37/108/41, 115-6; see also Samuel Papers, A/41/2-4, which include Samuel’s drafts and notes.

Sec Irish Finance, 4 Dec. 1911, MS. Asquith 105, fos. 212-3; P.R.O. Cab. 37/108/167.

This is a highly simplified sketch of an extremely intricate scheme. For details, see Irish Finance, 4 Dec., ibid.; Government of Ireland Bill, 15 April 1912, MS. Asquith 106, fos. 199-222; Hansard, XXXVII, 62-6, 15 April 1912, for Samuel’s outline of the provisions; Outline of Financial Provisions, Cd. 6154, 1 and 4 April 1912, P.R.O. Cab. 37/110/57, 59, for white paper summarising and explaining the finance scheme.

Untitled memorandum by Birrell on Irish finance, 27 Nov. 1911, Lloyd George Papers, C/20/1/4; P.R.O. Cab. 37/108/161.


The Times, 2 Feb. 1912.

The Times, 30 April 1912. On the general failure to understand the finance scheme, see e.g. Hansard, XXXVII, 269 (O’Neill); XXXVII, 129 (W. Guinness); XXXVIII, 132, 134 (Barnes); XLVI, 2173-4 (Horne); “there is not one man in this House understands the finances of this Bill, and I do not believe that one man in twenty ever tried to understand [them]. Even Asquith ‘left the financial provisions in some obscurity’ (Albert diary, 11 April 1912).


See e.g. L. S. Amery, The Case Against Home Rule (1912); Hansard, XXXVII, 1764-74 (Amery); Amery’s letter to The Times, 20 April 1912. See also series of 4 articles on financial provisions, The Times, 26, 27, 29 and 30 April 1912; Rosenbaum’s memorandum on Irish finance, 29 April 1912, B. L. P. 26/2/51; Hansard, XXXVI, 1432 (Carson).


152. Nation, 9 Nov. 1912. See also deputation to Samuel, The Times, 29 Oct. 1912. The Manchester Guardian supported the critics (see e.g. 4 Nov. 1912).

153. See e.g. Hansard, XLIV, 147-9 (Wason); ibid., XLIV, 159-60, (Munro-Ferguson); ibid., XLIV, 209-13 (Pirie). See The Times, 20 Nov. 1912.

154. When the divisions on the Finance Resolution were taken on 19 and 20 November 1912, 47 Liberals failed to vote or 19 Nov., and 51 did not vote the following day at Report stage. 34 Liberals sustained or were absent for both divisions. Of the 51 Liberals who failed to vote on one or both divisions, more than ⅓ were federalists and 12 represented Scottish constituencies (see Hansard, XLIV, 251-8, 442-8, for division lists).

155. The Times, 20 Nov. 1912.


157. Birrell to Redmond, 21 Nov. 1912, ibid. See also Asquith’s cabinet letter to King, 21 Nov. 1912, MS. Asquith 6, fo. 184; Peace diary, II, fo. 57, 21 Nov. 1912.

158. The amendment led to a storm of protest in Ireland (see e.g. The Times, 25 Nov. 1912). The power to reduce customs duties was valued more as a symbol of fiscal freedom than a really practical weapon, since the Irish parliament was unlikely to be able to afford to reduce taxes, but it was no less valued for that.


161. See e.g. Government of Ireland Bill. Note, N.D. [early March 1914], Lloyd George Papers, C/20/2/8; draft of White Paper, 6 March 1914, MS. Asquith 110, fo. 216.


164. See e.g. C. Addison. Four and a Half years (2 vols, 1934), II, 514.

165. More than half a century later, The Times reported that the Commons listened 'with cynicism or widespread non-seriousness' to the Conservative prime minister's statement on the Kilbrandon report on United Kingdom devolution. The Times explained: 'It is necessary only to remember that every politician knows that constitutional reform on this large scale must always be politically dangerous to handle' (The Times, 1 Nov. 1973).

166. This conclusion is strengthened by the difficulties of the Labour government, in 1976, in contemplating the introduction of a bill for United Kingdom devolution.

167. See e.g. Nation, 7 Dec. 1912.

168. See e.g. Unionist Central Office pamphlet giving text and comments on the bill, B. L. P. 40/1/59.

169. See Asquith's cabinet letters to king, 1 Nov. 1912, MS. Asquith 6, fo. 171. The government refused to extend proportional representation to the Irish Commons, except in the case of the nine 3-member constituencies (see Nation, 11 Jan. 1913; Annual Register, 1913, pp. 8-9).

170. See e.g. Sandars' memorandum of conversation with Lord Esher, 9 Nov. 1911, Balfour Papers, B. L. Add. MS. 49719, fos. 195-8.

171. 'The Home Rule Bill', anon., Quarterly Review, CCXVI (July, 1912), 267. The only detailed criticisms concerned the financial provisions and the lack of safeguards for the Protestant minority.


CHAPTER II

THE 'ULSTER QUESTION' FROM 1586 TO APRIL 1912

THE ORIGINS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE 'ULSTER QUESTION'

The 'Ulster Question' was the customary term used to describe the problem posed by the existence of a large Protestant community in the province of Ulster, totally opposed to the Home Rule demand of Nationalist Catholic Ireland. About one-quarter of the total population of Ireland in 1911 was Protestant. The vast majority of these Irish Protestants were concentrated in the six north-east counties of Ulster, where they controlled the political power and economic wealth.

Ulster was colonised in the seventeenth century by English and Scottish Protestant settlers, who were strongly attached to Britain in outlook and traditions. There were marked differences in temperament, race, religion and history, between Ulster and the rest of Ireland. From at least 1886 onwards, the Ulster Protestants had feared and mistrusted the prospect of Home Rule, because they believed it threatened complete destruction of their way of life.

The complexities of the problem were increased by the uneven geographical distribution of the two major religious groups in Ireland. In the nine-county province of Ulster, Protestants and Catholics were fairly evenly balanced numerically. The proportion of Protestants in the whole of Ulster rose from approximately 52% in 1885 to just over 56% between 1901 and 1911. The Protestants were in a distinct minority in the three south-west Ulster counties of Cavan, Monaghan and Donegal. They were concentrated in the six north-east counties of Ulster, where about 66% of the population was Protestant in 1901. This concentration was most pronounced in the four counties of Antrim, Armagh, Down and Londonderry, whereas Fermanagh and Tyrone were more evenly balanced.

In the three southern provinces of Leinster, Munster, and Connaught, Protestants formed only about 10% of the total population, but their influence was greater than their numbers suggested. For years they had been the dominant aristocracy, though their power and social position were gradually reduced as the
southern landlord interest declined. The southern Unionists were also distributed unevenly. They constituted 14% of the Leinster population, compared with only 6% in Munster, and 4% in Connaught. More than half the southern Protestants lived in the Dublin and Cork areas, leaving few Protestants scattered throughout the rest of the south and west.

The problem was accentuated because the three southern provinces remained predominantly agricultural, whereas the four north-east counties of Ulster underwent rapid industrial expansion after 1800. These Ulster counties benefitted from the Act of Union, depending on Britain for the large markets which were the basis of their prosperity in the linen, shipbuilding, and engineering industries. The Ulster Protestants feared that their industrial prosperity would be ruined by an incompetent and prejudiced economic policy controlled from Dublin, imposing protective tariffs and excessive taxes. Their opposition to Home Rule was strengthened by their conviction that it could not work without Ulster, since the resources of the north were indispensable to the economic viability of Irish self-government.

Ulster Protestants were conscious of a separate sense of identity, which isolated them from the Catholic majority and also from the scattered Protestants in the south. This was a product of the special loyalties created by a common sense of race, religion, and culture, strengthened by the historical traditions of evangelical Protestantism. Segregation of Protestants and Catholics was fairly rigid; passions were easily inflamed in the Belfast area, where children of both religions were brought up in an atmosphere of negated, sectarian rivalry. Protestants clung to the traditional ideas of the Protestant ascendancy. They were not prepared to surrender their privileged position for one of inferiority, or even equality, under a Catholic-dominated Dublin parliament. Protestants forgot their own differences and united in the face of an assumed Catholic threat. Though the influence of the Catholic clergy on the Nationalist party declined during the nineteenth century, Protestants continued to fear that Home Rule meant 'Rome Rule' and religious persecution.

After 1886, political and religious lines of division increasingly coincided. Contemporaries generally equated Protestantism with Unionism, and Catholicism with the Home Rule policy of the Liberal and Nationalist parties. Former Protestant Liberals tended to become Unionists, and Protestants sank their
earlier denominational and political rivalries in a common defence of the Union.

GLADSTONE AND THE ULSTER CHALLENGE

Gladstone did not ignore the Ulster question in 1886. Certainly he underestimated its dimensions, but so did most British politicians. Evidence suggests that the Ulster challenge was strong and serious, even in 1886. The Ulster Unionists openly threatened civil war if the first Home Rule bill was passed, claiming that the dictates of that Irish parliament would be resisted by the people of Ulster at the point of the bayonet. A united Conservative-Unionist party replaced the traditional rivalry between Conservatives and Liberals in Ulster, and a distinct Ulster Unionist party was organised in Westminster. Popular demonstrations in Ulster against Home Rule reached their climax with the Belfast visit of Lord Randolph Churchill, who raised the famous war-cry: Ulster will fight and Ulster will be right. Ulster passions were genuine, and they were already aroused before Churchill's visit. Parnell was almost certainly wrong in claiming that the agitation would have evaporated without encouragement from England.

The Protestant Belfast Newsletter proclaimed that the loyalists were not afraid of civil war, and would incur any risk, rather than submit to being ruled by boycotters and moonlighters. The Times considered the warlike threats of Ulster perfectly genuine, and insisted that the organization of resistance in Ulster was no merely local affair, but a general movement. There is evidence of a rapidly growing organization and firm intention behind the impassioned speeches and the sometimes ridiculous propaganda. Serious riots in Belfast from June to September 1886 further illustrated the intensity of feeling, which had reached fever pitch by the time the Home Rule bill was defeated. The Royal Commission which subsequently investigated these riots concluded that the highly explosive condition of public opinion over Home Rule was a major cause. An anonymous article in the Fortnightly Review emphasized that the riots would have taken a more ominous form had the Home Rule bill passed: There would have been no riots but there would have been civil war. Two factors prevented the Ulster challenge from becoming as critical in 1886 or 1893 as it became in 1912-14. Ulster's opposition lacked the united leadership and highly developed organization provided later by Sir Edward Carson. It also lacked immediate driving
force, because the Ulstermen knew the first two bills would never pass the veto of
the House of Lords.

Gladstone's decision to make no special provision for Ulster in 1886 was
not based on complete ignorance of the problem, or a deliberate attempt to suppress it.
John Morley revealed that Ulster was one of the 'knottiest points' discussed in the
cabinet. However, the Irish secretary's personal view that the Ulster agitation
was largely artificial seems to have influenced the cabinet more strongly than the
well-informed advice of James Bryce, who took the Ulster threats seriously. Bryce
was a prominent Liberal and an Ulsterman, who explained his views in the February
1886 issue of the Nineteenth Century, after two recent visits to Ulster. He warned
that a serious risk of collision existed unless Ulster was given some measure of local
autonomy to protect the Protestant minority and Ulster's economy. 'England ought to
realize that here lies a difficulty which she cannot evade without dishonour nor neglect
without the risk of civil war.' Bryce presented his case more formally to the cabinet
early in March, but his advice was rejected.

By 20 March 1886, Gladstone decided that the question of special
treatment for Ulster should be set open for consideration during the parliamentary
debate. When he introduced the Home Rule bill, he declared that the government
was prepared to give careful thought to any practicable plan for Ulster which received
general approval. Gladstone explained that none of the various schemes suggested had
seemed entirely justified, particularly in view of the widespread Nationalist sentiment
expressed at the 1885 election. Instead Gladstone inserted safeguards for the
Protestant minority into the bill, providing that the second 'Order' in the Dublin
parliament should have a veto on the first, and should be partly elected on a high
property franchise. The Irish parliament was also forbidden to pass discriminatory
legislation on religious matters. Such safeguards failed to satisfy the Irish Unionists,
both in 1886 and in 1893, when again no special provision was made for Ulster.

Yet there was considerable justification for this line of action on
Gladstone's part in 1886. Many Liberal and Nationalist politicians shared Labouchère's
view that Ulster's threats were 'a game of brag.' Moreover, as Gladstone explained
in his concluding speech on the bill, since Parnell and the Ulster Unionist leader had
both rejected partition, there seemed no reason to pursue it further. In all fairness
to Gladstone, he gave the Ulster question as much consideration before the 1886 bill was introduced, as did Asquith's government twenty-five years later, despite the vastly different circumstances.

By 1911, the extent of Ulster's hostility to Home Rule should have been perfectly clear to the cabinet. The Ulster Unionist organization had been made more effective in response to the 1893 Home Rule bill, which followed its predecessor in treating Ireland as a single unit. The Ulster Defence Union was established in 1893 as the supreme Ulster Unionist authority to prepare for resistance to Home Rule. Demonstrations and armed preparations again took place, but the House of Lords still stood between the Ulster Unionists and a Dublin parliament. Ulster Unionist forces were again reorganized after the shock of the 1904-5 'devolution crisis', when members of Balfour's Unionist government were suspected of Labouring Home Rule sympathies. By 1905 the Ulster Unionist Council had been formed to direct the forces in preparing to resist any future encroachments on the Union.

Even more ominous was the adoption of Sir Edward Carson as the new leader of the Ulster Unionist Council in July 1911. Carson has been well described by Rev Jenkins as a southern Irishman, who 'combined great personal charm, hypochondriacal neurasthenia, a huge law practise, and a strong taste for melodrama'. Carson was determined to stamp out apathy on the Home Rule question, as he told Lady Londonderry: 'I will make a big effort (my last in politics) to stir up some life over this Home Rule fight --- I will lend for myself this time.' When he launched the campaign against Home Rule in July 1911, with Captain James Craig, Carson emphasised that he would only lend his name and powerful support to a movement which was serious in its determination to resist Home Rule. 'I am not for a mere game of bluff', he wrote to Craig, 'and unless men are prepared to make great sacrifices which they clearly understand the talk of resistance is no use.'

The government was soon acquainted with Carson's intentions, which were only too well publicized. A vast Ulster Unionist demonstration at Craigavon, on 25 September 1911, indicated the strength of the Carson-Craig partnership and their rank and file support. Carson threw down his challenge to the government: 'We must be prepared --- the morning Home Rule is passed, ourselves to become responsible for the government of the Protestant Province of Ulster.' In January
1912, Leopold Amery reported to Bonar Law the impressions gained during a two week tour in Ireland:

Ulster I think we can count on absolutely. They are determined from top to bottom -- and are quietly working out all their plans for keeping order and carrying on the local administration within their own area --- if attacked, they will fight.

Thus, long before the third Home Rule debate began at Westminster, the Unionists publicised their intention to carry the battle outside parliament in order to win public support. The Parliament Act prevented the Unionists winning victories inside the House, where their attack would be splintered against an automatic government majority. When Bonar Law replaced Balfour as leader of the British Unionist party in November 1911, a more aggressive and partisan approach to politics replaced Balfour’s moderation and broader perspective. Bonar Law was determined to provide firm leadership, especially since he was taking over a shattered party in the aftermath of the humiliations of the 1910 election defeats and the Parliament Act. The impact was all the greater in that Bonar Law’s unexpected rise to power coincided with the advent of Carson. Bonar Law warned Alfred Emmott that the 1912 session would be a very nasty one, and he rather expected that every Unionist would be suspended before the Home Rule bill left the Commons. The Ulster Protestant campaign against Home Rule had received the official sanction of the British Unionist party.

A TRAGIC OMISSION: THE NEGLECTED ULSTER DIMENSION,

JANUARY 1911 TO FEBRUARY 1912

Despite all the warnings since 1886, Asquith’s government almost entirely ignored the Ulster problem throughout the twelve months preceding the introduction of the third Home Rule bill in April 1912. Contrary to the currently accepted view, there is little to suggest that Asquith was aware from the beginning that Ulster would be his most formidable difficulty. There is no evidence that the cabinet even considered the Ulster problem until February 1912. Finance and federalism dominated the government’s Home Rule discussions up to April 1912, and most ministers remained sublimely ignorant that Ulster might wreck their bill.
The Ulster question clearly created a dilemma for Liberals who accepted the Gladstonian concept of self-determination for a united Ireland. The existence of the large Protestant Unionist community in north-east Ulster raised important questions about minority rights and about the possible necessity of imposing Home Rule by force on a recalcitrant Ulster. There were no answers to these aspects of the Irish question which did not in some way conflict with fundamental Liberal principles. The complexity of the problems involved made it all the more vital that they should be thoroughly examined before the final form of the third Home Rule bill was settled.

Yet Asquith's cabinet completely failed to comprehend the extent of the Ulster problem. The only other explanation - that the government deliberately ignored Ulster while the bill was being prepared - seems most unlikely. The government missed the opportunity to incorporate special provision for Ulster into the Home Rule bill when it was first introduced, and the best chance to seize the initiative over Ulster was thereby lost. It was not until the Unionist Opposition forced the question of Ulster upon the government's attention, after April 1912, that it began to occupy the centre of the political stage.

The cabinet committee on Home Rule assumed throughout 1911 that the whole of Ireland should be treated as a single unit. Admittedly, there were reasonable grounds for adopting this position, as Roy Jenkins has argued so convincingly. Gladstone had twice taken this course, the Nationalists would be vehemently opposed to special treatment for Ulster, and some tactical advantage might be gained by reserving concessions until the third parliamentary circuit. But, if there was a case for continual discussion of Home Rule all round there was surely a far stronger case for some examination of the Ulster question. No evidence exists to indicate that the government even weighed the arguments for and against Ulster exclusion until February 1912, when it was already too late to alter the framework of their bill. Ministers did not even seem to be considering Home Rule all round in terms of its possible implications for Ulster. The failure to assess the Ulster problem and to examine the possible methods of dealing with it, is surely a severe indictment of the government. It was superficially far easier to treat Ireland as a single unit, following Gladstonian precedent, in the hope that Ulster's challenge was hysterical bluff which would ultimately evaporate.
There was little public comment on the Ulster question, before spring
1912, either by Liberal politicians or the Liberal press. Ulster’s preparations for
resistance were treated with the same derision as in 1883 and 1895. Herbert Samuel
could not ignore the Ulster problem entirely when he visited Belfast in October 1911,
and his brief remarks were typical of the sanguine attitude of most of his colleagues:

The British people would not stand threats, and the
more they heard of Sir Edward Carson’s revolutionary
campaign and of Captain Craig’s rifle, the more support
the Liberal Party would get in British constituencies.
Under the staunch leadership of Mr. Asquith the
Government would proceed with quiet but unflinching
resolution to carry their declared policy into effect. 30

The radical weekly journal, the Nation, frequently provided well-informed
comment on cabinet aims and attitudes through the close links of its editor,
H. W. Massingham, with prominent Liberal politicians and intellectuals. It faithfully
expressed the views of the radical wing of the Liberal party, opposing Grey’s foreign
policy, and applauding the progress of New Liberalism under Lloyd George’s energetic
leadership. The government’s Home Rule policy was loyally supported as the fulfil-
ment of an obligation to ‘old Liberalism’, which should be settled as rapidly as
possible to make way for the social reforms of the New Liberalism. 31 The Nation
reflected the government’s attitude to the Ulster challenge. In September 1911, it
ridiculed the ‘Playboys of Northern Ireland’ as they gathered to hear ‘Robespierre-
Carson’ openly inciting them to ‘seditious and outrage’. These essays in treason would
be severely punished if they meant business, but if they were merely ‘a fit of Ulsteria’,
then they would increase the defections from this violent and reckless form of Unionism.
The Nation then ignored Ulster again until January 1912, when readers were briefly
informed that Ulster’s threats left Britain sceptical and cold: ‘rebellion in anticipation
of wrongs commands the sympathy of no rational being’. 32 However, a letter from
Massingham to Redmond, in February 1912, suggests that the editor was more concerned
about the Ulster question than his paper revealed. Massingham mentioned that English
anxieties about Home Rule focused on the Ulster question and the fear of intolerance:
‘I found more evidence of this feeling than just now I thought it wise to publish.’ 33

The Unionists assumed that the government’s silence on the subject of
Ulster must be a deliberate policy, resulting from their fear of the Ulster threats.

anything about the Irish Question were frightened by the Ulster difficulty in January. 1911 before they had even begun to touch the subject. A Unionist writing for the Quarterly Review made a similar observation:

Nationalists in Ireland and Radicals in Great Britain pretended to regard Ulster as almost a negligible quantity — at all events as an element from which opposition might indeed be expected, but whose hostility might be pacified by stops and safeguards, and practically ignored.

It was inconceivable to the Opposition leaders that the government could underestimate the Ulster challenge to the extent of ignoring it so completely.

MINISTERIAL MISGIVINGS ON ULSTER: BIRRELL, CHURCHILL, AND LLOYD GEORGE, 1911-12.

The only members of the cabinet who were far more deeply concerned about the question of Ulster, in the months before April 1912, were Birrell, Churchill and Lloyd George. The chief secretary was the only minister who anticipated the full significance of the Ulster problem as early as August 1911. He explained his personal views on Ulster at length in a significant letter written to Churchill from Dublin, late in August:

Ulster has cried 'Wolf' so often & so absurdly that one is inclined to ridicule her rhodomontade, but we are cutting very deep this time & her yells are genuine — Great ferment & perturbation of spirit exists — mainly fed amongst the poor folk by hatred of Roman Catholicism & amongst the better to do by the belief that under a Home Rule régime Ireland will become a miserable, one-horsed, poverty stricken, priest ridden, corrupt oligarchy.

Birrell believed that the Ulster men were not bluffing, though he admitted that he could not predict the exact dimensions of the potential trouble in Ulster, because so much depended on the course of events. Military movements and drilling were taking place at the Orange Lodges, and several orders for arms were reported to have been made abroad, though arms had not yet been imported on a large-scale.

The chief secretary realised that there could be no final 'Liberal' solution to the Irish question because of Ulster's challenge. Home Rule for a united Ireland conflicted with Protestant minority rights and might also require coercion,
thus offending Birrell's Liberal philosophy in two significant respects. To leave Ulster permanently out of the settlement 'would have been an outrage upon Irish unity --- but to bring her in without bloodshed seemed impossible. 

The Ulster question posed problems for all Liberals, but in Birrell's case the conflicts involved were increased by his own peculiarly difficult position as chief secretary. On the grounds of personal preference and deeply-rooted sentiment he shared the Irish Nationalists' desire for a united Ireland. But in practical terms he recognised that some form of exclusion of the predominantly Protestant areas of Ulster might be the only way to secure Home Rule for the rest of Ireland. Thus he was the first Liberal minister to suggest the possibility of a compromise solution, similar to that later proposed by Lloyd George in November 1913, and subsequently adopted in the government's Amending bill of March 1914. This idea appears to have been mentioned for the first time in Birrell's letter of August 1911 to Churchill, which was also shown to Lloyd George on Birrell's instruction:

--- were the question referred to Ulster county by county, it is probable that all Ulster save Antrim & Down would by a majority support Home Rule & it might then be suggested & agreed to that for the transitional period, say 5 years, Antrim & Down might stand out & that at the end of that time there should be a fresh referendum to settle their fate. If this was done, there could be no Civil War.

The scheme for temporary Ulster exclusion by county option and referendum, usually attributed to Lloyd George or Churchill, probably originated then with the Irish secretary himself. There is no evidence to support Churchill's claim that he and Lloyd George advocated Ulster exclusion as early as 1909, and it seems unlikely that they put their proposal to the cabinet before February 1912.

However, although Birrell was one of the few ministers to recognise at an early date that Ulster exclusion might be necessary, he did not feel free to press it formally on the cabinet or the public. His references to Ulster in public speeches in 1911 were brief, cautious, and far more optimistic than his private remarks to Churchill. Because of his official position as Irish secretary, with all that implied in terms of deep commitment to the Nationalists, any such proposal from Birrell would have been regarded as the worst form of treachery by the Irish leaders; it might well have entirely destroyed their confidence in the Liberal party's good faith. It seems possible, therefore, that Birrell may have deliberately
placed his suggestion before the two ministers most likely to force the issue further.

Lloyd George and Churchill were the two ministers, other than Asquith and Birrell, who had the greatest impact on the government's Irish policy from 1911-14. Churchill played the more vocal and active role, while Lloyd George intermittently exercised a more profound influence behind the scenes, especially after October 1913. Their interest in the Ulster question, therefore, deserves some explanation.

Both these extraordinary men shared the nation's attitude to Irish Home Rule. It was a long-standing party commitment, which must be honoured as quickly as possible, allowing the Liberal party to proceed with more relevant and socially progressive causes. Neither man was notably enthusiastic about Irish Home Rule as a great Liberal cause per se. They were both irritated by the parliamentary time and the ministerial energy it diverted from other issues. Their view of the priorities due to these other causes admittedly altered after Churchill moved in 1911 from the board of trade to the admiralty, transferring his enthusiasm from social reform to naval expansion.

Lloyd George was supremely talented, full of restless energy and dynamic resourcefulness. His talents led to a spectacular rise to power, as chancellor of the exchequer in 1903, and potential successor to Asquith by 1914. He was a radical and champion of the people—a man of action, guided by instinct rather than intellect. He was adaptable, and proved to be a masterly negotiator, skilfully combining force with gentle persuasion. Inevitably he made enemies, who thought him ambitious, opportunistic and unscrupulous, but his colleagues generally felt that his outstanding abilities far outweighed his deficiencies.

The chancellor of the exchequer intervened rarely in Home Rule policy until the autumn of 1913. When he did play a part, it was usually in connection with the Ulster problem. Lloyd George never became as emotionally involved with Ulster as Churchill, but he held strong views on the subject. His Welsh background gave him an instinctive sympathy for the cause of any struggling minority. In the case of the Ulster Protestants, this sympathy was strongly reinforced by Lloyd George's nonconformity. Probably even more important, he viewed the Ulster problem as a potential stumbling-block to the speedy achievement of an Irish settlement. It must be dealt with quickly and effectively, so that Lloyd George could devote all his
attention to social reforms, such as the land campaign which obsessed him from 1912-14.

While the Home Rule bill was being drafted, then, Lloyd George was convinced that the Ulster problem should be squarely faced, rather than ignored. His views received less public attention than those of Churchill, but Lloyd George was prepared to press them equally forcefully on the cabinet in February 1912. He also discussed them with some of his colleagues beforehand, though only one fragmentary piece of evidence survives. On 30 January, the chancellor had lunch with McKinnon Wood, the Scottish minister, and Richard Holt, a Liberal member. Holt noted in his diary:

Had a good talk about Ulster & Home Rule - all agreeing that Home Rule was neither popular nor unpopular in Great Britain & that it could not be imposed upon Ulster by force & that if possible the Protestant counties in Ulster should be exempted. 44

If Lloyd George had his critics, the First Lord of the Admiralty had many more. As a former Conservative, Churchill was mistrusted by many politicians on both sides of the House. He was considered in some quarters to be irresponsible, unreliable and unpredictable. His colleagues were not always convinced that his undoubted abilities compensated for his infuriating limitations. Haldane commented that Churchill tended to act first and think afterwards, despite his energy, imagination and courage. 45 Yet he was recognised as a brilliant parliamentary speaker, with immense intellectual gifts, which might approach genius, given greater discipline and maturity.

When Churchill took over a new responsibility or adopted a new cause, he responded enthusiastically to the challenge, with all the force and ability of his powerful personality. This was the case with his advocacy of Ulster exclusion. As a convert from Unionism he was never a wholehearted Home Ruler. He was even more impatient than Lloyd George to settle the Ulster difficulty in whatever manner would be most effective to dispose of the Home Rule issue. Moreover, Churchill's sense of history attracted him inevitably to the Ulster question, because his father had first played the Orange card, with the resounding cry that 'Ulster will fight and Ulster will be right.'
Churchill made no attempt to disguise his desire for involvement, when he wrote to Birrell in August 1911.

I hear from more than one quarter that a good deal of arming is going on in Ulster, and it occurs to me that you may wish to set up some Secret Service work and enquire into the matter. I don’t know whether you have a secret service fund, or an adequate one; so I write to say that if my machinery would be of any use to you it is much at your service.

Birrell’s rejection of this offer did nothing to discourage Churchill. On 4 October, he informed his Dundee constituents that: ‘It is our duty to exhaust every effort which sympathy and earnestness can inspire to understand the reasonable difficulties of Ulster and to allay unfounded alarm.’

By January 1912, Churchill was evidently exasperated by his colleagues’ silence on the Ulster question, and decided to rectify the matter by a personal visit. His plan to speak in the Ulster Hall in Belfast, where his father had declared against Home Rule twenty-six years earlier, was particularly provocative. Churchill’s visit was interpreted as a deliberate government manoeuvre to carry the war into the enemy camp. Carson was deeply concerned that it would be impossible to control the inflamed situation which Churchill would provoke, and he believed the government knew this.

Professor Dicey thought Churchill had set a trap, intended to incite the Unionists to violence. Lord MacDonnell assumed that: ‘The Home Rule fight has begun. Carson is leading the Ulster host and Churchill & Birrell are going next month to stump Ulster with Redmond Dillon & Devlin.’ This was far from the truth. Churchill had consulted none of his colleagues except Lloyd George. Birrell was particularly exasperated at not being informed, warning Churchill to ‘leave Ireland alone in the future.’

The Ulster Unionist Council decided to prevent Churchill speaking at the Ulster Hall on 8 February. After considerable controversy, Churchill agreed to transfer his meeting to a marquee at the Celtic Road football ground in a Catholic district of Belfast. The Nation condemned the Ulster ‘anarchists’, who had ‘smeared the rugged surface of their russifism with the slime of moral indignation’, by their refusal to allow Churchill to use the Ulster Hall. Sir Edward Grey agreed that the attempt to prevent Churchill speaking in Belfast was an injury to democracy and free speech.
Churchill justified his visit in an interesting letter to Redmond on 13 January. He claimed that it was useful for a minister to set at rest any genuine apprehensions felt by the Ulster Protestants: "It will be a great gain even to give the appearance that a fair and reasonable discussion of the subject has begun in Ulster." Some of Churchill's colleagues were less convinced of the value of the enterprise. John Morley deplored Churchill's recklessness, which had destroyed the last chance to introduce the Home Rule bill in a calm atmosphere. After all the fuss, the meeting was rather an anti-climax, not improved by the effects of a rainstorm on Churchill's large marquee. Nevertheless, it was scarcely surprising that Lloyd George was advised against making a similar visit to Belfast only a few weeks later: "It would set the town on fire, inflame slumbering passions, and play old Harry with the prospects of Home Rule." 55

A CABINET DECISION AGAINST ULSTER EXCLUSION.

FEBRUARY 1912.

On 6 February 1912, Lloyd George and Churchill combined to place before the cabinet a formal proposal for Ulster exclusion. Churchill later reminded the prime minister:

I have always wished to see Ulster provided for & you will remember how Lloyd-George & I pressed its exclusion upon the Cabinet ( & how Loreburn repulsed us in the most bloodthirsty manner). 56

This was confirmed by Lloyd George in a conversation with Lord Riddell: 'Not only did he [Loreburn] oppose me, but he was most violent. He said that no self-respecting man would listen to such a proposal." 57 When Churchill asked Loreburn how he would enforce Home Rule on Ulster, and whether he was ready to shoot people down in the streets of Belfast, Loreburn merely replied pompously that he was prepared to do his duty. 58 Lloyd George asked his colleagues what would happen if Ulster rebelled, if military forces were ordered into the province, and if officers refused to give the orders to fire. The reply was that it might be so, but that "sufficient unto the day." 59 Churchill and Lloyd George undoubtedly pressed their case forcefully.

When Asquith reported the cabinet decision to the king next day, he naturally omitted these interesting details. The prime minister stated that a prolonged
discussion took place about giving an option to the predominantly Protestant Ulster counties to contract out of Home Rule. This option might be included in the initial bill, or by amendment at some subsequent stage. However, the proposal for Ulster exclusion was decisively rejected by the prime minister himself, and by Lord Crewe, who could generally be relied upon to support Asquith's tendency to procrastination. According to the cabinet letter, a majority of ministers finally acquiesced in the proposals suggested by Crewe and strongly recommended by Asquith. These provided that, while the initial bill should apply to the whole of Ireland, the Irish leaders should be informed that the government remained free to make such changes in the Bill as fresh evidence of facts, or the pressure of British opinion, may render expedient. The possible consequences of this policy were outlined:

--- if, in the light of such evidence or indication of public opinion, it becomes clear as the Bill proceeds that some special treatment must be provided for the Ulster counties, the Government will be ready to recognise the necessity, either by amendment of the Bill, or by not pressing it on under the provisions of the Parliament Act. In the meantime, careful and confidential inquiry is to be made as to the real extent and character of the Ulster resistance.

The cabinet was persuaded to accept this verdict by the combined weight of authority of Asquith, Crewe and Loreburn. The prime minister subsequently claimed that Morley was also a vehement opponent of exclusion on this occasion.

But an important minority was far from happy about the decision. Churchill was the least prepared to admit defeat, and had no intention of letting the matter drop. Precisely a month later, he introduced the issue again in cabinet, as Harcourt noted: 'Winston - recurring to idea of separate treatment of Ulster', but to no avail.

Lloyd George acquiesced more quickly than Churchill, partly, no doubt, because he was eager to return to matters which held more interest for him. Archival sources do not give Birrell's part in the cabinet discussion of 6 February. He clearly sympathised with the appeal for Ulster exclusion put forward by his two younger colleagues, but his own ambivalent attitude ensured that he would accept the majority decision, despite his misgivings.
Evidence about the specific views of other ministers is scanty, but there are a few clues. John Burns’s entry in his diary suggests that he inclined to Lloyd George’s view, for he described the February cabinet as the most critical in intent, but the most futile in the end that we have ever attended. Sir Edward Grey certainly shared the misgivings of Churchill, Lloyd George and Birrell by May 1912, when he spoke on the Second Reading of the Home Rule bill, and he may have been sympathetic in this crucial cabinet. McKinnon Wood had evidently agreed with Lloyd George on this issue only a week before the cabinet meeting, and Sir Rufus Isaacs’ Second Reading speech implied that he shared their uneasiness.

THE FAILINGS OF ASQUITH’S ULSTER POLICY

The general justification for Asquith’s policy of ‘wait and see’ deserves to be re-examined in the light of the evidence now available. Several major questions are raised by this vital cabinet decision against making initial provision for Ulster.

The prime minister’s policy of ignoring Ulster until events forced him to do otherwise can be defended on general and historical grounds. The Liberal party had always advocated Home Rule for a united Ireland, which was the aim of both Gladstone’s bills. A departure from traditional policy had to be justified more forcefully than a maintenance of the status quo. Moreover, the Irish Nationalists strongly reinforced the cabinet decision by their vehement opposition to any form of Irish partition, and by constantly minimising the strength of the Ulster challenge.

The inevitable opposition of the Ulster Unionists to Ulster exclusion, and the existence of large Catholic, Nationalist minorities in the north, added further complications. There was also the fear that Home Rule was not economically viable unless Ulster was included. Another practical difficulty of some significance was entirely of the cabinet’s own making. The Home Rule bill had been drafted largely before February 1912, without taking the Ulster problem into consideration at all. This did not necessarily mean that it was an impossibility to draft a bill making special provision for Ulster. If, however, any plan for Ulster exclusion would require drastic revision of this particular bill, especially of its complicated financial provisions.

Roy Jenkins has provided a most persuasive defence of Asquith’s Ulster policy. Apart from the points just mentioned, he emphasizes two further
arguments. The first two parliamentary circuits in 1912 and 1913 were dummy runs: 'Why should anyone settle until they saw what the disposition of forces was likely to be when it came to the final confrontation?' Secondly, Jenkins claims that no arrangement for Ulster exclusion would in 1912 have destroyed the opposition to Home Rule. The British Unionists were largely playing 'the Orange card' to wreck the entire Home Rule bill and smash the Liberal government: 'They would have swallowed the concession as though it were nothing and looked for a fresh battleground.'

These arguments are undoubtedly powerful, but they overlook several important points. First, Asquith's government had not examined the situation in Ulster by February 1912 sufficiently thoroughly to be sure that their decision was wise. This point will be considered further later. Secondly, there would have been stronger moral justification for Asquith's policy, had he really believed that Home Rule for a united Ireland could ever be passed. But he evidently recognized from the start that the bill would never pass without an amendment making some provision for Ulster. This was indicated in his February 1912 cabinet letter, and confirmed by an interesting letter he wrote to Churchill in September 1913:

I always thought (and said) that, in the end, we should probably have to make some sort of bargain about Ulster as the price of Home Rule. But I have never doubted, that, as a matter of tactics and policy, we were right to launch our Bill on its present lines.

If this was the case, then Asquith did not fully consider the consequences of leaving such a compromise until the last minute, and the advantages of taking immediate action. Churchill, at least, failed to understand the logic of the policy: 'We had been met by the baffling argument that such a concession might well be made as the final means of securing a settlement, but would be fruitless till then.'

The most important argument against Asquith's Ulster policy was that it overlooked the advantages to be gained from the Parliament Act by dealing with Ulster immediately. If Asquith had seriously examined the implications of the Parliament Act, he could have ensured that the last two parliamentary circuits, rather than the first two, would be the dummy runs. Special provisions for Ulster would automatically pass within three years, under the terms of the Parliament Act, if they were incorporated into the initial bill, or introduced as government amendments during the first circuit. The government did not need the consent of the
opposition up to the end of the 1912 session and could, therefore, largely impose their own terms for Ulster.

The strategy adopted by Asquith and so adroitly defended by Jenkyns, contained one fundamental weakness. Amendments to meet Ulster's grievances could only be incorporated into the Home Rule bill, after it left the Commons for the first time, by means of 'suggestions' which required Unionist agreement. If no settlement could be reached, the government could only introduce its own amendments for Ulster by introducing a separate bill; this would obviously not come into operation, under the Parliament Act, until much later. Thus, by waiting to see the final state of play before negotiating terms for Ulster, Asquith placed himself in an unnecessarily, if not fatally, weak position. At whatever time he chose to admit that concessions for Ulster were required, he would be admitting that his original measure was far from perfect. His equivocal attitude also made compromise negotiations with the Unionists almost inevitable, at some later stage, if the effective operation of Home Rule was not to be postponed indefinitely. Asquith's policy placed his government in an exceptionally vulnerable position over Ulster. This was demonstrated most strikingly in June 1912, when a Liberal backbencher proposed an amendment to exclude part of Ulster. The government was exposed to the embarrassment of criticism from its own backbenches on a particularly delicate issue, which gave maximum opportunity for the wrecking tactics of the Opposition.

The prime minister would have been far wiser to dictate his own terms for Ulster from the start and retain the initiative, instead of waiting for concessions to be forced from him. Any proposal for dealing with Ulster involved difficulties, but these might have been reduced by different timing. If there was justification for introducing Lloyd George's scheme of temporary Ulster exclusion by county option in March 1914, there was far more reason in April 1912. It would then have been part of the initial Home Rule bill, obtaining the same benefits from the Parliament Act. This procedure might have eliminated the need for endless negotiations with the Unionists in 1913-14, which culminated in the rejection of a separate amending bill for Ulster. Lloyd George's 1913-14 proposal contained nothing particularly original. In general principle it was very similar to Birrell's suggestion of August 1911, which was probably the basis for the cabinet proposal of February 1912, made by Lloyd George and Churchill.
However, the Liberals would probably have been well advised to propose something less than Ulster exclusion in April 1912. The scheme known as 'Home Rule within Home Rule' had much to recommend it as a starting point. This took various forms, but usually included administrative autonomy for part of Ulster, and possibly also a legislative veto, but within a Home Rule framework for all Ireland. This would have been acceptable to most Liberals, and would have been far easier for the Nationalists to concede, since it did not violate the principle of a united Ireland. Certainly, by January 1913, John Dillon indicated that he would be prepared to accept such a solution, and Redmond followed suit later in the year. The Unionists would almost certainly have opposed it, but their agreement was not essential in the 1912 session. Moreover, 'Home Rule within Home Rule' did not exclude the possibility of further concessions if these proved necessary.

If such a proposal had been incorporated into the original measure, it would have undermined the most persuasive aspect of the Opposition case. The Unionists could not then plausibly accuse the Liberals of ignoring the genuine grievances of the Protestant minority. This was the only aspect of Unionist propaganda against Home Rule which held powerful appeal to British public opinion. This point is ignored by Jenkins, when he argues that an early concession over Ulster would only result in further demands involving a 're-grouping of forces against other aspects of the bill.' No other issue could have aroused the same degree of British public support or justified threats of an Ulster rebellion. The only obvious alternative background was that of finance. The financial provisions were undoubtedly a grave source of weakness in the bill; but they were scarcely likely to arouse a public outcry of sufficient proportions to destroy Home Rule, or create a civil war. In any case, though Unionist agreement was naturally preferable to hostility, it was essentially irrelevant to the passage of a measure under the Parliament Act, so long as the grounds for civil war were removed.

Making provision for Ulster in the 1912 circuit, rather than at a later stage, had a further advantage from the Liberal viewpoint. During the negotiations of 1913-14, there were two major obstacles to an agreed settlement of the Ulster question - the opposition of the Nationalists on the one hand, and the opposition of the southern Irish Unionists on the other. Bonar Law and Carson might be individually prepared to consider Ulster exclusion, but their negotiating freedom was restricted
ly the hostility of the southern Unionists, who had powerful advocates in such men as Walter Long and Lord Lansdowne. The southern Unionists had nothing to gain from compromise, and continued to block the way, when an agreed settlement over Ulster was essential to the peaceful passage of Home Rule. But this obstacle, at least, could have been avoided by inserting provision for Ulster into the original bill. The southern Unionists would not like it, but the British and Ulster Unionists could rightly claim that they had no choice in the matter. Moreover, the introduction of a government plan for Ulster in 1912 was likely to split and weaken the Unionist forces. The southern Unionists would be totally opposed, but the attitudes of their brethren in Ulster and Britain would be more uncertain. If the Ulster Unionists continued to threaten civil war, they might well forfeit the sympathy of the public and the support of the Unionists in Britain.

Admittedly, the opposition of the Irish Nationalists would remain an obstacle, regardless of the timing of an Ulster compromise. Naturally the government preferred to avoid inflaming relations with their eighty-four Irish Nationalist allies at an early stage. Undoubtedly the Nationalists would have opposed Ulster exclusion in 1912 as vehemently as they fought it from 1913-14. Yet the fact remains that they were forced to acquiesce in 1914 'as the price of peace'. They could probably also have been induced to agree in 1912, had it been put to them 'as the price of Home Rule, especially if the initial proposal had been 'Home Rule within Home Rule. ' Though the Liberals were partially dependent on the Nationalists, they could survive, so long as the Irish only abstained and did not vote in the Opposition lobby. The Nationalists were far more dependent on the Liberals for the grant of Home Rule. Birrell recognized in 1911 'how tremendously important it is for Redmond & his friends not to fall & how far they will go to meet us if they can.' He did not think Redmond would be very hard to deal with, because he was pledged to the hilt to pass Home Rule. 69 In a similar vein, Earl Grey believed that Redmond would be obliged to take whatever Asquith offered him. 70 Naturally, the official Nationalist party gave no hint that they would be open to any form of concession over Ulster, in 1911-12. But the rebel independent Nationalist, William O'Brien, informed Asquith in November 1911, that a moderate, experimental Home Rule bill, incorporating the opportunity for future revision, would probably be acceptable to the Nationalist leaders; they had 'pledged their credit beyond recall to carrying a Home Rule Act in the present Parliament.' 71 In the last resort,
the Nationalists were likely to accept a modified Home Rule bill from the Liberals, rather than force an election which would wreck their prospects of Home Rule altogether.

Moreover, it might have been wiser for the government to force the Nationalists to accept a major compromise at the start, however reluctantly. Instead, a continual series of smaller concessions were wrung from them later. Each one was more humiliating than the last, and eroded the Irish leaders' confidence in Asquith's good faith. One hard bargain would have been much better than a series of broken promises. It would not have been an easy course for either party to agree to insert provision for Ulster into the initial 1912 bill. The Nationalist leaders would have to face intense criticism within Ireland, and the government would scarcely relish the prospect of keeping their reluctant Irish allies in line throughout three parliamentary circuits. But the Nationalist leaders were in a far stronger position to win round support in Ireland in 1912, than they had become by 1914. By introducing a Home Rule bill for a united Ireland, the government raised expectations which could not be fulfilled, so that any subsequent concessions were seen as treachery to the Nationalist cause. Meanwhile Ulster prepared for civil war and feelings on both sides hardened, as the influence of the extremists in Ireland increased.

From the government's point of view, it was probably worth taking the risk of offending the Nationalists in 1912, in order to gain the benefits of pushing an Ulster solution through under the Parliament Act. The government would thereby retain the initiative in deciding the terms for Ulster, and negotiations for an agreed settlement with the Opposition could be avoided. The southern Unionists would be in no position to veto a compromise, and the case for an Ulster rebellion would be undermined. The Ulster Unionists could not be expected to like such a settlement, but their justification for opposing it, and their appeal for British support, would be substantially weakened, if the government could show that it had made a reasonable attempt to deal with their grievances.
CABINET IGNORANCE AND ULSTER INFORMATION: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE 1911-12 POLICE REPORTS

It might be argued that the government could not have excluded Ulster in 1912, because they did not become aware of the seriousness of the opposition there until late in 1913. It may well be true that the cabinet was ignorant of the full dimensions of the Ulster situation in February 1912. But there was little excuse for such complete ignorance in view of Ulster's opposition to the two earlier Home Rule bills, and the current publicity surrounding preparations for resistance. There was absolutely no excuse for the total failure to make a thorough examination of the Ulster situation in 1911, when the Home Rule committee was meeting to prepare the bill. If special provision for Ulster had been considered advisable, then the entire bill would have had to be framed in the light of that decision. The cabinet discussion on the possible exclusion of Ulster in February 1912 was essentially unreal. It took place at far too late a stage for the evidence to be examined, or for the suggestion to be effectively incorporated into a major bill to be introduced only two months later.

The government should have acquainted itself more fully with the existing situation in Ulster, before discussing the problem in February 1912. Yet there is no evidence that the prime minister even asked the chief secretary for such a report throughout 1911. Birrell did not present the first report on the Ulster situation to the cabinet until after the fateful meeting of 6 February. This suggests, at the very least, that ministers were hardly sufficiently well-informed to take that important decision when they did. They might have been better advised to read the police reports and other material circulated by Birrell before arriving at such a critical conclusion.72

The chief secretary had himself been examining police reports for Ulster with considerable care since April 1911. Birrell can obviously be criticised for not sending earlier reports to the cabinet. Though he had a good deal of information, its value was very mixed; his own uncertainty about the conclusions to be drawn probably made him reluctant to offer guidance to the cabinet. Birrell had to overcome many practical problems in assessing the gravity of the Ulster problem. His enquiries were hindered by the rudimentary and haphazard espionage methods employed by the 'Crime Special Branch' of the Royal Irish Constabulary. Reports from county inspectors were based on the observations of their local police, who in turn depended
upon civilian informants, whose reliability was uncertain. An equal problem was posed by the fact that the local police in the predominantly Protestant areas of Ulster were likely to sympathise with the Unionist movement they were supposed to be investigating.

These deficiencies were well known to the chief secretary, but they were too deep-rooted to be easily altered. Assessment of the real danger in Ulster was made even more difficult by the knowledge that the Ulster Protestants would naturally seek to exaggerate the extent of their preparations, particularly if they really were just bluffing. The Ulstermen made little attempt at secrecy, usually quite the contrary. Police arrangements to have Ulster's activities discreetly watched probably did not upset them unduly. Indeed, those participating in the drilling occasionally supplied the police with the required information.

When Churchill offered to place his secret service machinery at Birrell's disposal in August 1911, Birrell politely refused. The chief secretary had already directed further investigations to be made as to whether any suspicious acts of preparation were on foot. The police reports from April 1911 to February 1912 indicated a gradual escalation of drilling, but little evidence of any large-scale purchase of arms. Up to September 1911, the reports were generally negative. The district inspector of county Fermanagh, for example, believed it was simply 'bluster and bravado intended to Impress British newspapers. The tone of the reports altered after the Unionist demonstration at Craigavon in September 1911, because the majority of marching Ulstermen had quite obviously been drilled. In February 1912, Birrell circulated to the cabinet a general report on drilling in Ulster, which showed that drilling was being practised in all Ulster counties except Donegal and Monaghan. About 12,000 people were involved, but in most cases they were unarmed.

Birrell also obtained the opinion of the Irish law officers in February 1912, concerning the legality of arming and drilling. If it could be proved that arms were being obtained in order to resist a parliamentary statute by force, or to promote civil war, the parties responsible were guilty of sedition and might be indicted. If action was required, the suspected parties should be arrested and their arms seized, but it would be difficult to prove that the purpose was seditious. The case of drilling was rather different. Under an old statute, unlawful military training was forbidden, unless held under the authority of two county magistrates. These magistrates in
Ulster would inevitably give the necessary authority; legal prosecution would end in failure, merely providing welcome publicity for the participants. Though drilling was illegal under common law, if undertaken for seditious purposes, indictment presented the same problems as in the case of arming. 79

Such information formed the basis for the chief secretary’s reports to the cabinet in February 1912, but it was plainly conflicting and inadequate. Birrell therefore sought additional advice from leading civil servants in Ireland who had personal knowledge of the Ulster situation. He was probably influenced to some degree by the persistently optimistic view of his permanent under-secretary. Sir James Dougherty continued to believe that Ulster was bluffing throughout the years 1912-14, regardless of mounting evidence to the contrary. 80 However, Birrell clearly attached more weight to the opinions of Sir David Harrel, who had formerly been chief commissioner of the Dublin Metropolitan Police, and Irish under-secretary from 1895 to 1902. 81 The chief secretary was evidently so worried by the cabinet decision of 6 February 1912, that he discussed the Ulster situation with Harrel two days later, asking Harrel to put his views in writing for the cabinet. Sir David pointed out that the Ulstermen were, so far, protesting as effectively as possible in order to influence the British electorate. They were quite serious, and ‘in a general far-off way’ might be thinking of a time when it might come to a fight in the open. On the whole, however, Harrel did not consider that ‘platform’ speeches will materialise into deliberate and armed resistance to authority. 82

Birrell was no doubt reassured by Harrel and Dougherty, whose views suggested that his own fears, like those of Lloyd George and Churchill, were unnecessarily alarmist. They probably helped him to stifle his misgivings about the cabinet’s decision to make no special provision for Ulster, and to express his acquiescence in that decision more confidently. 83 Less than a year later, however, Sir David Harrel’s view of the Ulster situation had swung round to the Lloyd George-Churchill standpoint. 84 The acute differences of opinion between Harrel and Dougherty thereafter were reflected in Birrell’s own inner conflict, which the chief secretary was never able to resolve.

It could, perhaps, be argued that the cabinet would merely have been confused if they had seen Birrell’s inconclusive police reports before, rather than
fter, their vital decision of 6 February. That decision can certainly be justified, as Roy Jenkins has shown. It would have reflected greater credit on Asquith’s cabinet, however, had it represented a carefully planned strategy, based on the fullest available information. Instead it was a decision taken almost by default with the false confidence generated by ignorance.

CONCLUSION: THE ULSTER QUESTION - LIBERAL FAILURE

BY OMISSION

Asquith’s government entered the Home Rule battle in April 1912 totally unprepared to deal with the Ulster question. Up to the time the Home Rule bill was introduced in parliament, the prime minister and most of his colleagues almost entirely overlooked the problem of Ulster. The cabinet committee which drafted the measure was absorbed by Home Rule all round and the financial provisions. Up to April 1912, the Ulster issue was scarcely mentioned in the private correspondence and diaries of prominent Liberals - in stark contrast with the monotonous repetition of the Ulster theme in Unionist correspondence.

The only ministers who were seriously concerned about the problem of north-east Ireland were Birrell, Lloyd George, Churchill, and possibly Grey. Lloyd George and Churchill were irritated that the Ulster question should remain a potential obstacle to a Home Rule settlement, and a gift to their Unionist opponents. But Lloyd George had little patience with Asquith’s uncertain Ulster policy, and took almost no part in its control from February 1912 up to autumn 1913. The chancellor turned his attention back to insurance and land reform, while Grey was equally preoccupied with foreign affairs. Birrell remained very uneasy, despite his reluctant acquiescence in the February 1912 decision. Only Churchill continued to exert pressure on his colleagues to reconsider their Ulster policy.

The government’s failure even to examine the Ulster situation, before April 1912, was an important error of omission. The decision to make no provision for Ulster in the Home Rule bill involved a massive and dangerous gamble, at the least. It assumed that Ulster’s grievances were exaggerated, and that the Ulstermen would not actually carry out their threats of rebellion. The fact that the cabinet almost certainly did not appreciate the degree of risk involved hardly exonerates
Asquith's Ulster policy is perfectly explicable in terms of the prime minister's personality and characteristic political behaviour. These were illustrated by some remarks made by John Morley to Sir Almeric Fitzroy in January 1912:

Lord Morley confirmed all I have heard of Asquith's indolence in shirking a difficulty, confident in his ability to furnish at least some provisional solution when the situation created by neglect threatens to get out of hand. 85

But such a cavalier and casual treatment of the Ulster problem was dangerous. While Asquith's cabinet concentrated on other aspects of Home Rule between February and April 1912, the noisy Unionist campaign gave it top priority. On 9 April 1912, an impressive Unionist demonstration took place at Balmoral near Belfast. Bonar Law and Walter Long pledged the full support of the official Unionist party in the cause of Ulster; after an enthusiastic military march-past of 80,000 men. Bonar Law denounced the Liberal attempt to pass Home Rule as 'naked tyranny', and threatened to do 'all that man can do to defeat a conspiracy as treacherous as has ever been formed against the life of a great nation'. 86 Two days later, Asquith introduced the Home Rule bill in the House of Commons. The Liberals hoped for the best, though they were disastrously unprepared to face the Unionist onslaught on the Ulster question.
According to the 1911 Census of Ireland, the total population of Ireland was 4,390,219. 73.86% (i.e., 3,242,670) of the total Irish population were Roman Catholics, and 24.59% (i.e., 1,079,518) were Protestants. The latter consisted of: 13.13% Protestant Episcopalians, 19.04% Presbyterians, 1.42% Methodists. (Census of Ireland 1911. General Report, Cd. 6663.)

2. See Census of Ireland 1911, p. xlviii; R. B. McDowell, The Irish Convention, 1917-18 (1970), p. 16; 4 Hansard, CCCV, 970 (Redmond's speech citing figures from the 1885 census.)


4. On Ulster Unionism, see e.g. Buckland, Irish Unionism: II. Ulster Unionism and the Origins of Northern Ireland 1886-1922 (Dublin, 1973).


6. 4 Hansard, CCCIV, 1231, 9 April 1886 (William Johnston).


8. 4 Hansard, CCCVI, 1180, 7 June 1886 (Parnell). There was remarkably little direct encouragement from English politicians, with the exception of Churchill's Belfast visit.

9. The Times, 24 Feb. 1886 (quoting Belfast Newsletter); 14 and 17 May 1886.


11. 'The Riots in Belfast', Fortnightly Review, N.S., XL (Sept. 1886); 287.


James Bryce, 'Alternative Policies in Ireland,' Nineteenth Century, XIX (Feb., 1886), 326; cabinet paper dated 16 March 1886, P.R.O. Cab. 41/19/29. John Bright also criticised Gladstone for 'leaving out of view the important minority' (G. & N. Trevelyan, The Life of John Bright, 1914, p. 447), as also did Chamberlain.

Memorandum dated 20 March 1886, Gladstone Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 14532.

4 Hansard, CCCIV, 1053-4, 8 April 1886 (Gladstone).

4 Hansard, CCCV, 1342, 18 May 1886 (Labouchère). Nationalist derision even took the form of an advertisement of '25,000 old women with broomsticks to march against the Orange men' (The Times, 19 May 1886).

4 Hansard, CCCVI, 1220, 7 June 1886 (Gladstone). Parnell refused to consider a separate parliament for Ulster: 'we cannot give up a single Irishman. We want the energy, the patriotism, the talents and the work of every Irishman to ensure that this great experiment shall be a successful one' (4 Hansard, CCCVI, 1180, 7 June 1886).

See Buckland, Irish Unionism: II. Ulster Unionism, pp. 16-19.


Jenkins, Asquith, p. 274. See biographies of Carson; H. Montgomery Hyde, Carson (1853); Colvin and Marjoribanks, The Life of Lord Carson, 3 vols., 1934 (vol. II, 1910-14, by Ian Colvin).

Carson to Lady Londonderry, 29 Aug. 1911, quoted by Hyde, Carson, p. 289.

Ibid., pp. 287-8.

Quoted by Gwynn, Redmond, pp. 194-5.

L.S. Amery to Law, 20 Jan. 1912, B.L.P. 25/1/42.


Emmott diary, II, fo.45, 17 Nov. 1911.

Jenkins, Asquith, pp. 279-282.

The Times, 7 Oct. 1911.


Nation, 30 Sept. 1911; 6 Jan. 1912. The Nation's views were supported by Harold Begbie, a journalist investigating the Ulster situation, in Feb. 1912, for Robert Donald's Liberal Daily Chronicle. Begbie reported from Ulster that 'there will be great unrest and minor disturbances during the passing of the Act', but 'nothing in the nature of a population rising in arms. That is bunkum'. Donald was very impressed by Begbie's reports, which he forwarded to Lloyd George and Elibank (Donald to Lloyd George, 19 Feb. 1912, with enclosures from Begbie to Donald, dated 14, 17 and 18 Feb. 1912, Lloyd George Papers, C/4/8/1). In sharp contrast, Montgomerie wrote a series of articles for The Times early in 1912, concluding that the Protestant Ulster counties would go to any length in resisting Home Rule; Buckle, the editor of The Times, was equally impressed by Ulster's threats (Sir Almeric Fitzroy, Memoirs, 1925, II, 492-3).

Massingham to Redmond, 4 Feb. [1912], Redmond Papers, N.L.I., Add. MS. 15,254 (Bodleian, MS. film 1081).

F.S. Oliver to Bonar Law, 20 Aug. 1912, B.L.P. 27/1/47.

'The Ulster Covenant', [anon.], Quarterly Review, CCXVII (Oct. 1912), 562.

John Morley also had moments of anxiety, as he confided to Fitzroy in Jan. 1912: 'Correspondents whom he could trust assured him that there were present in Ireland elements as inflammable as he, to his cost, had had to reckon with twenty-five years ago, and all these forces were now about to be unchained --- The outlook filled him with misgiving ---' (Fitzroy, Memoirs, II, 476, 24 Jan. 1912). However, Morley's views on Ulster were not consistent, and the same day he wrote more optimistically to Carnegie, hoping for a miracle (Bodleian, MS. film 569).

Birrell to Churchill, 26 Aug. 1911, Verney Papers. Two copies exist in the Verney Papers, the first a rough draft by Birrell, dated 25 Aug., and the second more polished draft in Verney's hand, which is quoted here. The contents of both are identical, and the style essentially Birrell's own.


Birrell to Churchill, 26 Aug. 1911, Verney Papers. This refutes Peter Rowland's claim that Birrell was firmly opposed to Ulster exclusion (Rowland, Last Liberals' Governments, II, 42).

See e.g. Birrell's speeches at Oxford Union, Leeds, Ilfracombe, Skipton (The Times, 4 March, 18 Nov., 20 Oct. and 29 Nov. respectively.)


For the influence of nonconformity on Lloyd George's views on Irish Home Rule, see also below, chapter III, p. and note 107.

Richard Holt diary. mentioned in entry for 5 Feb. 1912.

See e.g. Haldane to Grey, 2 Oct. 1911, Haldane Papers, N.L.S. 5909, fos. 151-3; C.P. Scott diary, 6-8 Sept. and 1 Dec. 1911, B.L. Add. MS. 5900, fos. 37-40, 50-52 (for Loreburn's views); Hbert to Bryce, 20 Feb. 1912, 9 Jan. 1913, MS., Bryce 14, fos. 46-9, 42-5; Pease diary, 29 March 1909 (for McKenna's views); A. Ponsonby to Gladstone, 10 Jan. 1911, H. Gladstone Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 46023, fos. 211-3.

Churchill to Birrell, 23 Aug. 1911, Verney Papers.


Carson to Law, N.D. [Jan 1912] and 28 Jan. 1912, B.L.P. 25/1/55, 65; Dicey to Law, 21 Jan. 1912, B.L.P. 25/1/44.


See correspondence between Churchill and Lord Londonderry, quoted in R.S.C., Churchill. Young Statesman, pp. 445-52, which also provides a useful account of the visit.


Churchill to Asquith, 17 Sept. 1913, MS. Asquith 38, fo.194; see also Memorandum of Chamberlain's conversation with Churchill, 27 Nov. 1913.
B. L. P. 31/1/3. This is a convenient place to stress again the inadequacy of the source material on cabinet discussions, and the need to reconstruct what was said as carefully as possible from the fragmentary manuscript material available.


58. Memorandum of Chamberlain’s conversation with Churchill, 27 Nov. 1913, B. L. P. 31/1/3.

59. Sir J. H. Lewis (Welsh Liberal M. P.) to Lloyd George, 13 April 1914, recalling a talk we had more than two years ago (Lloyd George Papers, c/5/9/6).

60. Asquith’s cabinet letter to king, 7 Febr. 1912, MS. Asquith 6, fos. 95–6.

61. Ibid. This section of the letter is quoted in full by Jenkins, Asquith, p. 277.

62. Redmond’s account of his interview with Asquith, 17 Nov. 1913, Gwynn, Redmond, p. 236.

63. Harcourt’s pencilled cabinet notes, 6 March 1912, Harcourt Papers.

64. Burns diary, 6 Feb. 1912, B. L. Add. MS. 46334, fo. 47.


68. C. P. Scott diary, 15–16 Jan. 1913 (interview with Dillon), B. L. Add. MS. 50901, fos. 75–6; Asquith’s memorandum of his interview with Redmond, 17 Nov. 1913, MS. Asquith 59, fos. 23–6. See also Birrell to Asquith, 16 Oct. 1913, MS. Asquith 38, fos. 235–6; Gwynn, Redmond, pp. 230–1 (for T. P. O’Connor’s views).


71. O’Brien to Asquith, 4 Nov. 1911, MS. Asquith 36, fos. 7-10.


73. See ibid., where these points are illustrated throughout the police reports.


75. Reports with regard to Probable Resistance to Home Rule, 14 Feb. 1910, Birrell Papers, Bodleian, dep. c. 301, fos. 18-35 (see e.g. p.10).


77. Reports with regard to Probable Resistance to Home Rule, 14 Feb. 1910, ibid. (esp. pp. 3-5, 8-9).

78. Drilling in Ulster, 28 Feb. 1912, Birrell Papers, Bodleian, dep. c. 301, fos. 60-62.

79. Reports with regard to Probable Resistance to Home Rule, ibid., (esp. pp. 5-6, 10.)

80. For Dougherty’s views, see esp. Birrell Papers, Bodleian, dep. c. 300, fos. 31-2 (Dougherty to a correspondent, 9 April 1913.)

81. John Morley shared Birrell’s faith in Harrel’s judgement, commenting to Asquith on 7 Jan. 1914 that Harrel was ‘a very sane observer, and not sworn to either Irish or English’ (MS. Asquith 39, fo. 85).

82. Sir David Harrel’s letter, 8 Feb. 1912, circulated to cabinet 14 Feb., Birrell Papers, Bodleian, dep. c. 301, fos. 18-35.

83. See e.g. Birrell’s speech to his Bristol constituents, The Times, 23 Feb. 1912.

84. See e.g. Harrel to Birrell, 30 Dec. 1912, Birrell Papers, Bodleian, dep. c. 300, fos. 8-10.


86. The Times, 10 April 1912.
THE SLEEPLESS BEAUTY.

Mr. Asquith (the Fairy Prince). "I DON'T SO MUCH MIND ALL THIS BRIAR STUFF; IT'S LADY AT THE END THAT MAKES ME NERVOUS."
CHAPTER III

THE FIRST PARLIAMENTARY CIRCUIT.

APRIL TO JUNE 1912

'It is absolutely incredible that the Minister in charge of the Bill, and still more that the Prime Minister, could have left their treatment of the proposed exclusion of Ulster to the inspiration of the moment, or even, and this is more absurd, to the trend of the Debate, as the trend of the Debate developed in the House of Commons.' (F.E. Smith, 13 June 1912, Hansard, XXIX, 1505).

The first parliamentary circuit of the Home Rule Bill was at least as important as the secret negotiations of the winter of 1913-14, which have received so much more attention from historians. The 1912 do+ete in the Commons allowed each party to put its case for or against Home Rule, before passions in Ireland became so inflamed that emotion became stronger than reason. The Unionist case concentrated from the first on the Ulster question. The Government, by contrast, attempted to ignore the Ulster issue altogether. Unionist pressure, and criticism from the Liberal back benches, rapidly forced ministers to consider the Ulster problem more seriously. This first parliamentary circuit was particularly crucial, since it afforded the second and last opportunity for the Government to incorporate special provision for Ulster into the Home Rule bill. Provided the Nationalists did not actually vote with the Opposition, a Government amendment on Ulster would have passed in 1912, automatically becoming law in 1914 under the terms of the Parliament Act. After the first circuit ended in January 1913, any such amendment required Opposition agreement, allowing the Unionists to dictate their own terms, and creating the danger that an acceptable compromise might not even prove possible. The Government was made more fully aware of the potential pitfalls or advantages of this situation, when the Committee stage of the debate was reached in June 1912. The missivities of several dissident Liberals were expressed in an amendment to exclude the four north-east Ulster counties, moved by A'gar-Robartes, a Cornish nonconformist.
No historian has so far analysed the 1912 Home Rule debates in depth. The argument that the debates were too dull to merit consideration has provided a convenient excuse for ignoring the thousands of columns of _Hansard_. Certainly, the arguments for and against Home Rule were already familiar, and were repeated ad nauseam from 1912 to 1914, supported by every conceivable analogy and illustration, both relevant and irrelevant. But though the debates were sometimes monotonous, frequently ill-attended, and occasionally not fully understood, they were not unimportant. The actual significance of the first parliamentary circuit has been generally ignored or underestimated, and consequently our understanding of the Ulster crisis in these years has been neither comprehensive nor properly balanced.

The problems of dealing with the Ulster question in parliament rapidly became clear. Most members of both main parties were sincerely in their public attitudes to Ulster in 1912, but they were frequently unable to acknowledge the sincerity of their opponents. Their viewpoints were based on fundamental assumptions so totally at variance that they did not allow meaningful discussion. The Unionist position involved elements of hysteria and fanaticism, while that of the Liberals was too often based on ignorance and uncertainty. Each party waited to see if the other would introduce an amendment in Committee, making special provision for Ulster. But if the government took the initiative in moving such an amendment, this would imply that their original bill was badly deficient. The Unionists were scarcely easier to move an amendment which involved tacitly accepting Home Rule for most of Ireland, and helping the government to solve the embarrassing Ulster question. Moreover, the British parties had to consider the hostility of the Ulster Unionists to Home Rule, and the fierce opposition of the Nationalists and southern Unionists to any form of Irish partition.

The Home Rule debate opened at a time when the Liberal party's confidence had been substantially restored, after several depressing months. In January 1912, many Liberals were generally gloomy about their political prospects, particularly as they believed the parliamentary session was heavily overloaded. The two other major measures to be introduced under the Parliament Act, the Franchise bill and the bill to dis-establish the Welsh Church, were almost as controversial as Home Rule. Birrell thought the labours of the coming session frightful to contemplate,
and shared Herbert Gladstone’s fears that the political equilibrium of the cabinet was not stable enough to withstand a dramatic session. Sir Courtenay Ilbert was equally depressed early in February; the Insurance Act was unpopular, by-elections were losing badly, industrial unrest was still a problem, and the cabinet was sharply split over female suffrage.

During the next two months, the political outlook brightened considerably. The debate on the Address in February 1912 was a significant turning-point, which restored Asquith’s reputation to its usual level and raised the cabinet’s morale. The prime minister won great praise from his colleagues for the masterly way he overthrew Bonar Law, like a dreadnought fighting a sailing barque, as Burns described it. This no doubt reinforced the new Opposition leader’s profound sense of intellectual and parliamentary inferiority vis-à-vis Asquith, giving the prime minister considerable advantage in the Home Rule debates. By April, Asquith was acclaimed in some quarters for having overcome the coal strike and restored his party’s confidence. Even Lord Esher, who was usually more critical, considered Asquith a wonderful parliamentarian, who had kept his cabinet together under circumstances which would have baffled most of his predecessors. Esher predicted that Asquith would ‘steer through the Home Rule shallows, but it will be a difficult job’, though made easier because ‘the other side are quite hopeless’.

The Home Rule debate thus commenced its first parliamentary circuit on 11 April in a favourable political climate for the Government. Contemporary impressions varied considerably. Gladstone’s daughter was acutely aware of the nostalgic influence of the past, when Asquith rose to introduce the bill:

All through one saw another figure, heard another voice.
There was an overpowering sense of his presence - if
It had not been for 1886 & 1893, today could not have
witnessed this Bill.

Henry Lucy inevitably recalled ‘memories of days and Bills and men that are no more’, and Charles Masterman felt that ‘every kind of ghost seemed to rise up of the old days & the old fights’. John Burns calculated that sixty-seven of the existing members sat in the Commons in 1893. These survivors viewed the earlier struggles through the rose-tinted spectacles of advancing years, and found the 1912 debate less exciting. The sense of drama and novelty had gone. Observers of all ages commented
on the monotony and repetition. Professor A.V. Dicey was doubtful 'whether human
inventors could now produce on Irish Home Rule either a new argument or a new
fallacy', and speakers commonly complained that everything had already been said.

The First and Second Readings, April-May 1912.

The First Reading was a three-day full-dress debate from 11-13 April, which naturally attracted considerable attention. Asquith, Carson and Redmond were the leading speakers on 11 April when the bill was formally introduced. Edmund
Harvey, one of the more recent recruits to the Liberal benches, described the proceedings:

Asquith's speech was a fine one and gave a very clear idea of the main features of the Bill. Bonar Law's interjections were as unhappy as usual; and Captain Craig even more purple in the face than his wont, sat behind and kept interjecting schoolboyish remarks. Carson's reply tried in vain to stamp the scheme as fantastic and impossible. Redmond's welcome to the Bill was splendid and the later part of his speech of unwonted eloquence.

Sir Courtenay Ilbert shared the common view that Asquith's exposition was masterly except for the prime minister's vagueness on the financial provisions. Ministerial supporters generally deplored the behaviour of the Opposition. Sir Matthew Nathan considered the Unionists angry and unfair, while Burns condemned 'the calculated rudeness of the Orange Gang led by Capt. Craig'.

Balfour, Samuel, Lord Hugh Cecil, and John Dillon were the main speakers on 15 April, when the First Reading was resumed. Samuel remarked that Balfour was in his best form and it was a pleasure to follow him. The chief excitement was reserved for 16 April, which Samuel described as a stormy end to the debate; Bonar Law was absolutely vitriolic, and Birrell was grossly interrupted by the unmannersly Tories, who frequently got out of hand and were not controlled by the Speaker. Ilbert also thought the Unionist leader was as 'irritating and nasty as he could be', while Walter Long was 'torrential in denunciation'. The Unionists naturally had a different perspective. Carson thanked Bonar Law for a splendid speech, which gave the Ulster Unionist leader renewed hope for his people in Ireland.
Professor A.V. Dicey pronounced the Unionist side of the debate 'brilliant and satisfactory', and a Unionist member assured his leader that the 'new style' was inspiring great support among their rank and file.

Enthusiasm for the Home Rule debate declined very rapidly, however, as the initial novelty vanished. By the end of the First Reading, John Burns was already complaining that the House was:

--- not at all excited nor interested in Home Rule. A jaded House, overworked Ministry, stale subject, indifferent public. A. Balfour tried to galvanise the controversy, Lord Hugh to flagellate it in best 14th century sacerdotal style, but all in vain. Samuel --- put the seal of financial stamps all over it, but still no enthusiasm. The thing that did interest us was the Titanic! slowly sinking in the western ocean. ---

Several observers commented on the lack of enthusiasm on the Liberal benches, caused because 'Liberals have no long thought it the right thing to do.' This apathy helps to explain the strange dearth of comment on the debate in the private letters and diaries of Liberal politicians.

Interest declined still further during the Second Reading, which was allocated seven parliamentary days between 30 April and 9 May. The Western Daily Mercury lamented that the debate was demonstrating 'an unrivalled capacity for dullness', and the British Weekly marvelled that so many members possessed the facility for saying nothing at extreme length. The increased number of speeches from the government front benches on Second Reading only occasionally revived the early enthusiasm. The government had treated the First Reading as an occasion for speeches from the back benches, whereas eight ministers spoke on Second Reading, including Asquith, Birrell and Churchill.

**THE UNIONIST CASE ON ULSTER.**

The Unionists displayed far more interest in the Home Rule debates from the start, because they loathed the bill so intensely, and felt particularly strongly on the question of Ulster. The Unionist case started from the fundamental assumption that any kind of Home Rule was unnecessary and wrong, and that this particular measure was confused and unworkable. The Opposition contended that Ireland merely required
Further development of the social and economic reforms carried out since 1890, particularly the completion of land purchase. They maintained that Home Rule would inevitably lead to the separation of Ireland from Great Britain and encourage the disintegration of the Empire. The Unionists largely confined their attack on the detailed provisions of the measure to criticisms of the financial scheme, the nominated senate, and the consequences of continued Irish representation at Westminster. They were prepared to discuss finance and federalism at length, but the issue which most passionately concerned them, and which rapidly dominated the entire debate, was that of Ulster.26

The question of Ulster27 was, from the first, one of the most fundamental Unionist arguments against the Home Rule bill. The Unionist case on Ulster was explained explosively and exhaustively throughout the First and Second Reading debates, and dominated Opposition speeches. The Nation commented, for instance, that Bonar Law was 'Ulster and little more than Ulster all through.28

The Unionist position on Ulster was generally consistent, forceful and clear. Since it scarcely altered throughout the First and Second Readings, it can readily be analysed thematically. In stark contrast Ulster was scarcely mentioned by the six Liberals who spoke on First Reading, and the reluctant ministerial references to the question on Second Reading require individual examination, to show the gradual development of Liberal views.

Seven of the fifteen Unionist speakers on the First Reading and about a dozen Second Reading speakers either represented Ulster constituencies or had strong personal connections with the province. Attention was deliberately concentrated on the one issue of Ulster. The problem of the Protestant Unionist minority in the south and west of Ireland was carefully ignored by almost all Unionist speakers during these early stages of the debate. The southern Unionist representatives themselves chose to adopt the Nationalist position of maintaining a low profile and quietly awaiting developments.29

The starting-point of the Unionist case on Ulster was that Ireland consisted not of one nation, but two. The Ulster Protestants were separated as much by race, religion and history from the Catholic Nationalists as the latter were from the people of Great Britain. Walter Guinness declared that '— in Ireland you
have two camps, two races, and two religions', separated for six centuries by bitter
differences, which were accentuated because racial and religious cleavages largely
corresponded. 30 As Leopold Amery pointed out, any recognition of an 'Irish'
nationality involved depriving Ulster of her British nationality. 31 Carson and Bonar
Law drove this point home, by contending that all the arguments for giving Home Rule
to Ireland could just as well be applied to granting separate treatment for Protestant
Ulster. The Irish Nationalists formed only one-fifteenth of the United Kingdom
population whereas the Ulster Protestants constituted one-quarter of the Irish
population. 32

The Unionists claimed that religious persecution of the Protestant
minority by a Catholic dominated Dublin parliament was inevitable because of the
deeply-rooted religious feud. The Irish Protestants firmly believed that Home Rule
involved a threat to their liberty, security and religion, and could conceive of no
safeguards which could effectively protect them. 33 Unionist speakers repeatedly
declared that the safeguards supposedly intended for their protection were futile and
worthless, especially as there would be no sure means of enforcing them when the Irish
executive and parliament were hostile to the Protestants. 34 Unionist leaders, however,
persuaded their followers not to overemphasize these fears of religious persecution;
such arguments ran the risk of alienating British Catholics and Irish Unionists who
disliked religious bigotry. Playing on the theme 'Home Rule means Rome Rule' was
as likely to lose as to win votes in Great Britain. 35 No similar explanation exists for
the Unionists' failure to make capital out of Ulster's fears of economic persecution.
Captain Craig and William Moore were the only speakers to argue that Ulster's
commercial prosperity and industrial supremacy would suffer from Home Rule. 36
These fears had been exploited more fully in the two previous Home Rule debates,
and certainly received much publicity within Ulster itself in 1913-14.

Probably, some Unionists felt that a rational explanation for Ulster's
opposition to Home Rule was unnecessary, since the arguments were already so
familiar. Instead, considerable energy was devoted to constant repetition of the
theme that the Ulster Protestants hated the very idea of Home Rule. 37 Captain
O'Neill spoke for the Ulster Unionists:
I look upon the Bill with loathing and bitter resentment. Nothing that we can say describes too strongly our determination to this measure — this opposition is the wildest, the most stubborn, and the fiercest which the Government and their Nationalist supporters will have to confront.

The British Unionists also recognised the strength of Ulster's hatred of the measure.

Balfour explained in Committee:

In 1886 Ulster expressed quite clearly its dislike of the measure. The dislike of 1886 had grown to detestation by 1893, and —— the detestation of 1893 has [now] grown into incalculable loathing.

Two corollaries followed from their hatred of Home Rule. The Unionists insisted they were prepared to use all means to resist the attempt to impose Home Rule on Ulster. Captain O'Neill warned the Government to remember there was a party in Ulster determined to go to any length rather than submit to this Bill. Moreover, several prominent British Unionists gave full support to Ulster Unionist threats.

L.S. Amery declared that 'this measure is so great a crime that the people of Ulster are justified in resistance to it by any means at their disposal.' Walter Long commented that Ulster was 'steadfast, grim, determined', and the Opposition was pledged to stand by her as one man. Bonar Law believed he had a duty to impress on the country the reality of the Ulster situation. Ulster would not submit to Home Rule, and Ulstermen were prepared to lay down their lives for their cause.

The second corollary was that the Liberal Government would bear full responsibility for the bloodshed which was inevitable if they attempted to force Home Rule on Ulster despite these grim warnings. Sir Robert Finlay cautioned the Government to count the cost while there was still time:

If you go on with this Bill, it means Civil War —— You have been treating this question as if it were a mere matter of Parliamentary tactics —— You will find yourselves face to face with grim realities.

You have come to the brink of the precipice. I entreat you to draw back before it is too late.

Robert Thompson was even more extreme in his threats than most other Ulster Unionists. He announced that 'if Imperial troops are sent to Belfast they will light a torch that will illuminate the civilised world' —— He added ominously that Germany had taken all the measurements of Belfast docks and intended to send an expedition to
Belfast if the Government instigated civil war in Ulster. William Moore, Walter Gait, and many others warned the Government explicitly that if they reflected these warnings, 'the blood of the explosion will be on their own heads.'

The Ulster Unionists were undoubtedly genuine in their determination to resist Home Rule, but there was an element of unreality in their threats of civil war, based on the Unionist conviction that a Liberal Government would never dare to coerce Ulster. Bonar Law declared that it was a practical impossibility for a Liberal Government to order the armed forces to shoot down men whose only crime was loyalty, and he believed the bill would be shipwrecked on that rock. Austen Chamberlain also warned that British public opinion would not tolerate the coercion of Ulster, and 'you and your Bill together, will go to wreck in the storm you have caused.' Lord Hugh Cecil made great play with the absurdity of shooting down a great body of people in the name of self-government; George Cave, in one of the most forceful Opposition speeches, threatened that the first shot fired in Ulster would bring all England and Scotland about the Government's ears.

Throughout the First and Second Readings then, the Unionist position was simple opposition to Home Rule. They were encouraged in this by their assumption that Home Rule would never pass, if only because they believed the Government would shrink from forcing its measure on Ulster. At this stage, they hoped that their opposition would induce the Government to drop Home Rule altogether, eliminating the necessity to consider a compromise settlement for Ulster.

The Government's Reluctant Response to the Unionist Challenge:
Development of Ministerial Misgivings on Ulster.

The Liberal position on the Ulster question, by its very nature, defies similar analysis in terms of a series of coherent, logically developed arguments. The Liberals were incapable of any common, well-defined response in face of the Opposition onslaught, since they had given little sustained consideration to the Ulster problem before April 1912. The ministerialists were almost totally unprepared to meet the Unionist challenge on Ulster in the First Reading debate. Consequently, some speakers ignored the subject altogether, and others tried to make light of it or ridicule it. The Liberal silence on the Ulster question on First Reading indicated
ignorance, uncertainty, and lack of forethought. The problem was compounded because any Liberal admission that Ulster might have a genuine case, involved the implication that the bill was defective on a fundamental point. The Unionists naturally made capital out of this, increasing their pressure, until the Liberals were forced to make reluctant attempts on Second Reading to answer the Opposition case more fully. The Ulster question rapidly became the dominant issue of the Second Reading debate.

On the First Reading two out of the six Liberal speakers entirely ignored Ulster, two made exceptionally brief references to the problem, and only Asquith and Birrell attempted to consider it at all seriously. 46 Herbert Samuel made no comment on Ulster in a very long speech mainly devoted to finance, and Eugene Wason likewise saw no need to mention Ulster in a speech expressing the loyal support of the Scottish members for the measure. 47 Thomas Lough and Sir David Brynmor Jones, both veterans of the 1893 debate, made only brief passing references to the Ulster problem. As an Ulster Protestant, Lough claimed to understand the Ulster question perfectly, but his comment that Protestants in the predominantly Protestant counties were not afraid betrayed little expert knowledge. Sir David Brynmor Jones was, at least, the first Liberal to admit that Ulster provided the main ground of opposition to Home Rule. However, he merely reassured the Ulster Protestants that differences of race and religion would gradually be replaced by class factors in determining party allegiance in Ireland. 48

More significant were the speeches of Asquith and Birrell, who were obliged to pay rather more attention to the Unionist challenge on Ulster, if only to explain why the bill made no special provision for the predominantly Protestant counties. When he introduced the bill on 11 April, the prime minister attempted to justify his Ulster policy in a statement which reflected his public attitude up to March 1914. Asquith declared that he had never underestimated the determined hostility to Home Rule, and claimed that this had not been ignored in framing the bill.

But we cannot admit, and we will not admit, the right of a minority of the people, and relatively a small minority — particularly when every possible care is being taken to safeguard their special interests and susceptibilities — to veto the verdict of the vast body of their countrymen.
Asquith conceded that Ulster was genuinely divided on Home Rule, but underlined the fact that the province was currently represented by as many as sixteen Home Rulers, as compared with seventeen Unionists. These figures demonstrated the misleading character of the pretence that Ulster would die rather than accept Home Rule. The prime minister outlined the various safeguards inserted to meet the objections of Protestant Ulster. These included the special provisions for the maintenance of religious equality, the Lord Lieutenant’s veto exercisable by the imperial executive, and the ultimate supremacy of the imperial parliament. Asquith concluded by asking the Opposition for their alternative: ‘Have you any answer to the demand of Ireland beyond the naked veto of an irreconcilable minority?—?’ 49 These references to Ulster formed only a minimal portion of Asquith’s speech, and ignored many of the issues which most concerned the Unionists.

The chief secretary’s speech, which wound up the First Reading on 16 April, was even more unsatisfactory. Birrell devoted one-third of an uninspired speech to the Ulster problem, which he could hardly avoid in view of the inflamed speeches by Walter Long and Bonar Law which preceded his own. Birrell denied the charge that the Catholic majority would persecute the Ulster Protestants, and protested against threats of ‘hypothetical and anticipatory treason’ before any coercive action took place. He insisted that Ulster had no cause for alarm. The Ulster Unionists would indeed be justified in fighting if their religion was threatened or their property destroyed. But if that happened, the whole force of the Empire would support Ulster. The basic issue was to decide whether any minority was entitled to block a change approved by the great majority of their countrymen. 50

The Opposition was far from satisfied by the government’s treatment of the Ulster problem on First Reading. Walter Long expressed his party’s resentment on the final day of the debate. Far from placating those in Ireland who so opposed Home Rule, Long insisted that the government’s attitude immensely increased the bitterness of the Opposition. Instead of giving proper consideration to Ulster’s genuine fears and grievances, the ministry had accused the Ulstermen of ‘acting not only in bad faith, but in a spirit of bravado’. 51 The Times also expressed Unionist complaints that government policy was ‘to brush Ulster aside’ and ignore Opposition questions about Ulster. But The Times found consolation in the belief that Ulster’s determined stand was producing ‘gloomy forebodings’ in government.
circles: 'misgivings and scruples notoriously haunt the consciences' of several Liberal supporters, — we question whether the uneasiness of the Liberal soul will not become greater as time goes on.\textsuperscript{52}

The First Reading division, taken on 16 April, gave the Unionists little encouragement, and merely hinted at the existence of some Liberal misgivings about Ulster. The First Reading passed by 360 votes to 266, indicating that the Opposition turned out to vote in greater force than the ministerialists. But even The Times rightly predicted that any cross-voting or deliberate abstentions on the part of the ministerialists would be confined to two or three recalcitrants. The ministerial coalition was reported as being solid, with 'no caves, nor hole and corner meetings' as in 1866 and 1893.\textsuperscript{53} Admittedly ten Liberal members were absent unpaired, but only three of these were regarded as hostile to the bill.\textsuperscript{54} These three were Sir George Kemp, Captain D. V. Pirie, and Thomas Agar-Robartes, of whom explained their abstentions in their Second Reading speeches. Sir Clifford Cory was the only Liberal member so adamantly opposed to Home Rule that he actually voted against the bill on First Reading. But at this stage, these were still isolated and unexplained straws in the wind.

Ministerial whipping was more efficient on the Second Reading, so that the division on 9 May revealed even less of the growing uncertainty about Ulster in some sections of the party. The Second Reading was carried by 372 votes to 271, showing an increased majority of seven over the previous division.\textsuperscript{55} This time, Sir George Kemp was the only Liberal member known to have deliberately abstained,\textsuperscript{56} while Sir Clifford Cory was again the one Liberal to vote with the Unionists. The Nation congratulated the ministry on the excellent majority of 101, 'representing the practically undivided force of the Liberal, Labor [sic], and Nationalist parties.'\textsuperscript{57}

But the Second Reading debate had already indicated that this excellent division list was deceptive. Unionist pressure forced the Liberals to make more specific statements about Ulster in the course of the debate, which lasted intermittently from 30 April to 9 May. Signs of uneasiness were revealed by the Liberal front bench, as well as the rank and file. The government was obliged to show its hand more openly, and several cracks appeared in the ministerial front, which had previously been thought united. Moreover, those Liberal backbenchers who either opposed Home Rule
altogether, or who could only accept it under certain conditions, took this opportunity to explain their positions.

Ulster exclusion was suggested for the first time from the Liberal benches on Second Reading, and not by the Agar–Robartes amendment in Committee. The possibility of Ulster exclusion had scarcely been mentioned during the First Reading debate. The most direct reference had been made in a very brief altercation between Carson and Redmond. This chiefly demonstrated that neither Irish leader intended to reveal his views on this delicate issue until he knew the intentions of the two major British parties. In the interval between the First and Second Readings, F.D. Acland, a junior minister, hinted in a speech at Yeovil, that he believed the Ulster situation was more serious than his party had so far admitted, and he anticipated a very considerable row before the thing ended.

More significantly, during the Second Reading debate, two leading ministers conceded that some sort of compromise might be required to deal with the Ulster problem, and several Liberal backbenchers stated explicitly that exclusion was the only answer.

The weak links in the ministry’s previously united public front were Churchill and Grey. Winston Churchill’s remarks on Ulster received all the more publicity because the First Lord actually introduced the Second Reading on 30 April. In the course of a powerful speech, Churchill emphasized that it was the duty of both British parties to effect a lasting settlement:

I admit that the perfectly genuine apprehensions of the majority of the people of North-East Ulster constitute the most serious, and in my humble judgement, the only serious obstacle to a thoroughly satisfactory settlement of this question. It is impossible for a Liberal Government to treat cavalierly or contemptuously, for any British Government to ignore, the sincere sentiments of a numerous and well defined community like the Protestants of the North of Ireland — We are not likely to under-rate the forces and the influences which they can exercise upon the party opposite — We know perfectly well how firm is the grip which Ulster politicians have upon the mainsprings of the Unionist party —

Finally Churchill came to the vital question. He asked whether the four Protestant counties of north-east Ulster claimed separate treatment for themselves, either by obtaining a parliament of their own, or by remaining under the Westminster parliament.
Churchill declared that it would be disastrous for Ireland if the Ulster Protestants took either of these courses. Ulster had a duty to 'stand by the ship' and 'sweep the Irish question out of life into history'. But if the Ulstermen refused this great challenge, they had no right to obstruct Home Rule for the rest of Ireland: 'Half a province cannot impose a permanent veto on the nation.'

It is unlikely that the prime minister had advance warning of these highly controversial remarks. This was one of the many occasions when Churchill chose to act independently on the Irish question. Asquith may have been embarrassed, but cannot have been altogether surprised. He knew Churchill's views on Ulster and was familiar with the eccentricities of the First Lord's volatile personality.

The Opposition, however, had no idea whether Churchill's words heralded a change of heart on the part of the cabinet. They noted the contrast between Churchill's attitude to Ulster, and that of his colleagues, and initially hoped the government had at last recognized the extreme gravity of the Ulster situation.

A. J. Balfour seized more specifically on Churchill's important question about Ulster's demands. He observed that Churchill suggested no solution, despite his recognition of the problem. It was extraordinary procedure for the government to admit that Ulster was a formidable problem, and yet wait as late as Second Reading to ask the Opposition how they proposed to deal with it. Finally, Balfour challenged Sir Edward Grey, who followed him on the third day of the debate, to tell the House whether he agreed with Churchill that Ulster could not be ignored; Grey should explain how he proposed to solve the riddle left unanswered by Churchill.

Balfour's remarks no doubt left several ministers feeling uncomfortable, and induced Grey to attempt a reply to the challenge. No evidence survives to show Grey's attitude towards Ulster exclusion at the February 1912 cabinet, but by the time he spoke on Second Reading on 2 May, he had evidently moved some way towards the position held by Churchill and Lloyd George. Grey insisted that Ulster's cooperation was important to the successful operation of Home Rule, and tried to reassure the Ulstermen that there was no need to fear unreasonable treatment from an Irish parliament. Then followed the important statement which was to be frequently quoted in subsequent debates:

- If Ulster defeats the solution which we propose or makes it impossible, we cannot afford to continue the present state of affairs. Some other solution will have to be found.
which will free this House and put the control of Irish
affairs in Irish hands.

As the Opposition was quick to point out, however, Grey said no more than Churchill
suggested what that 'other solution' might be.

No further enlightenment was provided by the remaining six ministers
who spoke on Second Reading. Rufus Isaacs' speech was interpreted as a veiled
acknowledgement that alternative arrangements for Ulster might be needed. But
the other five ministers either continued to ignore Ulster altogether, or else sought
the usual refuge in reassuring platitudes. Herbert Samuel and Jack Seely made
exceptionally brief passing references to the subject, which added nothing.

T. W. Russell, the vice-president of the department of agriculture, scarcely improved
relations between the two sides by ridiculing Ulster's threats as mere 'midsummer
madness'. Birrell may privately have sympathised with the comments of Churchill
and Grey, but he carefully avoided anything more dangerous than general assurances
that Ulster's fears were unjustified. Asquith wound up the Second Reading with further
platitudes and firm refusal to be intimidated by threats. No attempt was made to follow
up the hints of Churchill and Grey that an alternative solution might have to be found.
Indeed, Asquith appeared quite genuinely to believe that the onus for proposing a
settlement of the Ulster problem lay with the Unionists.

Lloyd George was again silent.

The government had revealed itself far from united on the question of
Ulster, and decidedly uncertain how to follow through the negative policy decided in
the February cabinet. If the veiled hints of Churchill and Grey embarrassed Asquith,
he tried to cover up by simply ignoring them. The Opposition was confused. Having
abandoned the initial hope that the government had experienced a change of heart, they
were uncertain whether the controversial speeches indicated a divided cabinet, or a
deliberate plot to trap the Unionists in some way. They eventually concluded that
Churchill had made his overtures without consulting his colleagues, and Walter Long
launched a bitter attack on the First Lord; by making such a speech on a formal
occasion, Churchill misled the Opposition as to the government's intentions.

Churchill adopted the reproachful manner of the weary peace-maker,
whose well-meaning overtures had been ungenerously rejected. When Bonar Law
wound up the Second Reading with the provocative challenge: 'Will nothing satisfy
you until there has been bloodshed?" Churchill passed a note to F.E. Smith:

"My dear, I grieve more than I can say at B.L.'s speech; and if that is the answer to all that we have offered there is nothing for it but a trial of strength on which, believe me, I shall enter with the deepest sorrow but without fear.

Alas! Alas!"

Yet only Churchill and Grey had appeared to offer anything, and it was by no means clear what their vague pronouncements were intended to mean, especially in view of the wall of silence from their colleagues. Sir Aimeric Fitzroy noted in his diary that the Second Reading debate had not strengthened the position of the government:

"... upon the question of Ulster the hints, at concession, which prominent Ministers have given are evidence of incertitude that cannot fail to have disastrous effects. It is difficult to see how such offers could be made, unless the Government are seriously frightened by the attitude of the Ulstermen; and how then is it reconcilable with prudent statesmanship to leave such a factor out of calculation in formulating a plan for the self-government of Ireland?"

**Dissident Backbenchers: Ignconformity.**

**Federalism and the Celtic Fringe.**

Though the Second Reading division list revealed little evidence of dissension in the Liberal ranks, the speeches told a different story. It was scarcely surprising that the rank and file were bewildered and uncertain, given the absence of any clear ministerial lead on the Ulster question. But whereas Churchill and Grey had to content themselves with broad hints, a number of Liberal backbenchers expressed strong criticism of the government's Ulster policy.

Sir George Kemp and Sir Clifford Cory were the most extreme. They could not stomach Home Rule at any price. Kemp opposed Home Rule as firmly as did Cory, though he refrained from voting against the government. Instead, Kemp explained his position in his Second Reading speech, while abstaining on all crucial Home Rule votes taken before his resignation in August 1912. Kemp's position in the Liberal party was, however, quite unique, and his stand against Home Rule must be seen in its proper perspective. Otherwise, Kemp's promotion to the peerage in 1913 could wrongly be interpreted as the convenient removal of a party rebel. Unlike Cory and Agar-Robartes, who had always been at least nominal Liberals, Kemp had
been a Liberal Unionist until he resigned over tariff reform in 1905. Kemp happily returned to his work as a Lancashire textile manufacturer, until he was reluctantly persuaded to stand as the Liberal Free trade candidate for Manchester North-West, which was a vital marginal Lancashire constituency in both 1910 elections. Kemp was an immense electoral asset to the Liberals, since his powerful local support included a strong appeal to moderate middle class Liberals as well as Unionist Free Traders. 72

After his victory in the January 1910 election, Kemp wanted to retire as soon as possible in order to attend to his textile business. Kemp's views on Ireland were always entirely Unionist, and his lack of sympathy with the Liberals' Home Rule programme undoubtedly increased his disinclination for politics. The promise of a peerage helped to persuade Kemp to fight the December 1910 election and remain in the Commons for some time longer. 73 The cabinet was well aware of Kemp's adamant opposition to their Home Rule policy. But since no other Liberal candidate was likely to retain Manchester North West, the government had to weigh the potential loss of the seat against the damage which might be caused by Kemp's opposition in the Irish debates. 74 The government also had to determine the least unfortunate timing for the anticipated by-election defeat, and the party managers brought considerable pressure to bear to induce Kemp to postpone his resignation throughout 1911 and the early months of 1912.

In September 1911, Churchill rather rashly assured Kemp, on the prime minister's authority, that 'if on careful consideration of Bill you cannot see your way to support it, you shall be removed to calmer surroundings and no reproaches shall be made.' This subsequently led Kemp to ask if he might see a draft of the bill in confidence - 'a most unusual proceeding', to which the chief whip refused his assent, while continuing to hope that Kemp would be able to support the measure. 75 By early March 1912 it was decided that Kemp would have his peerage in June, and this promise was not made conditional on his Home Rule vote. Kemp also hinted to Asquith that his peerage would be justified and 'need not require much explanation'; whatever his vote or speech on Home Rule might be, 'made, of course, with every desire to approach the Government position —'. However, efforts were made in March and April to delay Kemp's impending retirement still further, until Kemp finally lost patience and threatened to go in June, whatever the consequences. 76
Asquith had evidently hoped that Kemp would not speak in the debate, and Ellibank entertained a vain hope of silencing Kemp by persuading him to remain nominally a member for some months longer, while staying 'quietly' at his mills.77 Sir George Kemp's ultimate decision to speak against the bill on Second Reading may partly have reflected his desire to increase the pressure on the government regarding his resignation and peerage; but he told the House that the decisive influence was his opposition to the ministry's policy on Ulster. Even though he opposed Home Rule for other reasons, he insisted that he would have remained silent, if only Ulster had been allowed to contract out of the bill, and been given separate treatment or a parliament of her own. Kemp believed the people of north-east Ulster were just as much a nation as the rest of Ireland, and they were passionately opposed to Home Rule.

Personally, I believe that they would resist Home Rule to the point of fighting. I believe they would, but I do not think it would be right of us as a nation to try and force it upon them even if we were able to do it.78

Fortunately for the government, Sir George Kemp's convictions were too widely known and respected to allow the Opposition to reap political advantage from Kemp's speech,79 or the Liberals to indulge in recrimination.80 Kemp's decision to resign was now finally accepted by the prime minister, though he was persuaded to remain until July. The promised peerage raised rather a delicate problem in view of Kemp's speech, as Asquith feared that an early creation would in the circumstances give rise to a good deal of speculation and possible misunderstanding.81 Accordingly, Kemp did not become Lord Rochdale until 1913, many months after the Liberals lost Manchester North-West in August 1912.82

Sir Clifford Cory's opposition to Home Rule was a more obvious case of open rebellion from within the Liberal ranks, though Cory's 'Liberalism' was decidedly unconventional. Cory voted against all three Readings of the Home Rule bill in 1912, and continued to vote against the measure in 1913-14. He did not actually speak against the bill, however, until February 1914, when he explained that he had previously remained silent because he had no wish to underline his opposition to his party on Home Rule.83 Cory represented a Cornish constituency, as did Thomas Agar-Robartes, and their reasons for opposing Home Rule developed out of this Cornish background. Cornwall and Devon were centres of stern nonconformity.
encouraged by a vigorous Methodist revival. Wesleyanism, the militant, political sect of Methodism, was irulently anti-Catholic, and Wesleyanism was predominant in Cornwall. Cornish Wesleyans identified Irish Home Rule with Roman Rule, and were adamantly opposed to both. Cornwall was strongly Liberal, but its hostility to Home Rule had encouraged the development of Liberal Unionism in the region from 1886 onwards.

Cornwall’s opposition to Home Rule sprang chiefly from this anti-Catholicism, which was undoubtedly a very powerful influence on Cory and Agar-Robartes. When Cory finally broke his silence on Home Rule in 1914, his somewhat bigoted speech left no doubt that a fierce anti-Catholicism was at the root of his hostility. Cory represented St. Ives, which had an exceptionally strong anti-Home Rule tradition, and had previously been represented by a Liberal Unionist. Though Cory was at least nominally Liberal, he took care to explain at each election that he opposed Home Rule. The strong Protestant Liberal Unionism of St. Ives allowed him to win all three elections between 1906 and 1910 on a remarkably individualistic platform.

Moreover, both Cory and Agar-Robartes had been keen Liberal Imperialists and members of the Liberal League. Their connections with Lord Rosebery and Sir Robert Perks no doubt reinforced their religious hostility to Home Rule. The combination of Cory’s imperialism, his ardent nonconformity, his Roseberyite hostility to ‘New Liberalism’, and his open opposition to Home Rule, set him apart from most other Liberal members. The Nation described him as a nominal Liberal, who had ceased to be a Liberal by April 1912. Cory had been among twenty Liberal members who voted against the government in the debate on Redmond’s Home Rule resolution in March 1908. Cory’s hostile votes on Home Rule in 1912–14 were no surprise to his party. His Protestantism prompted him to support the amendments for Ulster exclusion put down by Agar-Robartes and Sir Edward Carson, following the Unionists into the lobby on both occasions. An interesting consequence of Cory’s vote against the First Reading was a request from the Liberal Executive of the St. Ives division that he resign his seat. Presumably, however, the nonconformity of the St. Ives’ executive finally triumphed over its Liberalism, because Cory remained their representative.

Thomas Agar-Robartes was not at first ready to speak quite as strongly as Kemp or Cory against Home Rule, but gradually he adopted the same
position. As Lord Clifden's oldest son, he was the heir to a great Cornish estate. He sat for St. Austell, the safest Liberal seat in the south-west, from 1908 till his death in 1915. Agar-Robartes opposed Home Rule because he was an ardent nonconformist, and also, like Cory, a Liberal imperialist. Lord Rosebery's personal influence almost certainly helped mould his views on Home Rule; he was a close friend of Rosebery's son, Neil Priorrose, and spent a good deal of time with the family. Rosebery's famous speech of November 1905, rejecting Campbell-Bannerman's Stirling compromise on Home Rule, was delivered in support of Agar-Robartes' candidacy for Bodmin. When Jack Pease, the Liberal chief whip, suggested he should succeed the Master of Elibank as comptroller of the household in 1909, Agar-Robartes replied that 'Lord Rosebery was his leader, and finally rejected the offer.

While he was popular in the House and had a good many friends on the Unionist side, he was neither very prominent nor very talented. Mrs. Masterman, who knew him personally, has described him as 'a gay young man who was not making a very big mark in politics. He was a lightweight rather.' Like Cory he opposed the radical aspects of the government's social policy, and this aroused sufficient criticism in the St. Austell Liberal Association, to require personal support by the chief whip for Agar-Robartes' candidacy in the January 1910 election.

Agar-Robartes' views on Home Rule were fairly well known, and his hostile speech on Second Reading was not unexpected, if unwelcome. He firmly believed that British people were 'bored to tears with the Irish question', and wished to be rid of it, so they could turn to their own affairs. He admitted, however, that he was not entirely opposed to Home Rule, since the Irish question must be solved somehow, and the only Opposition alternative was the unsatisfactory status quo. What was not anticipated was the emphasis Agar-Robartes placed on the Ulster problem. He declared that he would provisionally support the Second Reading, but would vote against Home Rule at later stages, unless the government met the grievances of the Ulster Protestants. This speech was significant, because it foreshadowed in detail his subsequent amendment in Committee, and should have alerted ministers to possible dangers ahead.

Agar-Robartes dismissed the 'simple' argument that the Ulster Protestants were bluffing. He denounced the government's attempts to ignore the
genuine convictions of the Irish Protestants and their deep determination never to submit to a Catholic-dominated Irish parliament. Amidst a roar of opposition cheering, Agar-Robartes declared:

A way out must be found which this Bill does not find. You cannot treat the opinion of the Protestants in the North-East of Ulster with contempt -- I believe there is only one way out, and it is to leave the North-East of Ulster out of your scheme. "If you think you can solve this question and settle it finally with the North-East of Ulster included in your scheme, then I believe your expectations and hopes are as vain of realisation as the expectations of an ambitious mule hoping for posterity."

Agar-Robartes' first appeal for the exclusion of north-east Ulster was made on 2 May, more than a month before his amendment led to a debate on the subject. The press took little notice of this early warning. The Nation reported the speech briefly, but made no comment. The Times merely noted that Agar-Robartes struck the first discordant note from the ministerialist benches, and commented sarcastically on his attempt to reconcile an extremely hostile speech with a favourable vote. The Liberal Western Daily Mercury naturally took more interest in a speech by one of its local members. This "rebel in the Government camp" made the most interesting contribution of the evening, causing Opposition members to hurry in from the lobbies to cheer the first attack on the bill from the government benches. The Liberalism of the Western Daily Mercury was evidently more powerful than its nonconformity. Agar-Robartes was sternly reprimanded for not recognizing that mid-Cornwall had always voted in favour of Home Rule, and that the demand for Ulster exemption was impossible.

In order to demonstrate that Cory and Agar-Robartes were not simply complete eccentrics, it is worth noting that other Liberal representatives of the southwest were subject to the same regional nonconformist pressures. F.D. Acland, the member for Cornwall north-west, had indicated his concern for the position of Protestant Ulster in his Yeovil speech in April 1912. E.J. Soares, the Liberal member for Devonshire north-west, a particularly strong nonconformist constituency, had joined Sir Clifford Cory in voting against Redmond's 1908 Home Rule resolution. The only other Liberal member for Devonshire was Sir George Lambert, a junior minister at the Admiralty, who was eminently suited to represent his constituents.
since he was also a nonconformist farmer. 104 Though Lambert voted steadily for Home Rule, unlike Cory and Ager-Robartes, his attitude was well illustrated by a speech to his constituents in April 1911:

"I say let the Irish govern themselves, and if they make a mess of it, well, they must get out of it - [laughter and cheers]. Why should I be called up to say whether a drain should be put down at Ballydaugh?" 105

There is strong evidence that the nonconformity of the south-west had a decided influence on the attitude of its Liberal representatives towards Home Rule. The nonconformity of Scotland, Wales and the north of England had a similar effect, though it was less pronounced than in Cornwall. 106 Nonconformity was undoubtedly also a strong element in the reluctance of individual Liberals, like Lloyd George and Sir Joseph Compton-Rickett, to force Protestant Ulster to join Home Rule. Lloyd George's roots in Welsh nonconformity contributed to his lack of active enthusiasm for Irish Catholic nationalism. His awareness of the antipathy of nonconformist Liberal voters for a Catholic dominated Irish parliament almost certainly affected his calculations on Home Rule. 107 Sir Joseph Compton-Rickett, a prominent Congregationalist and chairman of the nonconformist Liberal members, wrote to The Times in October 1912: "A defeat through the Nationalist vote would be a far less evil than forcing the Bill through, with the certainty of trouble and bad blood for many years to come." 108

The influence of nonconformity on the attitudes adopted by Liberal members towards the Irish question should not, however, be exaggerated. It was most powerful in the south-west and the north of England, and probably rather less so in Wales and Scotland where other forces were also operating. There is little evidence that it had much impact on members from other regions. By 1912 nonconformity was probably a stronger force among Liberal voters than among Liberal members, though naturally the parliamentary party took the religious views of its supporters into account. Nonconformist Liberal members officially welcomed the bill in May 1912, and the nonconformist British Weekly supported Home Rule. 109 Many individual nonconformist members shared the attitude of the Welsh nationalist free churchman, Albert Spicer; he sympathised with the fears of the Ulster Protestants, while remaining convinced that the bill would not threaten their religious liberties. 110
The government's Ulster policy helped, then, to determine the attitudes of Kemp, Cory and Agar-Robartes—the three most prominent Liberal rebels. The failure to make provision for Ulster forced all three to adopt a more extreme position than they might otherwise have done. Cory actually voted with the Opposition, Kemp spoke out openly against the bill, and Agar-Robartes moved ultimately from a position of conditional support to one of outright hostility.

The federalists, on the other hand, formed a much larger and less hostile group of critics, for whom Ulster was only an incidental aspect of a far wider problem. They criticised the bill for not being sufficiently 'federalist', and concentrated their attacks on those features, such as the financial clauses, which would endanger a federal scheme. These were the points emphasized in their Second Reading speeches, and only Pirie's contribution indicated the strong line on Ulster they subsequently adopted in the debate on the Agar-Robartes' amendment. The federalists did, however, have two reasons for sympathising with the Ulster cause. Firstly, most federalists came from Wales and Scotland, where nonconformity was strong. More important was the consideration that separate treatment for Ulster would strengthen the federalist demand for individual parliaments for all parts of the United Kingdom. Ulster could easily be fitted into a general scheme of Home Rule all round.

Scottish and Welsh federalists took a prominent part in the Second Reading debate, but concentrated almost entirely on the promotion of Home Rule all round. Munro-Ferguson made no reference to Ulster in his forceful plea for an early extension of Irish Home Rule to the rest of the United Kingdom, more particularly to Scotland. He merely commented that such a movement would automatically resolve the current difficulties over transite, Ulster and Irish representation. Munro-Ferguson subsequently supported Agar-Robartes' amendment for Ulster exclusion and abstained on Carson's amendment, presumably despairing by then of a speedy execution of his federal dream. George Greenwood, E.T. John, and Robert Parcourt also devoted the major part of their speeches to Home Rule all round, dismissing the Ulster problem very briefly.

Captain D.V. Pirie was more aggressive than his fellow federalists in his remarks about Home Rule all round. He was also the only federalist to examine the Ulster question more carefully on Second Reading. Pirie's position at this stage
requires particularly careful analysis. Like Agar-Robartes, he tried to be conciliatory on Second Reading, but became progressively more hostile in his subsequent speeches on the Agar-Robartes and Carson amendments, as the government failed to do anything to meet Ulster's objections. Pirrie insisted that the Ulster question might have been solved if the bill had been framed on true federal lines, allowing Ulster separate treatment within a federal system. Failing that, he believed the Ulster problem could only be settled by a conference representing statesmen of all parties, willing to compromise and sacrifice some of their prejudices. Pirrie added significantly: "and if there were no other solution, then I think Ulster should have the option of standing out, though I do not think she will accept it." This statement foreshadowed Pirrie's decision to second Agar-Robartes' motion for Ulster exclusion, and his subsequent support for the Carson amendment. Pirrie's support for the bill on Second Reading was definitely qualified, like that of Agar-Robartes. He was prepared to vote for the Second Reading only as a vote of principle on Home Rule all round, but unless the measure was substantially altered in Committee, he would certainly vote against the Third Reading.

The speeches of the remaining six Liberal backbenchers on Second Reading added little to the Liberal case on Ulster, such as it was. Edward Shortt, Sir Alfred Mond, Nell Primrose, and Albert Spicer denied that Home Rule would lead to the persecution of the Protestant minority, and maintained that Ulster would reach a reasonable decision to accept Home Rule. Edward Shortt declared that the Liberals did not believe for a moment that Ulster would fight, and pronounced opposition threats absurdly exaggerated. William Gladstone and Sir Alfred Mond conceded that Ulster might be given separate treatment 'if there were a province of Ireland populated entirely by Protestants and anti-Nationalists', but such an Ulster existed only in the Unionist imagination. The real Ulster included a substantial proportion of Catholic Home Rulers. Atherley-Jones was the only one of the six who expressed more serious concern about the consequences of the Ulster problem:

I do not for one moment imagine there is any danger of revolution, but I think the establishment of Home Rule might possibly lead to very great disorder. There might be some attempt at passive resistance, and it might bring about a very deplorable state of things.

Such misgivings might explain Atherley-Jones' subsequent absence from the divisions
on Carson's amendment and Third Reading. But at this stage he merely adopted the popular Liberal technique of asking the Unionists how they proposed to settle the Ulster question.

The overall Liberal response to the carefully developed Unionist case was hesitant, uncertain and badly divided. Apart from the dissidents, who were mainly nonconformists or federalists from the Celtic fringe, most Liberals who spoke on First and Second Readings paid little attention to the Ulster question. Many ignored the subject entirely and others ridiculed the Ulster threats as pure bluff. The confused and divided party position on Ulster was faithfully reflected in the Nation, which became almost schizophrenic in its comments on Ulster. On the one hand, the Liberal weekly continued to ridicule the Ulster threats in language scarcely less restrained than Bonar Law's 'new style', and insisted that Ulster had no grievance.

On the other hand, by 4 May, the speeches of Churchill and Grey encouraged the Nation to suggest giving Ulster an option of exclusion after a fair trial period within Home Rule. 'Before she talks of rebellion, she must tell us what she wants, and what she would take to settle.' But the Nation beat a hasty retreat from this exposed position when the hints of Churchill and Grey were ignored by their colleagues. Louie Harcourt, the colonial secretary, confused matters further by his well-publicized remarks at Rossendale on 4 May. He declared that the 'bombastic threats' of Ulster were founded on nothing more substantial than the nightmare of unrealized and unrealizable suspicion.' He dismissed the Ulster question as a mere detail and would not admit that the 'parliamentary mouthing' of the Orange members represented the considered opinion of Ulster. The Times condemned Harcourt's folly in speaking of Ulster's attitude with such levity.

Ministers were feeling tired and somewhat depressed in the interval between the end of the Second Reading on 9 May and the commencement of the Committee stage a month later. John Burns noted in his diary on 14 May: 'A tired House. A jaded Ministry. A weary Opposition. A wornout press and an indifferent public.' However, the cabinet had to devote further time to vital procedural matters during this period. Since the Parliament Act decreed that the Commons could only alter a bill during its first session, it was important to allow sufficient time for reasonable discussion and amendment of the Home Rule bill at Committee stage. On 30 April the cabinet decided that closure should not initially be applied to
debate in Committee on either the Irish or Welsh bills. This meant that the first clause of the Home Rule bill, dealing with the establishment of the Irish parliament, could be debated without closure restrictions, and was allocated seven days of debate. These included three days devoted to the amendment moved by Agar-Robartes, which was taken on 11, 13 and 18 June. The Cabinet subsequently decided in July that parliament should rise on 2 August, and the major part of the Committee stages of the three Parliament Act measures should be postponed until the House reassembled early in October. Closure would then be applied and a 'gulotino' resolution proposed, allocating time to the three bills in Committee.

AGAR-ROBARTES' AMENDMENT FOR THE EXCLUSION OF NORTH-EAST ULSTER, JUNE 1912.

On 11 June 1912, during the Committee debate on clause one, Agar-Robartes proposed an amendment to exclude the four Ulster counties of Antrim, Armagh, Londonderry and Down, from the jurisdiction of the Irish parliament. Most biographers and historians have since assumed that this was a significant development, worthy of mention even in the briefest accounts of the 1912-14 Home Rule crisis, yet rarely have they tried to explain precisely why it was significant. R. C. K. Ensor and Roy Jenkins described it briefly as a great missed opportunity. George Dangerfield alone attempted a more detailed interpretation, but one which was very misleading:

The Government had prepared what seemed at first a very pretty trap — To make the trap more complete, this amendment — which the Government itself would oppose — was to be moved by one of the Government's own following, etc., because he was known as a stern evangelical, would thus obscurely pacify the wide anti-Catholic feeling in Liberal circles —

This general lack of historical analysis, and Dangerfield's misrepresentation, are readily explained by the problems of the source material. Halsard, though invaluable, has remained a relatively untapped source, because historians appear to have been daunted by the sheer volume of material. The published memoirs are singularly unhelpful. Even unpublished letters and diaries have yielded surprisingly little information, especially on the Liberal side. A deliberate attempt on such a wide scale, to destroy incriminating evidence of a government plot, can be
discounted. More likely, most Liberals simply did not appreciate the significance of the debate at the time — in itself a damning indictment of a different kind. But the Opposition recognized the importance of the amendment, so that Unionist private papers have provided an unexpected source of valuable information.

The amendment was an honest, if politically misguided, attempt by Agar-Robartes to persuade his party leaders to reconsider their Ulster policy. However, it was interpreted by many contemporaries on both sides, and by many historians — as a potential trap. From the Unionist point of view, if they supported it, they could be accused of abandoning the sacred cause of the Union, and betraying their fellow Protestants in the south-west of Ireland. If they opposed it, they would appear to be rejecting the offer of a solution by peaceful means, in favour of a similar result achieved through threats and violence. The government was also faced with a dilemma, though there is no evidence that they fully recognized it as such. Support for the amendment would imply that their original bill was faulty on a fundamental point, and would obviously create conflict with their Nationalist allies. But if the government rejected the motion, they could be accused of refusing to deal with a problem which might otherwise wreck their entire measure.

The Unionists undoubtedly appreciated the significance and the potential tactical pitfalls of the amendment more fully and more rapidly than the government ever did. A few Unionists had favoured moving such an amendment from the start, on the grounds that the exclusion of Ulster would at least mitigate the evils in the Home Rule bill. St. Loé Strachey, editor of the Spectator, also advocated an exclusion amendment, but for quite different reasons. On 1 May 1912 he tried to persuade John Middleton to bring it forward from the Unionist benches in order to embarrass the Government, since 'nothing would so much enlighten public opinion here as the rejection of such a proposal.' Strachey was convinced the government would reject such an amendment as 'absolutely fatal to their scheme'. He added in a letter to the Earl of Midleton that 'it would be quite safe to ask for exemption for North East Ulster, but that asked and refused, Ulster's right of resistance would be enormously increased.' Strachey recognized that an amendment of this nature would present difficulties for the government, but he failed to see that it might pose equally embarrassing problems for his own party. Middleton did not oblige Strachey,
but another Unionist member, Lionel de Rothschild, put down the required amendment challenging the government to exclude the counties of Antrim, Armagh, Down and Londonderry from the bill. 127

Unionists who were less short-sighted on the subject than Strachey realized the disadvantages of such a move. When it was discovered that Agar-Robartes had proposed a similar amendment, Rothschild’s motion was rapidly withdrawn from the Order Paper. 128 As J.H. Campbell explained later, it was the ‘merest elementary party tactics’ to allow the Opposition amendment to be replaced by an identical amendment from a Liberal member. 129 If such an amendment were to be moved at all, it was tactically advantageous to either party that it should be moved from the enemy camp. The cabinet’s apparent failure to appreciate this, and to ensure that Agar-Robartes’ amendment was quietly withdrawn, led some Unionists and subsequent historians to conclude wrongly that a sinister plot was in the making. 130

Despite the Opposition advantage in having the amendment proposed from the ministerial benches, they still had to deal with the potential problems it posed. Regardless of its source, the Unionists from the south and west of Ireland inevitably saw the amendment as ‘a trap designed to secure an admission that the Northern Unionists were willing to abandon the Unionists in the rest of Ireland to their fate.’ 131 Walter Long, who wrote anxiously to Bonar Law from Switzerland on 4 June 1912, shared this view:

I hope the Ulster men will not be caught by the very open trap set for them by Agar-Robartes’ amendment. If they are it will mean that for the first time in the history of the H [ome], R [ule] question our Party will be divided. As an Englishman I cannot assent to H.R. in any form, & as one connected by the closest ties with the provinces of Leinster & Munster I cannot sacrifice my friends there. 132

Long’s views were to have a significant influence on Unionist Irish policy in the long-term, but on this occasion his desire to see the amendment rejected was overruled. The Opposition leaders decided to accept Agar-Robartes’ amendment. They concluded that the advantages of acceptance outweighed the disadvantage of highlighting the southern Unionist problem. Many Unionists clearly shared Moreton Frewen’s view that the Agar-Robartes’ amendment ‘... splits the other fellows. It is as good a stick as possible with which to beat Redmond. It is full of “good politics”’. 133
Walter Long was, therefore, persuaded to support the official party line in the interests of unity.

Unionist arguments and strategy on the Ager-Robartes’ amendment will be examined first, because they help to explain the policy ultimately adopted by the government. It is again easier to provide a general analysis of the Unionist position, since this was reasonably consistent and clear, in marked contrast with the diffuse reactions of the Liberals. Unionist support for the amendment was justified in two different ways - on grounds of merit, and on grounds of tactics. It is important to emphasize that all but one of the British Unionist speakers, and even many of the Irish Unionists, supported it seriously on its merits, as an attempt to mitigate the evils of Home Rule. Balfour explained that the southern Unionists could only be relieved by the defeat of the entire bill; since they could not deal with the whole measure in Committee, their duty was to improve the bill as far as possible, and prevent the Ulster Unionists sharing the fate of their southern brethren. Bonar Law declared that this amendment would not remove his opposition to the bill, but if Home Rule had to come, then this amendment might make it 'less bad' by helping to prevent civil war.

The Irish Unionists remained silent until the second day of the debate, but significantly most of them then took their cue from Balfour and Bonar Law rather than Carson. William Moore considered it his duty as an Ulsterman to accept even minimal relief for any Protestants from the persecution of a Catholic nationalist parliament. Several Ulster Unionists agreed with Captain James Craig that it was better to salvage part of Ulster from the wreckage, as a rallying point for all Irish loyalists. Moreover, the Westminster parliament would provide a far more effective base from which to protect the southern Unionists. Three Irish Unionists justified their position still further on grounds of logic. Walter Guinness and the two Craig brothers pointed out that Ulster could not reasonably oppose the granting by peaceful means of that very exclusion for which their constituents are prepared even to take up arms.

The attitude of those Unionists who spoke for the scattered loyalists in the south and west was inevitably more ambivalent, as Walter Long’s attitude has already indicated. John Newman’s complicated explanation of his abstention
illustrated the confused reactions of southern Unionists. He admitted that the amendment was a shock. Since the southern Unionists obviously did not want Ulster to leave them isolated as a ‘useless minority’ in the south. But it was not for the southern Unionists to ‘say her nay’, if Ulster wanted to march out of Home Rule, and Newman hoped his dilemma would be solved by a government rejection of the amendment.

Guinness also thought it was a ‘dog-in-the-manger’ policy for Unionists outside Ulster to grudge relief to the Ulster Protestants simply because they could not share it. 141

Only four of the twenty-five Unionist speakers adopted the purely tactical approach of supporting the amendment as a wrecking measure, which might be expected to ruin Home Rule completely. But since Carson’s speech was among those four, and was one of the few to receive historical notice, it created the misleading impression that Unionist policy was purely negative and destructive. William Haynes-Fisher was the only British Unionist to take this wrecking line, announcing on the first day of the debate that ‘if this Amendment is carried it kills the Bill. That is why I am going to vote for it.’ He believed that Home Rule could never be carried if Ulster were excluded; the Nationalists would reject it, the deplorable finances of the bill would be reduced to even greater chaos, and the necessary recasting of practically the whole bill would shatter it. 142 Carson adopted the most extreme wrecking stance of the four when he opened the second day’s debate on 13 June. He believed Home Rule was impossible for many reasons and concluded that the solution was to abandon Home Rule altogether: ‘We do not accept this Amendment as a compromise of the question. There is no compromise possible.’ Carson did not even attempt to consider the advantages of Ulster exclusion if the bill did pass. 143 Charles Craig and Walter Guinness were the only other Irish Unionist speakers to follow Carson’s lead in treating the amendment as a wrecking device. 144

The supreme advantage of the wrecking tactic was that it neatly eliminated the difficulty posed by the southern Unionists. It enabled Unionists to claim, on the one hand, that they had not specifically opposed the exclusion of Ulster as a potential solution to the Home Rule question. Yet they were also able to deny that they had deserted the southern Unionists, since they supported the amendment only in order to wreck Home Rule altogether. But this wrecking manoeuvre was possibly too clever, as Walter Long had feared before the debate, and it carried its own problems. It threw suspicion on the motives of those Unionists who were attempting to consider
the amendment seriously on its merits. It had the same effect in weakening Carson's own case, when he was involved in genuine negotiations for an Ulster compromise at later stages in the crisis. Most important, it enabled the government (if only belatedly) to evade some of the fundamental issues by adopting a similar tactical approach.

The debate indicated some differences of tactics and opinion on the Unionist side, but these were, for the most part, logical, predictable, and well-considered. The situation on the ministerial benches was quite another matter. The first day's debate revealed the Liberals in complete disarray. Speeches from the back benches suggested that the government's forces were in retreat or open rebellion, and there was no clear guidance from the front bench to rally the wavering supporters. There is no evidence that the government shared the Cyprian government's awareness of the potential pitfalls involved in the debate, or that they had even discussed their policy and tactics in advance. The first day's debate suggests that the government was caught unprepared, despite the fact that they had ample time and opportunity to consider the matter in the previous week. They simply failed to appreciate its significance until it was underlined by speakers from their own benches on 11 June.

The surviving private papers, letters, and diaries of leading Liberals do not even mention the Agar-Robartes' amendment before 11 June, and they provide almost no comment on the debate itself in the following week. John Burns appeared not to notice that a crucial debate was in progress, merely commenting in his diary for 13 June: 'Home Rule quietly in Committee.' Burns was never conspicuous for profound insight, but more precisely might have been expected of his colleague, Herbert Samuel, who commented five days after the debate ended:

The most striking thing in the political situation is the flatness of the Cyprian government to Home Rule --- after the political orgies of 1909-10-11, emotions are exhausted, and both in Parliament and in the country nothing short of a European war would break the languor. Ulster is an exception, but the shrieks from there rouse no echoes here.

The absence of any other ministerial comment suggests that the remarks of Burns and Samuel may not have been atypical of the shortsightedness of their colleagues.

From the Liberal point of view, the debate can be sharply divided into two stages, at the end of the first day's debate on 11 June. The majority of
Liberal speakers on the first day were sympathetic to the amendment, thereby aligning themselves with the Unionists. They received little guidance or discipline from an unprepared front bench. The speeches of Carson and Redmond, which opened the second day’s debate on 13 June, marked the turning point. They suggested to the cabinet the most effective tactics to employ, and from that point the Liberal speakers followed a party line which was more clearly prescribed. The backbench speeches of 11 June, supported by an analysis of the division list, provide a useful indication of the reasons why some Liberals supported Ulster exclusion, and the extent of their support. Liberal speeches of 13 and 18 June, on the other hand, provide an equally helpful guide to the arguments belatedly introduced to justify the official party policy on Ulster.

On 11 June, Asquith, Birrell and Simon spoke, and so did seven Liberal backbenchers, none of whom followed the orthodox line of the three ministers. All seven backbenchers showed some sympathy for the Ulster exclusion amendment, and four explicitly supported it. The only one of the seven who was not Scottish was Agar-Robartes. The Cornish member introduced his amendment in a speech which was dull and repetitive, especially by contrast with his forceful Second Reading performance, which had received far less attention. He described his amendment as an honest attempt to remove the major storm centre in the path of Home Rule and solve a highly complex problem which could otherwise lead to civil war. He was anxious that some measure of Home Rule should be carried, but this particular bill made the grave mistake of treating Ireland as one nation instead of two. A stronger administrative case could be urged for the total exclusion of all Ulster, but Agar-Robartes justified his more limited proposal on the grounds that determined Protestant resistance to Home Rule was overwhelmingly concentrated in the four counties specified. He even sought to anticipate the argument used by Asquith and other ministers, that such an amendment should have come from the Ulstermen themselves. Agar-Robartes pointed out that it was not the Ulster Unionists’ responsibility to ask for special treatment, since they did not want Home Rule in any case, and such a request would leave them open to the charge of betraying the southern Unionists.

Agar-Robartes received strong and unconditional support from three Liberals who were all Scottish and all federalists – D.V. Pirie, Munro-Ferguson,
and W. H. Cowan. All four riders voted for the amendment, or acted as tellers, in direct opposition to their party's official position. D. V. Pirie seconded the motion in a speech which expressed far greater hostility and criticism of the government than Agar-Robartes had shown. Pirie was particularly disgruntled because he had finally become disillusioned by the ministry's vague, non-committal references to Home Rule all round. Pirie reminded the House of his Second Reading declaration that it was the government's duty to allow Ulster to stand out of the bill. He still believed the Ulster problem might be settled by a federal scheme for the United Kingdom, and deplored the government's 'studied silence' on the subject. He even made the highly original suggestion that a federal system would give the four Ulster counties the option of joining a Scottish parliament instead of an Irish parliament.

Munro-Ferguson supported Agar-Robartes' amendment in a very brief speech. He considered the proposal currently expedient in view of the very real Ulster difficulty, though he remained hopeful that Ulster would ultimately join forces with the Irish parliament. W. H. Cowan was the third Scottish federalist to give full support to Agar-Robartes. Cowan warned that some Members on this side of the House possibly unduly minimise Ulster's threats of armed rebellion. The government's consent to the purely temporary exclusion of the four counties was surely a reasonable price to pay to ensure that Home Rule could be established without armed resistance. Like most Liberals, Cowan assumed that even if Ulster were initially excluded, she would eventually choose to join the Dublin parliament, so that even when exclusion was not explicitly described as 'temporary', this was often implied.

Chapple and Morton, two more Scottish Liberals, sympathised with the spirit of the amendment, but felt obliged to oppose its method. Dr. Chapple believed a better solution to the Ulster problem was available within the context of a future scheme of devolution. He proposed that Ulster should initially be included in the Home Rule bill, but the Ulster Protestants should be allowed by referendum to 'escape' to a Scottish parliament, if their worst fears were realised. Subsequent Liberal speakers carefully ignored Chapple's strange suggestion, first mooted by Pirie a few hours earlier. F. E. Smith, however, poured scorn on this 'fantastic' idea, which he interpreted as proof that the Scottish Liberals viewed Irish Home Rule with the utmost concern. A. C. Morton shared Agar-Robartes' desire to protect the Ulster Protestants, and warned that he would not hesitate to vote against the government
if be considered Protestants were at risk. But he believed Agar-Robartes' amendment was not the most effective way to help the Irish Protestants; the Ulster Protestants would be better advised to develop their influence in the Irish parliament, to strengthen the position of their southern brethren. 152

Sir John Jardine was the only one of these seven Liberal backbenchers to express reasonable satisfaction with the government's position. He pointed out that Ulster exclusion would apparently not guarantee Ulster Unionists' support for Home Rule. In view of his fellow Scots' remarks, however, Jardine was not very convincing when he denied Hugh Cecil's charge that the Liberal members were unsettled in their opinions. 153 Jardine may well have moved closer to the views of his Scottish colleagues in the next few days, since he abstained on the division a week later. This hypothesis gains further support from his subsequent abstention on Carson's amendment for Ulster exclusion on 1 January 1913.

Agar-Robartes and the Scottish members who shared his views hoped that the amendment would be considered genuinely on its merits. Though several Liberals thought Agar-Robartes' action naive or misguided, speakers as varied as Birrell, Hay-Fisher and Captain Craig expressed their belief that the proposal was made in good faith. Only Thomas Lough gave way to bitterness in his scathing remarks about his fellow Liberals 'who thrust a proposal upon the floor of the House to give their own party trouble and to give delight to their opponents.' Lough felt that the dissentients might have considered the embarrassment they were likely to cause their party in their eagerness to protect Irish Protestants. No doubt other Liberals shared Lough's view that the indifference of the dissentents to party interests and tactics approached naivety. 154 Yet their views were consistently held, as well as sincere. Six months later, Agar-Robartes, Pirie, Munro-Ferguson, Cowan, and Jardine abstained on Carson's amendment.

The Liberal dissidents left no doubt about the reasons for their dissatisfaction with their party's Ulster policy. Agar-Robartes and Morton were primarily motivated by their strong nonconformist faith. Fears for the Irish Protestants also help to explain the views of Cowan 155 and Munro-Ferguson, though they were influenced by other forces as well as nonconformity. It was no accident that six of the seven Liberal dissidents were Scottish, nor that Pirie, Munro-Ferguson, Cowan,
and Cheape were all federalists.

Press reactions to these hostile Liberal speeches naturally depended upon political affiliations. Liberal papers took as little notice as possible. The Daily News and Westminster Gazette ignored them altogether. The Nation merely commented that a more serious controversy was raised by ‘the small body of Whig Home-Rulers’, mainly from Scotland, who favoured Ulster exclusion. The Western Daily Mercury could not so easily dismiss an amendment moved by a Cornish member, and adopted an attitude of ridicule mixed with reproach.

Agar-Robartes’ scheme was criticised for its lack of wisdom and logic, and he was condemned for sending the unoffending Ulster counties to so grotesque a fate as exclusion. The Times, on the other hand, remarked that ‘an embarrassing number’ of the government’s Scottish supporters showed sympathy with the amendment, since they had an instinctive understanding of their kinsfolk in Ulster.

The division at the end of the debate on 18 June was chiefly significant because it indicated the influence of the Liberal dissidents. In spite of the orthodox speeches which dominated the remaining two days’ debate. The ministerial majority sank from its potential figure of 114 to the abnormally low 69, with a vote of 320 against 251. Sixty-two ministerialists failed to vote, compared with 35 of the Opposition, and five Liberals actually voted with the Unionists. Agar-Robartes and Pirie acted as tellers, while Cowan, Munro-Ferguson and Sir Clifford Cory supported them in voting for the amendment, alongside the Opposition. The Nation admitted that the majority was the smallest so far yielded in the Committee debates, but claimed that the diminished majority was caused by the abstention of Labour members. Two-thirds of the unusually high number of ministerial absences, however, were accounted for by 43 Liberals, against which the sixteen Labour and three Irish Nationalists who failed to vote appeared less significant.

Twenty-three members on each side were paired for the division, but in the absence of a pair-list it is impossible to know which of the 43 Liberals paired, who failed to obtain pairs, and who deliberately abstained. George Kemp was known to have remained away deliberately, and it is probable that several more of those Liberals who were not accounted for did the same. Those 21 Liberals who failed to vote with the government on both the Agar-Robartes and the Carson amendments can
be isolated as the most likely to have abstained deliberately on the Ulster exclusion issue. They include Agar-Robartes, Cory, Cowan, Lloyd George, Jardine, Munro-Ferguson and Pirrie. At least nine of these 21 were nonconformists, five were Scottish, five from the north of England, three were Welsh, and five were federalists. The most pronounced common factors were the large number of nonconformists, and the even larger number from Scotland and northern England. The Scottish element can be explained in terms of federalism, nonconformity and Scottish nationalism, while the influence of nonconformity chiefly accounts for the northern English attitudes.

The Unionists were naturally pleased by the division. The Times, the Observer, and Lord Hugh Cecil, claimed that the government was only saved from defeat by the dead-weight of Nationalist votes. The Observer declared that the clear majority of British representatives was opposed to the government's policy and had practically authorised the resistance of Ulster. The Times commented that the debate had brought the Ulster question more clearly before those Liberals whose convictions were not overridden by the whips' orders. As to the decline in the government majority:

That is a drop which is eloquent of much that is passing in the minds of some among the supporters of the Government and an augury full of hope for the opponents of Home Rule. If at this early stage not all the pressure at the disposal of the Whips can bring some Ministers to "toe the line", what is likely to be the attitude of the recalcitrants later on? They are only beginning to see the character of the abyss to the edge of which they are being driven. The nearer they are brought, the less they will like the prospect of the plunge, and the more they will be disposed to murmur at the leadership which has made it hard for them, either to go on or to go back.

On the first day of the Agar-Robartes' debate it had been clear that the ministry was in an exceedingly difficult position. The seven Liberals who spoke from the back benches had openly supported the amendment or else shown marked sympathy. No Liberal speakers on 11 June, except for the three ministers, really opposed the Ulster exclusion proposal. Even the response from the front bench was so weak as to deserve the caustic comment of The Times: "we find nothing but embarrassment and the most extraordinary ineptitude and paucity of argument."
Birrell spoke immediately after Agar-Robartes, and his feeble reply can only be explained by the chief secretary’s lack of conviction about the policy he was supposed to be defending. The uneasiness he had felt in August 1911 must have been increased by the evidence about the Ulster campaign in the police reports which reached him since then. Between February and June 1912, the chief secretary had carefully avoided dealing with the Ulster question in his public speeches, taking refuge in vague generalities. The Agar-Robartes’ debate forced him to approach the problem more specifically, but the first of his two speeches was scarcely instructive. Birrell argued that a great deal more evidence was required to prove that Ulster really wanted separation from the rest of Ireland; this proposal would leave dissatisfied Protestants in the included Ulster counties, and create new Catholic minorities in the few counties excluded. Religious differences, in his view, were not a barrier to political and economic unity, and Birrell shared Parnell’s belief that Home Rule would be imperfect without the cooperation of all Ulster. Bonar Law thought this speech illustrated the government’s total failure to grasp the real issues in Ireland, and Lord Hugh Cecil accused the chief secretary of shirking the main issue.168

Asquith’s speech, which came in the middle of the first day’s debate, following the attacks by Agar-Robartes, Munro-Ferguson and Pirie, was more dextrous, but it was also more obviously evasive and negative. He made no attempt to answer the questions put by the Opposition, and sought instead to defend himself by counter-attack. Recognizing the problems of his own position, Asquith sought to exploit the weakest link in the Opposition armour, namely the problem of the southern Unionists. He accused the Ulster Unionists of abandoning the scattered Protestants of the south-west and the included Ulster counties to the tyranny and persecution they themselves feared from a Home Rule parliament. This charge had been anticipated by the Opposition, but they must have been surprised at the prime minister’s failure to produce any other arguments, except the flat assertion that Ireland could not be split because of the ‘fundamental unity of race, temperament and tradition.’169 The Times commented that Asquith produced not a single argument to justify the government in declining to accept the amendment. Walter Long observed that Asquith avoided answering even the criticisms of his own supporters.170

Sir John Simon did little to rescue the government from a hopelessly weak position when he wound up the debate on 11 June. He was chiefly concerned to
demonstrate that Ireland had always been treated as a single unit for all legal and administrative purposes. Despite Simon's characteristic clarity and restraint, The Times reported his speech as 'contributing a few forensic futilities', while Sanderson thought his argument so poor that it demonstrated the weakness of the government's case. 171

The ministry scarcely emerged with credit on 11 June, as Carson was quick to point out when he opened the second day's debate on 13 June. Carson charged that the speeches of Birrell and Asquith made little effort to propose an alternative solution to the Ulster problem. Indeed they suggested that no real consideration had been devoted to the question of Ulster at all. F.E. Smith detected 'a patent inability on the part of the Government even to attempt to understand the fundamental facts of the Ulster case'. 172 Ministers had given the impression of being totally unprepared on that first day, with their forces in rebellion and disarray.

Fortunately for the government, the timetable allowed a brief respite before the debate resumed on 13 June, thus providing an opportunity for a somewhat belated assessment of the situation. They were able to avoid much further humiliation, and to recover their position to some extent, by adopting a tactical approach, where no policy of any kind had existed before. Carson and Hayes-Fisher provided the ammunition for this new departure by the very nature of the wrecking tactics they themselves adopted. The Liberals and Nationalists were able to imitate their methods, by arguing that there was no point in considering the amendment constructively on its merits, since the Opposition were deliberately using it as a tactical device to wreck Home Rule.

Hayes-Fisher had been the only Unionist to adopt the wrecking tactic on the first day, but Simon was quick to note the implications, and include a brief reference in his concluding speech. Simon asked those Liberals who sincerely supported Home Rule to think twice before they join in a plan which is being exploited by hon. Gentlemen opposite in order that they may defeat the Bill. 173 Simon had pointed to the most effective means of defence. Redmond was in a far stronger position to exploit this tactic to the full, after listening to Carson's speech, opening the second day's debate. The Nationalist leader developed his argument very cleverly, to allow the Liberal rebels of 11 June a means of escape. He
deliberately addressed his remarks to one or two of his Liberal friends, who, before this situation had developed as it has done, expressed some sympathy with this Amendment. Redmond could understand his friends giving serious consideration to this proposal if it were put forward as the price of a Home Rule settlement, acceptable to the Ulster Unionists. But since the amendment had now been entirely repudiated by the Ulster members as part of a Home Rule settlement, and was supported frankly as a wrecking Amendment designed to destroy the bill, no genuine friends of Home Rule could possibly continue to support the amendment. 174 Redmond's speech did not succeed in converting the Liberal dissidents, but may well have ensured that no more Liberals followed Agar-Robartes and Pirrie into the Unionist lobby.

More important, Redmond showed his Liberal allies how they could evade the main issue and escape from an otherwise intolerable situation. He provided Thomas Lough, Ryland Adkins, Sir Stanley Buckmaster, and other Liberals who followed him, with a clear line of argument which had been entirely lacking in the first day's debate. They said it was now obvious that the Unionists were supporting the amendment merely to embarrass the government, and those who voted for it must realize it was intended to destroy the bill. 175 Lloyd George, like Redmond, had listened intently to Carson's speech, and gave an 'expressive toss of his head' before leaving the House, presumably to make the necessary alterations in his own speech. 176 The Chancellor's revised version conceded that if Ulster demanded separate treatment, the government would give serious consideration to such a proposal. But this particular amendment was avowedly supported by Carson to wreck the bill. It was Ulster's responsibility to make out a serious case for exclusion, and the current demand that Ulster should have the right to veto autonomy for the rest of Ireland was intolerable. 177 This line of argument presumably saved Lloyd George from any personal declaration of his views on the merits of Ulster exclusion. It also enabled Birrell to wind up the debate more forcefully than he began it, pointing out that Carson would not allow Home Rule, with or without Ulster. Consequently it was a pointless exercise to treat the amendment as if it were a grave Unionist design to reach a Home Rule settlement. 178

All the Liberal speakers on 13 and 18 June supported the official ministerial position, and between them a more coherent Liberal case against Ulster
exclusion was at last formulated. Despite the fact that the main emphasis was placed on the tactical defence, these other arguments deserve examination. Only two major lines of argument were developed against the amendment. The first was Asquith's point that Ireland was one indivisible nation, and that Ulster exclusion was incompatible with the nationality of Ireland. Naturally Redmond stated this argument strongly on 13 June: 'This idea of two nations in Ireland is to us revolting and hateful. The idea of our agreeing to the partition of our nation is unthinkable.' Strangely, Redmond devoted far more of his speech to the tactical argument, whereas William O'Brien, the leader of the small group of Independent Nationalists, concentrated with great passion on the national argument against the 'amputation' of his country. 179

The Liberal speakers who followed Redmond advanced the argument of Irish nationality with varying degrees of enthusiasm. Thomas Lough and Birrell repudiated the Unionist claim that there were two nations in Ireland, arguing that the Ulstermen were fundamentally good Irishmen. Only Harwood, an aged Gladstonian Home Ruler, devoted his entire speech to a simple passionate appeal for a united Ireland: '...a Home Rule scheme with a great piece torn out, bleeding, from the rest of Ireland is impossible. It must be all Ireland or nothing.' Crawshay-Williams and Buckingham passed over this issue lightly, Lloyd George mentioned it only indirectly, and many of their fellow Liberals ignored it altogether. 180

Most Liberal speakers devoted considerably more attention to the second line of argument, which concerned the practical obstacles in the path of Ulster exclusion. Lloyd George declared that any serious demand for the partition of Ireland must be put forward as a definite, formal proposal, giving precise details of its terms, limits and conditions. Significantly, the chancellor admitted that he did not believe it was an impossible feat to find a workable boundary line, but the four north-east counties were not a well-defined homogeneous area, and the proposal was full of practical, financial and geographical difficulties. These problems, although not insurmountable, were very grave, and no Home Ruler should support this vague demand, which failed to take into account the practical details of its application. 181 Thomas Lough also concentrated on the practical difficulties, condemning Agar-Robartes for his failure to examine these before making such a vague and crude proposal. Birrell declared that no good reason had been advanced,
statistically or otherwise, to show why these four counties should be segregated.

As chief secretary he was more familiar with the massive administrative problems presented by any form of Ulster exclusion; no provisions had been suggested concerning the fate of the excluded counties, in terms of their executive, their administration, or their local government. 182

Closely involved with this argument was the accusation that even the Ulstermen could not agree as to precisely which sections of Ulster ought to be excluded. Lloyd George observed that this was the first proposal for separating Ulster from the rest of Ireland, but the members for Ulster had not yet made up their minds what 'Ulster' meant. The amendment proposed the exclusion of only four counties, whereas Carson demanded six, and Charles Craig wanted all nine. 183 However, this argument was not entirely fair, since Birrell and Carson had explained that the Committee was considering the amendment as 'a kind of token vote' on the government's Ulster policy, and on the general principles of Ulster exclusion, regardless of geographical details. 184

The Unionists were not impressed by these rather belated Liberal arguments against some form of Ulster exclusion, especially as the government proposed no alternative method of dealing with the Ulster problem. Lord Hugh Cecil asked how the government intended to deal with Ulster's resistance, if they contemplated no alternative policy for Ulster. Walter Long declared that they had no right to force the bill through without facing the consequences of imposing Home Rule on Protestant Ulster. Earl Winterton believed that the Opposition was entitled to ask for the government's own proposals for Ulster. 185

The government had no reply to the Unionists' repeated demands for enlightenment. Asquith assured the House that Irish dissension would disappear once Irishmen cooperated in governing their country. Lloyd George declared that 'freedom is a great antidote of bigotry and intolerance', and Redmond suggested the Unionists should trust in the 'healing process of time'. Birrell echoed Redmond's view that Ulstermen would not need to resist Home Rule because there would be no oppression. 186

These bland assurances infuriated the Opposition. Their bitterness and frustration were increased by the cabinet's silence concerning the Second
Reading speeches of Churchill and Grey, which had appeared to suggest that they would sympathise with Agar-Robartes' amendment. As the Daily News remarked on 14 June, 'it was notorious that the amendment was looked upon a little kindly by more powerful persons. The Opposition repeatedly asked for explanations of the Second Reading speeches in question, but ministers maintained their silence on this embarrassing subject. Churchill and Grey incensed the Opposition still further by their conspicuous absence throughout the entire three-day debate on the Agar-Robartes' amendment. F.E. Smith and Carson complained that Churchill and Grey had raised false hopes concerning cabinet intentions, by giving strong encouragement on Second Reading to Ulster's desire for exclusion. Smith protested explosively that no minister had even attempted to reconcile those Second Reading speeches:

---with the speeches made in every other corner of the House. Neither of those two Ministers, each of whom made a more significant pronouncement in relation to this Amendment than has been made by any Minister who has spoken from that bench, thinks this Amendment is sufficiently important to be here in order to explain.

Churchill and Grey in fact remained away for the first seven days of the Committee debate. J.H. Campbell found this scarcely surprising, since their colleagues' attitude on Ulster had placed them in a 'very ignominious position'.

The onslaught from the dissident Liberal members on 11 June must have been even more embarrassing for the ministry. W.H. Cowan complained that several Liberals had expected the government itself to make some proposal for Ulster exclusion; Churchill's remarkable speech had suggested some ministerial intention to offer an olive branch of this nature to the Ulster members. Captain D.V. Pirie condemned the ministry's 'uncertainty, evasiveness, and wilful reticence'. Pirie was even more scathing and angry when he spoke on clause one on 2 July, since the government had still provided no explanation of their Ulster policy:

To my mind it would have been very seemly instead of leaving it to a private Member to put forward some guidance for the solution of this great question if the Government had condescended to answer the series of questions asked of them --- We have had no guidance at all from the Government [on the Second Reading speeches of leading Ministers]. The House is absolutely in the dark as to the allusions, which cannot be ignored ---
The prime minister replied keenly to Pirie on 11 June, that the question of Ulster had been fully discussed both in cabinet and on Second Reading: 'Neither I myself nor my colleagues have shown the slightest reluctance to grapple with the question in all its aspects'. Members might have been excused for treating this claim with a measure of cynicism. When pressed even harder three weeks later, Asquith sought refuge in the negative arguments that any proposals should come from Ulster, and that he was not obliged to explain what measures he might conceivably take in an unlikely hypothetical situation. 192

In the circumstances, Asquith took a most effective step to help restore his credibility in the Agar-Robartes' debate, by putting forward Lloyd George to defend the government's position on Ulster. Thus Lloyd George broke his public silence on Home Rule for the first time when he spoke on 13 June, in the middle of the second day's debate. Lloyd George and Churchill had been the most forceful advocates of Ulster exclusion in the February 1912 cabinet. But, unlike Churchill, the chancellor had seemed to acquiesce in Asquith's decision, and turned aside to other issues which interested him more deeply. Consequently, Lloyd George's personal views on Ulster had never become public knowledge or even rumoured in the press, and his name had not been linked with Churchill and Grey. On the contrary, Lloyd George had been widely criticised by the Nationalist press for his 'amazing silence' throughout the Home Rule debates, and for his failure to mention Ireland in his public speeches outside parliament. 193 The chancellor's speech on the Agar-Robartes' amendment was his only major contribution to the 1912 Home Rule debate, and consequently received all the more attention.

It was a clever stroke to co-opt Lloyd George to support Asquith's Ulster policy and to declare that the cabinet was united on the subject:

---if anyone imagines that the Government did not give very careful consideration to it and did not examine every proposal made on the subject to deal with Ulster, then he is not doing justice to the care and the consideration that were bestowed upon this very important matter. 194

This announcement had the desired effect. The implication was that the cabinet had unanimously agreed that special provision for Ulster was not practicable, and that Lloyd George himself shared this general view. Other aspects of the chancellor's forceful speech have already been examined. Its impact was increased by an
endorsement from Birrell, when he wound up the debate on 18 June, especially since the chief secretary privately shared Lloyd George's misgivings about the official policy:

We have had the whole case of Ulster before us all the time. We considered whether it would be possible to discover any dividing line or any basis whereby we could segregate any portion of North-East Ulster from the rest of Ireland, and we came to the conclusion that we could not do it.  

Lloyd George's feelings on 13 June must have been very mixed. It is hard to believe that he was entirely happy about delivering such a strong speech in defence of a policy which he had emphatically repudiated in the February cabinet, and was to reject again from November 1913 onwards. However, a careful examination of his speech reveals that he justified the ministerial veto on Ulster exclusion not on principle, but on tactical, practical, and technical grounds. Lloyd George did not absolutely oppose the Agar-Robartes' amendment, though he cleverly gave the appearance of doing so. He stated explicitly that, if there was a demand for separate treatment from Ulster, then the government should give it serious consideration. Though he emphasised the practical difficulties involved in the partition of Ireland, he added significantly that he did not believe they were insuperable. Lloyd George may have salved his conscience further by refraining from voting—a possibility which appears more likely in view of his abstention on Carson's amendment also.

However, the chancellor's audience was almost certainly unaware of the implications of these subtle innuendoes. His speech disarmed and confused the government's critics, as was undoubtedly the intention. Previously they had guessed the truth—that the government's Ulster policy had not been in the least carefully considered, and had split the cabinet. The speeches of Lloyd George and Birrell, especially Lloyd George, caused them to revise this estimate. The Unionists tended to assume thereafter that the government had examined the idea of Ulster exclusion, but had been forced to abandon it at Redmond's dictation. In the light of the comments made by Lloyd George and Birrell, they could only interpret the Second Reading hints of Churchill and Grey as a deliberate tactical sham, or else as sincere statements which had to be revised at Redmond's demand. This ministerial disparity of views was never satisfactorily explained away, but at least Lloyd George's speech left the
Unionists feeling reasonably certain that the cabinet was united behind Asquith's Ulster policy. By 3 July, Asquith was able to claim that he associated himself fully with the views of Churchill and Grey: 'There is no difference of opinion of any sort or kind in the Government on the matter.' They were all perfectly prepared to consider proposals from Ulster for special treatment, consistent with the general scope and purpose of the Home Rule bill.

Though The Times recognised that the Agar-Robartes' amendment had 'secretly' caused the ministry considerable anxiety, the full extent and true nature of the cabinet divisions were disguised. It was assumed that informal proposals for Ulster exclusion had been abandoned by the cabinet because of Redmond's veto. The rebels were always thought to be Churchill, Grey, and possibly Isaac; Lloyd George's name was never linked with theirs. Moreover, the Unionists firmly assumed that these 'informal discussions' must have been in progress about the time of the controversial Second Reading speeches, and that the issue was now closed: 'whatever their doubts and hesitations may have been', the government had now definitely rejected Ulster exclusion.

By adopting a tactical approach to the amendment, and with the help of Lloyd George, the government partially recovered from the fiasco of 11 June, and managed to conceal the full extent of the divisions within the party over Ulster. But the illusion of ministerial unanimity only increased the frustration and anger of the Opposition. The Unionists repeatedly warned the government that if they rejected Ulster exclusion and proposed no alternative, then they would either have to impose their bill on Ulster by force, or else submit to last-minute negotiations for compromise on Opposition terms. Acceptance of Agar-Robartes' amendment would prevent a humiliating choice between civil war or subsequent capitulation. They rejected Asquith's argument that the onus for making a proposal lay with the Opposition. This was the government's problem, caused by a bill which they introduced and Ulster did not want; it was, therefore, a ministerial responsibility to avoid coercion of Ulster in the name of self-government. The Unionists continually warned that 'if they attempt to overcome the resistance of Ulster by methods of violence, they will precipitate a conflict which must have disastrous consequences'. The government were told they were playing with fire and should realise that the Ulster Unionist statements were not bluff or exaggeration. Austen Chamberlain complained bitterly that,
since the prime minister declined to give any indication of the government's
tentions concerning Ulster:

He is steering this country straight for disaster.
He declares a confidence for which he has no
justification, and shows none that the men of
Ulster do not mean what they say. — Why do
you insist that Ulster shall resist before you
declare your plan? 205.

The Opposition also tried extremely hard to impress on Asquith the
crucial importance of an early ministerial decision on Ulster, before the end of the
1912 session. F. E. Smith pointed out on 13 June that the Parliament Act's provisions
made the crisis serious and immediate in 1912, rather than in the two subsequent
sessions. If this amendment was not inserted at Committee or Report stages in 1912,
it could never be adopted at all, except by Opposition consent. However, Smith
believed that repeated appeals were ignored because the government 'do not know
themselves what their policy is', and in that indecision on a point of critical urgency,
Home Rule would be destroyed. Bonar Law agreed that the government did not realise
their folly in placing themselves in a position from which they could not retreat. 206
Carson also doubted whether the ministry recognised the vast importance of the
Agar-Robartes amendment. The Parliament Act decreed that the debate in the 1912
session would settle the final form in which the bill would become law. This imposed
grave responsibility on the House then and there — it could not be fulfilled either in
1913 or 1914. Charles Craig added the ominous warning that, after the first
parliamentary circuit, it would be impossible to incorporate Ulster exclusion into the
bill, except by agreement, but an amendment by agreement was highly unlikely,
because it is not possible to get any agreement with Ulster upon this Bill. Therefore
the government should treat this amendment far more seriously, as the most practicable
way of rendering some form of Home Rule at all possible. 207

These warnings contained a strong element of common sense, which
Asquith would have been well advised to heed. The Parliament Act allowed the
government to impose a solution to the Ulster question, during the first parliamentary
circuit, without requiring either the cooperation or agreement of the Unionists. The
government might well have improved its position by seizing the initiative and making
a definite proposal to meet the Ulster case, even at this late stage. Ministerial...
acceptance of the Agar-Robartes' amendment would admittedly have been unwise on tactical and practical grounds. A possible alternative line of action might have been to substitute an official government amendment on the lines of 'Home Rule within Home Rule', granting some form of administrative autonomy to part of Ulster. This could later have been extended to Ulster exclusion, if necessary. Such a proposal would at least have appeared to provide a reasonable attempt to meet the Ulster Unionist case, in the eyes of the British public.

Instead, the prime minister kept his head in the sand, though admittedly with some justification. He preferred to avoid pressing Redmond for concessions at this early stage, since this would have caused anxiety about Redmond's uneasy cooperation during the next two circuits. The Agar-Robartes' debate at least served the purpose of dropping a hint to the Nationalists, without in the least committing the government. But by rejecting Agar-Robartes' amendment and suggesting no alternative, the ministry placed itself in a weakened and vulnerable position. They were thereby committing themselves more deeply to the Ulster policy of February 1912, which had never been thoroughly examined. They were inevitably reducing their options, unless they were prepared for a volte face at a later stage. The longer they were forced to defend their original position, the more entrenched it became, and the more likely that retreat would be regarded as a party humiliation. The situation was not promising in June 1912, but it was not yet irretrievably lost.
CHAPTER III

NOTES

1. The Parliament Act provided that the Commons could amend a bill before it was sent to the Lords for the first time. After that, the bill could only be altered by means of 'suggestions' which required the Lords' agreement.

2. See e.g. Bladæ, Bonar Law, p. 127: 'it would, however, be tedious to repeat at length the speeches made on the subject of the third Home Rule Bill — from 1912 to 1914 the discussions were for the most part an endless repetition of the same well-worn themes. In general, therefore, the detailed Parliamentary history of Home Rule will be omitted here.'


6. See e.g. Lord Sandhurst to H. Gladstone, 7 April 1912: '--- Asquith has done admirably well — his patience & moderation beyond all praise' (H. Gladstone Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 46072, fo. 255).


8. Mary Dray (nee Gladstone) diary, 11 April 1912, B.L. Add. MS. 46265, fos. 18-19.


10. Burns diary, 16 April 1912, B.L. Add. MS. 46334, fo. 83.

11. See e.g. Ilbert diary, 11 April 1912.

12. Dicey to Bonar Law, 12 Feb., 1913, B.L. P. 29/1/15; J.L. Garvin to Law, 2 April 1912, ibid. 26/2/4; Sir Thomas Esmonde, Hansard, XXVI, 1487 (11 April 1912).

13. The bill was not actually available until 15 April, causing Ilbert to lament the absurdity of wasting three days discussing an unknown text (Ilbert diary, 11 April 1912).
14. T.E. Harvey to wife, 11 April 1912, Harvey Papers.

15. Hetert diary, 11 April 1912. See also Burns diary, 11 April 1912, B.L. Add. Ms. 46334, fo. 50; Nation, 13 April 1912.

16. Nathan diary, 11 April 1912; Burns diary, 11 April 1912, B.L. Add. Ms. 46334, fo. 80; See also Mary Drew diary, 11 April 1912, B.L. Add. Ms. 46265, fos. 18-19; Nation, 13 and 20 April 1912.


18. Hetert diary, 16 April 1912.

19. Carson to Law, 16 April 1912, B.L.P. 26/2/29. See also Bishop of St. David's to Law, 17 April 1912, ibid. 26/2/30; Long to Law, 18 April 1912, ibid. 26/2/32.

20. A.V. Dicey to St. Loe Strachey, 16 April 1912, Strachey Papers, S/5/6/5; G.A. Touche to Law, 17 April 1912, B.L.P. 26/2/31. See also The Times, 16-17 April 1912.

21. Burns diary, 15 April 1912, B.L. Add. Ms. 46334, fo. 82.


23. Research in about seventy collections of private papers yielded surprisingly little useful information on the home Rule debate in 1912. This can partly be explained on the grounds that politicians had less need to communicate with each other in writing, when they were together at Westminster. The exceptionally busy session of 1912 also left little time for family letters and diary writing. My analysis of the debate, therefore, relies mainly on Hansard, which has previously been scarcely used for this subject, despite a wealth of valuable material. Press reports have been used to supplement Hansard, especially The Times and the Nation, which provided the most full and accurate reports, besides occasionally having access to interesting inside information.

24. Western Daily Mercury, 3 May 1912; British Weekly, 5 May 1912.

25. See e.g. The Times, 13 April 1912.

26. For the Unionist case, see esp. speeches by Carson (Hansard, XXXVI, 1427-41); Balfour (ibid., XXXVII, 38-55); Lord High Cecil (ibid., XXXVII, 92-98); Walter Long (ibid., 194-211); Bonar Law (ibid., 281-97).

27. For convenience, the term 'Ulster' will be used in the loose contemporary sense to mean the Protestant dominated north-east section of the province of Ulster, unless the context indicates otherwise. Most speakers talked
loosely of 'Ulster', when they actually meant only the predominantly Unionist counties of the province. See e.g. P.E. Smith: 'By Ulster I mean the Protestants of the North-East of Ireland' (Hansard, XXXIX, 1512); see also Hansard, XXVII, 112 (Craig); ibid., XLVI, 2387 (Law).

28. Nation, 20 April 1912. See also 13 April 1912: 'it is significant that the Opposition should have chosen to stake its entire case upon the wild advocacy of extreme Ulsteria ---. ' Balfour was the only important exception, for he made only one brief reference to Ulster in a very long First Reading speech (Hansard, XXXVII, 28-55).

29. Walter Guinness was an exception. He pointed out that Ulster could look after itself, but 750,000 Protestants in the three southern provinces had no hope of representation in a Dublin parliament (Hansard, XXXVII, 127).

30. Hansard, XXXVII, 133-4 (W. Guinness). See also, ibid., XXXVI, 1465 (Viscount Castleragh); XXXVII, 87 (Lord Hugh Cecil); XXXVII, 271 (Captain O'Neill); XXXVII, 291 (Bonar Law); XXXVII, 1880 (Sir Robert Finlay).

31. Hansard, XXXVII, 1778.

32. Hansard, XXXVI, 1440 (Carson); ibid., XXXVII, 292; XXXVIII, 688-9; XXXIX, 780-80 (Bonar Law). See also, XXXVIII, 262 (Austen Chamberlain); XXXX, 785 (Joyce-Smith).

33. See e.g. Hansard, XXXVII, 1746 (Captain O'Sullivan); XXXVII, 118 (William Moore); ibid., XXXVII, 133 (W. Guinness); XXXVII, 290 (Bonar Law); XXXVIII, 654-57 (J. Gordon).

34. See e.g., xxxvii] 1427, 1437 (Carson); XXXVII, 85 (Lord Hugh Cecil); XXXVI, 1501 (H. Lawson); XXXVII, 114-16 (William Moore); XXXVII, 288-90 (Bonar Law); XXXVIII, 257 (A. Chamberlain). In particular, these speakers ridiculed the nominated senate, and argued that in practice the vetoes of both the lord-lieutenant and the Westminster parliament would not be exercised.

35. See e.g., John Baird to Bonar Law, 30 Aug. 1912, B.I.P. 27/1/59. Lady Ninian Crichton-Stuart and C. Alfred Cripps warned Bonar Law to moderate the 'religious mud-slinging', which alienated Irish Catholic Unionists and hundreds of British Catholics (4-5 Oct. 1912, B.L.P. 27/3/6, 8; and Law's replies, B.L.P. 33/4/57-68.) This correspondence resulted in the production of a memorandum analysing the difficulties involved in dealing with Roman Catholic Unionists (Memorandum on the Irish Situation, 16 Oct. 1912, ibid. 40/2/68.)

36. Hansard, XXXVI, 1478 (Craig); XXXVII, 107 (Moore).

37. See e.g. Hansard, XXXVI, 1461; XXXVII, 1752 (Craig).

38. Hansard, XXXVII, 269-70 (O'Neill).
53. Hansard, XXXIX. 814 (Balfour).

40. Hansard, XXXVII, 208 (Long); XXXVII, 86-8 (Cecil); XXXVII, 110 (W. Moore); XXXVII, 1754 (Craig).

41. Ibid., XXXVII, 273 (Capt. O'Neill); Ibid., 1779 (Amery); Ibid., 1734 (Long); Ibid., 293 (Law).

42. Hansard, XXXVII, 1882 (Finlay); Ibid., XXXVIII, 643-4 (Thompson).

43. Ibid., XXXVIII, 643-4 (Thompson).

44. Ibid., XXXVII, 127 (W. Guinness); XXXVII, 120 (W. Moore); XXXVII, 273 (O'Neill); XXXVIII, 299 (Horner); XXXVIII, 631 (Hope).

45. Hansard, XXXVII, 293-4 (Bonar Law); Ibid., XXXVII, 262 (Chamberlain); Ibid., XXXVII, 88-9 (Cecil); XXXVII, 1736 (Cave).

15. It is an interesting feature of the First Reading debate that only six of the 31 speakers were Liberals, and only three of those were ministers.

47. Hansard, XXXVI, 1484-6 (E. Wason); Ibid., XXXVII, 56-79 (Samuel).

48. Hansard, XXXVII, 265 (T. Lough); Ibid., XXXVII, 123 (Brannan Jones).


50. Hansard, XXXVII, 305-10 (Birrell). The Irish Nationalists followed the ministerial lead and largely avoided the delicate question of Ulster. See e.g. Hansard, XXXVI, 1442-5 (Redmond); Ibid., XXXVII, 97-100 (Dillon).


52. The Times, 11, 12 and 17 April 1912.

53. The Times, 12 and 15 April 1912.

54. The Times, 17-18 April 1912; Nation, 20 April 1912; Hilbert diary, 16 April 1912. For details; see Appendix.

55. Hansard, XXXVIII, 707-12; The Times, 10 May 1912; Nation, 11 May 1912. Elibank had sent out two urgent whips demanding full attendance (The Times, 3 and 9 May 1912).

56. See Appendix. Nine Liberals were absent, but five of these were paired.

57. Nation, 11 May 1912.
Hansard, XXXVI, 1440-43 (Carson, interrupted by Redmond). The only other
brief reference were made by Hugh Cecil and Walter Guinness (Hansard,
XXXVII, 88-9, 126), Cecil commenting that separate treatment of Ulster
would at least be slightly more feasible than the existing bill.

The Times, 22 April 1912.

Hansard, XXXVII, 1705-12 (Churchill).

See e.g. Hansard, XXXVII, 1753 (Captain Craig); ibid., XXXVII, 1772
(Amery); ibid., XXXVII, 1881 (Sir Robert Finlay).

Hansard, XXXVII, 2055-59 (Balfour).

Hansard, XXXVII, 2084-85 (Grey).

See e.g. Hansard, XXXVII, 2095 (Lord Charles Beresford).

Hansard, XXXVIII, 73-87 (Isaacs). Isaacs asked specifically: 'Does the
Ulster minority claim the right to prevent Home Rule for the rest of Ireland?'
For the interpretation of Isaacs' speech, see e.g. British Weekly, 9 May 1912;
The Times, 19 June 1912; D. V. Pirie (Hansard, XXXIX, 784).

Hansard, XXXVIII, 279 (Samuel); ibid., XXXVII, 1897-1908 (Seely); ibid.,
XXXVIII, 612-24 (F. W. Russell); ibid., XXXVIII, 434-51 (Birrell); ibid.,
XXXVIII, 693-700 (Asquith).

See e.g. The Times, 3 and 9 May 1912.

Hansard, XXXIX, 788-9 (Long). See also ibid., XXXIX, 1066 (Carson); ibid.,
XXXIX, 1542-3 (J. H. Campbell).

Hansard, XXXVIII, 960 (B. Law).


Fitzroy, Memoirs, II, 484-5 (4 May 1912).

See P. F. Clarke, Lancashire and the New Liberalism (Cambridge, 1971),
pp. 278, 293-5, 303-7, and passim, for Kemp's background and electoral
importance to the Liberals.

Ibid., pp. 294-5.

See e.g. Asquith to Ellbank, 30 Dec. 1911, Ellbank Papers, N. L. S. MS. 8802,
fo. 362 (Asquith thought it better that Kemp should abstain on the Home Rule
bill, than that the 1912 session should open with the damaging loss of his seat).
Pencilled draft of memorandum, N.D. [c. March-April 1912], enclosed with Kemp's letter to Asquith, Manchester Guardian Papers, transcripts kindly lent by Dr. P.F. Clarke; Elibank to Kemp, 7 Feb. 1912, ibid.

C. P. Scott to Elibank, 2 March 1912, Manchester Guardian Papers, Clarke transcripts; Kemp to Asquith, 13 March 1912, ibid.; Eva Peate (Kemp's secretary) to Scott, 26 April 1912, ibid.; Scott to Elibank, 2 March 1912, quoted by Clarke, New Liberalism, p. 303.

Elibank to Scott, 1 March 1912, quoted by Clarke, New Liberalism, p. 363.

Hansard, XXXVIII, 644-50 (Kemp).

The Times merely noted Kemp's speech and abstention, with the comment that they would cause no surprise to his constituents, who would not want to demand his resignation on account of them (The Times, 11 May 1912). The Times did not mention the rumours of Kemp's voluntary resignation until 19 June 1912.

See e.g. Sir Albert Spicer's speech, following Kemp's, expressing deep regret at Kemp's decision, but acknowledging that it was the result of deep conviction and Liberals could not blame him (Hansard, XXXVIII, 650).

Asquith to Kemp, 14 May 1912, quoted by Clarke, New Liberalism, p. 304.

The Nation (10 Aug. 1912) commented that the only significant factors in the N.W. Manchester defeat were free trade and insurance; Home Rule was not mentioned.

Hansard, LVIII, 246-50 (debate on Unionist amendment to Address, 11 Feb. 1914).

The swing from Liberalism to Unionism in Devon and Cornwall between 1885 and 1892 had been twice as great as the average for Britain as a whole. When Home Rule again became a prominent issue in the two 1910 elections, the south-west once more showed a definite swing to the Unionists between the two elections, whereas there was little change in the country as a whole (H. Pelling, Social Geography of British Elections 1885-1910, 1967, pp. 162-3). In the December 1910 election, the Liberals lost several seats in the south-west, including Bodmin (Neil Biewett, The Peers, the Parties and the People. General Elections of 1910, 1972, pp. 198, 411). The Westminster Gazette, 20 Dec. 1910, and the Unionist Western Morning News, attributed the Conservative gains in Cornwall and Devon to the sensitivity of the south-west on the Home Rule issue.

This seems a more convincing interpretation than Henry Pelling's suggestion that it was a reaction to the strategic and maritime dangers of the proximity of an alien power (Pelling, Social Geography, p. 163). There were few Irish immigrants in the south-west, so it was certainly not caused by a direct prejudice against the Irish.
See Pelling, Social Geography, pp. 163 and 173-4. I am indebted to Dr. David Bebbington of Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge, for a most helpful discussion on nonconformity in the south-west.

See H.C.G. Matthew, The Liberal Imperialists (Oxford, 1973), pp. 275, 300. Sir Robert Perks, the prominent lay leader of Wesleyan Methodism, was also a leading Liberal Imperialist organizer, and a supporter of Lord Rosebery. He followed Rosebery's line on Ireland, opposed the 'progressive' social reforms and finally broke with the Liberal party over the 1909 budget (see Blewett, General Elections of 1910, p. 347). Perks shared many of the views of his friend, Sir Clifford Cory, and was responsible for securing Cory's entry to parliament in 1906.

Nation, 20 April, 11 May 1912.

Only nine of the original twenty were still members of the 1910-14 parliament. The remaining eight were: E. Beauchamp, A.C.T. Beck, Munro-Ferguson, Cathcart Wason, J.W. Wilson, A. Corbett, E.J. Soares and J.C. Wedgwood. The first five probably voted as they did out of enthusiasm for Home Rule all round or Scottish Home Rule. Soares' motives in doubt corresponded fairly closely with Cory's own, for he was a firm nonconformist from Devon, who resigned in May 1911, and so took no part in the Home Rule debates.

Daily Express, 22 April 1912. An enterprising Unionist wrote to Bonar Law, suggesting that the Unionist party should utilize their splendid opportunity by approaching Cory with the offer to support him for re-election as an anti-Home Ruler. (M.D. Lines to Law, 22 April 1912, B.L.P. 26/2/4/1.)

Agar-Robartes stood as Liberal League candidate for Bodmin in January 1906, but was later unseated for 'treating' as a result of over-spending. He retained the St. Austell seat in a February 1908 by-election, and held it in both 1910 elections.

Agar-Robartes' papers were probably destroyed by his twin sister before her death in 1909, but I am grateful to his sister-in-law, Lady Clifden, for helping in confirming these points. Agar-Robartes used to 'drive the late Lord Rosebery out every night as Lord R. had bad insomnia. They were such friends that we believe Thomas would have been interested in all the opinions Lord R. held!' (Lady Clifden to P. Jalland, 1 Nov. 1978, writing also on behalf of her sick husband). Mrs. Lucy Maserman made similar remarks (interview, 3 Feb. 1974). Michael Trevick, secretary of the Devon and Cornwall National Trust Committee, added that Rosebery planted a copper beech at the Clifden home in Bodmin, and it 'has done much better than one planted some years earlier by Gladstone!' (M. Trevick to P. Jalland, 7 Dec. 1973).
Soon after Agar-Robartes entered the Commons for the first time in 1908, Munro-Ferguson suggested to Rosebery that Agar-Robartes be asked to move an amendment to Redmond's Home Rule resolution, affirming the limited principle of the 1907 Council bill against full Home Rule (14 Feb. 1908, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S. MS. 1002v. fo. 36). Agar-Robartes also abstained in the debate on a unionist anti-Home Rule motion in April 1911 (Nation, 29 April 1911).

Hansard, XXXVII, 2149-50 (Agar-Robartes). Mrs. Masterman confirmed that 'Home Rule bored him stiff!' and that he wished to dispose of this Gladstonian inheritance as fast as possible (Interview; 3 Feb. 1974).

Hansard, XXXVII, 2149-53 (Agar-Robartes).

Nation, 4 May 1912; The Times, 3 May 1912.

Western Daily Mercury, 3 May 1912. A subsequent issue claimed that Cornwall's hostility to Home Rule had been exaggerated, and expressed the hope that appeals to nonconformist feeling in Devon and Cornwall were losing their force (ibid., 8 June 1912).

The Times, 22 April 1912.

Hansard, CLXXXVII, 239-43. Soares resigned in May 1911, so his reactions to the 1912 bill are not known.

Only two out of the ten seats for Devonshire and Devonport were held by Liberals. Lambert held Devon north from 1891, and Soares was replaced in May 1911 by Sir Godfrey Baring, another Liberal. According to Pelling, Social Geography, p. 171, the north Devon farmers were inclined to be Liberal.

Western Daily Mercury, 1 May 1911. As a prudent junior minister, Lambert voted with the government on all the major Home Rule divisions.

39 out of the 119 Liberals who were present or voted against the main Home Rule divisions of 1912 were nonconformists (107 Liberal nonconformists had been returned in Dec. 1910 - S. Koss, Nonconformity in Modern British Politics, 1975, p. 231). Of these 39, 15 represented northern constituencies, including 8 from Yorkshire; 8 were Welsh members; 5 Scottish, 4 from the south-west, and 2 from elsewhere (See table).
167. See K. Morgan, *David Lloyd George: Welsh Radical as World Statesman* (Cardiff, 1964), pp. 19, 23; Jenkins, *Asquith*, pp. 274–8; Blake, *Unconven Prime Minister*, p. 125. See also *Pape diary*, II, fo. 28, 16 Aug. 1911, for Lloyd George's insistence that nonconformists wanted a clearly subordinate Home Rule parliament, which would be quite unable to oppress Protestants. Lucy Masterman commented: 'George is not a very keen Home Ruler. He admits it as an abstract proposition, but he has a good deal of the protestant in him. It is rather curious because in general he admits the principle of nationality very cordially' (C. F. G. Masterman, p. 242). Mrs. Masterman expressed similar views when interviewed: 'Lloyd George did not understand Catholicism and he had inherited the usual nonconformist prejudices against them. He once said to me, quite cheerfully, that he considered that Roman Catholicism was a very good religion for children' (interview, 3 Feb. 1974). Other influences affected Lloyd George's attitude to Home Rule equally strongly, however, especially his desire to get the Irish question finally settled, so that issues which he considered more important could be allocated adequate time.

108. The Times, 2 Oct. 1912, signed 'C. R., a Liberal M. P.' Compton-Rickett was the only Liberal member with those initials. He was a member for Yorkshire, and had been chairman of the Congregational Union of England and Wales from 1907–8.

109. The Times, 8 May 1912; *British Weekly*, see e.g. 9 May and 13 June 1912.

110. *Hansard*, XXXVII, 650–51 (Spicer).

111. *Hansard*, XXXVII, 2123–8 (Munro-Ferguson).

112. *Hansard*, XXXVII, 2125–6 (Greenwood); ibid., XXXVIII, 660–5 (John); ibid., XXXVIII, 670–1 (Harcourt).


114. *Hansard*, XXXVII, 1796–99, 1869–72 (E. Shortt); ibid., XXXVII, 1930–38 (A. Mond); XXXVIII, 300–6 (N. Primrose); ibid., XXXVIII, 315–20 (W. Gladstone); ibid., XXXVIII, 480–7 (Atherley-Jones); ibid., XXXVIII, 650–1 (A. Spicer). Neil Primrose declared himself unequivocally in favour of Home Rule and showed no sympathy for the views of his friend Agar-Robartes. Primrose and Mond both failed to vote on the Agar-Robartes' amendment, however, which may suggest that they became less complacent about Ulster's situation in the next month.

115. See e.g. *Nation*, 27 April 1912: '...the obscurantism of Ulster is more than "religious". It is a wild nightmare of hallucinations in which Protestantism, landlordism, Unionism and loyalty have come to be regarded as synonymous terms.'

116. *Nation*, 4 May 1912. The first hint of this proposal was made in the issue of 20 April.
117. Sec.e.g. Nation, 11 May 1912: 'As for the disloyal minority of Ulster, their cause has sensibly receded with the revelation that while they can advance no rational ground of grievance under the Bill, they decline even to set up the plea of separate treatment.'

118. The Times, 6 May 1912. See also Harcourt to H. Gladstone, 13 May 1913, Harcourt Papers, for similar views expressed privately.

119. Burns diary, 14 May 1912, B. L. Add. MS. 46334, fo. 99.

120. Asquith's cabinet letter to king, 1 May 1912, MS. Asquith 6, fos. 135-6; Pease diary, II, fo. 42, 30 April 1912.

121. Asquith's cabinet letter to king, 5 July 1912, MS. Asquith 6, fos. 135-6; Pease diary, II, fo. 46, 5 July 1912.


124. Dangerfield, Strange Death of Liberal England, pp. 93-5. Dangerfield misdated the amendment and his interpretation needs to be treated with caution, but he provides one of the few more detailed accounts of the amendment, apart from Colvin's purely narrative approach. Stewart, Ulster Crisis, pp. 53-7, followed Dangerfield's view that it was a ministerial trap, which placed the Unionists in a dilemma.

125. See e.g. Earl of Mar to Bonar Law, 13 April 1912, suggesting that loyal Ulster should be excluded from the bill as a 'compromise, supposing this outrageous Bill cannot be stopped', which might help to lessen the evils of Home Rule (B. L. P. 26/2/21).

126. Strachey to Middlemore, 1 May 1912, Strachey Papers, S/21/1/7; Strachey to Midleton, 6 May 1912, ibid., S/21/1/9.

127. The Times, 11 May 1912.

128. See Hansard, XXXIX, 1119 (Lloyd George); ibid., XXXIX, 1080 (Redmond); ibid., XXXIX, 824 (Simcoe).

129. Hansard, XXXIX, 1541 (Campbell).

130. The Unionists were so amazed at the government's inept handling of the amendment, that they continued to wonder at intervals whether a trap lay behind it. (see e.g. Hansard, XL, 1169-70, W. Long).
131. Irish Times, 12 June 1912. For detailed analysis of the problem of the southern Unionists, see P. J. Buckland, Irish Unionism: I The Anglo-Irish and the New Ireland, 1885-1922 (Dublin, 1972). For illustrations of southern Unionist fears and requests for support from English Unionists see e.g. Midleton to Balfour, 5 Oct. 1911, Balfour Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 49721, fos. 291-2; Midleton to Strachey, 4 May 1912, Strachey Papers, S/21/1/9; Lady Ninian Crichton-Stuart to Law, 4 Oct. 1912, B.L. P. 27/3/6; J. M. Wilson to Law, 15 Nov. 1912, B.L. P. 27/4/36.

132. Long to Law, 4 June 1912, B.L. P. 26/4/7. See also Long to Law, 7 June 1912, B.L. P. 26/4/12, appealing for a rejection of the amendment on the grounds that 'clever tactics' would disgust their southern Unionist friends. Long also revealed that the Ulster Unionist Council in Belfast had decided to leave the decision as to the party's action on the amendment entirely in the hands of the leaders.

133. Moreton Frewen to Law, 13 June 1912, B.L. P. 26/4/27.

134. See Long's speech (Hansard, XXXIX, 789-90), explaining frankly that he had experienced great difficulty in reaching a decision. He even wrote to The Times in defence of the party's decision to support the amendment (The Times, 20 June 1912).

135. Hansard, XXXIX, 311 (Balfour); The Times, 12 and 14 June 1912. See also Hansard, XXXIX, 794 (Joyson-Hicks).

136. Hansard, XXXIX, 780, 1559. (Bonar Law); see also Hansard, XXXIX, 781 (Lord Hugh Cecil).

137. Hansard, XXXIX, 1089-90 (W. Moore).

138. Hansard, XXXIX, 1562-3 (J. Craig); see also ibid, 1532 (MacCaw), and 1525 (M'Mordie).

139. Hansard, XXXIX, 1731 (Guinness); ibid., 1115-6 (Charles Craig); ibid., 1562 (Captain James Craig).

140. The southern Unionists had no direct representation, but the sympathies and interests of Walter Long, Newman, Guinness and J.H. Campbell caused them to act as spokesmen. Although Campbell claimed to be the chief spokesman of the southern Unionists, his sympathies were mainly with their Ulster brethren, and he professed not to see the problems which worried Long, Newman and others (Hansard, XXXIX, 1541).

141. Hansard, XXXIX, 107-10 (Newman); ibid., XXXIX, 1131-2 (Guinness).


143. Ibid., XXXIX, 1068-74. (Carson).

145. John Burns' diary, 13 June 1912, B. L. Add. Ms. 46334, fo. 115.

146. Samuel to H. Gladstone, 22 June 1912, H. Gladstone Papers, B. L. Add. Ms. 45992, fos. 267-72.

147. The only surviving comment from the Liberal side on the debate itself appear to be those of Sir Courtenay Ilbert, who merely noted that 'an important debate arose' over Agar-Robartes' amendment, which was supported by some Unionists on the avowed ground that it would kill the bill (Ilbert diary, 11 June 1912).

148. Hansard, XXXIX, 771-4 (Agar-Robartes). For Asquith's argument, see e.g. Hansard, XXXIX, 786.

149. Hansard, XXXIX, 785 (Fiske).

150. Ibid., XXXIX, 781 (Monro-Ferguson).


152. Hansard, XXXIX, 808-9 (Chapple); Ibid., XXXIX, 1169-70 (E. Smith); Ibid., XXXIX, 830-801 (Morton).

153. Ibid., XXXIX, 791-2 (Jardine).

154. Ibid., XXXIX, 777 (Birrell); XXXIX, 806 (Hayes-Fisher); XXXIX, 1552 (Craig); XXXIX, 1099 (Lough).

155. See e.g. Hayes-Fisher's comments on Cowan's Protestantism (Hansard, XXXIX, 807); he added that many Liberals in their hearts feared Protestant persecution and supported the amendment along with Cowan.

156. Nation, 15 June 1912. The Westminster Gazette, 19 June 1912, listed the names of those Liberals who voted against the amendment, but avoided comment.

157. Western Daily Mercury, 12 June 1912.

158. The Times, 12 and 14 June 1912.

159. The Liberals and their allies totalled 392 in June 1912 - a figure composed of 266 Liberals, 42 Labour, and 84 Irish Nationalists. The Unionists numbered 278. According to the Westminster Gazette, 21 Aug. 1912, the average government majority in all divisions in the 1912 session was 106-2.

160. Chapple and Morton voted with the government, and Jardine abstained, as promised in their speeches.
June 1912. Sixteen Labour members failed to vote, whereas Labour generally supported their Liberal allies in full force over Home Rule. Only 2 Labour members failed to vote on Second Reading, for instance. Admittedly, then, Labour support on this amendment fell far short of its usual high figure, but these Labour defections were probably caused by grievances against the Liberals on issues other than Home Rule (see e.g., The Times, 22 June 1912).

The Times, 19 June 1912, gave the number of pairs but no detailed list of names. Western Daily Mercury, 19 June 1912, asserted that several Liberal and Labour members, who were unavoidably absent, had been unable to obtain pairs.

The Times, 19 June 1912.

See Appendix for details. These results are confirmed if abstentions on the Agar-Robartes amendment are considered alone, though these figures are less significant because 23 paired members cannot be identified and excluded. Out of the 48 Liberals who either failed to vote on the Agar-Robartes amendment or voted with the Opposition; 11 were Scottish, 5 Welsh, 14 nonconformists, and 7 federalists.

Observer, 23 June 1912; The Times, 19 June 1912; Hansard, XL, 1082-3 (H. Cecil).

The Times, 20 June 1912.

The Times, 14 June 1912.

Hansard, XIX, 774-7. (Birrell); XXXV, 777 (Law); XXXVI, 781-4 (H. Cecil).

Hansard, XXXIX, 735-7 (Asquith).

The Times, 14 June 1912; Hansard, XXXIX, 787-8 (Long).

Hansard, XXXIX, 817-24 (Simon); The Times, 14 June 1912; Hansard, XXXIX, 1145 (Sam’rson).

Hansard, XXXIX, 1055, 1074 (Carson); ibid., 1804 (E. E. Smith).

Hansard, XXXIX, 523-4 (Simon).

Hansard, XXXIX, 1080-82, 1085 (Redmond).

Hansard, XXXIX, 1096 (Loth); XXXIX, 1171 (Adkins); XXXIX, 1517-15 (Buckmaster). Redmond also gave the Liberal press a line to take on the debate; see e.g. Western Daily Mercury, 18 June 1912, and Daily News, 14 June 1912.


172. Hansard, XXXIX, 1554-5 (Birrell).

173. Hansard, XXXIX, 1085-7 (Redmond); ibid., XXXIX, 1513-14 (O'Brien).

174. Hansard, XXXIX, 1098, 1102 (Lough); XXXIX, 1558 (Birrell); XXXIX, 1131-43 (Birrell); XXXIX, 1150 (Crawshay-Williams); XXXIX, 1523 (Buckmaster); XXXIX, 1120-21 (Lloyd George).

175. Ibid., XXXIX, 1124-7 (Lloyd George). Redmond naturally denied that it was possible to find a logical boundary line (ibid., 1082-5).

176. Ibid., XXXIX, 1096-1102 (Lough); XXXIX, 1552-3 (Birrell).

178. Hansard, XXXIX, 1121 (Lloyd George). Carson's words were: 'I myself would certainly never agree to leave out Tyrone or Fermanagh which, I believe, come essentially under every principle that applies to the counties mentioned in the Amendment' (XXXIX, 1068). Craig stated that the Ulster Unionists were treating this as a question affecting the whole of Ulster and not just the four counties (XXXIX, 1115).

179. Hansard, XXXIX, 1553 (Birrell); 1068 (Carson).

180. Hansard, XXXIX, 781-2 (H. Cecil); XXXIX, 788-90 (Long); XXXIX, 796-8 (Winterton).

181. Hansard, XXXIX, 717 (Asquith); XXXIX, 1128 (Lloyd George); XXXIX, 1087-8 (Redmond); XXXIX, 1557 (Birrell).


183. See e.g. Law's requests for information and subsequent charges against the government (Hansard, XXXIX, 779, 1559). The ministry's silence was finally broken only by highly unsatisfactory statements from Asquith and Birrell on 2-3 July, denying that Churchill and Grey disagreed with the cabinet on Ulster. (Hansard, XL, 1073, Birrell; XL, 1176-8, Asquith.)

184. Hansard, XXXIX, 1507 (F.E. Smith); XL, 1085 (Carson); XL, 1033 (Campbell). See also ibid., XL, 1169-70 (Long). Asquith was finally induced to explain weakly that 'both of my right hon. Friends are seriously engaged in their arduous administrative duties——' (Hansard, XL, 1176).

185. Hansard, XXXIX, 804-5 (Cowan).

186. Hansard, XXXIX, 784; XL, 1078-9 (Pirie). He mentioned that he had put forward an amendment to the Agar-Robartes' motion, proposing that after the Home Rule bill passed, Ulster should be given the right to declare whether to stand in or out of the bill.
162. Hansard, XXXIX, 785-6; XL, 1177-8 (Asquith).

163. C.R. Irish Ind. Papers, 8 May 1912, experienced the surprise and perplexity of the Nationalists at the 'amazing silence' of the men they expected to be 'the most active and zealous champions' of the Nationalist cause in the Home Rule debates. Lloyd George took no active part in parliament or on the platform in the 1912 Home Rule campaign, except for his speech on the Agar-Robartes' amendment, and a few short speeches on the financial clauses in Committee.

164. Hansard, XXXIX, 1119 (Lloyd George).

165. Ibid., XXXIX, 1557-8 (Birrell).

166. Ibid., XXXIX, 1119-28 (Lloyd George).

167. See e.g. Hansard, XXXIX, 1542-3; XI, 1033-4 (J.H. Campbell); XI, 1085 (Carson); XXXIX, 1559 (Law).


169. The Times, 19 June 1912. Even the Nation noted that a section of the cabinet might have been willing to allow the four Ulster counties to contract out of Home Rule after a fair trial (Nation, 22 June 1912).

170. L.S. Amery and J.L. Garvin were particularly incensed at the government's partial recovery and their refusal to face 'reality' over Ulster. Garvin urged in the Observer on 16 June that the Unionists should stop all business in the House by a disciplined storm', to break the apathy of impotent debate. Amery encouraged Bosanquet to 'really try & make things uncomfortable for these rotters now', by prolonging discussion for about ten days, until numerous Unionist protestors had been removed and the whole party suspended. (L.S. Amery to B. Law, 16 June 1912, BLP, 26/4/25.)

201. See e.g. Hansard, XXXIX, 781-3 (Hugh Cecil).

202. See e.g. Ibid., XXXIX, 798 (Wentton).

203. Hansard, XI, 1050 (Landale).

204. Ibid., XI, 1065 (Charles Craig). See also XI, 1081-4 (Hugh Cecil).


206. Hansard, XXXIX, 1513 (P.E. Smith); XXXIX, 1559-60 (Law).

207. Hansard, XXXIX, 1066-7 (Carson); XXXIX, 1117-18 (C. Craig).
CHAPTER IV

THE FIRST PARLIAMENTARY CIRCUIT CONCLUDED,

JULY 1912 – JANUARY 1913

After the Agar-Robartes' debate, the government still had six months in which to heed the warnings they were no longer able to ignore. On 19 June 1912, The Times remarked that the government should not be deceived by their unimposing majority into considering that the Ulster question was now settled, or that adroit parliamentary tactics would enable them to evade the problem for much longer. They either had to face it and solve it, or confess the bill would not work. However, both parties took advantage of the parliamentary recess, lasting from 3 August to 1st October, to stimulate popular support, rather than to reassess their respective positions. The situation was thereby allowed to harden, and feelings on both sides were even more inflamed when the Committee stage was resumed in October.

THE PUBLIC DEBATE. JULY-OCTOBER 1912:

ASQUITH, BONAR LAW AND CHURCHILL:

Asquith took the initiative with a visit to Dublin on 19 – 20 July 1912 – the first British prime minister to go there since the Union. He attempted to stir up enthusiasm in the south to rival the hostility in the north. Asquith was given an enthusiastic welcome at the Theatre Royal, where he declared that Unionist opposition to Home Rule was 'purely destructive in its objects', anarchic and chaotic in its methods. He ridiculed the behaviour of the Opposition during the Agar-Robartes' debate:

The Unionist Party ... voted only the other day – with many heart-searchings, with many haltings and flounderings of logic and apologies – for the selection and segregation of four particular counties as the mainstay and stronghold of the opposition of the minority. Was there ever a more contemptible figure cut by the adherents of a great principle? ... the rest of Ulster, and the poor scattered minority throughout the other three Provinces, were to be thrown to the wolves. Of course, I need not tell you there was no sincerity in this ... It was a mere theatrical, strategical manoeuvre which took in nobody ...
Ascholin informed his audience that the mere suspicion of future oppression was an utterly trivial justification for insurrection to civil war, and that he was not in the least embarrassed by Unionist questions so to his hypothetical intentions: 'I tell you quite frankly I do not believe in the prospect of civil war.' In John Dillon's view, the prime minister's visit was 'an unexpectedly brilliant success.' The Nationalists had previously distrusted Asquith as a Roseberyite, but were now completely convinced that he was in earnest about Home Rule.

This Dublin speech was hardly calculated to convince the Unionists that the prime minister was taking the Ulster problem any more seriously than he had on 11 April. Accordingly, Asquith's challenge was taken up all the more forcefully at an impressive Unionist demonstration of around 13,000 people at Blenheim on 27 July. Bonar Law, Carson and P.E. Smith were at their most extreme, giving 'full marching orders to lawlessness in Ulster, in terms which will be held to condone any kind of physical outrage.' Bonar Law described the government as 'a revolutionary committee which has seized by fraud upon despotic power' - a somewhat unusual description of a cabinet which included Asquith, Grey, Morley, and Birrell. The Unionist leader's more menacing remarks haunted him for the next two years. He declared that the government must take the consequences of their flat refusal to consider separate treatment for Ulster:

--- if an attempt were made without the clearly expressed will of the people of this country, and as part of a corrupt Parliamentary bargain, to deprive these men of their birthright, they would be justified in resisting by all means in their power, including force --- if the attempt be made under present conditions I can imagine no length of resistance to which Ulster will go in which I shall not be ready to support them. ---

The Liberals and Nationalists claimed that these inflammatory Blenheim speeches helped to provoke the serious outbreak of violence and intimidation in the Belfast shipyards late in July. Bonar Law denied this charge in the Commons. He protested that he had refrained from giving full official support to Ulster's resistance movement, until it was clear that the government's only policy would be coercion. Asquith replied that he could find 'no parallel in the language of any responsible statesman' for Law's Blenheim threats, which constituted 'a declaration of war against constitutional Government.' Bonar Law's behaviour in 1912 is certainly
The strongest reaction to the Blenheim threats came from Churchill. His initial response was an attempt to restrain the passions of Ulster, by emphasising the dangerous consequences of Unionist extremism. On 19 August he told J.L. Garvin that he was shocked at the Unionist threats of violence, which were the more inexcusable since one contemplated the application of force to Ulster.

Churchill's views were made public two days later, when The Times printed his letter to Sir George Ritchie, president of the Dundee Liberal Association. Churchill attempted to dampen the rising tide of Ulster's passion by pointing out the results of the Blenheim policy of 'anarchy'. He charged that the Blenheim doctrine put an end to constitutional government, and justified the patience of any aggrieved faction, on the grounds that a government majority had been unfairly acquired. The consequences could be fatal in the empire, and equally disruptive among the millions of urban poor at home. It was incredible that Bonar Law should inflame this 'morbid hysterical spirit', especially as he would be very shocked if 'all this melodramatic stuff suddenly exploded into real bombs and cannon. Churchill declared that such exhibitions would not seduce the government into weakness or violence, and the Unionists would not gain power until Law divested himself of doctrine of anarchy.

Bonar Law replied in a letter to the Morning Post, claiming that civil war was unlikely in practice because the government's 'paper dictatorship' would fail to pieces when it was resisted. However, 'there would have been a real danger of civil war if the Government had been allowed to move blindly towards the precipice without a clear warning of the dangers in front of them'. Churchill answered through The Times, on 15 August, that Bonar Law was now attempting to represent his threats of civil war merely as solemn warnings which were not intended to be translated into action. Churchill was not prepared to accept this explanation that it was all bluff. 'Was it necessary for the sake of warning the Government, to express approbation of the organised drilling and armament of a province?' Bonar Law could not escape his responsibility by contending that 'the only way to avert civil war was to organise it.'

Reactions to this exchange of views were interesting. Carson wrote to the Belfast Newsletter, thanking Churchill for once again helping to focus public opinion on the 'stern realities' of the situation in Ulster. Indeed, Churchill's
regarded it as the most forceful, that he considered the Ulster situation far more serious than Asquith had allowed in his recent Dublin speech. The prime minister refused to become excited by the uproar, commenting blandly that "for Winston there would be nothing in the newspapers." This was the kind of laconic attitude which caused Sir Courtney Alber to complain that "Asquith maintains his supremacy but is perhaps apt to take things too easily." The chief secretary made a characteristically slipshod remark, which disguised his real concern:

Fortunately Civil War in Belfast has been most politely postponed by request of Bonar Law and his troops of Braces, so for the present we may sleep in our beds, although mine is guarded every night by Scotland Yard.

However, the Blenheim speeches undoubtedly confirmed Churchills personal view that Ulster should be excluded from the Home Rule bill, to avert the tragic consequences he feared and condemned. He was no doubt frustrated at being muzzled during the Agar-Robartes' debate, and Lloyd George presumably had misgivings about his own ambiguous contribution. Both ministers were required by constitutional propriety to suppress their private views, but in this respect Churchill was both less reliable and less capable than the chancellor. The Blenheim demonstration encouraged Churchill to put pressure on his colleagues and the Nationalists about Ulster exclusion, at first by private manoeuvres, but later by a public bombshell at Dundee.

On 21 August 1912, the First Lord sent a significant letter to Lloyd George, revealing that Churchills views on the Ulster question had not altered in the least since the February cabinet. The initial Unionist interpretation of his Second Reading speech had been correct:

The time has come when action about Ulster must be settled. We ought to give any Irish county the option of remaining at Westminster for a period of 5 or 10 yrs, or some variant of this. This ought to be settled one way or the other with the Irish before Parli meets, & announced at the very beginning of the session, prior to or simultaneous with the guillotine motion. Time has in no way weakened the force of the arguments you used in January [sic], & I am prepared to support you in pressing them --

Churchill evidently assumed that Lloyd George's views had not changed since February, despite his speech on the Agar-Robartes' amendment. This was correct. Lloyd George
was on holiday in Marienbad at the time, and no record survives of his reply; but he consulted Mark Lockwood, a Unionist M.P., that it believed the Ulster movement was both real and deep. Lloyd George blamed the Nationalists for the government's inability to exclude Ulster: 'We want to leave Ulster out, but they won't have it - it would put you fellows in a hole for a certainty, but they are too much for us ---',

Churchill had suggested in his letter to Lloyd George that Ulster exclusion ought to be settled with the Irish during the recess. Probably fairly certain of Lloyd George's support, Churchill wrote next to Redmond. He suggested giving the Protestant counties of Ulster the option of a moratorium of several years before joining the Irish parliament. Such an offer should soon be made, and it would come much better from the Nationalists than from the government. Presumably this was intended to begin applying pressure to the Irish leaders, and to prepare the ground for the Dundee revelations, rather than as a proposal Redmond might be expected to accept.

Churchill explained his private views on Ulster more fully on 8 September, in another letter to Sir George Ritchie. Churchill believed that Home Rule could be carried 'so long as the case of those three or four counties is met in some way or another', by delaying the operation of the Act in those areas. Once the Irish parliament was established, the misgivings of the Orangemen would gradually be overcome:

Of course it is possible and even probable that if this offer were made to them in all frankness and sincerity it would be refused. Even if that were the case I do not think that it is an argument against making the offer ---

There are a good many misgivings felt at their proceedings in all but the most violent sections of the Tory Party, and I am distinctly of opinion that their refusal of such an offer would tend very greatly to isolate them and show very clearly to the English electorate what a 'dog in the manger' policy they were pursuing.

Churchill believed the Unionists had a strong case, unless it could be shown that their attitude was purely obstructive, as their refusal would do.

On 12 September, Churchill dropped his bombshell in a major speech at Dundee, for which his colleagues were totally unprepared. He had discouraged Redmond from appearing with him, presumably to give himself more freedom and to avoid embarrassment. Churchill emphasised that he spoke only for himself and not for the government; that he was only speaking in a tentative and speculative
...because he was anxious that attention should be drawn to the subject. The United Kingdom devolution and this was Churchill's first major reversion to a federal scheme he had enthused about in 1911. Churchill began by repeating the official policy, that Irish Home Rule was a vital preliminary step to the wider internal organisation of the United Kingdom. But he considerably stretched the ministerial line, when he turned to the problem of an English parliament. Since the might easily rival the Imperial parliament, England would have to be divided.

I am not in the least disturbed by the prospect of seeing erected in this country 10 or 12 separate legislative bodies for discharging the functions entrusted to them by the Imperial Parliament.

Churchill suggested that separate legislatures might be granted to areas like Lancashire, Yorkshire, the Midlands and greater London. Despite the scepticism of other politicians, Churchill anticipated 'no difficulty in setting up a thoroughly workable federal system'.

Churchill's colleagues were amazed and perplexed. They were only too familiar with his proposals, since they summarised the suggestions in his memoranda of February and March 1911, which the cabinet committee had rejected. But it was one thing for Churchill to present his devolution scheme to the cabinet before the Home Rule bill was even drafted. It was quite another to propose it publicly nearly two years later, without consulting his colleagues. Not only had they long since abandoned the idea for all practical purposes, but they recognised its significant implications in the context of the 1912 Ulster controversy.

The Nation remarked that Churchill had started 'a very lively hare, which will give a brisk run for the critics'. Asquith complained that he stayed with Churchill in Scotland immediately before the speech; but he was given no prior warning that his First Lord intended to have a trial run at Dundee with his favourite scheme for creating a dodecarchy in England.' Leuliett Harcourt expressed the irritation of several ministers in a letter to Grey: 'What the deuce is Winston up to with his provincial parliaments? He seems to be as much laughed at by the Liberal as by the Tory press.' The chief secretary was anxious, depressed, and thoroughly irritated by Churchill's antics, coming after a bad harvest and cattle disease in Ireland. 'Things my way are going as badly as they well can.' WC's Heptarchical
... has covered us with ridicule in Ireland... - Herbert Samuel merely
remarked that "Winston has been carrying the idea to strange lengths", while Walter
Brenngh took the cynical view that Churchill's actions were leading up to a
combination with F. E. Smith. Hebert commented that Churchill's proposals had
found no welcome among Liberals and had given "many handles" to the Opposition.

Most significantly, Churchill had undermined the government's position
on Ulster: if a senior minister could seriously propose ten or twelve parliaments for
England, then surely Ireland might be allowed two. J. A. Fennell was anxious about
Churchill's 'Heptarchy Bill', because the form of it gives away the case of Ulster.

An anonymous contributor to the Quarterly Review underlined this point:

---If it is right that Yorkshire and Lancashire should
have separate 'parliaments', because, forsooth, their
interests differ so widely, then, a fortiori, Ulster
should have a government separate from the rest of
Ireland... Churchill would hardly have thrown out,
in so apparently casual a way, these curious suggestions,
had he not begun to have an inkling that, after all, it
might be safer to leave Ulster out of his Bill.

Bonar Law declared that Churchill's amazing speech had virtually offered Ulster
separate treatment, and it was certainly widely interpreted as the thin edge of the
wedge.

Meanwhile, the Blenheim rally was followed up by impressive Unionist
celebrations surrounding the signing of the Ulster 'Covenant', between 19-28
September. Nearly half a million Irish people were alleged to have signed the
'solemn Covenant', pledging themselves to use all necessary means to defeat the
conspiracy to establish Home Rule. Bonar Law sent a message assuring the Ulster
people that they could rely on the support of the whole British Unionist party, while
Balfour and Lansdowne sent messages of sympathy. Carson's speeches reiterated his
declarations in the House. Separate treatment for Ulster was not their policy, and they
merely supported Ulster exclusion because it would make Home Rule impossible.

Churchill's efforts combined with the Ulster Covenant celebrations to
alter the attitude of the Liberal press to some extent. The Nation was torn between
its former position of ridicule, and a growing recognition that the comedy might turn
to tragedy. On 'Ulster Day', 28 September, the Nation tried to put on a brave face:
The comedy of the Orange Rebellion has this week broadened down into farce.

"King" Carson has become "King" Carson, and his tour a kind of burlesque of a politician's progress. But a new note had also been creeping into the commentaries.

Until August, the Nation still denied the possibility of a 'rebellion', but did allow that there would undoubtedly be rioting, bloodshed and probably a loss of life. On 21 September, Massingham's Action appeared to be admitting that 'a separate Government of the national kind for half Ulster' was a practical possibility, though it added a demand that the Unionist leaders be prosecuted for treason-felony.

H.W. Massingham's growing uneasiness was also displayed in the Daily News and Leader. He declared that politicians must cure the Ulster disease, this vulgar cavalcade of arrogance and bad feeling, but the government should be conciliatory to Ulster sentiment. He admitted that 'there may still be something fairly due to Ulster in the way of a formal appeal to the British electorate', since he conceded the Unionist point that Home Rule was insufficiently examined in the 1910 elections. Consequently, the editor of the Unionist Morning Post, H.A. Gwynne, remarked to Honar Law that:

---even Massingham (the Radical Slew) seems to have checked up the sponges. I don't know whether I am ultra-optimistic but I see signs of disorder and even panic in the ranks of the enemy.

The Westminster Gazette was also very worried, announcing that the imperial parliament could not allow such a flat declaration of rebellion to end all hope of orderly government. Gwynne reported gleefully to Law: '---the attitude you and the Ulster men have taken up has altogether shaken the Govt. --- vide the Westminster [sic].'

A particularly perceptive review of the situation at the end of the parliamentary recess was provided by an anonymous contributor to the Unionist Quarterly Review, in October 1912. The author was a Unionist opponent of Home Rule, who believed the Ulster movement was deadly serious. He was also a realist, who recognised the dilemma facing both sides if they maintained the existing irreconcilable positions. The development of the Ulster movement had rudely shaken the 'vain imaginings' of the Liberals that Ulster was a 'negligible quantity', whose hostility could be ignored. The author emphasised the change in ministerialist attitudes, but warned the Opposition against interpreting this growing uneasiness as evidence that
the government was doomed. Despite some desertions and manifestations of
independence, there was as yet no sign of anything like widespread dissatisfaction.

The government was, therefore, likely to carry the Home Rule bill in 1914. Force
would be needed to coerce Protestant Ulster, and the writer believed full-scale
rebellion was a distinct possibility. Yet political leaders on both sides were
sensing their way to this inevitable calamity - the government because they
regarded the threat of rebellion as bluff or attempted intimidation; the Opposition
because they hoped to defeat both the Home Rule bill and the ministry before the last
fateful step became necessary. The writer appealed to the party leaders to set aside
their party feuds and their blindness, and to avert impending tragedy through
conciliation and compromise: - the four counties, at least, should be omitted from
the operation of the Bill. He also pointed out that the Nationalists had already accepted
provisions in the Home Rule bill which they found profoundly disturbing, and they
could be induced to acquiesce in further vital concessions:

--- If the Government is dependent on them, they are
equally dependent on the Government. They have a
better chance now of attaining their supreme object
than they ever had before, and they are not likely to
throw it away --- So long as Ministers keep the Home
Rule flag flying, it is not from the Nationalists that
they have any defection to fear. 35

THE PARLIAMENTARY BATTLE RESUMED, OCTOBER-DECEMBER 1912.

However, the spirit of Blenheim and Ulster Day was more in evidence
than the Quarterly writer's conciliatory realism when parliament re-assembled early
in October. The Unionists were spoiling for a fight, and merely biding their time until
an appropriate opportunity arose. The most important immediate business was the
closure resolution, needed to ensure that the Home Rule bill could be forced through
the Commons by January 1913. Seven days had been allowed for the Committee stage,
without closure, before the recess. Asquith proposed to allow twenty-seven additional
days for Committee, seven for Report, and two for Third Reading. A specific time
was allocated for the discussion of particular clauses, and the chairman was given power
to select the amendments he considered most suitable for discussion, and pass over
others. 36 Asquith argued that the bill must be carried in a reasonable time, allowing
adequate opportunity for discussing essential features, but preventing the Opposition
from smothering it with obstructive amendments. The closure resolution was passed on 19 October by 223 to 232, despite extremely strong Unionist protests, and some Radical misgivings. The arrangement worked fairly effectively, for the Home Rule bill went steadily through Committee, while Whitley was judicious in his use of the chairman's power to select amendments.

The Unionists angrily denounced the use of closure as ministerial tyranny, aiming to pass Home Rule without adequate discussion while the constitution was in suspense. Many Liberals had expected serious trouble over the closure resolution, and were justifiably suspicious when that debate was unexpectedly orderly. But the Unionists felt there was little point in challenging the government over important issues like the closure resolution, for which the ministerial whips would have full forces prepared. Instead they proposed to wait until attendance in the division lobby fell off, and the government whips became less watchful. The Opposition reckoned that the government would be hard pressed to maintain its potential majority of around 110 throughout the Committee debates.

The Opposition finally pounced on 11 November, when the division was taken for the Report stage of the Home Rule Finance Resolution. This had already passed its main hearing in Committee by 302 to 181. The Unionists seized the opportunity to express their pent-up fury over the Parliament Act, the government's treatment of Ulster, and the final indignity of the guillotine. It was inevitable that the overloaded time-table would provide opportunities for the Opposition to press for divisions when ministerial ranks were thin. This particular occasion was ideal for their purpose, since the financial clauses were highly technical and very dull.

Members were normally late in returning from the country on Mondays, and most Liberals arrived only in time for the anticipated 7.30 p.m. division, since no one expected an amendment. However, Rosenbaum of the Conservative Central Office had deliberately drawn up a wrecking amendment to be moved by Sir Frederick Banbury. Banbury had given no notice of this amendment, which effectively aimed to abolish the British exchequer's commitment to pay the Irish deficit, and would destroy Samuel's finance scheme.

The manoeuvre was skilfully organised by William Mitchell-Thomson, an Ulster Unionist, who ensured that the Opposition gave up part of their weekends to
The Unionists were summoned by a code telegram urging them to 'Meet me at Marble Arch at four. Susie', and proceeded to pour down to the House in motor cars. They entered by side doors, their presence unsuspected, 'trooped into the House, and swept the field half-an-hour after the commencement of business'. After a very brief debate, during which Samuel rejected the amendment, the Speaker ruled the amendment in order and discussion unexpectedly collapsed. The question was put at 4.15 pm and the government defeated by a majority of 227 to 206.

The defeat was chiefly due to the absence of Liberal and Labour members. Only 131 out of the 264 Liberal members, and 12 of the 41 Labour men, were present for the division. D.V. Pirrie, the dissident Scottish federalist, was the only ministerialist to vote with the Opposition, since he opposed 'anti-federalist' aspects of the finance scheme, as well as the lack of provision for Ulster. Only two cabinet ministers were in the House, and only the Nationalists voted in full strength. The government whips were taken completely by surprise, thereby incurring criticism from members like C.P. Trevelyan, who felt convinced the Unionists had 'some game on'. Percy Wingate, the chief whip, was temporarily absent, while the whips on the door failed to realise the position and put up speakers to continue the debate. A decision was thereby reversed, which four days previously had been upheld in Committee by an overwhelming majority of 121. A scene of wild excitement took place on the Unionist benches when the figures were announced, with members jumping on their seats, waving their hats and their handkerchiefs, and calling loudly for the resignation of ministers.

An emergency meeting of the cabinet, held immediately afterwards, agreed unanimously that the 'accidental adverse decision' afforded no reason for resignation. Instead, they decided to propose a resolution on Wednesday 13 November, rescinding Monday’s vote. Most Liberals believed this decision was justified. The Nation commented that snap divisions were an accepted part of parliamentary warfare, but the prime minister had rightly interpreted the feeling of the House and the country:

There was no question of any cleavage in the Liberal, Labor, or Irish ranks, there was no weakening, no point of difference, no large principle at stake, no volume of sudden indignation against Government action — We cannot, therefore, regard a mere surprise division as a sign of Liberal disaffection or
of any deplorable Liberal slackness. But it would be wise to treat it as a warning symptom. Even a mere trick could not have succeeded if the Parliamentary party had not been overworked. 49

Illustrated in his diary that the ministry might disregard a snap defeat so long as they held together; it would embarrass the government by upsetting their time-table, but would do no serious harm. Charles Trevelyan remarked that it was a serious reverse which would not make the government’s position any easier in the coming months, and will mean stricter attendance than ever for us, when we have righted the ship. A week would be wasted, but government supporters would henceforth attend even more assiduously, and parliamentary bitterness would be increased still further. 50

The Opposition were evidently not entirely sure what the results of their manoeuvre would be, but aimed for the maximum disruption of the government’s Home Rule plans. Despite rumours on 11 November that some ministers favoured resignation, 51 this was never seriously expected. The Opposition’s chief aim was to sabotage the ministry’s guillotine time-table, since business was so tightly arranged that any unforeseen disturbance would dislocate it altogether. 52 They determined to make the most of the government’s embarrassment and waste the maximum parliamentary time while the guillotine time-table was thus placed in abeyance. Consequently, on 13 November, when Asquith moved that the Banbury Amendment be rescinded and the time-table re-established, the Unionists ensured that the House rapidly deteriorated into a state of uproar. This famous scene had been deliberately planned by Opposition leaders at a meeting the previous evening, where they determined to shout down all speakers except Asquith, in view of ‘the unprecedented oppression of the minority’. 53 Even Sir William Anson, the eminent Unionist lawyer, considered the proposed serious outbreak of temper justified, since the Opposition had been tried beyond the limits of human endurance by the government’s intolerable tyranny. 54

When Bonar Law’s motion for adjournment was defeated, the Opposition indulged in a stormy scene, intended to prevent the Speaker putting Asquith’s motion, and to force the adjournment of the House. Robert Ilfracombe and Rufus Isaacs were howled down by the excited Opposition chant of ‘adjourn, adjourn.’ The Speaker suspended the sitting for an hour, in the hope that a brief interlude would calm the tempest, but finally adjourned the House because he felt nothing would be
THE WRONG SOLUTION.

Mr. Asper, "I don't think I like the effect of this. After all, seems only to increase the irritation."
After the adjournment, amidst the opposition cheers, some unionists shouted 'twice' after the disappearing figures of Churchill and Soely, whereupon Churchill waved his handkerchief mischievously in reply. Sir Courtney Libert considered the proceedings particularly disgraceful because the opposition front bench deliberately encouraged the uproar. The nation concluded that the 'noisy and personal violence' had entirely swept away any advantage the opposition might have gained from the snap defeat. However, Libert admitted that the government were also much to blame:

They have been trying to force through an impossible programme by exceptional methods, & have by so doing harassed & irritated many of their friends & infuriated their enemies. They were driving a powerful motor at full speed on very rough ground, & a smash was the almost inevitable result.

The cabinet met twice after the enforced adjournment on 13 November and determined not to submit to threats of renewed disorder. Asquith informed the king that the speaker had declared his refection motion in order, thus allowing the house to decide between the two conflicting votes. The cabinet was unanimous that it must be persisted with, & that the majority cannot be asked to yield to tactics of organized disorder. Meanwhile, the chaos in the house caused james lowther, the speaker, to have second thoughts about his original decision. Lowther wrote twice to asquith on 14 November, threatening to resign unless the prime minister withdrew his abrogation motion. He argued that a reversal of the house's original decision of 11 November was 'an infringement of the rights of the minority', which would destroy parliamentary procedure. Instead, the speaker suggested that some alternative method of reversing banbury's amendment should be found. The cabinet had little choice but to fall in with the speaker's proposal, though they felt they had behaved badly in changing his mind. The house was then adjourned until Monday 18 November. The deadlock was finally resolved by substituting for the original finance resolution a slightly amended text with precisely the same actual effect. This was a far more circuitous method than simply annulling banbury's hostile amendment, since it meant sacrificing several more days to debate the 'new'
resolution. Lord Crowe lamented that 'our beautiful time-table is of course greatly
queer'. Liberals were generally agreed, however, that Asquith had done his
best with a difficult situation, and that the government was 'securely in saddle'
despite the loss of valuable time.

First blood had been drawn. The government was believed to have
scored relatively unscathed, but the Opposition believed real victory had been theirs.
Geoffrey Robinson, the new editor of The Times, congratulated Bonar Law on the 'great
triumph', and St. Loz Streete of the Spectator believed the government would not long
survive this serious blow. Lord Stamfordham even remarked that the Opposition had
saved the Commons from 'a serious attack upon its time honoured liberties'.
Bonar Law himself publicly admitted that he had made no attempt to check the disturbance
because Asquith's original motion would have destroyed the House. The Unionists
believed they were fighting for something much more fundamental than a 'beautiful
time-table'. This apparently petty clash in mid-November illustrated one of the most
consistent and significant features of the Home Rule struggle. Each side genuinely
believed that the other party was using unconstitutional means to gain their respective
ends.

The Unionist leader sent an important letter to Lord Stamfordham, for
the king's information, making it quite clear that this episode was merely the first
skirmish in a prolonged battle. Law warned Stamfordham that the basic position had
not changed even though the government had been forced to abandon their 'intolerable
outrage' against parliamentary democracy. The government was still trying to carry
its Home Rule bill, despite its recent defeat on a 'vital principle' in the House, and
despite the opposition of the people:

—if the Government succeed in carrying out their programme, two results will follow — they will be
bound to coerce Ulster, and that will mean civil
war, and --- they will make the position of the Crown
impossible --- Well, if it is in our power to prevent
it we shall not permit this.

Bonar Law added ominously that events in the House merely indicated what might
happen in the larger arena, when the nation might expect the king to intervene, just
as the Speaker did in the Commons. The Liberals failed to understand that the
Unionists saw the struggle over Banbury's amendment as merely symptomatic of a
far greater battle, which they would fight until their Ulster case was met or the Home Rule bill abandoned.

After the crisis over the snap defeat, the Opposition relentlessly maintained their pressure on the Government’s timetable throughout the Committee stage. They continually hoped for another snap defeat to lower the ministry’s morale, and they were fully alive to the propaganda value of their claim that the Home Rule bill had never even been fully discussed in the Commons. The Nation complained on 7 December that the Tories were refusing to pair, and their whips:

--- regard large majorities in divisions with complete indifference, while Liberals are kept chained to the treadmill. Last week, over ten hours were spent in walking through the lobbies.

By 13 December, the Committee stage of the bill filled 4900 columns of Hansard, though very few amendments of importance were actually passed. 71 John Burns commented that the Home Rule debate was going ‘easily and well’, but members were very tired, the ministry overworked, and the system severely tried. He described proceedings on 11 December: ‘House of Commons at 2.45 and then 30 Divisions till 2 a.m. in the morning. A senseless, useless, shameful waste of flesh and blood’. 72

The bill finally passed the Committee stage on 12 December, amid general weariness, and a marked decline in parliamentary attention and attendance. The enthusiastic ministerial demonstration probably reflected relief that the ordeal was over, as much as pleasure that the bill had survived almost unscathed.

CARSON’S AMENDMENT FOR ULSTER EXCLUSION AND THE THIRD READING DEBATE, JANUARY 1913.

Asquith had a final opportunity to incorporate special treatment for Ulster into the bill at the Report stage during the first week in January 1913. But there was no advance sign that he intended to seize this initiative. The Liberal dissidents and the Ulster Unionists were both determined that the cabinet should be made to face the issue squarely. The first move came from Captain D.V. Pirie, the Scottish federalist whose strong disapproval of his leader’s Ulster policy was now well-known. He placed an amendment on the Order paper in mid-December, proposing that all nine Ulster counties be excluded from the bill until a majority of Ulster’s
representatives at Westminster petitioned the King in favour of inclusion. Pirrie explained later:

It was put down, not with an idea of wrecking the Bill but of saving the Bill and of affording a bridge for the reconciliation of different and conflicting feelings conscientiously held by two sections of the population in Ireland. 73

There was some suggestion that Pirrie might secure Unionist support for his amendment, but from the Opposition point of view, little was to be gained from a repeat performance of the Agar-Robartes' debate. One of the chief arguments used by Asquith to justify rejecting the Agar-Robartes' motion had been the fact that the proposal had not come from the Ulster Unionists themselves. Liberal leaders had challenged the Ulster members to state their own alternative to the proposals in the bill; Birrell complained that 'we have never had any honest, upright, genuine, self-committing proposal of that sort made'. 74 The Unionists had some justification for calling the government's bluff and removing one of their favourite debating points, by taking the initiative from Pirrie.

The Ulster Unionist Council considered the question during Carson's visit to Belfast in December 1912. By mid-December they had decided to put down their own amendment at the Report stage, excluding the entire province of Ulster from the bill, and supported by the whole Unionist party. 75 This amendment was placed on the Order paper on 28 December, in the names of Carson, Sir John Lonsdale, and Captain Craig. As the first formal demand for Ulster exclusion from the Unionist side, the motives behind it require examination. These can be deduced from a variety of sources, including press speculation, the government's accusations, and the reasons advanced by the Ulster Unionists themselves, both at the time the amendment was put down and during the subsequent debate. The Unionists' motives are difficult to determine precisely because they were very mixed. The government naturally interpreted them in the worst light, while the Opposition emphasised their more altruistic aims. The truth was almost certainly a combination of the two, as Churchill was sufficiently realistic to recognise:

--- it might be only a kind of compromise between those who wish for an impossible compromise and those who wish for no compromise at all. These alternatives are not necessarily exclusive. Everyone knows the difficulties of a party. It is not difficult to see how many different
interests and sections [Mr. Bonar Law] has to consider. 76

The aims which inspired the amendment were undoubtedly partially tactical, though probably less so than the government believed. The Opposition had to mention the tactical possibilities to some extent, to reduce the fears of the Unionists in the south and west, who dreaded being abandoned in the Catholic section of a partitioned Ireland. The Dublin correspondent of The Times explained that the southern Unionists were prepared to acquiesce in the amendment, only because they had Carson's solemn assurance that the Ulster Unionists would never desert them:

The amendment is regarded, in fact, as a shrewd and perfectly legitimate piece of tactics. It puts off the Government the responsibility of declaring definitely for civil war in Ulster, and there is no doubt that it will trouble the consciences of many of the Government's Liberal supporters. 77

Sir David Harrel, the former Irish Under-Secretary, doubted whether the southern Unionists were resigned to the amendment even on tactical grounds. So far as he could ascertain, the Unionists outside Ulster had no prior notice of the amendment, and regarded this move by Ulster as a breach of faith. 78 The southern Unionists were naturally alarmed by the Opposition's increasing concentration on the plight of the Ulster Protestants. Liberals tried to exploit these fears, in order to drive a wedge between the different Unionist groups, arguing that the Ulster Unionists were deserting the defenceless southern Protestants in their selfish concern for their own interests. 79

Tactical considerations were also important to the Unionists for reasons other than their rather vain attempt to reassure the southern Protestants. They detested Home Rule whether Ulster was excluded or not. 80 Therefore, they would still like to see the bill abandoned altogether, if possible. So there was some truth in Asquith's accusation that the motion was a wrecking amendment, designed to give Ulster a veto on Home Rule for the rest of Ireland:

--- there is not a single effective or operative Clause in the Bill which, if Ulster were excluded from its operation, would not become practically unworkable and meaningless. The whole fabric falls to the ground at once, as everybody knows.
This argument, however, involved an embarrassing admission that the amendment might actually succeed in destroying the practical machinery of the bill, if accepted. The prime minister also emphasised that the amendment would not reconcile the Ulster Unionists to Home Rule, using this both as proof of their destructive intentions, and a reason for rejecting the motion. 81 This was both naive and unreasonable, since Asquith can hardly have expected the Ulster Unionists to welcome Home Rule under any circumstances, and he did not yet need Unionist agreement to incorporate Ulster exclusion into the bill.

But the Unionists did not primarily move the amendment as a wrecking tactic, for they must have anticipated the government rejection of a nine-county exclusion proposal. Naturally, Carson continued to hope that Home Rule would be abandoned, but as the months passed this had become increasingly unlikely. Obviously, therefore, it was wise to consider the consequences of the likely passage of Home Rule, and to try to make the best of an unwelcome situation. If Ulster could not be used to wreck Home Rule, then at least Ulster herself should not be wrecked by Home Rule. Therefore the motion was chiefly intended to be treated as a discussion of the principle of exclusion.

Such a debate was expected to serve several purposes. The Belfast Newsletter interpreted it as a challenge to the government to declare its hand on Ulster 82 But Carson probably held out little hope that the amendment would induce the ministry to change its official policy at this stage. The reasons advanced by the Irish Unionist members in their letter to Asquith on 28 December, published subsequently in The Times, were probably more important:

As the Report stage will be the last opportunity for raising this question in the House of Commons we think it our duty to ask from the Government a very earnest and deliberate consideration of this proposal having regard to the momentous consequences which in our opinion it involves.

They believe Ulster would be right to resist Home Rule, but they recognised the 'grave mischiefs which are involved even in righteous resistance'. Therefore, it was clearly their duty as the representatives of Ulster to try to avert the evils they anticipated. They asked the prime minister to accept the amendment as the only way to prevent civil war. 83 Carson underlined these points when he introduced the amendment, warning the government that this was positively their last chance to avert
civil war by incorporating the exclusion of Ulster into the bill. Otherwise the ministry must face up to the alternative of employing coercion to force Ulster into Home Rule. The Ulster Unionists also used the amendment to emphasize that the government alone must bear the heavy responsibility for the disastrous consequences, if their motion was rejected.

The cabinet met on 31 December to decide how they would deal with Carson's amendment. The chief secretary had already shown his concern by writing the previous day to ask for Sir David Harrel's advice. The reply must have alarmed Birrell, for Harrel had changed his mind quite sharply since the previous February. He now seriously wondered whether it would not be advisable to give the Ulstermen what they asked for. If they were bluffing, with a reliance upon the difficulties involved in readjusting the provisions of the bill, this could only be ascertained by putting them to the test. If they were honest, the exclusion of Ulster might involve loss of time and some complications, but it would give Home Rule for the rest of Ireland a far better chance of ultimate success. Birrell may have put forward Harrel's advice to the cabinet, but it was overruled.

The prime minister's opinion was again decisive, as in that other critical cabinet meeting of 6 February 1912. Tactical considerations received priority. Jack Pears described the discussion in his diary, noting that the Irish Unionists' letter to Asquith was first read aloud:

'We decided to stick to policy - of no concession now to those who admittedly pursued a hostile attitude to bill, even if concessions could be given - but it was recognized that any now would be fatal to the financial & other proposals of this Bill & we must proceed with it. Churchill & George blew off steam.'

John Burns' diary provides the only other clue to this important discussion: 'Cabinet. Letter re. Ulster: proceed as before despite the doubts and fears of the Dromios. P.M. stiff and solid about it.'

Several points of significance emerge from these two brief diary entries. The prime minister remained 'stiff and solid' in his stubborn determination to maintain his original policy towards Ulster. Moreover, Lloyd George and Churchill, the two 'Dromios', resisted Asquith's decision just as energetically as they had done in February. It had been obvious in the intervening period that Churchill's opposition
to Asquith's policy had not diminished in the least, but Lloyd George had been less voluble about his view. These diary extracts confirm that Lloyd George had never been reconciled to the official Ulster policy, despite his general silence on the subject, and his speech of qualified support on the Agar-Robartes' amendment.

It is also interesting that the only reason given for retaining the original Ulster policy was that concessions at this late stage would be fatal to the major provisions of the bill. This was Asquith's chief argument against the amendment in his speech during the debate, and the objections raised by George Cave and D.V. Pirie would appear justified. Cave pointed out that, if there were indeed grave reasons for excluding Ulster, they should be considered on their merits, and if the effect is to destroy or alter the form of this particular Bill for Heaven's sake withdraw it and bring in another. 89 Considerable re-drafting would obviously have been necessary to allow for Ulster exclusion, but Lloyd George had not considered this an impossibility, in his Agar-Robartes' speech. Moreover, Asquith himself evidently did not find this objection quite so overwhelming when negotiations for an agreed settlement became necessary in 1914. In any case, if he really believed from the start, as he later claimed, that Ulster exclusion might have to be finally conceded, then it was shortsighted to draft a bill which could not accommodate it. 90

It was easy enough to justify the rejection of an amendment demanding the exclusion of the whole province of Ulster. If interpreted literally, the Carson amendment was obviously less reasonable and practicable than that moved by Agar-Robartes, since seven of the nine Ulster counties were either divided in loyalty or strongly Nationalist. 91 Had Asquith been seriously interested in making provision for Ulster at this stage, he could have substituted a far more limited government amendment. The longer he delayed in making concessions over Ulster, the harder it became for him to reverse his original decision. It had always been true that any amendment to exclude part of Ulster would be an admission that the original bill was far from perfect. That admission became increasingly difficult to make as time passed and Liberal leaders publicly committed themselves more and more deeply to the defence of the initial decision. The more the Liberal press and politicians defended Asquith's policy, and denounced the Ulster Unionist challenge, the more humiliating would be an ultimate surrender to Opposition demands. Asquith's pride was involved, as well as his habitual preference for the status quo, which had
Influenced his Ulster policy from the start.

The debate on Carson's amendment on 1 January 1913 covered much well-worn ground, and only a few points deserve mention. The Commons had reassembled on 10 December, and when the timetable for the Report stage was established, Asquith agreed to extend the time allocated to new clauses, to allow a whole day for discussion of Carson's amendment. Out of the sixteen speakers, four were British Unionists, four Ulster Unionists, seven Liberals and one Nationalist. The eight Unionists maintained a high standard, but the Liberal contributors were less impressive. The only important statements of the ministerial position were made by Asquith and Churchill, ably supported by Redmond. The remaining five Liberal speakers were all backbenchers, four of whom rehearsed the familiar arguments and contributed little. The fifth was Captain D.V. Pirie, who was again openly critical of the government.

By agreeing to wind up the debate, Churchill was playing the role so ably performed by Lloyd George in the Agar-Robartes' debate. It was another excellent manoeuvre to disguise the extent of the cabinet divisions over Ulster, especially in view of Churchill's public statements and his opposition to the cabinet decision taken the previous day. His tactics were essentially the same as Lloyd George's on the earlier occasion. Churchill put forward a purely technical argument based on a literal interpretation of the amendment. His speech was chiefly confined to a narrow examination of the impracticability of nine-county exclusion. He condemned the amendment as 'unreal in its form and contradictory in its appearance', regretting that it was simply a hostile move designed to ruin the bill. Since the debate was in part intended as a discussion of the principle of exclusion, this approach was hardly constructive, but it did allow Churchill to avoid expressing his private opinion. He was careful not to oppose the general principle of Ulster exclusion, and to add that there were many other forms of this amendment which might command support.

Most supporters of the amendment argued from general principle. Carson alone made out a case for nine-county exclusion on its merits. He argued that it was more sensible to have a larger mixed community, than to create a smaller, homogeneous stronghold of Unionism. Several other speakers implied that the principle of Ulster exclusion might be admissible under certain circumstances, though some form other than nine-county exclusion would be necessary. Three
speakers proposed specific alternatives. The most damaging of these, from the government perspective, was naturally the only Liberal, Captain Pirrie, who was well known to favour some form of special treatment for Ulster. He had twice tried unsuccessfully to bring amendments to this effect before the House, but was reduced to reading out the motion he would himself have liked to put. This proposed that Carson’s amendment should be accepted, with an additional clause providing that the nine counties could be included in Home Rule, if the majority of Ulster’s representatives petitioned the King to that end. Pirrie did not believe that such a scheme would wreck Home Rule because he was convinced the Ulster counties would eventually take up the option to join the rest of Ireland. Bonar Law suggested instead an amendment whereby ‘any county in Ulster might be given power to decide whether or not it should come into the new Parliament or remain in the British Parliament.’ More significantly, the Unionist leader added that he might vote for such a motion. Lord Hugh Cecil made the alternative proposal that the boundaries of the excluded area should be determined by taking a plebiscite of the local government districts in Ulster, rather than the counties. When Churchill reviewed all these possibilities in his concluding speech, it was fairly clear that he would be willing to consider these other variants, though he would reject the amendment in the form proposed by Carson.

Asquithian optimism was a major feature of the debate on the Liberal side. The prime minister continued to reject Carson’s view of the possible consequences if Home Rule was forced on Ulster, and refused to speculate on contingent policies relating to a hypothetical eventuality. The Times complained that Asquith still failed to treat Ulster’s opposition with the essential seriousness it demanded. He continues to deal in technicalities, and refuses to see that this question is dominated by substantial realities which cannot be argued out of existence by abstract arguments. Sir Alfred Mond expressed the typical Liberal faith that social and political distinctions would replace the traditional religious cleavage in the new Home Rule parliament: ‘Religious differences are now more in the nature of dead issues in a country like Ireland than in almost any other country.’

The Unionists were in no mood to tolerate any more such platitudes at this late stage. Austen Chamberlain complained that the prime minister ‘declined to do anything to avert the crisis, under the conviction that, after all, the clouds may
pass away, and that Ulster will become reconciled. Bonar Law warned that there was no justification for the easy optimism assumed by the Liberal leaders; he questioned whether Asquith had the ‘right to trust in an incurable optimism’ that Ulster would not resist:

— Asquith — should realise the consequences of his acts, and if he means to enforce this Bill he should say so, and should not flatter himself that he will escape the responsibility of doing so. He is drifting, and we know what that means. 98

As usual, however, the most damaging criticism came from Captain Pirie on the government’s back benches. He appealed for a conference of all parties to reach a final settlement by agreement:

This Bill represents a very short-sighted policy —- Statesmanship demands something different. I refuse entirely to believe that the last word has been said on this question. It is unthinkable to say that this Bill as it will leave this House next week will, without the change of a syllable or comma, become the law of the land. If it did that, I should never call myself a Liberal again ——

Pirie’s demand for special treatment for Ulster was no longer an incidental aspect of his federal aspirations, but the mainspring of his appeal. Home Rule all round was not forgotten; however, as he added an appeal to the Ulster members to participate in a policy of federal conciliation. 99

Only Captain Pirie spoke against the government on Carson’s amendment, whereas the Liberal critics had been more numerous and vocal in the Agar-Robartes’ debate. This did not mean that the doubts and fears of June 1912 had disappeared, for the events of the subsequent six months had served rather to confirm and increase them. The debate on Carson’s amendment, however, was much briefer than its predecessor; the government also had its backbenchers under more effective control, after the shock of the first day of the Agar-Robartes’ debate and the November snap-defeat. Moreover, few Liberals would have felt able to support a motion for the exclusion of all nine counties, even if they accepted the principle that Ulster deserved special treatment. Liberals who sympathised with this principle would be likely to abstain, rather than speak or vote for the amendment.

The large number of abstentions and absences in the government lobby was disguised by the poor vote in the Opposition lobby, as on so many recent occasions when the Unionist whips saw no reason to over-exert their forces, since a snap defeat
was out of the question. Seventy-seven Liberals failed to vote, including Captain Pirie, while Sir Clifford Cory voted as usual with the Opposition. The amendment was rejected by 294 to 197, indicating that the Unionists were over eighty below their total voting strength. The Times provided no pair list, but unless an unusually high number of Liberals found pairs, the seventy-eight Liberal abstentions and hostile votes compared unfavourably with only forty-eight on the Agar-Robartes' division. The ministerial majority of ninety-seven was deceptive, but some Liberal sources chose to ignore this. The Nation bravely announced that Carson's amendment disclosed no fissure in the Ministerial party, being defeated by nearly the normal majority, 97 votes ---. John Burns noted: 'Government side strong for Bill as it is.'

The seventy-seven Liberal non-voters included the four members primarily responsible for the Agar-Robartes' amendment—W.H. Cowan, Munro-Ferguson, D.V. Pirie, and Agar-Robartes himself. Three of these four were Scottish federalists and three were nonconformists. George Kemp's retirement had, by this time, removed one ardent Liberal opponent of Home Rule from the scene, and Cory showed his feelings more actively by voting in the Opposition lobby. It is impossible to know which of the remaining seventy-three Liberal non-voters deliberately abstained, particularly in the absence of a pair list. The most likely dissidents were to be found amongst those who also abstained previously on the Agar-Robartes' amendment, examined above. The most outstanding of these double non-voters on Ulster exclusion was Lloyd George, whose example was not followed on this occasion by Churchill. Of the seventy-seven who failed to vote on Carson's amendment, twenty-six were nonconformists, thirty were federalists, thirty were strongly connected with the north of England, fourteen with Scotland and nine with Wales.

If Asquith was seriously worried by these Liberal abstentions, or by fears of the possible consequences of his Ulster policy, he no doubt took comfort in the far greater state of disarray in the ranks of the Opposition. The long drawn-out Unionist schism over tariff reform had reached a crisis at the end of 1912, encouraging Morley to be more optimistic than usual:

The government is not to go out this year, I fancy --- and Home Rule has a promising look. The other side has been in a state of utter confusion from which they will not get out in a hurry.
The Opposition differences were unexpectedly settled in mid-January 1913, however, so that the tariff reform controversy no longer provided a welcome diversion from the Home Rule debate.

The Report stage of the Irish bill was completed by 13 January, in an unusually depicted and apathetic House, which was 'impatiently awaiting the end.' 105 Flaring interest was revived for the Third Reading debate on 15 and 16 January, when the Ulster question again dominated proceedings. The most impressive speeches of the two-day debate were made by Asquith and Birrell for the government, and F.E. Smith and Bonar Law for the Opposition. 106 Dillon commented on Asquith's speech that 'the man was inspired', while Jack Peace noted: '--- all agreed it was delivered brilliantly, & affected the whole House who appeared to be under a spell, & quietly listening to every word.' Birrell also surpassed himself in winding up the first parliamentary circuit. Charles Trevelyan remarked that Birrell made 'a quite magnificent speech', and though the Tories wanted to be noisy, 'they were quite dominated by its elevated tone and its fine appeal to nobler instincts'. 107 The Nation may have been correct in deciding that all the 'bratorical honors' rested with the government, but in terms of content there was little to choose between the two sides, since so little remained to be said. 108

The most significant part of the debate was the exchange of questions and counter-questions about each sides' proposals for settling the Ulster question. As usual, the replies from both sides were evasive. Asquith's apparent willingness to meet the Ulster Protestant case was belied by his subsequent statement that Ulster's claim was fatal to democratic government, since it allowed a minority to thwart the constitutional demand of the vast majority. 109 F.E. Smith asked if the government's rejection of Carson's amendment meant that they would not exclude any portion of Ulster, unless Ulster pretended to be satisfied with a truncated Home Rule. He claimed that it was the ministry's duty to place their cards on the table and explain precisely what they meant:

Are not the stakes too high for the two sides of the House to be manoeuvring for position in this matter? Obviously the Prime Minister does not expect Ulster Members to pay lip-service to a Bill which they detest ---

If the government really meant that they would accept Home Rule without Ulster, then they should say so, and F.E. asked directly: 'Will you on any terms consent to the
exclusion of Ulster? If so, what are those terms? If there are none, we know where we stand. The responsibility is the Prime Minister's ——. Bonar Law later challenged Irwell to say whether he believed the bill could be imposed on Ulster without bloodshed.

The chief secretary followed Bonar Law, to wind up the Third Reading debate. He had taken no part in the discussion on Carson's amendment, and allowed no hint of his personal misgivings about Ulster to escape on this occasion. His statements echoed Asquith's. In response to Law's challenge, Birrell gave his usual answer that the threatened consequences of Home Rule would never arise, so the question was irrelevant. Instead, he threw the ball back into the Opposition court, telling the Unionists to make their proposals and to explain exactly what they wanted. He regretted that Bonar Law had not explained the Opposition solution, thereby maintaining the government position that the responsibility for making detailed proposals lay with the Unionists. Birrell promised that if the Unionists were sincerely anxious to reach a settlement, the government would be perfectly ready to consider any proposals they wished to make. The effect of this generous statement was somewhat marred by his subsequent declaration that the claim already made was unacceptable: 'The right you demand is an arrogant right. It is the right to defeat this great national solution ——.' In the absence of any specific proposal from Ulster, Birrell argued that the bill held the field.

This verbal sparring established that the government had no intention of relenting over Ulster, at the eleventh hour, while they still held the political initiative. Asquith preferred to maintain his stand on the whole bill, and to take the massive gamble that the Ulster Unionists would accept the measure in the last resort. The Unionists indulged in a final attack on the ministry's blindness, false optimism and shortsightedness. Balfour was "almost shocked at the utter want of comprehension of the Ulster case". He warned that if the attitude of oblivion was maintained and blood was spilled, the real assassins would be those who never had the courage to face the situation. Harry Lawson, a Unionist back-bencher, commented that the debate had proceeded under the artificial light of a great illusion: 'It had been assumed everything would be for the best in an impossible world.' F.E. Smith denounced the prime minister as an optimist by necessity because he was dependent on the Irish: --- a shifty, groundless, and irresponsible hopefulness, exercised at other people's
expense, is a political cowardice and a public danger.' Ponar Law again accused England of drift.

What are the Government doing? They are simply waiting in the hope that something will turn up. They have put their head in the sand, and refused to look at the facts. Is that statesmanship? 113

The Liberal dissidents returned to the attack on Third Reading, with Agar-Robartes unrepentant and D.V. Pirie more qualified in his censure. Throughout the first parliamentary circuit they had acted as the chief spokesmen for the discontented Liberals, so that their statements at this final stage deserve examination. Agar-Robartes was adamant that 'unless you solve the Ulster question, the Bill is doomed to failure, and therefore I am obliged to give my vote against it.' Like the Unionists, he believed 'optimism must be running riot', if the government believed this measure would reconcile Ireland. Unless the four north-east counties of Ulster were allowed to contract out, the government was bound to apply coercion to enforce the measure: 'How are they going to deal with Ulster? Are they going to emulate the example of Oliver Cromwell and turn Belfast into another Drogheda?' If, on the other hand, the four counties were excluded, and the bill fulfilled all the ministerial promises, then in a few years those counties would be anxious to join the rest of Ireland. The Cornish rebel attacked the ministry for rejecting his own amendment, on the grounds that it was not moved by the Ulster Unionists, and yet subsequently rejecting also a similar amendment moved by Carson. Moreover, though the ministry constantly asked for Ulster's proposals, Agar-Robartes suggested that only Churchill had taken the question of four-county exclusion at all seriously, when he flew his kite at Dundee. 114

Captain Pirie's position was more qualified, and in this respect more accurately reflected the opinions of the majority of the Liberal critics. They were prepared to vote for the Third Reading, treating it as a vote of principle on the question of Irish self-government. But they were not satisfied, either that the measure was sufficiently 'federal' in intention, or with its treatment of Ulster. Pirie was mainly concerned to argue that certain aspects of the bill were inconsistent with its professed aim of United Kingdom devolution. But he also criticized the prime minister's 'vague, happy-go-lucky' approach to the issue of Ulster exclusion. Pirie was concerned for the Protestant minority, and believed Ulster must be converted rather thandragonised. Despite much idle talk about a search for settlement, Pirie thought the prime minister
had made little effort to discover points of agreement and had evaded crucial questions on the Ulster issue. He again stated that he had excellent reasons for believing that the amendment he had twice put down for temporary Ulster exclusion would find favour with the Ulster members. Despite these important criticisms, Pirrie was prepared to vote for the Third Reading because he believed the government would eventually have to face a conference; it was therefore wise to pass the bill in its present form to attain a good negotiating position for making concessions. 115

The results of the Third Reading division suggest that most of the Liberal critics followed Pirrie's example. The bill passed by a majority of 110 - 367 to 257. The ministerial list vote was almost identical to that on Second Reading, reflecting great credit on the whips' efforts at the end of such an arduous session. The number of Liberals who failed to vote with the government (including those paired and those voting with the Opposition) had risen only from ten to thirteen since Second Reading. 116 Of the thirteen who failed to vote with the government, at least four were ill, abroad, or otherwise engaged, while Agar-Robartes and Cory voted with the Unionists as expected. The Scottish federalist, W. H. Cowan, was probably the only member of the remaining seven who deliberately abstained, given his strong views on Ulster, Scottish Home Rule, and federalism.

The Liberals were delighted with the Third Reading majority of 110. Edmund Harvey, the Quaker Liberal member, reported that the closing majority was an unexpected surprise even to Percy Bellingham, the chief whip. Both sides had made strenuous efforts to secure a full attendance; but the ministerial whips had been the more successful, if only because their members had become more accustomed to conscientious attendance since the snap defeat. 117 The result indicated a British majority of about 40, excluding the Irish votes, and the total 110 majority was obviously more impressive than the 97 majority on Carson's amendment, which had reflected poor attendance on both sides. The announcement of the figures was received in the Commons with great enthusiasm, and the House rose amid cheers for Asquith, Redmond, and Parnell. John Burns noted that a large crowd stood in the 'lun to hear the division results: --- 'then home hopeful that this may settle the last trial of Home Rule!' Sir Courtenay Ilbert described the renewed confidence and revived spirits of the Liberals in January 1913, in sharp contrast with their misgivings of the previous autumn. 118 This mood of optimism was understandable so long as it was not allowed
to conceal the very real problems and divisions which had appeared in the course of
the first parliamentary Home Rule circuit.

Several conclusions emerge from this examination of the debates on the
Ulster problem during the first parliamentary circuit. The Unionists, at least,
recognised that this first circuit was the crucial one, when alterations could be made
to meet the Ulster case if Asquith chose to make them. The government, however,
ignored this point or failed to appreciate it, continuing to argue that the responsibility
for proposing a solution lay with the Unionists. 119 This contention was always rather
weak, since the Liberals introduced the Home Rule bill, and it was essentially their
problem to deal with basic deficiencies in the measure. But the argument collapsed
altogether after Carson introduced his Ulster exclusion amendment. Subsequently
the government fell back on a demand for specific, detailed, proposals from the
Opposition, though the Unionists moved further in this direction than the cabinet. The
Opposition’s mixed motives should not entirely obscure their actual support for two
different Ulster exclusion amendments, and the more detailed suggestions put forward
by Hugh Cecil and Bouverie Law on 1 January. But when F.E. Smith asked specifically,
on Third Reading, on what terms the government would consent to the exclusion of
Ulster, the question was evaded.

Asquith tried to justify his failure to produce a proposal for Ulster
on the grounds that separate treatment for Ulster would not reconcile the Opposition
to Home Rule. Yet the Unionists had every right to argue that they detested Home Rule,
but if it was to be imposed regardless of their views, then they preferred to exclude
Unionist Ulster as the lesser evil. In any case, the ministerial charge that Ulster
exclusion was not proposed by the Unionists as a genuine basis for an agreed
settlement on Home Rule was quite irrelevant at this stage. So long as the
ministry could maintain its own majority on the issue, it could force through an
amendment making special provision for Ulster, provided this was done by January
1913. The agreement of the Unionists would have provided an unexpected bocuda, but
it was not crucial. The official ministerial position was in many ways at least as
negative and intransigent as that of the Unionists. They consistently evaded the
repeated questions put to them about the way they intended to deal with Ulster.
Instead, they persisted with their unrealistic demand that a detailed proposal must
came first from the Unionists as part of an agreed compromise over Home Rule.

The cabinet and the parliamentary party were far from united in support of this position. Asquith skillfully managed to disguise the full extent of the criticism, by delegating Lloyd George and Churchill to support the official Ulster policy at key points in the parliamentary debate; and Birrell was careful to conceal his private misgivings. Even so there was considerable public speculation about cabinet divisions over Ulster, and Churchill, Grey and Rufus Isaacs were thought to favour special treatment for Ulster. The first parliamentary circuit had also revealed that a number of Liberal members sympathised with the views of Agar-Robartes and D.V. Pirie. Moreover, their attitude on Ulster corresponded fairly closely with the views of many English Unionists, as Pirie had pointed out.

A strong case can be made that Asquith would have been wiser to follow the advice of Churchill, Lloyd George, Agar-Robartes and D.V. Pirie. The actual details of the scheme would have presented major problems; these would have been less formidable, however, than in 1913-14, when agreement with the Opposition was required and feelings on both sides had hardened. Possibly 'Home Rule within Home Rule' would have provided a more flexible and reasonable starting-point, from the Liberal viewpoint, than the proposals made by Agar-Robartes or Pirie. Considerable re-drafting would have been necessary, involving a complete revision of the financial provisions, which might not have been entirely a bad thing. But, as Lloyd George suggested during the Agar-Robartes' debate, amending the bill to provide for Ulster might be very difficult; but it was not impossible. In any case, if Asquith's gamble failed, and he found it necessary to negotiate terms with the Unionists in 1914, as was in fact the case, a major revision would still be necessary, but in the worst circumstances and under acute time pressure.

It is a pity that the prime minister did not examine the arguments in favour of special treatment for Ulster more carefully before the bill was introduced. Any scheme would have been criticised from some quarters, but the principle would have won some support from members of both parties. At the same time it would have undermined Ulster's case against the bill, and deprived the Ulster Unionists of popular support in Britain. Having missed the first and best opportunity, it would undoubtedly have required considerable courage and initiative for the prime minister to have.
incorporated special terms for Ulster into the bill at a later stage in the first circuit.

But by failing to do so, Asquith was increasing the risk that Ulster exclusion would ultimately have to be agreed on terms acceptable to the Opposition. In this sense, he had reduced his options after January 1913 and effectively lost the political initiative he possessed during the first parliamentary circuit.
NOTES

CHAPTER IV.

1. The Times, 19 June 1912.


3. See letter to Bryce, 5 Sept., 1912, MS Bryce 14, fos. 56-8. See also C. P. Scott diary, 15-16 Jan., 1913, B. L. Add. MS. 5090', fos. 74-6, for Dillon’s comment that great mistrust of Asquith had been replaced by warm attachment.

4. For detailed accounts of the Blenheim rally and speeches, see The Times, 29 July 1912; Blake, Bonar Law, p. 130; Annual Register, 1912, p. 192.


6. The Times, 29 July 1912. The more extreme Unionists were delighted with the Blenheim speeches (see e.g. Lord Roberts to Law, 2 Aug., 1912, B. L. P. 27/1/9). But the violence of the oratory also aroused misgivings (see e.g. F. S. Oliver to Law, 10 Aug. & 20 Aug., 1912, B. L. P. 27/1/47; A. V. Dicey to Strachey, 30 June, 7 July, 14 July 1912, Strachey Papers, S/5/6/5.)

7. Hansard, X11, 2129-38 (Debate on Report of Irish Supply, 31 July 1912); The Times, 1 Aug. 1912; Nation, 3 Aug. 1912. The government had to send three battalions of troops to Belfast to deal with the intimidation of Catholic workmen (Seely to Birrell, 29 July 1912, MS. Mottistone 19, fos. 170-71.)

8. Bonar Law explained that ‘when a fight is going on it is never I think a time to suggest compromises.’ (Law to Duke of Sutherland, 2 July 1912, B. L. P. 33/4/48.)


10. The Times, 12 Aug. 1912.


13. Belfast Newsletter, 19 Aug. 1912; also printed in Westminster Gazette on same date.


16. Birrell to T. P. Le Fanu (Birrell’s private secretary at the Irish Office), 21 Aug. 1912, Birrell Papers, Liverpool U. L., MS. 8.3 (3).


18. Mark Lockwood (from Marienbad) to Bonar Law, 22 Aug. 1912, B.I.P. 27/1/30. Lloyd George obviously assumed that the information would be passed on; he distorted the facts by blaming the Nationalists, but this coincided with Unionist assumptions and concealed cabinet divisions.

19. Churchill to Redmond, 31 Aug. 1912, Redmond Papers, N. L. I. Add. MS. 15,175 (Bodleian, MS. film 1060). This is the only letter from Churchill in the Redmond Papers, and no copy was kept of Redmond’s reply.


23. Ilbert noted the strong similarity between Churchill’s ‘fantastic scheme in Dundee’ and his 1911 proposals; despite the rejection of his 1911 scheme, Churchill has always been brooding over it and his young friends of the Round Table group probably persuaded him to do this. (Ilbert to Bryce, 24 Oct. 1912, MS. Bryce 14, fos. 68-9).


27. ‘The Ulster Covenant’, anon., Quarterly Review, CCXVII (Oct. 1912), 564.

28. Law at the Constitutional Club, 11 Oct. 1912 (The Times, 12 Oct. 1912). See Nation, 21 Sept. 1912, for rather weak attempt to argue that Churchill was merely trying to suggest a plan for English local government reform.
29. See The Times, 23-24 and 28-29 Sept. 1912; draft of Law's letter, 19 Sept. 1912, B.L.P. 30/4/53. For a good account of the Covenant celebrations, see e.g. A.P. Ryan, Money at the Curragh, pp. 57-63.


34. 'The Ulster Covenant', anon., Quarterly Review, CCI VII (Oct. 1912), 559-88. This may have been written by L.S. Amery, who contributed regularly to the Quarterly Review; but he makes no mention of this particular article in his memoirs, and the conclusions appear more moderate than Amery's (see L.S. Amery, My Political Life, I, 397-466, passim).

35. 'The Ulster Covenant', ibid., p. 569; see esp. pp. 559-67, 570-73, 589-98.

36. Asquith's cabinet letter to king, 8 Oct. 1912, MS. Asquith 6, fo. 164. See also Memorandum on Home Rule: 'Cag', prepared by Union Defence League, 8 Oct. 1912, B.L.P. 40/1/64. This scheme was more drastic than that of 1893, allowing only about 50 days for the entire bill, compared with 77.

37. e.g. Nation, 19 Oct. 1912, disliked the necessity for restrictions on freedom of speech.

38. See e.g. Ilbert to Bryce, 24 Oct. 1912, MS. Bryce 14, fo. 63-66; Nation, 19 Oct. 1912.


40. Ilbert diary, 11 Nov. 1912.

41. This was explicitly stated in a letter from John Baird, Bonar Law's P.P.S., to his chief, 11 Nov. 1912, B.L.P. 27/4/21.

42. Riddell, More Papers from my Diary, p. 100.

43. Ilbert diary, 11 Nov. 1912; Nation, 16 Nov. 1912.

44. The Times, 13 Nov. 1912.
63 out of 94 Nationalists voted. 24 Liberals were paired, but an additional 34 had unsuccessfully applied to the Whips for pairs (The Times, 13 Nov. 1912). Asquith, Churchill, and Lloyd George were absent.

C.P. Trevelyan to wife, 11 Nov. 1912, Trevelyan Papers. Only Simon's persuasion prevented Illingworth's resignation (Illingworth to Simon, 12 Nov. 1912, Simon Papers; Riddell, More Papers, p. 161.)

Ilbert diary, 11 Nov. 1912.

Asquith's cabinet letter to king, 12 Nov. 1912, MS. Asquith 6, fo. 177.

Nation, 16 Nov. 1912.

Ilbert diary, 11 Nov. 1912; Trevelyan to wife, 11-12 Nov. 1912, Trevelyan Papers. See also Haldane to mother, 12 Nov. 1912, Haldane Papers, N.L.S. MS. 5988.

See e.g. Baird to Law, 11 Nov. 1912, B.L.P. 27/4/21; Stamfordham to Law, 13 Nov. 1912, B.L.P. 27/4/26; Fitzroy, Memoirs, p. 498; Nation, 16 Nov. 1912.

Balfour believed that if Asquith tried to rescind the amendment, the guillotine would be wrecked and would have to be completely re-established, since the Finance Resolution had to be passed by 11 November (Baird to Law, 11 Nov. 1912, B.L.P. 27/4/21).

Alfred Lyttelton to Balfour, 13 Nov. 1912, Balfour Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 49775, fo. 80.


See Ullswater, A Speaker's Commentaries, pp. 132-3; Ilbert diary, 14 Nov. 1912; Ilbert to Bryce, 15 Nov. 1912, MS. Bryce 14, fos. 69-72.

Ibid., See also Burns Diary, 13 Nov. 1912, BL. Add. MS. 46334, fo. 206; Burns claimed the credit for persuading MacNeill to apologize to Churchill and to the House.

Ilbert diary, 14 Nov. 1912. Long, Chamberlain, Carson, and Bonar Law all played a conspicuously part, though the absent Balfour strongly disapproved (Nation, 16 Nov. 1912).

Nation, 16 Nov. 1912; see also R. Holt diary, 15 Nov. 1912.

Ilbert diary, 14 Nov. 1912; Ilbert to Bryce, 15 Nov. 1912, MS. Bryce 14, fos. 69-72. See also Crewe to Lord Hardinge, 15 Nov. 1912, Crewe Papers, C/25.
60. Asquith's cabinet letter to King, 14 Nov. 1912, MS. Asquith 6, fos. 180. The King complained in return that he was not kept fully informed of the 'lamentable state of things'. (George V to Asquith, 16 Nov. 1912, MS. Asquith 3, fos. 136-7.)


62. Lowther to Ilbert, 14 Nov. 1912, Ilbert Papers, MS. 10. See also Ilbert diary, 14 Nov. 1912: Ulswater, A Speaker's Commentaries, p. 133.

63. Ilbert diary, 14 Nov. 1912; Ilbert to Bryce, 15 Nov. 1912, MS. Bryce 14, fos. 69-72. (Ilbert acted as go-between for Asquith and the Speaker.) See also Crewe to Montagu, 15 Nov. 1912, Crewe Papers, 1/5(10); Burns diary, 14-15 Nov. 1912; B. L. Add. MS. 46334, fo. 207.

64. Ilbert diary, 14 Nov. 1912.

65. Crewe to Montagu, 15 Nov. 1912, Crewe Papers, 1/5(10).

66. Burns diary, 15 Nov. 1912, B. L. Add. MS. 46334, fo. 207; Ilbert to Bryce, 15 Nov. 1912; MS. Bryce 14, fos. 69-72; Runciman to Montagu (draft telegram), 20 Nov. 1912, Crewe Papers, 1/5(11).

67. Robinson to Law, 14 Nov. 1912, B. L. P. 27/4/32; Strachey to Law, 15 Nov. 1912; B. L. P. 27/4/33; Strachey to Dicey, 15 Nov. 1912, Strachey Papers, S/5/6/6.

68. Stamfordham to Law, 17 Nov. 1912, B. L. P. 27/4/40.

69. Law at Albert Hall, The Times, 15 Nov. 1912.

70. Bonar Law to Stamfordham, 16 Nov. 1912, B. L. P. 33/4/65.

71. Nation, 7 and 14 Dec. 1912.

72. Burns diary, 4 and 11 Dec. 1912, B. L. Add. MS. 46334, fos. 218-21. See also Trevelyan to wife, 26 Nov. 1912, Trevelyan Papers.

73. Hansard, XLVI, 455; Belfast Newsletter, 18 Dec. 1912.

74. The Times, 19 Oct. 1912.


76. Hansard, XLVI, 473-4 (Churchill).

77. The Times, 31 Dec. 1912.

78. D. Harrel to Birrell, 30 Dec. 1912, Birrell Papers, Bodleian, dep. c.300, fos. 8-10.
See e.g. Harvard, XLVI, 477 (Churchill); ibid., XLVI, 440 (A. Mond); XLVI, 447 (C. Money). The only serious Unionist reply was that the Southern Protestants would obtain greater protection if the Ulster representatives remained at Westminster (ibid., XLVI, 388-9, Carson; XLVI, 461, Law). Despite these assurances, the Southern Unionists became increasingly alarmed in subsequent months (see e.g. G. P. Stewart, Irish Unionist Alliance, to James Campbell, [early March 1913], B. L. P. 29/2/8; Stewart to Carson, L. P. 29/2/10; Stewart to Law, 21 July 1913, B. L. P. 29/6/27; Statement of Deputation of Irish Unionists to Mr. Bonar Law, 14 March 1913, B. L. P. 29/2/19.)

See e.g. Irish Unionists' letter to Asquith, The Times, 30 Dec. 1912; Hansard, XLVI, 406-7, 412-3 (Hugh Cecil); ibid., XLVI, 378-80 (Carson).

Hansard, XLVI, 394-5 (Asquith).Redmond naturally agreed that the proposal was a pure piece of party tactics to wreck the bill (ibid., XLVI, 401-3).

Belfast Newsletter, 30 Dec. 1912.

The Times, 30 Dec. 1912. The letter was signed by the 17 Ulster Unionist members, and by Carson and Campbell, the two members for Dublin University.

Hansard, XLVI, 380-3 (Carson).

Hansard, XLVI, 470 (Bonar Law); 389-3 (Carson); Ulster Unionists' letter to Asquith, The Times, 30 Dec. 1912. See also Hansard, XLVI, 380-3 (Carson); ibid., XLVI, 446-7 (Sir John Lonsdale).

Harrel to Birrell, 30 Dec. 1912, Birrell Papers, Bodleian, dep. c. 300, fos. 8-10; cf. Harrel to Birrell, 8 Feb. 1912, ibid., dep. c. 301, fos. 18-35.

Pease diary, II, fo. 63, 31 Dec. 1912 [wrongly dated 1913].

Burns diary, 31 Dec. 1912, B. L. Add. MS. 4633, fo. 232.

Hansard, XLVI, 334-5 (Asquith); XLVI, 420 (Cavc.). D. V. Pirie agreed that 'such an important measure as this ought not to be allowed to lapse simply because the drafting has to be changed.' (XLVI, 455).

See Asquith to Churchill, 19 Sept. 1913, R. S. C., Churchill, II, Companion, 1490. ('I always thought (and said) that, in the end, we should probably have to make some sort of bargain about Ulster as the price of Home Rule. But I have never doubted, that, as a matter of tactics and policy, we were right to launch our Bill on its present lines.')

Asquith produced precisely this literal interpretation in the debate (Hansard, XLVI, 392-7).
92. Charles Lyell, Thomas Lough, Chlozza Money, Sir Alfred Mond.

93. Hansard, XLVI, 470-9 (Churchill).

94. Hansard, XLVI, 338-90 (Carson).


96. Hansard, XLVI, 461-2 (Law); ibid., 466, 469-70 (J. S. H. Cecil); ibid., 472-8 (Churchill).

97. Hansard, XLVI, 392-7 (Asquith); The Times, 2 Jan. 1913; Hansard, XLVI, 441-2 (Mond).

98. Hansard, XLVI, 443 (A. Chamberlain); ibid., 464, 468-70 (Law); see also ibid., 446 (Sir John Lonsdale).


100. See Appendix for details, and Hansard, XLVI, 480-4, for division list.

101. Nation, 4 Jan. 1913; Burns diary, 1 Jan. 1913, B.L. Add. MS. 46335, fo. 26. The Annual Register, however, described Carson's amendment as a new effort to exclude Ulster, which found some sympathy among Scottish Liberals (Annual Register, 1912, p. 275.)

102. See Appendix and previous chapter III.

103. See Appendix for details. These figures represent a considerable overlap, as the table indicates. The twenty-six nonconformists comprised ten from northern England, four from Wales, three from Scotland, two from Cornwall, and seven from the rest of England. The federalist non-voters were more evenly scattered throughout Great Britain. The Scottish Liberals were more in evidence among the vocal leaders of the dissidents than among the rank and file. See previous chapter III, note 164, for comparison with breakdown of non-voters on Agar-Robartes' division.


106. Carson was absent due to his wife's fatal illness. (See Carson to Law, 11 and 14 Jan. 1913, B.L.P. 28/2/53, 61).


110. Hansard, XLVI, 2222-4. (F.E. Smith); ibid., XLVI, 2395-9 (Law).

111. Hansard, XLVI, 2405-6 (Birrell).

112. Hansard, XLVI, 2109, 2118. (Balfour); ibid., XLVI, 2341 (Lawson).

113. Hansard, XLVI, 2321-2, 2316 (F.E. Smith); ibid., XLVI, 2400 (Law).

114. Hansard, XLVI, 2164-7 (Agar-Robartes).

115. Hansard, XLVI, 2347-54 (Pirie).

116. See Appendix. The total coalition numbers had been reduced from 352 to 388 by the by-election losses since 9 May 1912. The numbers voting had declined by almost exactly the same figure, from 372 on Second Reading to 367, with 19 coalition members not voting: 27 Unionists failed to vote.


119. See MS. Asquith 39, fos. 292-307; undated typescript, clearly composed soon after the Third Reading in Jan. 1913, with annotations in Asquith's hand, on '10 Downing Street' notepaper; comprising 19 pp. TS. citing Hansard passages on Ulster exclusion (fos. 292-302) and 6 pp. Memorandum commenting on the extracts (fos. 302-7). Asquith concealed his personal views as well as ever, but this document provides some clues, since it does at least indicate the kind of advice he was receiving. Great emphasis was placed, throughout the document, on the fact that an agreed settlement with the Unionists might well have been possible. This does suggest a lack of appreciation of the implications of the Parliament Act in the first circuit.
CHAPTER V

FROM DEADLOCK TO REASSESSMENT.

JANUARY - SEPTEMBER 1913.

The situation was one of political deadlock at the end of the first parliamentary circuit. The prime minister had refused to compromise over Ulster while he still retained the political advantage and could dictate the terms. From January 1913 Asquith had to gamble on his assumption that the whole bill could be pushed through without serious resistance from Ulster. Much depended on the accuracy of his initial estimate of the Ulster situation, and the extent to which this situation altered in the eighteen months before the bill would pass for the third time. Meanwhile, the cabinet marked time while the Home Rule bill ran its course through the Lords and then through its second parliamentary circuit. Its rejection by the Lords was as inevitable as its acceptance in unaltered form during the second passage through the Commons. The only uncertainties concerned points of procedure under the Parliament Act. The time to consider negotiation was not reached until the end of the 1913 session, and only then because the government was subjected to mounting pressure from three directions. First, the Unionists organised a noisy campaign demanding a general election or referendum on Home Rule, and maximised their effectiveness by persuading the King to intervene on their behalf. The crisis also reunited the diverse supporters of Home Rule all round, in a general demand for a compromise settlement. Finally, the Ulster situation deteriorated so rapidly that the cabinet was at last induced to examine it more closely and take it more seriously. The combined pressures reduced the government’s complacency by the autumn of 1913, and persuaded ministers that they needed to play for time or for terms.

HOME RULE IN PARLIAMENT, 1913

The Home Rule bill was debated in the Lords from 27 to 30 January, under an informal closure time-table providing for its rejection on Second Reading after four days’ debate—‘as short a shrift as was given to the Bill of 1893’, in the
WHO'S AFRAID?
words of the Nation. The Liberals had considerable trouble finding an appropriate number of effective speakers from their limited ranks in the Upper House, and also in ensuring a full attendance. Crewe, Haldane, and Morley were the chief speakers for the government, in a situation best described by Haldane:

I felt full of conviction, & charged as hard as I could against the Stone Wall of Unionist Peers, who listened in gloomy silence. The House was crammed full ——

but I felt it was like trying to upset a mountain.

Herbert Samuel found the Lords' debate —— deadly dull. They remind me of mummmies in a tomb discussing the affairs of the living people up above. John Burns described it as --- a picturesque ruin in motion —— unreal and academic, no passion, no vitality, because they were shorn of their veto power.

For the most part the Lords' debate covered ground already very well trodden in the Lower House, but one interesting feature was noted by several observers. Many peers on both sides were no longer prepared to defend the old form of government in Ireland, though they were by no means agreed on the nature or extent of the change required. Morley commented that Home Rule has made strides since '93. The debate has been flat till on the surface, but full of a sullen conviction that the thing is bound to come, tho' more decently clad than in the Bill. He thought the debate remarkable for the new admission that some move was necessary in the direction of Irish self-government. Lord Emmott also noticed that 'many of the Lords confessed to reasons having been shown for a change, but they are horribly afraid of everything & have lost all faith in themselves.'

Conciliatory speeches were made by Unionist peers such as Grey, and even Curzon and St. Aldwyn, while Irish Unionists like Dunraven, Kildare and Massereene recognized the need for change. Stephen Gwyn remarked later on the striking discrepancy between the balance of argument and the balance of votes --- What emerged from the debate was a general admission that something had to be done.

The overwhelming rejection of the bill in the Lords by 326 to 69 did not demoralise the Liberals, partly because of its inevitability, and also because the Parliament Act had encouraged complacency. Richard Holt noted that although Home Rule and Welsh Disestablishment had been rejected by enormous majorities
in the Lords. "—things are different now & we have only to wait patiently & long for another 12 or 15 months to secure our objects". In any case, many Liberals felt that the defeat in the Lords was more than compensated for by the ministerial gain of the Londonderry seat from the Unionists on 30 January. This was an important moral victory for Home Rule, since the Unionist representatives for Ulster were now outnumbered by seventeen to sixteen, thus weakening the argument that Ulster contained a Protestant and Unionist majority.

The short session of 1913 lasted from 10 March until 15 August, and provided a lull before the storm that was to follow. The cabinet had decided that legislation should be confined to the minimum, to keep the session short after their previous rigorous labours. The withdrawal of the Franchise and Registration bill in January 1913 had been a serious blow to the ministry’s prestige, since it was one of the three major measures proceeding under the Parliament Act provisions. New measures included an Irish Land Purchase bill, and a bill to abolish plural voting, which was a very limited replacement for the abortive Franchise bill, but Parliamentary time and attention were concentrated on the Home Rule and Welsh Church bills. Major Liberal plans for reform of the educational system, reform of the House of Lords, proposals for settling labour disputes and Lloyd George’s land scheme, had all to be postponed. Inevitably, the 1913 session was a tedious and abridged version of its predecessor. John Burns found the Commons disillusioned and depressed, lacking in interest and enthusiasm, while Hibbert feared that ‘a kind of dry rot has set in among the Liberal rank & file’.

This depression in the Liberal ranks was also partly due to the Marconi scandal, which provided the main excitement of the session. Lloyd George, Rufus Isaacs, and Lord Murray of Elibank, had unwisely taken out shares in the American Marconi Company, despite the fact that the English parent company had a contract with the British government. Though the ministers’ dealings were misguided rather than criminal, they provoked intensive investigations which reached a climax between February and June 1913. The Marconi affair was a depressing business for the cabinet, and lowered the morale of their backbenchers, while the ministry’s prestige in the country sank. Marconi had one side-effect which did not displease all Liberals. As Hibbert put it: ‘E.G. has lost his halo."
The sober & religious people who were his strongest support have lost their confidence in him—This at least allayed the fears of men like J.A. Spender, who had taken a gloomy view of Lloyd George and Winston in April 1913, because he thought they were "playing up for a "National Party".

By-election results also contributed to the air of gloom and disenchancement among Liberals, which reached a peak in June 1913. The loss of Newmarket on 16 May and the increased Unionist majority at Altrincham on 28 May had a demoralizing effect on the party, though in fact a statistical analysis of all by-elections from January to June 1913 reveals a slight improvement in Liberal performance. On the whole, however, by-elections were not considered to have any direct bearing on Home Rule prospects. It was widely believed among politicians that the electorate at large was completely apathetic about Home Rule, despite Asquith's attempts to prove that by-election results since April 1912 indicated an overall majority for Home Rule. A report from Jack Pease's Rotherham constituency noted "a complete apathy with regard to Home Rule. Among all the workmen here I have heard no one mention the fireworks of Sir Edward Carson — There is more interest in the Land question." Herbert Samuel remarked that there was no feeling of any kind about Home Rule or Welsh Disestablishment in his own north Yorkshire constituency. Most observers believed that by-elections were fought chiefly on issues other than Home Rule, and that the two elections of May 1913 were dominated by the Insurance question.

This general air of gloom was not alleviated by the discussions on procedure under the Parliament Act, which punctuated the debates of the second parliamentary circuit. The Parliament Act specified that bills must be introduced in the last two circuits in precisely the same form they left the Commons the first time. However, controversy was caused by a clause of the Parliament Act which authorised the Commons to 'suggest' any further amendments they thought fit to the Lords, in the second or third sessions, without actually inserting them into the text of the bill. If the Lords agreed to these 'suggested' amendments, they should then be treated as amendments made by the Lords and incorporated into the bill. However, no procedure existed in the Standing Orders for dealing with such 'suggested amendments' and the government had to tread carefully. A cabinet
committee discussed the procedural problem in March and April 1913, finally acting on the advice of Sir Courtenay Ilbert, clerk of the Commons. Ilbert believed that the aim of the 'suggestion' provision was to allow the Commons an opportunity to correct drafting mistakes or to comment on new points raised in the Lords. In view of the Lords' failure to propose amendments and the short interval between the two sessions, he concluded that 'suggestions' would be a waste of time in the second session.

The prime minister explained the procedural decisions during the Second Reading debate on 9 June 1913, and again when moving the Procedure Resolution for the bills under the Parliament Act on 23 June. This Procedure Motion was necessary to allocate one day for debating the Financial Resolution of the Home Rule bill, which had to pass again through both stages. It also provided that the Committee and Report stages of the Home Rule bill should be dispensed with, since the Parliament Act would not allow Commons' amendments to be inserted into the text. However, if there was a general desire for amendments, the prime minister conceded that an informal 'suggestion' stage might replace the Committee stage. Any 'suggestions' made in this way would separately accompany the bill to the Lords.

Asquith explained that 'suggestions' which destroyed the identity of the bill would not be allowed, and the government would decide which 'suggestions' fell into this category. Bonar Law denounced this as absurd and futile, since to make suggestions would be to admit that we had given up the fight against the principle of the Bill. Austen Chamberlain and F.E. Smith also poured scorn on the 'suggestion' stage, in which the government proposed to act as judge, jury and executioner. The Opposition therefore refused to make 'suggestions' and the whole proposition was abandoned. Thus the only stages which were actually debated were the Second Reading on 9 and 10 June, and the Third Reading on 7 July. The Home Rule Finance Resolution was discussed on 24 June, but this debate was no more than a tedious repetition of the various criticisms of the bill's finances.

The Opposition was fully aware of the difficulties involved in trying to 'oppose' legislation in a session where the passage of the two major bills was a foregone conclusion and hostile amendments were not allowed. Consequently, they repeated the general tactic employed during the 1912 Committee stage of the Home Rule bill,
by attempting a series of snap divisions on minor bills, in the hope of wearing down
the government's supporters. Herbert Samuel commented in April 1913 that 'the
chief danger comes from snap divisions, of which we are in a constant condition of
nervous expectation.' The Unionists attempted several snap divisions in June and
July, causing Charles Trevelyan to complain that 'it is a severe thing to have always
to keep enough men present for weeks to outwit this sort of crisis.' The Opposition
came closest to defeating the government on 2 June, forcing Asquith to speak gravely
to his cabinet about the party's slackness.

The Opposition was rather more divided about the specific tactics they
should employ in the Second and Third Reading debates on the Home Rule bill. The
Ulster Unionist party initially decided to stage a protest by taking no further part in
the Home Rule debates, but later modified this position, allowing Carson alone to
speak for them on Second Reading. The Ulster Unionists believed that 'such terrible
events are impending' that the parliamentary debate was irrelevant, but the British
Unionists largely shared Lord Midleton's view that they should not allow the Liberals
a simple walk over the course. Walter Long urged that the British Unionists
should participate in the boycott or at least refuse to speak in the Third Reading debate,
but this policy was rejected on the grounds that their supporters might assume they
were abandoning the fight. However, the Opposition made their feelings clear on
Second Reading. Carson denounced the proceedings as 'sham and hypocrisy',
contrasting the parliamentary 'farce' with the stern reality of events in Ireland, and
stating that the Irish Unionists refused to play out the pantomime any further.
Bonar Law commented sourly that they could debate the bill, but were not allowed
to alter a single line. He felt the Ulster members were perfectly justified in
declining to participate in this automatic process.

The Second and Third Reading debates were indeed no more than a
formality, carried out in a thin House. The debates lacked inspiration. Bonar-
Law pointed out, when he opposed the Third Reading, that this was the fifth time the
general principle of the bill had been discussed; since he had participated on each
occasion, his current interest was minimal, he could not hope to find anything new
to say, and pronounced the question 'undoubtedly dead' as far as the Commons was
concerned. Occasional good speeches relieved the boredom, and many lesser
known members, who had not so far spoken on Home Rule, acquired an opportunity to speak. Ministerial whipping was efficient on both divisions, maintaining a good majority. The Second Reading was passed by 368 to 270, despite a full Opposition turnout, and the Third by 352 to 243. These results compared very favourably with those in the first circuit, especially in view of the reduction in coalition numbers caused by the by-election losses. Only three Liberal dissentients can be isolated from these division lists. From now on, Agar-Robartes joined Sir Clifford Cory in voting consistently with the Opposition against Home Rule on all the major divisions. Captain D.V. Phie abstained on both divisions, which was scarcely surprising and clearly deliberate in view of his statements in the previous circuit.

The two debates followed their familiar course, the only new feature being the increasing Unionist emphasis on the demand that Home Rule be submitted to the electorate. The usual charges were laid against the ministry. Asquith was blamed by several Opposition speakers for failing to take any initiative in seeking a compromise settlement. Balfour warned that time was running out for the government to make the necessary changes to avert their collision course and prevent a great national tragedy. Bonar Law feared that the government was 'drifting without any fixed plan towards an inevitable disaster', from which it would be impossible for them to retreat. J.H. Campbell deplored the dangerous manner in which the ministry was trifling with the situation; they were on the brink of a volcano, but they still had time to retrace their steps. Predictably, Asquith and Birrell merely responded, as usual, that they were prepared to consider any reasonable suggestion for Ulster consistent with the principle of the bill. Rufus Isaacs wound up the Third Reading, by asking again for the Unionist alternative to the ministry's policy, claiming that no plan had so far been proposed which would satisfy Ulster. Thomas Lough made the somewhat revealing assertion that it was not the government's responsibility to initiate compromise proposals, since they would only be exposed to laughter and humiliation if they made any definite offer.

The six Liberal backbenchers who spoke on Second Reading followed the rather uncertain party line as carefully as possible, but added little that was not familiar or irrelevant. On the Third Reading, however, the only two Liberals who spoke from the back benches, adopted firm individual positions on Ulster which were totally opposed to each other. H.B. Lees Smith, the federalist member for
Northampton, proposed a settlement by agreement to prevent Ulster's armed resistance and to ensure that the Irish parliament would have a fairer chance. He suggested that the four north-east counties, and the rest of Ireland, should each be granted a subordinate state legislature, under an all-Ireland assembly for the whole nation, until the Protestants sought complete union with the rest of Ireland. This was similar to the line taken in 1912 by Agar-Robartes and D.V. Pirrie, though different in form and slightly more specific. The Nation thought Ulster might more readily be reconciled by Lees Smith's proposal than by the terms of the bill, but a Unionist member remarked that such a fundamental alteration would have been more valuable had it been suggested in 1912 when changes were possible.

Edward Hemmerde adopted precisely the opposite position from Lees Smith. Hemmerde believed the Home Rule bill in its existing form was the most practical solution, and therefore rejected Lees Smith's proposal or any other alternative. Hemmerde shared the impatience of Lloyd George and Agar-Robartes with the Irish problem, charging that 'the country is sick and tired of this question, and wants to go on to other business.' However, Hemmerde's warning to the government was rather different from those they were accustomed to hearing from Agar-Robartes and Pirrie: 'I hope there will be no wavering on the part of the Government, and no attempt at compromise. I believe that they have gone to the very limits of compromise.' If they persisted in their present course, they would win a great victory, for 'the perils that they see facing them in the North of Ireland will melt away—. Asquith might have taken comfort from Hemmerde's whole-hearted support, but he may well have interpreted this speech as a potential new problem. The prime minister had now moved so far in the one direction, that to retreat or change tack would increasingly alienate die-hard supporters like Hemmerde and Thomas Lough.

Both parties had their die-hards and their compromisers at opposite ends of the spectrum of opinion on Ulster, and feelings hardened as the crisis developed. In the Liberal camp, the compromise group led by Agar-Robartes, Pirrie, Churchill and Lloyd George, had been forced to articulate its views first, in criticism of the official policy. This group would obviously have been very much larger if Ulster exclusion had been Asquith's policy from the first. A majority of members supported government policy for reasons of party discipline and custom,
or from lack of strong private views. As it was, the official party policy was Home Rule for a united Ireland, and the rank and file had been supporting this policy through two arduous parliamentary sessions. Hennessy's speech was the first important sign that any compromise move might provoke criticism from a 'die-hard' Liberal group, which interpreted concessions to Ulster as humiliating retreats. William O'Brien hinted broadly at this when he charged that the government feared the loss of votes if they were known to be seeking compromise.

The Home Rule bill was rapidly discussed in the Lords on 14 and 15 July, in a cursory debate described by Sir Almeric Fitzroy:

The Home Rule debate presented no novel features: the same dreary reiteration of irreconcilable points of view, and nothing but lip-service to the wisdom of compromise.

Signs, moreover, of growing acrimony are not wanting.

But by the time the Lords rejected the bill, the government was steadily regaining confidence, after reaching the depths of depression in June 1913. As Herbert reported:

The Government people are much more hopeful than they were a month ago & Asquith in particular seems to be in excellent health & spirits. A session in which little had been achieved ended on 15 August, with a six months' recess giving backbenchers a much-needed rest, and allowing the various extra-parliamentary pressures on the cabinet to reach a climax.

PRESSURES TOWARDS COMPROMISE: (1) THE UNIONIST CAMPAIGN FOR DISSOLUTION AND ROYAL INTERVENTION.

While members of all parties were being frustrated by the parliamentary session, three forces outside parliament were driving the government to recognize the critical nature of the situation and take appropriate action. Among these forces was the Opposition demand for an appeal to the people before the Home Rule bill actually passed the Commons for the third time. This campaign became increasingly vociferous in 1913. Unionist arguments began with the familiar claims that Home Rule had not been submitted to the electorate in the 1910 elections, and that the Parliament Act had left the Constitution in abeyance until the House of Lords was reformed.

Consequently, they contended that additional powers must be granted to the electorate or the king (or both) to check the actions of the Commons while the Lords' veto power was in commission. It was also argued that only electoral approval could give moral
authority to a bill opposed by the upper house, and thus prevent the Unionists from repealing it later. The king was heavily involved, because some Unionists urged him to use the royal prerogative of changing his ministers and advising a dissolution, while others even encouraged the use of the royal veto against the Home Rule bill. Most Unionists sought a general election as a means of wrecking Home Rule, with the implicit assumption of a Unionist victory at the polls. Professor A.V. Dicey and Lord Selborne were among the more enthusiastic advocates of a referendum on Home Rule, though a referendum was generally seen only as a second option in case the government rejected the dissolution proposal. The idea of a referendum was revived by Bonar Law himself in March 1914, but otherwise the main emphasis of the campaign was placed on the demand for a general election.

Unionist advocates of an early dissolution included Bonar Law, Lord Lansdowne, Lord Selborne, Professor A.V. Dicey, and St. Loe Strachey, editor of the Spectator. The campaign had the advantages of support from the official party leadership, combined with Dicey's intellectual authority, and the publicity provided by The Times and the Spectator. Bonar Law horrified the king as early as May 1912 by informing him that 'you must either accept the Home Rule Bill or dismiss your Ministers and choose others who will support you in vetoing it and in either case half your subjects will think you have acted against them.' The view that it was the king's constitutional duty to dismiss his ministers and appoint others who would allow the question of Home Rule to be decided at a general election was again put to the king by the Unionist leader in September 1912, and more forcefully a year later. Bonar Law and Lansdowne did not entirely reject the idea that the king might veto the Home Rule bill, but there was considerable opposition in the party to the use of the royal veto. St. Loe Strachey, in particular, feared that their case against Home Rule might be destroyed at the polls by a 'mad movement' for reviving the royal veto. Strachey denounced the 'attempt to blackmail the King into gambling with the Monarchy in order to help the Unionist Party', which was likely to humiliate the Unionists and injure the monarchy. The Spectator became the vehicle for Strachey's furious campaign against the exercise of the royal veto, which gained sufficient support to encourage the Unionist leaders to place all the emphasis on the need for an early dissolution. However, the Unionists were treading on almost equally doubtful constitutional ground by suggesting that the king had the responsibility
to dismiss ministers who proposed policies of which he disapproved. Whatever the royal view of such policies, they had the support of the majority in the Commons elected by the people, at least for the time being. The last precedent for such a doctrine was hardly encouraging—even if more recent than the last use of the royal veto—for Peel had failed to obtain a majority in 1834, in the election which followed William IV's dismissal of Lord Melbourne.

Asquith considered granting the Unionist demand for a dissolution in the middle of winter 1912-13, rather earlier than the Opposition wanted. He was tempted to take advantage of the Tory split over tariff reform, to make a bold bid for an early election victory in spring 1913. On Christmas day 1912, the prime minister confided to Lloyd George that: 'Assuming we get a majority, we have a direct mandate for the Irish & Welsh Bills as Bills, and only the most enragés among the Tories can then support or approve violence in Ulster.' Lloyd George agreed that 'a favourable election would paralyse the Ulster revolt', but Asquith decided to test the validity of this assumption during the debate on Carson's amendment on 1 January 1913. Therefore Asquith challenged the Opposition to explain the attitude they would adopt if the electorate endorsed the existing Home Rule bill with Ulster included. Bonar Law replied that, if the voters approved the Home Rule bill as a clear issue, 'we shall not in any way, shape, or form encourage the resistance of Ulster'; but if the government tried to enforce Home Rule without an election, he would assist Ulster's resistance. However, other speeches suggested that British electoral approval would not alter the attitudes of the Ulster Unionists in the least. In any case Asquith dropped the idea of an early election when the Unionist divisions over tariff reform were healed in mid-January. Thereafter, it became increasingly clear that the government intended to hold a general election between the passage of the Home Rule bill in 1914 and the first meeting of the Irish parliament some time in 1915. This was partly a response to Liberal backbench opinion that the ministry should complete the whole of its programme under the Parliament Act before making an appeal to the constituencies. This timing would also enable the government to reap the benefits of the abolition of plural voting, while still retaining the full complement of Irish Nationalist members at Westminster.

The Unionists were also concerned about the timing of the dissolution. Professor Dicey was amongst the first to recognise the urgency of the situation,
since the government must dissolve before the third session actually began in January 1914 in order to retain the advantages of the Parliament Act for their Home Rule bill. At the end of March 1913, Dicey warned Bonar Law that they only had ten months in which to press for a dissolution. He argued that it would be far more difficult for a new Unionist government to repeal a parliamentary statute than simply to introduce a bill which never received the royal assent. Moreover, the chances of bloodshed were vastly increased if the bill was passed and later repealed after a Unionist electoral victory. Therefore, Dicey urged that the party should increase the active agitation for dissolution, in Parliament and the country. Once the party crisis over tariff reform was over, this advice was heeded. The Unionist leaders made the demand for a dissolution the focal point of their speeches during the 1913 parliamentary circuit of the Home Rule bill. Walter Long, Carson and Bonar Law repeatedly demanded that the government submit the bill to the electorate before the measure passed the Commons for the third time. Asquith and Redmond replied that there was no point in having a general election if it would not alter the hostility of the Ulster Covenanters; Carson argued that a British mandate for Home Rule would make a significant practical difference for the Ulster Unionists would have to fight their battle without British support. The Unionist peers pressed the campaign further during the Lords' debate on Home Rule in July 1913, with an amendment by Lansdowne demanding an election before the Lords would debate the bill.

Professor Dicey wrote repeatedly to The Times and to Bonar Law, pressing for a general public agitation, since he believed they had a direct choice between dissolution and civil war. From May to September 1913, the Unionist leader considered the idea of organizing a monster petition to the king asking him to withhold the royal assent to the Home Rule bill until the electors had expressed their views. The plan was eventually dropped, mainly because the whips and the Conservative Central Office envisaged too many practical problems. Instead the Unionist leaders concentrated on making a top-level, direct approach to the king. On 31 July 1913, Law and Lansdowne forwarded to Lord Stamfordham a lengthy memorandum for the king, forcefully stating their case for dissolution. This formidable document contained a more detailed and polished version of the arguments previously placed before the king in May and September 1912, with some additional points from Dicey and Strachey. It repeated the contention that the king had a constitutional responsibility to take urgent
steps to promote a dissolution before the 1914 session began. Only an early dissolution would prevent the king from damaging involvement in a controversy as to whether he ought to use the royal veto to prevent Home Rule being forced on Ulster. The two Unionist leaders suggested that the king should address a memorandum to the prime minister, indicating that it was the duty of his ministers to save him from an impossible position, by submitting their bill to the people. Lord Lansdowne understood that the king did not disagree with the substance of their observations, though other advisers such as Lords Curzon, Esher and Cromer thought it unwise for the king to refuse to follow his government's advice.

The king was extremely worried by the increasing volume of conflicting advice, warning and near-blackmail, especially as the royal prerogative of advising a dissolution had become the subject of heated controversy in The Times. George V felt his responsibility acutely, and responded by seeking the advice of many leading politicians from both parties, who were invited to stay at Balmoral during the months of August, September and October 1913. As Sir Almeric Fitzroy commented:

The King's perfect constitutional propriety has never been in question: if Lord Lansdowne and Mr. Bonar Law have sought to draw him, they met with no encouragement for the doctrines put forward by certain Unionist publicists. On the other hand, it would be equally wrong to assume that he takes his orders from the Prime Minister.

The king adopted the course suggested by Law, Lansdowne and Esher. He presented the prime minister with two formidable memoranda on 11 August and 22 September, recapitulating the Unionist arguments in favour of a dissolution, outlining the difficulties of his own position, and asking for a reasoned ministerial reply. The second royal communication was partly a response to the two lengthy memoranda sent by Asquith in September, and partly a further summary of the arguments put forward by the Unionist visitors at Balmoral.

Lord Crewe described the king's state of mind accurately and vividly to Asquith, during Crewe's visit to Balmoral early in September. The king was deeply disturbed and perpetually harassed by the thought of his moral responsibility over the Irish dilemma. He had kept his head and had not allowed himself to be influenced by the 'impudent' demands of the extreme Unionists that he should veto the bill or dissolve parliament before the next session began. But the king was
 convinced that the passage of the bill would mean civil war in Ireland, while its failure would make the government of the rest of Ireland impossible. He found no consolation in the doctrine that he should merely take his ministers' advice, because he felt he should be able to use his influence to prevent a collision. If he did not actively work for a settlement, he could be justifiably held partially responsible for any serious loss of life after the bill passed. Proof of the integrity of his constitutional position was not enough to satisfy the king, partly because some of his subjects would dispute the evidence, and partly because he was oppressed by his moral obligation to do all in his power to ease the crisis. 85

Crew's exposition was a masterly summary of the situation. The two memoranda sent by Asquith to the king in September 1913 86 did indeed go far to satisfy the king as to the integrity of his constitutional position, but could not persuade him that he could therefore abdicate responsibility. Asquith first expressed his views on the constitutional issues involved in the Irish problem at his audience with the king on 11 August, 87 and he subsequently replied to the king's second memorandum in a further lengthy letter on 1 October. 88 The arguments put forward at the royal audience and in the three lengthy written statements were lucid, logical, simple and repetitious. 89 Asquith stated that the royal veto on legislation had not been exercised for two hundred years, and the principle was firmly established that the monarch should accept the advice of his ministers. By doing so the king was freed from all personal responsibility for his ministry's actions, and was removed from 'the storms and vicissitudes of party politics.' Though the king retained theoretical powers to change his ministers, the authority of the crown had been undermined when that prerogative had last been exercised in 1834. If the king intervened on one side by dismissing ministers who had a parliamentary majority, the crown would inevitably become 'the football of contending factions' in the ensuing election. Finally, Asquith argued that the Parliament Act had not in any way increased the sovereign's constitutional responsibilities, and that an early dissolution would offer no guidance and no solution to the Irish question. If the government won the election, the Ulster Unionists would not alter their resistance to Home Rule, and if the ministry was defeated, little would be proved about public attitudes to Home Rule, since the election would be fought on numerous other controversial issues. 90
By early October 1913, the prime minister considered that the question of an early dissolution was closed. Asquith had taken great pains to answer all the king's queries and uncertainties in elaborate detail, and was no doubt relieved to learn from Birrell at Balmoral that his final letter of 1 October had a salutary effect on the king: 'There is a considerable change — in the constitutional atmosphere, so I think your efforts have had a bracing effect and got rid of some dangerous matter.' Asquith felt secure in the knowledge that his colleagues firmly supported his refusal to hold an election before the Home Rule bill passed. Lloyd George and Churchill were firmly opposed to a general election before June 1914, since a Liberal victory would not alter the Ulster Unionists' attitude. Harcourt felt the king would commit an 'incredible folly' if he tried to force his ministers to dissolve before Home Rule passed; he bluntly informed the king that, under such circumstances, the ministry would feel obliged to attack the king personally, and treat the Crown as they had previously treated the Lords. The chief secretary had privately been undecided whether the government had an obligation to place the Home Rule issue directly before the people. In February 1911 Birrell had thought it almost inconceivable that Home Rule could be passed without another dissolution, and eighteen months later he doubted whether the bill ought to pass before another general election. As the Ulster campaign gathered force the chief secretary became increasingly worried that dissolution might be the only responsible alternative to the coercion of Ulster. However, in September 1913, Birrell agreed with Asquith that the best solution would be to place the Home Rule bill on the Statute Book to satisfy their Nationalist allies, but to dissolve immediately afterwards, before the measure came into operation. At the same time, the chief secretary ended public speculation about his attitude, by publishing a letter in The Times, dismissing the notion that another general election was needed before Home Rule was passed.

In September 1913, Lord Lansdowne and a Unionist minority still argued that the Opposition must continue the campaign for dissolution, to convince all parties that this was the only legitimate solution. However, Lord Esher informed Balfour on 8 October that there was no chance of a general election or a referendum, and the more moderate Unionists reluctantly accepted their verdict. Although Balfour believed that an early dissolution was the best course, he recognised that the king feared compromising the crown if he forced a dissolution. Strachey
and they were agreed that it was 'an iniquity' for the government to refuse a
dissolution, but they acknowledged 'the awful misfortune' that they lacked the
power to force one. Even Bolan Law admitted that if they succeeded in forcing
an election:

---we are not certain of winning, and even if we do
win, there will be I think the certainty of lawlessness
in Ireland on the other side encouraged to the utmost
by the whole Radical Party in this country. 102

The issue was completely closed by the time Asquith spoke at Leeds late in November:

--- if a General Election were held how much further
would it advance matters? I see then no ground for
this demand for a General Election and so far as I
am concerned, you may take it from me that I shall
not advise any such course. 103

Thus by the autumn of 1913, most Unionists recognised that they had
failed in their primary aim of forcing an early dissolution before the Home Rule bill
passed. They had, however, been considerably more successful in achieving their
secondary goal of urging the king to intervene to prevent trouble in Ulster. Though
George V wisely refused to take the extreme step of precipitating a general election,
the Unionist campaign made him view his responsibilities even more seriously than
he might have done otherwise. He might have no technical obligation to intervene,
but he felt a keen moral duty to prevent the consequences of Asquith's Home Rule
policy, if pursued to its logical conclusion. The increasing certainty that the
government would not allow an early dissolution, which would in any case probably
solve nothing, clarified matters and increased the pressure for compromise
negotiations. If any Ulster Unionists had, as Birrell claimed, postponed 'making
up their minds as to fighting until they see whether there is first to be a General
Election', 104 they had no further justification for such procrastination. Moreover,
as Unionists increasingly accepted that the Ulster dilemma would not be solved by
an early general election, they were forced to consider 'what is the next best course
to pursue'. 105 The federalists took the opportunity to revitalize their 1911 campaign
for Home Rule all round, while party leaders on both sides looked more closely at
the possibilities of providing for some form of Ulster exclusion. The king had been
brought into the arena to force a dissolution, but though this had been abandoned,
George V maintained his pressure on both parties to secure a compromise solution
by other methods.
PRESSURES TOWARDS COMPROMISE.

HOME RULE ALL ROUND REVIVED.

While the king was steadily increasing the royal pressure for a compromise, and the Unionists were starting to look for alternatives to dissolution, a campaign for settlement by consent was gathering strength from various quarters outside the official party leadership. The backbone of this campaign lay in the Home Rule all round movement, which temporarily recovered a rather tenuous unity and purpose in the autumn of 1913 and the spring of 1914. The federalist movement had been quiescent during the first two Home Rule circuits, and many former supporters had deserted the cause in the belief that the Irish bill paid only lip service to Home Rule all round. On the Liberal side, many of the Scottish nationalists abandoned federalism for Scottish Home Rule. However, a hard core of federalists awaited the opportunity to resume their 1911–12 campaign, and the deadlock over the Ulster problem appeared to offer precisely that chance. Ulster exclusion seemed to have been rejected as a method of compromise during the first two parliamentary circuits, and Home Rule all round offered a potential alternative, which held some appeal to men of peace on all sides. A number of individuals like William O'Brien shared the federalist desire to promote an all-party conference to discuss an Irish settlement by consent, though not necessarily on federal lines.

Up to the middle of 1913, the most active leaders of this movement for settlement were William O'Brien, the Independent Irish Nationalist, and a group of Unionist federalists led by Lords Hythe, Dunraven and Grey. The compromise movement amongst Unionist peers gained publicity from a manifesto signed by twenty-four Irish peers and prominent country gentlemen, on 20 October 1912, asking for a settlement by a fully representative non-party conference. The pressure for compromise was increased during the Home Rule debates in the Lords in January and July 1913, when Dunraven and Grey made particularly powerful appeals for the creation of a federal constitution for the United Kingdom. Lord Dunraven's views were also well known through an article in the January 1913 issue of the Nineteenth Century, advocating 'conference as the alternative to confusion'. He believed that 'a great body of opinion overlapping the lines of party cleavage exists and gathers force', demanding settlement by consent on federal lines. Dunraven also tried to persuade Bonar Law privately, in September 1912, that a solution might be found
by a conference on the whole constitutional question, to examine the grant of self-government to Ireland and other parts of the United Kingdom, and also the reform of the Lords, and parliametary contention. Lord Hythe, formerly T.A. Brassey, had for some years devoted much of his time to the advocacy of United Kingdom devolution and imperial federation, writing articles and addressing meetings.

Like Dunraven and Grey, he disliked the Liberal Home Rule bill, and believed the Irish grievances could be met instead by establishing subordinate parliaments for all parts of the United Kingdom, including Ulster with powers similar to those possessed by the Canadian provincial parliaments. Hythe also deplored Unionist support for Ulster's religious campaign and condemned the Opposition for meeting the bill with a blank negative. In October 1912 Hythe had appealed to Bonar Law to settle the Home Rule question on Canadian & Federal lines - give N.E. Ulster a little show of its own if it really desires it, but by February 1913, Hythe decided that 'non-Party men' like himself must intervene.

Since 1911, William O'Brien had been suggesting to the leaders of both parties that the best way to settle the Irish question was to hold an all-party conference to discuss mutual concessions necessary to reach a settlement by consent. O'Brien made this appeal in letters to The Times and the party leaders, and in all his speeches throughout the first two Home Rule circuits. A resolution was passed to this effect at a conference of O'Brien's All-for-Ireland League in Cork on 1 March 1913, supported by Lord Dunraven. O'Brien pointed out that many prominent Unionist peers recognized the need for conference and compromise, and that all parties were beginning to see the limitations of their policies of intransigence. During the Second Reading debate on 9 June 1913, O'Brien renewed his appeal for a settlement by conference, and complained that the government had ignored the conciliatory overtures made during the January 1913 debate in the Lords. Once again, O'Brien received more encouragement from the Lords than the Commons, though Unionist peers such as Dunraven and Grey placed more emphasis on a federal solution than O'Brien did.

From summer 1913 the movement for settlement by conference gained momentum from two additional sources. The first new element was the introduction of the king's name, following the precedent set by the 1910 constitutional conference, and influenced also by the dissolution campaign. When O'Brien's All-for-Ireland League held its annual conference at Cork in August, the usual resolution included
the additional appeal to the government to advise the king to call a small representative conference. Lord Lythe supported O'Brien at the meeting and Dunraven was amongst those sending letters of sympathy. After August, the suggestion was frequently made that the king should call the proposed conference, and George V did not discourage the movement for settlement. The other new development was the revival of Liberal enthusiasm for a federal solution through conference, while O'Brien provided the connecting link between the Liberal and Unionist branches of the movement. The leaders of the Liberal campaign for federalism via conference were Loreburn in the Lords and Murray Macdonald and Arthur Ponsonby in the Commons. Their views were very similar to those held by the Unionist federalists, except that the Liberals thought in terms of incorporating the existing Irish bill into a wider federal settlement, whereas the Unionists generally demanded the abandonment of the Liberal bill before a federal scheme could be established.

The first indication that prominent Liberals were again espousing the twin causes of conference and federalism was the anonymous publication by Murray Macdonald of a pamphlet on The Constitutional Crisis on 2 June 1913. It was simply signed by 'A Liberal M.P.', but The Times and the Nation devoted considerable space to examining its arguments. Murray Macdonald, the Scottish federalist, had been ominously quiet throughout the first two Home Rule circuits, making no speeches and voting with the government on all the important divisions. From June 1913 onwards, Macdonald expressed his criticisms of the government's Home Rule policy more actively - albeit anonymously in this first instance - and suggested a federalist alternative. In this pamphlet he proposed that the three major problems of Ireland, the House of Lords, and parliamentary congestion, should be settled on national rather than party lines, before it was too late. The existing situation was uncertain and confused, 'pregnant with disaster', because these issues had fallen within the lines of party controversy. The government was approaching the problems in a piecemeal, haphazard way, and both parties were to blame; the Liberals acted as the party needs of the moment dictated, while the Unionists just provided rigid opposition. Murray Macdonald appealed instead for the devolution of business to the component parts of the United Kingdom, and reminded readers that the government had lost sight of its original intention of making Irish Home Rule the first step towards a comprehensive federal scheme. He contested the Unionist claim that the Irish bill must be withdrawn
before a full devolution plan could be considered, arguing that the main Unionist objections could be met by altering the financial provisions.

The reaction of the Nation to Macdonald's pamphlet was interesting, in that the main weakness of the federalist campaign, in 1913-14, was underlined. The Nation sympathised with 'A Liberal M.P.'s desire for settlement, but considered it idle to ignore the difficulties which 'suspicions, hatreds, party passions and desires offer to such a reasonable cause.' In particular, a settlement on devolutionist lines would require major alterations in the Irish bill:

--- its adoption would render it impossible to guarantee the passage of the Irish Bill under the powers of the Parliament Act, and would throw the Bill entirely on the mercy of an agreement which, however firmly established it should appear, might easily break down in the House of Lords. In other words, party strife has bred such animosity and such mistrust as to make it hardly possible to secure guarantees for a non-party settlement which to Irish Nationalists, or even to English Liberals, would appear sufficiently secure. Nor would the suspicions be entirely one-sided.

The Nation concluded that tactical considerations would render 'A Liberal M.P.'s proposals impracticable as far as most politicians were concerned.

For the moment, however, the attractions of Macdonald's scheme outweighed the problems, in the eyes of many people who anxiously sought a way out of the Irish impasse. Arthur Ponsonby, another Scottish Liberal member, entirely shared Macdonald's views on the need for a non-party settlement on the lines of United Kingdom devolution, and criticised the government for drifting. Murray Macdonald's pamphlet impressed the king; and Arthur Ponsonby evidently decided to press the advantage through his brother Fritz, who had recently replaced Lord Knollys as the king's second private secretary. Arthur Ponsonby introduced Murray Macdonald to his brother, who proceeded to use his influence to promote the idea that the king might call a non-party conference to discuss a settlement. Fritz Ponsonby reported back to Arthur on 23 July 1913:

I liked Murray MacDonald and thought him a straight down-right sort of man --- Bigge [Lord Stamfordham] tells me that the King thinks it would be a mistake to start the conference off on a false track i.e. pressure of business at Westminster and that it would be best to put Home Rule before them at once. The King always prefers blunt outspoken ways and hates indirect methods.
I am convinced however that the word Home Rule must not be mentioned. It would be far easier for them to discuss a scheme of devolution applicable to the three [sic] countries. Otherwise the whole thing will degenerate into a repetition of the Home Rule debate, and fizzle out. I think however the King quite grasps the point of a conference. 123

Murray Macdonald agreed that a conference on the Irish question alone was out of the question, because party interests and prejudices were against it. "There must be some shifting of the ground of controversy before either side can consent to meet the other. 124 However, the efforts of Macdonald and the two Ponsonbys had no doubt helped the king to reach the point where, by early August, he felt the only possible solution was an agreed settlement between the party leaders, possibly based on the idea of general devolution. 125 Arthur Ponsonby reassured the king further by informing Stamfordham that there was a strong left-wing sentiment in favour of coming to terms. 126

Thus, when the king handed his first memorandum to Asquith on 11 August 1913, he enquired if there was any chance of holding an all-party conference, on the lines suggested by Dunraven and O'Brien, to discuss the possibility of devolution and to try to reach an agreed settlement. 127 However, as Fritz Ponsonby reported later: 'I can't say we have got on very much with the idea of a conference.' Asquith informed the king that he saw no immediate necessity for a conference, as he did not think it would achieve anything in the existing situation. The king argued that it might solve the existing deadlock, 128 but Lord Lansdowne was almost as discouraging as Asquith when the king discussed the proposal with him early in September. The king suggested to Lansdowne that they should consider a conference of some kind to discuss the feasibility of a scheme of United Kingdom devolution. Lansdowne replied that formal conferences were of little use without a certain amount of previous agreement, and any enquiry into devolution would only be possible if the Irish Home Rule bill was laid aside. 129 The king may have been discouraged by the reactions of the two party leaders, but he continued his efforts.

Meanwhile, the movement for settlement by conference was receiving significant support from a more influential Liberal quarter. Lord Loreburn, the former Lord Chancellor and chairman of the 1911 Home Rule cabinet committee,
had always been sympathetic to the idea of Home Rule all round, though in 1911 he believed that an Irish bill should be introduced as the first part of the larger scheme. Loreburn's views had not changed, but his new position of independence allowed him to speak more freely than his former colleagues liked. During the Home Rule debate in the Lords in July 1913, Loreburn joined Dufferin and Grey in appealing for a settlement by consent along federal lines. The king was much impressed by Loreburn's observations, as also was William O'Brien, who lost no time in enrolling a new supporter. In August 1913, O'Brien met and corresponded with Loreburn, who promised to do all he could 'from the point of view of an independent man who wishes for a peaceful settlement.' Loreburn hoped the British Unionists—— may rise to a sense of public duty if appealed to in a proper way—— I would go a good way myself to get their withdrawal from the ruinous league with the Ulster firebrands——

A degree of political naivety was revealed in Loreburn's optimistic view that, if they could influence English public opinion --- it may solve the problem by enforcing moderation & good sense --- and if there is good will I do not see any insuperable difficulty. Loreburn also confided in Sir Almeric Fitzroy that he would do his best to bring about a conference, since he believed a settlement by consent was necessary and not impossible:

[Loreburn] did not seem to have reflected very deeply on the attitude his late colleagues might take towards such a scheme of accommodation, but spoke with very great fervour upon his own sense of responsibility in the matter.

Loreburn also tried unsuccessfully to persuade the Unionist Lord George Hamilton to act as go-between in bringing his ideas to the notice of the Opposition leaders. Loreburn could not agree to Hamilton's stipulation that the Home Rule bill must be dropped as a condition of conference, so Hamilton suggested that Loreburn's ideas might best be ventilated through a letter to The Times.

On 11 September 1913, The Times devoted more than three columns to Lord Loreburn's letter, under the caption: 'Lord Loreburn's appeal to the Nation. A Liberal Plea for a Conference.' Loreburn suggested 'a Conference or direct communication between the leaders' in an attempt to reach a common agreement, since all parties stood to lose by fighting out the Irish quarrel to the bitter end,
whether the bill was passed or rejected. He believed the congestion of the Imperial parliament provided an additional reason for Irish self-government and also for an analogous process all over the United Kingdom. In Longburn's opinion, all politicians realised the need for some change, whether they called it local government reform, devolution, federation or Home Rule; these concepts overlapped, and terms such as 'devolution' were less important than the idea behind them, which might contain the germ of a settlement. It did not matter which party took the first step towards dispelling this 'cloud of phrases' and reaching 'bedrock', but Longburn stipulated that no preliminary condition should be extracted from anyone in order to increase the chances of a settlement. For a letter which aroused such a storm of controversy, this was exceptionally mild and vague. It did not specifically suggest a United Kingdom devolution as a basis for the proposed settlement, but this was implied, while a precise definition of 'devolution' was deliberately avoided. Nowhere, however, was any form of Ulster exclusion even mentioned, since Longburn disliked the idea, though he took care not to exclude any possibility.

With some justification, the prime minister asked Longburn to explain precisely what he meant by this letter. Longburn obligingly provided a confidential memorandum for the cabinet, suggesting 'a practical form of overture to a Conference about Home Rule'. He recommended that any conference should be preceded by full and confidential parleys between the leaders, rather than by formal conditions. As a possible basis for these preliminary conversations, Longburn suggested that Irish Home Rule should be treated as the first step towards Home Rule for all parts of the United Kingdom. Ulster might be dealt with by creating a 'legislative enclaves', so that laws affecting the four north-east Ulster counties could only pass the Irish parliament with the assent of a majority of the members representing those counties. Longburn further proposed the establishment of a similar 'administrative enclave' for the four counties, though he did not explain its powers and responsibilities.

Longburn appeared to be proposing a combination of Home Rule all round for the United Kingdom, with only one parliament for Ireland, and a form of partial autonomy for N.E. Ulster, generally known as 'Home Rule within Home Rule'. The latter suggestion was to be the more influential in the forthcoming negotiations, but Longburn did not elaborate on either.
THE DAWN OF HARMONY.

Mr. Balfour to Mr. Asquith, "I'LL DARE YE TO COMPROMISE!"
Sir Edward Carson to Mr. Bonar Law, "D'YE HEAR WHAT THE GENTLEMAN SAYS? I'LL WID HIM ENTIRELY."
Lord Londesborough, "AH, MAY ALREADY THEY BEGIN TO AGREE."
Loreburn's letter to The Times provoked strong reactions. Redmond and Carson were among the many readers who assumed that Loreburn's letter was written with the knowledge of the government. Redmond was deeply shocked at what he thought to be a premature ministerial move towards compromise, and announced firmly in Kerry that he would not go into a conference in which Home Rule would be placed in the melting-pot. The day after the publication of Loreburn's letter, Dillon protested that proposals for conference, coming from friends of Home Rule, 'are quite futile and mischievous, and are only calculated to encourage the Ulster leaders to believe that their bluff and threats are intimidating the Government and the National Party.' Many Unionists were naturally suspicious; Leo Maxse, editor of the National Review, believed there was great anxiety in case the Unionists allowed themselves to be enticed into another 'conference trap.'

Fritz Ponsonby commented on 9 October that ever since Loreburn's letter, 'the whole of the Conservative Party has smelt a trap and they fear it may be had.' Carson made a blunt public statement that the Ulster Unionists would not enter a conference which would mean absolute surrender: 'No, we are not going to be led into the spider's parlour.' Even those, such as Lord George Hamilton and Lord Charles Beresford, who realized that Loreburn was speaking for himself rather than flying a 'kite' for the government, still thought Loreburn was voicing the ministry's fears and trying to persuade the Nationalists to agree to a conference.

Birrell later told Asquith & the cabinet that Loreburn's letter was interpreted in Ireland as a 'flag of fear', prompted by Loreburn's former colleagues; the letter did great harm in stiffening Ulster's resistance and 'the flood of talk & press effort' had a bad effect. On the whole, however, Birrell did not think it had done much damage among the Liberal rank and file, and if anything it had 'hardened their hearts.' Lloyd George was more angry, though his feelings may have been exaggerated for Nationalist consumption. The Chancellor told T. P. O'Connor that Loreburn's letter had been written without consulting any single minister, and had created the bitterest indignation among the cabinet and the Liberal rank and file.

It is the sort of thing with which I have been only too familiar for a generation past - a plausible rallying cry for faint-hearts, who want a decent case for cutting it [some] R [ule].
Realists in both parties shared Lansdowne's view that 'Loreburn does not seem to me to help us much so far as materials for a compromise are concerned. Birrell commented that a number of 'private pour parties' could overcome the fact that Lansdowne and Carson wanted the bill dropped altogether, whereas Loreburn's proposed concessions proceeded upon the assumption that the bill remained as a basis for compromise, with Ulster included. Birrell concluded that even the first step towards establishing a common basis for discussion could never be taken by consent. Morley also believed that 'Loreburn is pure moonshine for any practical purpose whatever', though his diagnosis contained some truth. Lord George Hamilton thought the public and the press had taken the only possible view of Loreburn's proposed conference, namely that it would be a pure futility without an agreed basis for negotiation.

Those who gave an unqualified welcome to Loreburn's letter were in a minority, which included some of the Liberal federalists and the *Manchester Guardian*. The federalist peers, Channing and Charnwood, admired 'its tone & lofty purpose', according to Birrell, while C. P. Scott used his newspaper to give full support to Loreburn's proposal. The *Guardian* reassured the Nationalists that they need not fear betrayal, for Loreburn was no 'turncoat', but insisted that every possibility of reasonable compromise must be exhausted before the government forcibly upheld Home Rule in the face of Ulster's resistance.

Lord Loreburn's letter had less actual effect than some contemporaries and historians have assumed from the storm of debate it aroused. Loreburn's initiative was not alone responsible for the opening of negotiations between the leaders, which were inevitable anyway, but it helped to create an atmosphere which allowed conversations to begin sooner than might otherwise have been the case. In particular, as Lansdowne recognised immediately, the famous letter made the king more than ever insistent on the merits of a settlement by consent. After talking to the king in mid-September, Lord Curzon commented that the king was disposed to take advantage of the 'new situation' created by the appearance of Loreburn's letter, by renewing his suggestions of conference.

The discussion of Loreburn's letter concentrated on the proposal for an all-party conference and paid little attention to his hints about Home Rule all round.
However, the federalists on both sides continued to campaign for United Kingdom devolution as a means of settling the Irish question. Murray Macdonald promoted his views in a letter to the Times on 7 October; while Arthur Ponsonby explained their ideas further in a Contemporary Review article in November 1913. Moreton Trowen held conversations with Healy and Dunraven about substituting a federal bill for the Home Rule bill, and MacCallum Scott drafted more manifestoes advocating a federal solution. The federalists differed as to which group should take the initiative. Lord Grey wished the Unionists would 'do the big and bold thing and adopt the Federal policy', thus making it possible for the Liberal to withdraw their Irish bill and think out a new constitution on a federal basis. F. S. Oliver believed firmly that the Liberal federalists, such as Murray Macdonald, Loreburn and Charnwood, should make the first move in proposing detailed settlements. If the Unionists took a strong initiative in favour of Home Rule all round, this would be treated by the government as the minimum, so that 'something worse wd. be the compromise in the end.'

However, the debate was largely academic. With the exception of Austen Chamberlain, the Unionist leaders never came close to adopting United Kingdom devolution as a serious basis for settlement in autumn 1913. Certainly, Chamberlain was a fairly committed federalist, though he used a cautious, diplomatic approach when trying to persuade Lansdowne of the merits of the scheme. Late in October 1913, he suggested that the only way to meet a Liberal proposal for Ulster exclusion would be to draw Asquith on the lines of 'general devolution':

I do not for one moment pretend that I am in favour of Home Rule all round, but I think it would be infinitely less dangerous than the present Home Rule Bill even with Ulster excluded —— In short, though I think that Home Rule all round would be inconvenient and often worrying, I do not believe that it could be dangerous to our unity or would materially lessen our strength. Apart from these arguments on principle, I suggest that this course has great tactical advantages for us ——

The best plan for both parties was to change the issue, so they could each save face. A discussion between Chamberlain and Churchill revealed that even Chamberlain had not thought it his business to construct a detailed plan; he was, therefore, unable to
tell Churchill whether their respective ideas on the devolution of powers were at all similar. As Churchill remarked: 'It is so easy to talk vaguely about Federalism, but few people try to face the obvious difficulties or provide answers to the first questions which arise.'

Chamberlain entirely failed to convert his Unionist colleagues, and federalists generally tended to overestimate the extent of Unionist support for Home Rule all round. Sir Edward Carson was actually closer to Chamberlain's position than most of the British Unionists, but only because federalism seemed to him a lesser evil than Ulster exclusion. Carson informed Bonar Law on 20 September that, if Ulster exclusion had to be considered at all, it would be preferable to incorporate it in a general scheme of devolution for the whole United Kingdom, since this would mitigate the problem of the southern Unionists. Bonar Law believed that a discussion of the larger question of general devolution — would really be impossible I think unless there were something in the nature of a coalition. Thus, when Bonar Law told Churchill and the king in mid-September that he was prepared to discuss a government proposal for United Kingdom devolution at a conference, Churchill perhaps misjudged Bonar Law's 'perfect sincerity'.

Certainly by 8 October Law stated categorically that a general system of devolution was not a possible basis for settlement.

Lansdowne, F.E. Smith, Balfour and Curzon were all opposed to United Kingdom devolution, but under certain circumstances they could appreciate the advantages of agreeing to negotiate along federal lines. F.E. Smith pointed out the tactical advantages of United Kingdom devolution, as against Ulster exclusion, arguing that federalism would: (a) postpone everything to the Greek Kalends (b) thoroughly dishearten the Nationalists (c) involve the Govt in a morass which might ultimately destroy them. Lansdowne wrote to Bonar Law on 23 September:

Balfour and Curzon both thought that a conference on Devolution in general would present insurmountable difficulties. We have none of us any clear ideas on the subject, and should have no proposals to make. This is true. At the same time, if impossible we were asked to take part in an extended enquiry of this kind, I do not think we could refuse to do so. Even if a conference on these lines were to prove abortive, we should have gained time without, I think, doing ourselves any harm.
The Government's lack of enthusiasm for the federalist cause was no doubt partially due to their recognition of the considerations which influenced the Opposition. However, Asquith had even more to gain by playing for time, and was equally prepared to maintain the pretence that he was genuinely willing to consider Home Rule all round. This position in any case coincided with the official policy that the Irish bill was intended to be the first step towards a wider federal scheme. Therefore the ministry continued neither to encourage nor discourage the federal enthusiasts like Chamberlain, Ponsonby and Murray Macdonald. The illusion was kept alive by occasional references to the official policy of ultimate devolution, as in Asquith's speech at Leeds on 27 November 1913. However, the cabinet's position had not changed since the rejection of devolution in 1911-12. Birrell still maintained that England did not want, and was not prepared for a scheme of federation, and that however desirable it might be it would take at least 10 years to carry such a scheme into effect. Lansdowne, at least, understood the Government's true position; Asquith might claim that he kept an open mind, but he would never let his Home Rule bill be side-tracked indefinitely, while Grey and Dunraven were hammering out a colossal scheme of Federal Government for the United Kingdom.

By late autumn 1913, the federalist leaders of the compromise movement had again failed to persuade party leaders to adopt United Kingdom devolution as a basis for settlement. The party leaders did not discard the federalist alternative altogether, however, since it provided a supremely useful tactical cover for initiating or disguising the discussion of the more delicate matter of Ulster exclusion. The movement for settlement by consent had been more successful in promoting interest in the general idea of a conference or conversations between the leaders. They had proved particularly effective in increasing the pressure on the king to intervene to promote such a compromise.

PRESSURES TOWARDS COMPROMISE: (3) THE ULSTER CAMPAIGN AND THE IRISH SECRETARY.

One of the most powerful forces driving the government in the direction of compromise was the campaign in Ulster. The foundations were being laid in the first half of the year for the rapid expansion in the strength of the movement which took place after June. By the end of 1913, the government's
attitude was transformed; they were obliged to recognise the Ulster movement as a new and independent factor in their calculations. Obvious problems existed in estimating the significance and gravity of the Ulster movement. The Unionists encouraged a wide dissemination of information through the press, and the chief secretary had at his disposal the reports of the Royal Irish Constabulary. Caution had to be exercised in using both sources, which were subject to bias and exaggeration, but Birrell took caution to extreme lengths in selecting the information to be passed on to the cabinet.

Press reports alone might have been expected to alarm the cabinet sufficiently to demand a thorough examination. The organization and recruiting of the Ulster Volunteer Force received considerable publicity throughout 1913. General Sir George Richardson assumed command of the U.V.F. in September, and reorganised it on a regimental basis. The main efforts of the 1913 campaign were concentrated in the second half of the year, during the parliamentary recess. In June, Carson headed the Irish Unionist members on a tour of British towns, to encourage British support for the Ulster cause. Public gatherings were held throughout Ulster on 12 July, the largest taking place at Craigavon, where 18,000 people marched in procession. The Ulster Unionist Council formally organised itself into a 'Provisional Government' on 24 September, consisting of a Central Authority of seventy-six members, a Military Council and four Committees to deal with specific matters. Special services were held throughout Ulster to commemorate 'Ulster Day' on 28 September, while Carson toured the province for two weeks, inspecting the U.V.F. and addressing meetings. Carson informed Bonar Law on 20 September that everything in Ulster was progressing splendidly and enthusiasm was growing instead of declining, indicating that the press reports were fairly accurate. 175 Carson's tour ended on 4 October with a meeting of 20,000 people at Armagh, at which 4,300 Volunteers paraded. During his tour he had inspected 22,000 men on parade in six counties. From the autumn of 1913, pressure was increased by the efforts of Lord Willoughby de Broke and Lord Milner, who established the 'British League for the Support of Ulster', employing agents all over England enrolling men to help the Ulster resistance movement.
Most of this was common knowledge, but the chief secretary also had access to more useful, detailed information provided in the monthly police reports from Ulster. These survive in the form of the condensed Intelligence Notes, which were drawn up at the end of each year to summarise the police reports. Though Birrell encouraged a process of 'sifting down' the original reports to allow for police bias, enough material remains in the Notes to show that the police reports generally substantiated the information provided by the press. The number of Unionist Clubs increased from 297 in November 1912, when they had a membership of 55,596, to 315 in May 1913, with a membership of 61,482, most of whom received drill instruction. The number of drill classes also rose from 298 in February 1913, to 757 in September, and up to 1,742 by December. The greatest increase took place between June and December 1913, with the most rapid acceleration from August to October. 176

Equally significant were the statistics on the growth of the Ulster Volunteer Force and the accumulation of arms. The U.V.F. consisted of men who had signed the Covenant, and were prepared to enrol and train for military service in the campaign against Home Rule. Numbers were reported as 41,000 in April 1913, rising to 56,651 by September 1913, and up to 76,757 by November. Information concerning the accumulation of arms was more difficult to obtain up to the middle of 1913, consisting mainly of scattered reports and rumours of arms shipments.

More precise figures were provided from October 1913, when it was reported that 10,000 rifles were ready for issue to the U.V.F. at short notice. Police observation revealed that about 4,000 modern rifles were imported from Birmingham and distributed throughout Ulster during October and November 1913, by three large Belfast arms dealers under contract to prominent Unionist leaders. Police returns estimated that a total of 17,054 arms of all descriptions were in the possession of the Ulster Unionists in December 1913, rising to 24,879 by March 1914. This increase took place despite the government Proclamations issued on 4 December 1913, prohibiting the importation of arms and ammunition into Ireland and also forbidding their carriage along the coast. The urgency of the situation was further underlined by the decision of the more extreme Nationalists to create an armed force of their own. The 'National Volunteers' were established at a meeting in Dublin on 25 November 1913, and 4,000 men enrolled immediately. 177
Admittedly, police reports were an unreliable source of information; methods of police investigation were rudimentary and scarcely amounted to a sophisticated espionage system. Moreover, the Royal Irish Constabulary, which supplied the reports, could not be relied upon to be politically neutral, though the full extent of this weakness was not revealed until 1913–14. Birrell informed the prime minister in August 1913 that the police reports were all obviously prejudiced. Sir Neville Chamberlain, the Inspector-General of the R.I.C., was himself a 'True Blue' and the majority of the reporting officers were Covenanters; they were already policemen. Birrell described the Ulster police as 'Lutherans guarding the Pope' and quite unfit for a 'real row' with their fellow Protestants. 'If there were to be a big row, we cannot rely upon the R.I.C.,' for so many were hand in glove with the other side. Two months later the chief secretary reported that the state of the R.I.C. was very serious indeed: 'There are practically no recruits and the resignations are pouring in.' It was understandable that the chief secretary should view these police reports with considerable caution and it was sensible to allow 'a liberal discount' for bias when interpreting them. However, Intelligence Reports deliberately toned down the original, complete reports, so that the condensed information provided there may well have been an under-estimate of the situation. Even if this were not so, it can reasonably be assumed that any exaggeration and bias was a fairly constant factor, so that the escalation of the Ulster movement was clear enough, especially after June 1913.

Birrell had to decide how these reports should be interpreted, and also how much of this information and his own conclusions, should be circulated to his colleagues. Birrell had long been uncertain and ambivalent about the situation in Ulster, torn by his loyalties to Asquith and the Nationalists, between what he wished to believe and what he feared to be the true situation. His vacillation was encouraged by the completely conflicting advice he continued to receive from the two highly respected Protestant civil servants, whose opinion he valued greatly. Sir James Dougherty, Birrell's under-secretary, held firmly to his conviction that 'this Ulster outcry is largely a game of bluff' and the fanatical 'fire eaters' were in a small minority. Dougherty remained confident that arms stored in Ulster were 'not intended for the purposes of warfare', and believed Birrell was over-anxious in taking the 'Ulster Gasconade more seriously than I am.
Sir David Harrel, formerly John Morley's under-secretary, had initially shared Dougherty's more sanguine view, but by December 1912 had swung round to the belief that the Ulster threats should be taken seriously. In January 1914, Harrel was convinced that the situation had developed too far to allow the Covenanters to retreat peacefully, even if their leaders advised them to lay down their arms. He believed that Dougherty 'greatly underestimated Covenant strength', which was based on fierce resentment at the creation of any Irish parliament which would mark the destruction of their own ascendancy.

Birrell instinctively inclined towards Harrel's gloomy forebodings, but was reluctant to admit their truth, or act on them, because he had already acquiesced in a cabinet policy based on Dougherty's assumptions. The chief secretary appears to have skirted the problem by providing the cabinet with minimal information on the Ulster situation, until his hand was forced, first by the king and later by some of his colleagues. Up to October 1913, Birrell circulated police reports to his colleagues only in February and October 1912, and again in April and August 1913. No commentary was provided to help his colleagues to interpret the brief, haphazard extracts from local police reports, and no attempt was made to tabulate the information or draw general conclusions. This was partly understandable, in that Birrell could not be absolutely certain of the gravity of the Ulster situation; the police reports were difficult to interpret, the major escalation of the Ulster movement did not take place until mid-1913, and it was obviously difficult to tabulate the statistics before about October 1913, when far more information was available. But at the best, the chief secretary was over-cautious; at the worst, he minimised the seriousness of the Ulster movement to a dangerous degree, which involved at least partial abdication of his own responsibility.

The police reports circulated to the cabinet in October 1912 provided brief and unhelpful extracts on the accumulation of arms in Ulster. This innocuous document revealed nothing of Birrell's personal views, which appear to have fluctuated quite considerably, according to the depth of his depression, the latest police reports, and the extent to which he was influenced by Dougherty and the Nationalist leaders. By March 1913, the cabinet had received no further information, but it was the king rather than the cabinet who
intervened to break Birrell's silence. George V had been alarmed to receive a
lengthy, anonymous document from a magistrate in the north of Ireland. The
writer claimed there were '100,000 able-bodied Orangemen, nearly all armed with
revolvers, prepared to follow their leaders to any length in resistance to Home
Rule.' In addition, 381 Unionist clubs could supply a further 100,000 armed men,
80,000 military rifles had been procured, and the Ulster counties were being
divided into military districts. These preparations could not be dismissed as
bluff. 'Too many boats have been burnt. The men are being drilled and prepared
very seriously and very completely.' The king was sufficiently worried by the
writer's serious tone and knowledgeable manner to request the Irish secretary's
views on the document. Birrell evidently delegated the task of preparing a reply
to his undersecretary, who feared the Chief will think it too optimistic.
Despite the divergence between their private views, however, Birrell relied very
heavily on Dougbery's draft when compiling the memorandum which he forwarded
to Lord Stamfordham, for the king, on 15 April, and circulated to the cabinet the
following week.

The memorandum seen by the cabinet in April 1913 consequently
represented Dougbery's more sanguine views rather than Birrell's own. With
the chief secretary's mind in a continual see-saw of indecision over Ulster, it was
undoubtedly easier to pass on Dougbery's more consistent and confident opinions.
The combined version was a curious document which for the most part played down
the significance of the Ulster movement. Memorandum B was full of inconsistencies,
the most striking being the muddled thinking of its conclusion, which contradicted the
optimistic tone of the main part of the document. Birrell almost certainly thought
Dougbery's draft was too optimistic, as his under-secretary anticipated, and felt
obliged to superimpose some of his own fears in the conclusion, while retaining
Dougbery's basic text. Thus Memorandum B argued at length that the anonymous
document sent to the king exaggerated the extensiveness of Ulster's military
preparations. On the basis of population statistics, it was ridiculous to suppose
that 200,000 male Protestants were enrolled in the movement, and there was little
evidence to show that the movement had taken any real hold on the mass of the
Protestant population. The claims concerning the accumulation of arms, the
extent of the drilling and the enrollment of the Ulster Volunteer Force were
similarly attacked as grossly exaggerated. In marked contrast, the concluding section of the memorandum was curiously confused and uncertain. On the one hand it argued that the talk of civil war was wild and irrational, and would scarcely further the interests of Belfast businessmen. On the other, it admitted that the situation was dangerous, that it was hard to estimate precisely the lengths to which the Ulster Protestants might go, and that real violence would probably first appear after the Home Rule bill passed. Birrell's covering letter to Lord Stamfordham was evidently a further attempt to balance the effect of Dougherty's optimism, but only added to the confusion. He gave his opinion that 'it would be equally foolish to make too much or too little of the active propaganda being carried on by the Protestant and Unionist Party.'

The chief secretary was remaining silent or taking a neutral central position as long as possible, in public or semi-official pronouncements. Even in correspondence or memoranda intended for the king or cabinet, Birrell generally refrained from hinting at his own misgivings over the official Ulster policy, no doubt believing that Churchill and Lloyd George were in a better position to act as critics. The cabinet only received the benefit of a written commentary from Birrell on the Ulster question on two occasions. Memorandum B of April 1913, based on Dougherty's draft, was the first, while the second did not reach the cabinet until 15 June 1914. It was clearly unwise and potentially dangerous for Birrell to conceal the extent of his personal misgivings from his colleagues, when he had access to the police reports and they relied on him to transmit the information. By keeping the cabinet ill-informed, or circulating a memorandum which he evidently judged to be over-sanguine, Birrell was reinforcing the arguments for maintaining the status quo.

Even the random police reports which the cabinet did see before October 1913 failed to justify the sanguine tone of the April Memorandum. Though Birrell's colleagues were scarcely in a position to appreciate this, the police reports circulated to the cabinet in February and October 1912, and April and October 1913, provided no basis for any kind of complete picture. The four memoranda up to August 1913 were brief and contained random extracts from police reports on small local areas. The reports submitted in October 1913 were much fuller and gave an impression of considerable local activity, but they all suffered from the same limitations as a
source for cabinet evaluation of the situation. Apart from the obvious difficulty presented by the bias and the elementary espionage techniques of the police, the diversified and localised nature of the reports was confusing to the uninitiated. Enthusiastic recruiting for the U.V.F. in Antrim, for instance, might be offset by apathy in Tyrone, as in the October 1913 report. Eye-witness accounts of various local demonstrations were largely meaningless to ministers not acquainted with the local parishes of Ulster, and merely added to the impressionistic material so readily available in the press. A careful synopsis of all the local material, complete with statistical tables indicating the situation in all nine Ulster counties and showing the monthly acceleration in drilling, recruiting and arms accumulation, would have been far more helpful.

It was not until November 1913 that the cabinet at last began to receive more useful tabulated information of this kind. Evidently some of Birrell's colleagues had commented on the inadequacy of the reports they received and requested fuller information. Birrell enclosed a brief covering note with the police reports circulated in October 1913:

Some members of the Cabinet having expressed a wish to be kept informed as to the reports I receive as to the 'going-on' in Ulster, I am circulating some extracts from recent reports, and will continue to do so from time to time. The correspondence between Asquith and Birrell at this time does not suggest that the prime minister was himself responsible for this request. Presumably Birrell's silence and failure to supply information appeared to justify the position to which the prime minister had become increasingly committed by January 1913, and allowed Asquith to keep his head in the sand. It is surprising that ministers did not complain about lack of information earlier, particularly as the copious press coverage of the Ulster movement should have alerted them to the limitations of the information supplied by Birrell. There is not even any evidence that Irish intelligence information was ever discussed in cabinet before autumn 1913, since the reports could well have been merely circulated. The cabinet as a whole can therefore be criticised for their preoccupation with their own departmental affairs, which allowed Birrell and Asquith to evade full cabinet examination of this delicate question for so long.
The reports supplied with Birrell’s note in October 1913 were certainly more copious and detailed than before, but it was not until the following month that more precise and meaningful statistics were at last provided. Tabulated information, similar to the condensed version of the local police reports used in the Intelligence Notes, was finally circulated to the cabinet more frequently from November 1913 onwards. Further Notes on the Movement in Ulster, distributed to ministers in November, provided more definite statistics on the estimated strength of the U.V.F. in September 1913, and on the arms believed to be in the Unionists’ possession in October 1913. Further Notes from Ulster in December 1913 was also more helpful and consequently more alarming. It provided tables showing the arms and ammunition imported and distributed through Belfast from August to November 1913, as far as was known to the police. The most important point to emerge was the very sharp escalation in the importation of arms in November 1913.

The police reports clearly indicated a significant acceleration in the growth of the Ulster movement from June 1913 onwards, with a particularly marked increase between August and November. This information was not, however, circulated to the cabinet in any clear, comprehensive statistical form until November 1913. Birrell and Asquith were both to blame; Birrell provided too little information and minimised the danger of the situation in his attempt to remain neutral, while Asquith did not press for more adequate reports since he preferred not to know the worst. By August 1913, it had become clear to Birrell that the force of evidence would not allow him to remain on the fence for much longer, though the true extent of the danger was not revealed to the cabinet as a whole until November 1913.

From August 1913, the chief secretary was increasingly certain that the Ulster movement was a grave threat to the prospects of Home Rule, but he experienced considerable difficulty in persuading Asquith that this was the case. As early as 24 July 1913, Birrell admitted the seriousness of the Ulster situation in an interview with the king, whose anxiety had been increased by the steady stream of Unionist warnings and the prime minister’s silence. The chief secretary commented later that, since he himself believed in the serious possibility of riots, bloodshed and religious strife in north-east Ulster, it was not easy to check the king’s ‘torrent of hearsay.’ The king subsequently informed both Lord Curzon
and Lord Lansdowne that Mr. Birrell was the only minister who seemed to have
grasped the extreme danger of the situation in Ireland - that the others had scoffed
at the idea of civil war or been indifferent to it. Birrell's royal audience of
24 July 1913 is particularly significant because the chief secretary made the first
clear admission, since his August 1911 letter to Churchill, that he was prepared to
accept Ulster exclusion. The kink subsequently described Birrell's suggestion to
Asquith:

[Birrell] seemed to think that perhaps an arrangement could be made for Ulster to 'contract out' of the Home
Rule Bill, say for 10 years, with the right to come under the Irish Parliament, if so desired, after a
referendum by her people, at the end of that period.

However, the chief secretary was careful to keep within safe limits by urging that
it was the duty of the Opposition to make the first move by coming forward with a
practical proposal to this effect. When the king argued that Redmond would
never agree, Birrell answered that he would have to agree, 'and could easily be
squeezed' by the threat of an early dissolution. Birrell's proposal was based
upon the same principle as the suggestion made to Churchill two years earlier.

By the end of August 1913, the chief secretary at last concluded that
he must impress upon Asquith the full gravity of the situation and try to persuade him
that Ulster exclusion might be a practicable solution. Birrell therefore warned
Asquith on 30 August that police reports showed they were heading for 'a shindy of
large proportions', which would involve a large-scale military operation by the
army. This prospect forced them to face a crucial policy question:

Is there any duty imposed on us to notify - in the
King's Speech or otherwise our willingness to
consider the exclusion from the Bill of some
portions of Ulster & to arrange for the local
government of the excluded parts under the
Imperial Parliament?

As usual, however, Birrell could see both sides of the Ulster question all too clearly,
and proceeded to weaken his case by emphasizing the strength of the opposition to
such a course. O'Brien and Healy opposed exclusion even more fiercely than
Redmond, while 'Carson and company' would ridicule any suggestion not
accompanied by the withdrawal of the Home Rule bill. Birrell's hopelessly mixed
feelings and conflicting loyalties were illustrated by the ambivalence of his final
appeal:
At the same time, though unable to justify any change of front just now and feeling satisfied, in my own mind, that we must & might 'steer right on' I am not sure other members of the Cabinet, when it comes to the 'sticking point' of facing powder & shot, may not hesitate to shoot, until it has been made plain that the Four Counties are not to be forced into a new Constitution, one of the features of which will be a Papist Parliament in Dublin & a Peasant proletariat in command of the Till.

Asquith's non-committal reply served to increase the chief secretary's anxieties; a week later, Birrell wrote to Asquith again, asking if there was anything they ought to say before the king's speech opening the 1914 session, to make their Ulster position clearer.

Birrell's gentle persuasion clearly had very little influence on the prime minister, for obvious reasons. From 1911, the chief secretary had recognised reluctantly that some form of Ulster exclusion might prove to be the only practical solution. But even at this late stage, when Birrell's anxieties about Ulster were intense, his loyalty to the Nationalists prevented him making a strong, unqualified proposal of Ulster exclusion. The chief secretary's equivocal position, combined with the distractions of his wife's illness and the Larkin affair, meant that when he finally urged Ulster exclusion on Asquith, his appeal lacked force and consistency. It was hedged around with qualifications which gave Asquith ample excuse for ignoring it. Tentative suggestions from the chief secretary left Asquith untouched, particularly when neither minister was personally enthusiastic about the course of action proposed. A far stronger initiative was needed to force Asquith's hand, but Birrell was unable to provide this in autumn 1913, for reasons of temperament and circumstance.

The prime minister responded very slowly to the appeals of Birrell and the king. Although Asquith admitted to the king on 11 August that he was prepared to consider any practical Unionist plan for granting Ulster exclusion for five years, his comments suggested that he considered this scarcely necessary:

The P.M. regarded the whole situation with almost frivolous optimism. He admitted there would be trouble in Ulster but he hoped it would soon evaporate. He thought it would have died away long ago had it not been for Carson.
In response to Birrell's anxious appeal of 30 August, the prime minister reiterated the official policy, as if to strengthen the chief secretary's resistance to temptation. They could not withdraw the bill but any proposal from the right quarter for separate treatment of the four counties must receive full consideration, as a possible amendment to the bill. Little progress was being made, so long as Asquith continued to believe that the proposal must come from the Unionists and might be incorporated into the existing bill. After an interview with the prime minister early in September, J.A. Murray Macdonald commented: "I had hoped for nothing from the interview; but the result is even more unsatisfactory than I had anticipated. The optimism of the P.M. regarding the prospects in Ulster is staggering."

But although Asquith frequently made light of the situation, and minimised, for the king's benefit, the significance of the police reports, even he gradually took the Ulster movement more seriously. The prime minister wrote a long memorandum for the king in mid-September 1913, intending to show that the consequences of rejecting the bill would be far graver than the results of its passage. But the inconsistencies in the document betrayed the influence of Birrell's ambivalence, and Asquith's admissions about Ulster's resistance to Home Rule by no means proved his case:

--- there will undoubtedly be a serious danger of organised disorder in the four north-eastern counties of Ulster --- there will be a considerable and a militant minority strongly in favour of the new state of things --- the genuine apprehensions of a large majority of the Protestants, the incitements of responsible leaders, and the hopes of British sympathy and support, are likely to encourage forcible resistance (wherever it can be tried); there is the certainty of tumult and riot; and more than the possibility of bloodshed ---

By mid-September, then, both Asquith and Birrell were belatedly coming to recognize the dangerous nature of the Ulster situation, and to examine the alternative policies available.

From April 1912 to the summer of 1913, the official party leaders on both sides generally maintained extreme positions, for and against the Home Rule bill. The Liberals sought to push through their original bill for the whole of Ireland, while the Unionists aimed to promote an early dissolution to turn the
Liberals out, wreck Home Rule and prevent civil war in Ulster. By the autumn of 1913, however, a combination of pressures was gradually forcing both parties to start thinking instead about possible escape routes from the logical consequences of their politics of intransigence.
1. Nation, 21 Dec. 1912. A majority of Unionist peers had favoured simple
rejection on Second Reading (see Lansdowne to Milner, 14 Dec. 1912,
Milner Papers, Box 195.), but others would have preferred substantial
amendment in Committee (see e.g. J.R. Fisher, Northern Whig, to
St. Loe Strachey, 15 Dec. 1912, Strachey Papers, s/21/1/12).

2. See e.g. Lord Colebrooke to Crewe, 1 Feb. 1913, Crewe Papers, c/9;
Crewe to Montague, 7 Feb. 1913, Crewe Papers, I/5/10.

3. Haldane to mother, 29 Jan. 1913, Haldane Papers, N.L.S. MS.5989,
fos. 34–5.


5. Burns diary, 30 Jan. 1913, B.L. Add. MS. 46335, fo. 42.

6. Morley to Rosebery, 31 Jan. 1913, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS. 10048,
fo.19; Morley to Carnegie, 17 Feb. 1913, Bodleian, MS. film 569.

7. Emmott diary, II, fos. 78–80, 8 March 1913.

8. See e.g. Hansard [Lords], XIII, 469–485 (Dunraven); ibid., 496–508
(Grey); ibid., 518–534 (St. Aldwyn).

9. Stephen Gwynn, 'Home Rule and the House of Lords', Nineteenth Century,
LXXIII (March 1913), 580–596 (esp. 581).

1913, Gladstone Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 46042, fos. 7–8.

11. The Marquess of Hamilton, the former member for Londonderry, succeeded
to a peerage, causing a by-election in this traditionally Unionist seat. David
C. Hoegg, a native of Londonderry, and a Liberal, gained the seat by 57 votes
over his Unionist rival, on a 95% poll. Rumours reached Westminster when
the division in the Lords was being taken.

12. King's speech 1913, copy in MS. Asquith 85, fo. 209.

13. For details of the Speaker's decision on the Franchise and Registration Bill, see
P. Rowland, The Last Liberal Governments: Unfinished Business 1911–14,
pp. 82–3, 145, 173–4. The bill had provided for the apportionment of plural voting,
the elimination of anomalies in the registration laws and universal male
suffrage. However, it was unable to avoid becoming closely linked with the
agitation for votes for women, particularly after Asquith indicated that an
amendment to the Franchise bill was the only method open to the suffragettes.
The speaker, however, unexpectedly ruled that a female suffrage amendment
would so substantially alter the bill's character that it would have to be withdrawn. The Nationalists' decision to vote against the female suffrage amendments would have caused considerable difficulties for those left-wing Liberals who supported both Home Rule and the female suffrage cause (see e.g. C.P. Scott diary, 15-16 and 20 Jan. 1913, B.L. Add. MS. 50901, fos. 74-6, 80-2.)

Burns' diary, 4 June 1913, B.L. Add. MS. 46335, fo. 103; Ibert to Bryce, 6 June 1913, MS. Bryce 14, fos. 87-90.

For details on the Marconi scandal, see Rowland, ibid., passim; F. Donaldson, The Marconi Scandal.

15. See e.g. Ibert to Bryce, 6 June 1913, MS. Bryce 14, fos. 87-90; Fitzroy, Memoirs, II, 513.
17. Ibert to Bryce, 24 June 1913, MS. Bryce 14, fos. 92-3.
18. See e.g. Nation, 7 June 1913; The Times, 7 and 9 June 1913; Ibert to Bryce, 6 June 1912, MS. Bryce 14, fos. 87-90.
20. Hansard, LIII, 1285-7; Asquith argued that 21 by-elections since April 1912 had been contested by Liberal and Labour candidates, whose total votes amounted to 121,269 as against 105,568 for the Unionists.
22. Samuel to wife, 18 Feb. 1913, Samuel Papers, A/157/657; See also Annual Register, 1913, p.118; Hansard, XLVI, 2312-3 (F.E. Smith); XLVI, 2179-84 (Russell Rea); Nation, 18 Jan. 1913. Naturally, differing conclusions were reached regarding the significance of this acknowledged disinterest. See also Dicey to Strachey, 18 Jan. 1913, Strachey Papers, S/5/6/8.
23. Nation, 24 and 31 May 1913. See also C.F.G. Masterman to Lloyd George, N.D., Tuesday, May 1913, Lloyd George Papers, C/1/1/7a. (— 'Social things the only things that count. As usual Home Rule: Welsh Disestablish. count for very little'.)

27. Hansard, LIII, 1288-90; ibid., LIV, 816-821 (Asquith). See also Birrell to Redmond, 1 May 1913, Redmond Papers, N.L.I. Add. MS. 15, 169 (Bodleian, MS. film 1050). Three bills were still going through under the Parliament Act, but the replacement of the Franchise bill by the more limited plural voting bill in 1913, left the Welsh and Irish bills as the only two major measures due to pass under the Parliament Act in 1914.

28. Ibid.

29. Hansard, LIII, 1556 (Bonar Law).

30. Hansard, LIV, 824-34 (Chamberlain); ibid., 922-3 (F.E. Smith).


32. Charles Trevelyan to wife, 30 July 1913, Trevelyan Papers. See also ibid., 13 June 1913.

33. Fitzroy, Memoirs, II, 513; Several ministers, however, felt the prime minister had not set any great example by returning late from a Mediterranean cruise, and by his constant absence from his place on the Treasury Bench. See also Nation, 7 June 1913, commenting that party discipline was dangerously slack.

34. Lord Midleton to Bonar Law, 2 May 1913, B.L.P., 29/4/2.

35. Long to Bonar Law, 30 May 1913, B.L.P., 29/4/29; Lord Edmund Talbot to Bonar Law, 3 June 1913, B.L.P., 29/5/5. See also Law to M.J.F. McCarthy, 10 July 1913, B.L.P., 33/5/43.

36. Hansard, LIII, 1464-67 (Carson); see also ibid., LIII, 1340 (W. Long).

37. Hansard, LIII, 1556 (B. Law).

38. One speaker pointed out that for a whole hour on the Third Reading nobody had sat on the Opposition front benches and only six members on their back benches (Hansard, LV, 145, Hemmerde).


40. Birrell's speech winding up Second Reading earned high praise; see e.g. Trevelyan to wife, 11 June 1913, Trevelyan Papers; Nation, 14 June 1913.
The division on Second Reading in May 1912 was 372 to 271; Third Reading in January 1913 was 367 to 257.

Little can be assumed about the remaining Liberals who failed to vote, though possibly abstentions were deliberate in some cases where members had also failed to vote in the 1912 session. David Davies and De Forest did not vote in either division. Munro-Ferguson failed to vote on Second Reading, and E. H. Lamb on Third Reading.

Hansard, LIII, 1295-7 (Balfour).

Hansard, LV, 80 (B. Law).

Hansard, LV, 158-9, 132 (J. H. Campbell).

Hansard, LIII, 1291 (Asquith); LIII, 1583 (Birrell).

Hansard, LV, 165-6 (R. Isaacs).

Hansard, LIII, 1512-13 (T. Lough).

Molteno, J. M. Hogge, T. Lough, D. C. Hoff, Sir Wilfrid Lawson and T. Hamar Greenwood. The ministerial speakers on Second Reading were Asquith, Simon and Birrell.


Nation, 12 July 1913; Hansard, LV, 136-7 (Henry Page Croft).

Hansard, LV, 144-5, 147, 149-50 (Hemmerde) Hemmerde was a radical, who had taken the same strong line against government weakness in Feb. 1910, when he believed the government was not dealing firmly enough with the Lords.

The Times commented that with rare exceptions, members would not vote against their party, because they kept an anxious eye on their constituencies and feared losing their seats (The Times, 11 June 1913); thus party discipline was generally tightly maintained on important divisions. The division lists on the Home Rule bill bear this out, though more can probably be deduced from abstentions than The Times allowed.

Hansard, LIII, 1326. (W. O'Brien).

56. Ilbert to Bryce, 18 July 1913, MS. Bryce 14, fos. 54–7. See also H. Gladstone to L. Harcourt, 11 June 1913: The Session on the whole ends very well (Harcourt Papers). S. Bulwer congratulated Illingworth on his excellent management of an extremely tiresome session (2 Aug. 1913, Illingworth Papers).

57. See e.g. Selborne to Bonar Law, 5 July 1912, B.L.P. 26/5/10 and MS. Selborne 77, fos. 48–53, 159–62, 169–83; letters from Dicey to Strachey, 1894–1912; show Dicey's enthusiasm for the idea; and also his recognition of the problems involved (e.g. Dicey to Strachey, 28 Feb. 1911, Strachey Papers, S/5/5/20; 27 Jan. 1912, S/5/6/3). See also Strachey's article, Spectator, 20 Jan. 1912, on use of referendum.

58. For a more detailed account of the Unionist campaign for dissolution, see especially, H. Nicolson, King George V, pp. 115–203, 218–229, and R. Blake, Bonar Law, pp. 128, 131, 133–4, 150–155 ff.


60. See e.g. Bonar Law’s memorandum, Sept. 1912, Blake, Bonar Law, p. 151 (draft in B.L.P. 39/1/6.).


62. Memorandum by St. Loe Strachey, 20 Feb. 1913, Strachey Papers, S/21/1/13; B.L.P. 39/1/9. As a Unionist Free Trader, Strachey had already established an identity for himself somewhat outside the main stream of Tory politics.

63. See e.g. Lansdowne to Bonar Law, 28 Aug. 1913, B.L.P. 30/1/29.

64. See e.g. Law to Dicey, 26 March 1913, B.L.P. 33/5/20: 'I do not think that it is a question really of using the veto.'

65. Asquith to Lloyd George, 25 Dec. 1912, Lloyd George Papers, c/6/11/11. Under the provisions of the Parliament Act, it was permissible for a general election to intervene so long as the three sessions were consecutive and the election took place before the start of the third session.


68. Hansard, XLVI, 468–9 (Bonar Law).

69. See e.g. Hansard, XLVI, 457–8 (McMordie); see also ibid., XLVI, 408–9 (H. Cecil).

70. 1p. TS, 'memorandum, describing a meeting of Liberal Members', N.D. (approx. late 1912?), MS. Asquith ‘38, fo. 64.
Memorandum by Birrell. Home Rule Bill, 9 Aug. 1913, MS. Mottistone 15, fos. 347-9; P. R. O. Cab. 37/116/54. Since the Plural Voting bill could not pass under the Parliament Act until May 1915 at the earliest, it would be necessary to pass the Home Rule bill as late as possible in 1914 and the Plural Voting Bill at the earliest date in 1915. The General election might then be held in the summer or autumn of 1915, allowing 109 Irish members still to be returned, and the Liberals also to gain the benefits of the Plural Voting Act.

Dicey to Law, 25 and 28 March 1913, B. L. P. 29/2/42, 45; Dicey to Strachey, 23 March, 2 and 27 April 1913, Strachey Papers, 8/5/6/2-15.

See e.g. Hansard, LIII, 1344-5 (Long); 1470 (Carson); 1165 (Law).

Hansard, LIII, 1292-3 (Asquith); 1482-3 (Redmond).

Hansard, LIII, 1470 (Carson).

Dicey to Bonar Law, 11 June 1913, 13 June 1913, B. L. P. 25/5/22, 25.

A. Steel-Maitland to Bonar Law, 21 May 1913, B. L. P. 29/4/13; Lord Edmund Talbot to Bonar Law, 26 Aug. 1913, B. L. P. 30/1/26, and also 2-3 Sept. 1913, B. L. P. 30/2/3-4.

Memorandum by Law and Lansdowne, 31 July 1913, B. L. P. 29/6/33; Curzon Papers, MSS. Eur. F.112/98. Several early drafts exist, e.g. B. L. P. 39/1/10. See also Lansdowne to Stamfordham, 31 July 1913, B. L. P. 29/6/33, for Lansdowne's covering letter.

ibid.

Lansdowne's memorandum, 6 Sept. 1913, B. L. P. 29/1/7; Nicolson, King George V, p. 221; Journals of Viscount Esher, III, 129-131. Esher's memorandum of 10 Sept. 1913 (Journals, III, 126-131) is wrongly dated as 10 Jan. 1913 in Balfour Papers, B. L. Add. MS. 49882, fos. 230-237. For Balfour's rather complicated views, see Memorandum: The Constitutional Question 1913, by A. J. B., Oct. 1913, Balfour Papers, B. L. Add. MS. 49889, fos. 123-142; Balfour to J. Sanders, 10 Sept. 1913, Balfour Papers, B. L. Add. MS. 49765, fos. 48-61. Stamfordham reduced Balfour's dialectic to the simple argument that the prerogative should only be used if the king was sure to win (Stamfordham to Balfour, 7 Oct. 1913, Balfour Papers, B. L. Add. MS. 49886, fo. 97).

See e.g. Letters from Sir William Anson, Hugh Cecil and J. H. Morgan in The Times, 10 Sept. 1913; and from George Cave, The Times, 4 Sept. 1913. Lord Esher thought the constant worry was affecting the king's health by November 1913 (Esher to Balfour, 13 Nov. 1913, Balfour Papers, B. L. Add. MS. 49719, fos. 250-255).
Memorandum, 11 August 1913, MS. Asquith 38, fos. 120-1; printed in Nicolson, King George V, pp. 223-4. Memorandum, 22 Sept. 1913, MS. Asquith 38, fos. 202-9; printed in Nicolson, King George V, pp. 225-229. These memoranda between the king and prime minister were treated as 'personal communications between ourselves' and not shown to others until later (see George V to Asquith, 12 Sept. 1913, MS. Asquith 38, fos. 178-8.) Asquith did not inform his colleagues until the cabinet of 14 Oct. 1913 (Pease diary, II, fos. 77-8, 14 Oct. 1913).

For the influence of Bonar Law and Curzon on the royal memorandum of 22 Sept. 1913 see: Law's Memorandum of Conversation with the King, 16 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 33/557, especially for Law's insistence that the king 'could not avoid personal responsibility', and would be condemned by half his subjects whatever he did; Curzon's Memorandum, 16 Sept. 1913, Curzon Papers, MSS. Eur. F.112/95.

Crewe to Asquith, 8 Sept. 1913, MS. Asquith 38, fos. 126-7.


For 11 August audience, see Lansdowne Memorandum, 6 September 1913, B.L.P. 39/1/7, and Fritz to Arthur Ponsonby, 28 Aug. 1913, Ponsonby Papers.


Indeed, when Asquith finally informed the cabinet of these communications on 14 October; he commented that they merely contained 'rudimentary truths, but sometimes it is as well to record them in plain language & place them before the King.' After Asquith summarised the contents of his memoranda, Pease noted: 'This naive statement of History for the King's benefit produced much laughter' (Pease diary, II, fos. 77-8, 14 Oct. 1913).

This summary of Asquith's main arguments is drawn from the following documents: Asquith's two memoranda on the king's constitutional position, Sept. 1913, MS. Asquith 38, fos. 158-173 (both printed in Spender and Asquith, Asquith II, 29-34, and Jenkins, Asquith, appendix B, pp. 543-9); Asquith to king, 1 Oct. 1913, MS. Asquith 38, fos. 216-9; Fritz to A. Ponsonby, 28 Aug. 1913, Ponsonby Papers; Lansdowne's Memorandum, 6 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 39/1/7; Pease diary, II, fos. 77-8, 14 Oct. 1913.

Birrell to Asquith, 3 Oct. 1913, MS. Asquith 38, fos. 220-1.
For Lloyd George’s views, see P. Harcourt Kitchin (Glasgow Herald) to Bonar Law, 30 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 30/2/19; for Churchill’s views, see Churchill to Asquith, 21 Sept. 1913, MS. Asquith 38, fos. 193-201, and Churchill’s Dundee speech, The Times, 5 Oct. 1913.

L. Harcourt to R. Gladstone, 16 March 1913, H. Gladstone Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 45999, fos. 138-9; also in Harcourt Papers; Lord Esher to Balfour, 13 Nov. 1913, Balfour Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 49719, fos. 250–5.

C. P. Scott diary, B.L. Add. MS. 56501, fos. 1-2 (Feb. 1911); Ubert to Bryce, 5 Sept. 1912, MS. Bryce 14, fos. 56-8.

Birrell to Asquith, 3 Oct. 1913, MS: Asquith 38, fos. 226-1 ('--- If we don’t think fit to intervene before hand is not dissolution a duty'). See also Fritz to A. Ponsonby, 6 Oct. 1913, Ponsonby Papers, stating that Birrell made clear at Balmoral that he saw no alternative but to force the bill on Ireland or go to the country.

Birrell to Asquith, 8 Sept. 1913, MS. Asquith 38, fos. 128-9.

The Times, 2 Sept. 1913; Nation, 6 Sept. 1913.


Balfour to Bonar Law, 23 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 30/2/20; Balfour Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 49693, fos. 41–7.

Strachey to Dicey, 13 Oct. 1913, Strachey Papers, S/5/6/12.

Bonar Law to Lansdowne, 24 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 33/5/55. See also Learburn’s letter to The Times, 11 Sept. 1913: ‘A dissolution would not soften the temperament of either side, but could only decide afresh which side would be coerced.’

Yorkshire Observer, 28 Nov. 1913.

Birrell to Asquith, 24 July 1913, MS. Asquith 38, fos. 109–113. See also Birrell to Asquith, 26 Sept. 1913, MS. Asquith 38, fos. 210-12.

Balfour to Bonar Law, 23 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 30/2/20; Balfour Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 49693, fos. 41–7.

Nation, 26 Oct. 1912. They included Lord Dunraven, Lord Finfarrow, Lord Rossmore, Lieutenant-Colonel Hutchison-Poole.
137. See Lord Hythe, *The Case for Devolution and a Settlement of the Home Rule Question by Consent* (1913), which printed all the relevant speeches in the Lords' debate of Jan. 1913.


139. Dunraven to Bonar Law, 8 Sept. 1912, 2 L.P. 27/2/12.

140. See e.g. Hythe to Bonar Law, 1 Jan. and 10 Feb. 1913, 2 L.P., 28/2/3 and 29/1/13; Hythe was an Ulster landowner, who claimed that he had deliberately sacrificed his political career as a Liberal Unionist in order to advocate the federal principle freely from outside parliament. See esp. Hythe's address at Hythe, 21 Jan. 1913, *The Case for Devolution*, pp. 3–22; Hythe's letter to *The Times*, 17 Oct. 1912.


144. See e.g. O'Brien's letter to *The Times*, 9 May 1912; *Hansard*, XLVI. 2188–9.

145. Nation, 8 March 1913; Hythe, *Case for Devolution*, pp. 105–118. The Cork resolution was sent to various party leaders, but Asquith did not reply and Birrell merely acknowledged receipt (O'Brien to *The Times*, 22 March 1913).


149. *The Constitutional Crisis*, esp. pp. 6–10, 20–34. Lord Grey predictably agreed with most of the arguments, except the last point, for Grey insisted that the Irish bill be entirely withdrawn (*The Times*, 9 June 1913).

150. *Nation*, 7 June 1913.

151. For a detailed exposition of Ponsonby's views, which correspond closely with Macdonald's, see A. Ponsonby, "The Future Government of the United Kingdom," *Contemporary Review*, Nov. 1913.
122. See Crewe to Asquith, 8 Sept. 1913, MS. Asquith 38, fos. 126-7.

123. Fritz to Arthur Ponsonby, 23 July 1913, Ponsonby Papers. Fritz Ponsonby subsequently had misgivings about his role, and the information he was passing on to his brother and Murray Macdonald. Fritz wrote to Arthur on 4 Sept. 1913: "Bigge is just a trifle jealous of my mixing myself up in Politics and perhaps rightly too. The only thing I did besides writing the conference was to come down like a sledge hammer on the idea of the Royal veto being resuscitated." (Ponsonby Papers).


125. H. Nicolson, King George V, p. 222 (based on documents in the Royal Archives).

126. See Crewe to Asquith, 8 Sept. 1913, MS. Asquith 38, fos. 126-7. Lord Grey agreed with Arthur Ponsonby's view: "My impression is that a large number of thinking Liberals must be, reluctantly perhaps, but at any rate steadily, approaching the position which you have already reached." (Grey to A. Ponsonby, 10 Nov. 1913, Ponsonby Papers).


129. Lansdowne's Memorandum of Conversation with the King, 6 Sept. 1913, (wrongly dated 1912), B. L. P. 39/1/7.

130. C. P. Scott diary, 6-8 Sept. 1911, B. L. Add. MS. 50901, fos. 37-40; see also Morley to Crewe, 23 Dec. 1912, Crewe Papers, c/37.

131. Lansdowne's Memorandum of Conversation with King, 6 Sept. 1913, B. L. P. 39/1/7.

132. Loreburn to O'Brien, 12 Aug. 1913, mfm. of N. I., MS. 11439, kindly lent by Dr. P. Bull.

133. Loreburn to O'Brien, 19 Aug. 1913, Ibid. In view of these communications, it is scarcely surprising that O'Brien suggested Loreburn as chairman of the proposed conference (Nation, 6 Sept. 1913).


135. Memorandum by Lord George Hamilton, 24 Sept. 1913, describing two long conversations at Deal in August 1913; memorandum sent to Lansdowne, forwarded to Bonar Law, B. L. P. 30/2/27. This explains why Birrell later attributed the Loreburn letter to Loreburn's proximity in Deal to Lord George Hamilton, "with whom Lady Robson found him shut up in an arbour!" (Birrell to Asquith, 20 Sept. 1913, MS. Asquith 38, fos. 196-7).
See e.g. C. P. Scott to Lloyd George, N.D. (c. Oct – Nov. 1913): 'Loreburn doesn't like the county exclusion plan & is all for Home Rule within Home Rule ---' (Lloyd George Papers, c/8/1/10); Loreburn to O'Brien, 18 Nov. 1913: 'I agree about the exclusion of Ulster. It is 20 years ago since I thought that might be a solution.' (mfm. of N. L. I. MS. 11439, lent by Dr. P. Bull.) Jenkins', Asquith, p. 287, mistakenly suggests that the Loreburn letter proposed Ulster exclusion (i.e. exactly the solution which he had so strongly opposed from inside.)

For Asquith's report of his letter to Loreburn, see note dated 20 Sept. 1913, circulated to cabinet with Loreburn's Memorandum, 'M.S. Asquith 38, fos. 181-191; P.R.O. Cab. 37/116/22. For Loreburn's reply, 15 Sept. 1913, see MS. Asquith 38, fo. 177.


The Times, 29 Sept. 1913; Gwynn, Redmond, pp. 227-8. Gwynn believed Loreburn's letter came as a 'staggering blow' to Redmond, who had counted Loreburn with Morley as the most reliable Home Rulers in the cabinet: 'Now Loreburn was entering the arena with a flag of truce when the battle was not yet nearly fought out, and when time was altogether on Redmond's side' (Gwynn, p. 227).

Freeman's Journal, 12 Sept. 1913.

Leo Maxse to Law, 27 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 30/2/30. However, Maxse was confident that responsible Unionists would not be lured into dealings with 'such liars and blackguards.'

Fritz Ponsonby to A. Ponsonby, 6 Oct. 1913, Ponsonby Papers.

Irish Times, 18 Sept. 1913.

Charles Beresford to Stamfordham, 14 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 30/2/12; memorandum by George Hamilton, 24 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 30/2/27.

Birrell to Asquith, 20 Sept. 1913, MS. Asquith 38, fos. 196-7; Pease diary, II, fo r. 77-8. See Nation, 20 Sept. 1913, for similar view.


152. Birrell to Asquith, 26 Sept. 1913, MS. Asquith 38, fos. 210-12. Morley put this point more crudely to Carnegie: 'Loreburn's intervention was well meant, but for untying the knot, it is moonshine. One set of people in Ireland are for an Irish Parliament, the other set won't have it. Each Irish set has a body of British friends, just as firm as they are, and as inexorable. Where is the room for compromise?' (Morley to Carnegie, 27 Sept. 1913, Bodleian, MS. film 569). See also Lansdowne to Law, 26 Sept. 1913, B. L. P. 30/2/27.


158. Curzon, Memorandum of Conversation with the King, 16 Sept. 1913, Curzon Papers, MSS. Eur. F112/95.


162. F. S. Olliver to Milner, 23 Oct. 1913, Milner Papers, Box 198.


See e.g. Lord Grey to Ponsonby, 19 Nov. 1912, commenting on the increasing Unionist support for a federal solution, including Northcliffe, Garvin, Oliver, Milner, Selborne, Carson, and even Carson, Law and Lansdowne (Ponsonby Papers). See also MacCallum Scott diary, 11 Oct. 1912.

Carson to Law, 20 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 30/2/15. Colvin, Carson, II, 253-4, suggests that Carson was coming round to a federal solution, but this view takes Carson's interest too readily at face value.

Law to Carson, 18 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 33/5/63.

Churchill to Asquith, 17 and 21 Sept. 1913, MS. Asquith 38, fos. 192-4, 198-201. Churchill certainly seems to have received an inflated view of Law's enthusiasm for Home Rule all round, and interpreted the conversation to mean that the Unionist party was 'ripe' for a devolution proposal. See also Law's Memorandum of his conversation with the King, 16 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 33/5/63.

Memorandum by Law, 8 Oc.t. 1913, B.L.P. 33/5/63.

Memorandum by F.E. Smith, N.D. (mid Sept. 1913), B.L.P. 30/2/15.

For Balfour's views, see Churchill to Asquith, 21 Sept. 1913, MS. Asquith 38, fos. 198-201; Churchill to Law, 21 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 30/2/18.

Lansdowne to Law, 23 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 30/2/21.

Fred Wrench (Irish Land Commission) to Law, 20 Oct. 1913, B.L.P. 30/3/47.


Carson to Bonar Law, 20 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 30/2/15.

Intelligence Notes 1913, pp. 16-27.

Ibid. Some idea of the difference between the Ulster Unionist propaganda claims and police figures can be gauged from Captain Craig's claim in October 1913 that the U.V.F. was 88,000 strong, whereas the police estimated their numbers at 56,651.

See Birrell, Times Past Redress, 99, for Birrell's own low view of Irish police intelligence methods.

Birrell to Asquith, 30 Aug. 1912, MS. Asquith 38, fos. 122-5.

Birrell to Asquith, 28 Oct. 1913, MS. Asquith 38, fos. 243-4. See also Notes by John Morley of his conversation with Sir David Harrel, 7 Jan. 1914, MS. Asquith 39, fos. 87-82, for confirmation of Birrell's comments.
See Birrell to Asquith, 30 Aug. 1913, MS. Asquith 38, fos. 122-5.

J. B. Doucarty to a correspondent, 9 April 1913, Birrell Papers, Bodleian, dep. c. 300, fos. 31-2.

J. B. Doucarty to J. B. Armour, Aug. 1913, P.R.O. Belfast, D. 1792/4/17, quoted by O’Broin, Birrell, p. 68. See also Doucarty to Bryce, 5 Jan. 1914, uncatalogued Bryce Papers, showing that Doucarty was even then making light of the situation.

Notes by John Morley of his conversation with Sir David Harrell, 7 Jan. 1913, MS. Asquith 39, fos. 87-92.

Preparations for Armed Resistance to the Law in Ulster, circulated to the cabinet by Birrell, printed 10 Oct. 1912, Birrell Papers, Bodleian, dep. c. 301, fos. 75-80; Lloyd George Papers, C/19/3/6.

For instance, in September 1912, Birrell told Ulster that the Ulstermen currently believed the Bill would not pass: 'therefore they can amuse themselves with impunity by playing at "conditional" insurrection.' (Ulster to Bryce, 5 Sept. 1912, MS. Bryce 14, fos. 56-8.)

Memorandum (A) re. Condition of things in Ulster in view of the Home Rule Bill, dated 23 March 1913, anon., circulated to the cabinet by Birrell or 22 April 1913, Birrell Papers, Bodleian, dep. c. 301, fos. 98-100; P.R.O. Cab. 37/115/25. The writer claimed to have business connections in several Ulster counties, to know very intimately most of the prominent men who are organisers, and to have friends in both camps.

J. B. Doucarty to correspondent, 9 April 1913, Birrell Papers, Bodleian, dep. c. 300, fos. 31-2.

Compare Doucarty’s draft memorandum (Birrell Papers, Bodleian, dep. c. 300, fos. 33-6), with Birrell’s final memorandum (Memorandum (B), 15 April 1913, signed by Birrell, Birrell Papers, Bodleian, dep. c. 301, fos. 101-2; P.R.O. Cab. 37/115/25).

Memorandum (B), 15 April 1913, Birrell Papers, Bodleian, dep. c. 301, fos. 101-2; P.R.O. Cab. 37/115/25.

Birrell to Stamfordham, 15 April 1913, Birrell Papers, Bodleian, dep. c. 300, fo. 24.

See e.g. Ulster Volunteer Movement: Summary of Police Reports for Week Ended April 17, 1913, MS. Mottistone 15, fos. 181-2. This provided further local reports on drilling practise, arms accumulation and the development of the U.V.F., which corresponded more closely with the anonymous document sent to the king than with Memorandum B. The latter, for example, claimed that the closest police investigation had failed to trace any store of rifles in any part of the Province and insisted that the Ulster Unionist Council had taken no steps to procure arms (P.R.O. Cab. 37/115/25). The April 1913 police reports, however, mentioned arms shipments from Germany being


15. Ibid.

16. Further Notes on the Movement in Ulster, Nov. 1913, MS. Mottistone 15, fos. 408-12; P.R.O. Cab. 37/117/83. No figures were given for earlier months, however, to enable ministers to see the growth in each case. Moreover, when Birrell reported to the cabinet on 13 November, on the progress of the Ulster movement, he estimated that about 50,000 Volunteers had been mustered, whereas Intelligence Notes gave the November figure as 76,757 and September as 56,651 (Asquith’s cabinet letter to King, 14 Nov. 1913, MS. Asquith 7, fos. 71-2.)

17. Further Notes from Ulster, 4 Dec. 1913, MS. Mottistone 15, fos. 450-2; P.R.O. Cab. 37/117/85. Details were provided in each case for the source of information, and the names of importers and distributors. See Birrell Papers, Bodleian, dep. c. 301, fos. 245-52, for an earlier draft of this memorandum, together with further police reports, neither of which were circulated to the cabinet.

18. See King’s memorandum to Asquith, 11 Aug. 1913, MS. Asquith 38, fos. 120-121. See also Nicolson, King George V, p. 297: “The one man who, during those spring and summer months of 1913, had never even alluded to the subject of Ulster was the Prime Minister himself.”


20. Curzon’s Memorandum on his conversation with the King, 16 Sept. 1913, Curzon MSS: Eur., P.112/96; Lansdowne’s Memorandum of conversations with King at Balmoral, 6 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 39/1/7.

21. King’s memorandum to Asquith, 11 Aug. 1913, MS. Asquith 38, fos. 120-121. Birrell did not himself mention this proposal to Asquith in his own account of the interview (Birrell to Asquith, 24 July 1913, MS. Asquith 38, fos. 109-13). But see also Stamfordham’s version which bears out George V’s account (Nicolson, King George V, p. 220).

22. Ibid. See also Nicolson, King George V, p. 220.


25. Ibid.

207. Report from Fitz to Arthur Ponsonby, 28 Aug. 1913, Ponsonby Papers. See also Lansdowne's Memorandum, 6 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 39/1/7; Nicolson, King George v., p. 224.

208. Asquith's reply to Birrell, 2 Sept. 1913, noted on back of Birrell to Asquith, 30 Aug. 1913, MS. Asquith 38, fo. 122. Asquith wrote in the same sense to Crewe, 9 Sept. 1913: '---we ought to be ready to treat, if proposals are forthcoming from responsible quarters, in regard to finance, and the special position of the 4 counties.' (Crewe Papers, c/140; MS. Asquith 46, fo. 210). See also Asquith to king, 1 Oct. 1913, MS. Asquith 38, fos. 216-7.

209. Murray MacDonald to A. Ponsonby, 11 Sept. 1913, Ponsonby Papers.

CHAPTER VI

SECRET MEETINGS AND SHIFTING GROUND: MOVING TOWARDS ULSTER EXCLUSION, SEPTEMBER – NOVEMBER 1913.

Haldane confided in Lord Esher '--- that it is difficult to get the Prime Minister to make any preparations in advance of a difficulty; that the best of Mr. Asquith's mind is towards a solution ad hoc; and that he is always inclined to; optimistic views in face of a complicated situation' (Esher to George V, 29 Sept. 1913, Esher, Journals, III, 140).

CABINET POLICY AND HOME RULE COMMAND

The government had two possible methods of attempting to deal with the Ulster problem in autumn 1913. They could press forward with their avowed policy of giving Home Rule to the whole of Ireland, regardless of the consequences, and make preparations to deal firmly with any resistance from north-east Ulster. This was still the official policy of the government, represented publicly mainly by Birrell and Asquith. Alternatively, they could introduce a compromise to meet the Ulster Unionist grievances. Since United Kingdom devolution was not seriously considered by the party leaders, the government had to choose effectively between the policy of the 1912 bill and some form of Ulster exclusion.

Irrevocable policy decisions had been taken in the first parliamentary session, which severely limited the government's alternatives thereafter. The government might have been wiser to provide special terms for Ulster, either in the original bill of April 1912, or as an amendment during the first parliamentary circuit. The ministry would thereby have retained the initiative, instead of becoming dependent on the doubtful goodwill of the Opposition for an agreed settlement. If Lloyd George, Churchill, Birrell and Grey were justified in believing that the most effective strategy was to include
Revision for Ulster in the original bill, then the best opportunity had already disappeared by January 1913. From the autumn of 1913, when the cabinet as a whole finally began to recognize the gravity of the Ulster situation, they had to act from a weak, defensive position. They could not alter their bill without the consent of the Opposition, and any compromise proposals would be regarded as an admission of the fundamental weakness of the bill. Moreover, with the passage of time the Unionists would raise their terms for settlement. They had also committed themselves very deeply and would only retreat at a high price.

From September 1913, then, the Liberals were at a disadvantage. The prime minister attempted to keep both options open for as long as possible, to negotiate for the most favourable terms, while keeping both sides guessing whether he would ultimately insist on the original bill. This finely balanced tightrope walk depended on the government being able to claim that they could and would use the army to enforce their bill for the whole of Ireland. After the Irish incident in March 1914, the ministry lost their military credibility, and had no choice but to accept a compromise on Ulster. Some element of choice did still exist between September 1913 and March 1914, but it was gradually reduced by the pressures for compromise acting on king and cabinet.

The ministry was also pushed further in the direction of an Ulster compromise by the change in the balance of power within the cabinet on Irish policy. This was largely a response to the belated recognition of the gravity of the Ulster situation. Between September and November 1913, ministerial support for Ulster exclusion increased noticeably. This important shift in policy was accompanied by the effective displacement of Birrell by Lloyd George, as Asquith's second-in-command directing Home Rule policy. The weak and uncertain partnership of Birrell and Asquith, based on the maintenance of the 1912 bill, was replaced by the more forceful, but frequently discordant leadership of Lloyd George and Asquith. The chancellor influenced cabinet policy intermittently but powerfully in the direction of an Ulster exclusion compromise, enthusiastically supported by the more persistent but less responsible First Lord.
From autumn 1913, Asquith was increasingly forced towards a compromise based on some form of Ulster exclusion. He retained, however, the advantage of determining the timing and the final terms of any settlement. Asquith and Redmond were agreed that, if concessions had to be made, they should be postponed until the last possible moment. This would prevent the situation raising their demands once they had a firm government offer. Moreover, the faint hope always existed, that if concessions were postponed specifically, they might never have to be offered at all.

Thus the meetings which took place between Asquith and Bonar Law on 24 October, 6 November and 10 December 1913, and the subsequent meetings with Carson, served several purposes. There is no evidence that the prime minister discussed his motives, even with his more trusted colleagues, but his probable intentions can be deduced from an analysis of his words and statements. It seems likely that Asquith never intended that the discussions with the Opposition leaders should lead to an early settlement. By January 1913, his party had the most to gain from a last-minute agreement, so that Asquith could easily justify a policy of playing for time. Continued negotiations would allow him to avoid for as long as possible the choice between increasingly unattractive alternatives. Time was also needed to win Redmond’s grudging agreement to any compromise, by showing him that minimal concessions would not satisfy the Opposition. While negotiations continued, Asquith would also be able to reassure the public that the government was dealing with the situation, and he could ask the Unionist leaders not to encourage the Ulster agitation. The earlier conversations between the leaders admittedly served a more positive purpose, since they were partially exploratory on both sides. Each party needed to discover the minimum terms the other might be prepared to accept, and the extent of the concessions they might make for the sake of a settlement.

The negotiations between the party leaders from September 1913 to January 1914 were disconnected, desultory and largely futile. Terms appeared to be offered, only to be later withdrawn; ‘concessions’ were offered which were
been to be unacceptable; Bonar Law and Carson were alternatively encouraged and discouraged. The 'conversations' were a prolonged tactical manoeuvre, which partially disguised the awkward fact that the prime minister was not at all sure where the final destination lay. However, Asquith and Lloyd George were masters of this kind of political game. Their frequently adroit management managed the baffled Opposition, and subsequent historians, to mistake make-shift tactics for grand strategy. The 'conversations' between the leaders have, perhaps, received greater prominence in the Home Rule struggle from 1911-14 than they deserve. They have also been made to appear more purposeful and determined than they probably were. This analysis of the last months in which ministers had any freedom to manoeuvre, will examine the cabinet's discussions and divisions behind the scenes, and attempt to explore the effective significance of the negotiations which apparently led nowhere.

CHRISTIE. LLOYD GEORGE AND ULSTER EXCLUSION.
SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER 1913

In September and October 1913, when the king consulted leading politicians of both parties at Balmoral, Asquith and Birrell were still nominally directing the ministry's 'policy of drift'. 1 They had been reluctant to admit the gravity of the Ulster situation and failed to alert their colleagues to the need for a revised policy to meet the danger. The result was a confused and divided cabinet. Birrell confided in Asquith that the king was naturally bewildered by seeing so many people separately 'each with a stand of his own, --- Winston, Grey, Harcourt, myself - none quite the same'. Birrell failed to synthesize these views, suggesting that it rested with the prime minister to reduce his colleagues 'to a harmonious whole'. 2 But the views expressed by Asquith were drawn largely from Birrell's witty and discursive letters, inconclusive and scattered with qualifications though they were. 3 There is little evidence that Asquith was thinking independently at this stage, and lacking a clear lead from Birrell, the prime minister seemed incapable of taking a strong initiative.
During September, Asquith admitted to Churchill that he was
prepared to consider proposals for temporary Ulster exclusion, but still insisted
that the important thing is to emphasize the dangers of rejection, when the ship is
standing port. The First Lord was impatient, and used his visit to Balmoral
in September to full effect, providing Asquith with an edited version of his
speech. On 17 September, Churchill had a 'confidential, personal & informal'
conversation with Bonar Law during a game of golf. The Unionist leader
suggested a secret meeting 'between one or two on each side', as a preliminary
to a conference between the British party leaders. Churchill understood
Asquith was prepared to consider Ulster exclusion as a basis for the secret
talks. However, Bonar Law emphasized 'the impossibility of our considering leaving
the union unless there should be a large measure of consent to it among the
Nationalists in the South and West'. Churchill confided in Bonar Law that he had
hoped that the Nationalists could be made to agree to the exclusion of Ulster.

Churchill admitted to Asquith that this remarkable conversation
had restored his former enthusiasm for a compromise. Churchill had always
wished to see Ulster provided for, as Asquith well knew; but Carson's recent
behaviour had a 'stiffening effect' on him, making him fear that a conference
might be premature, 'before any real stress had made men anxious to settle'.
However, Churchill now believed that Asquith should write to Bonar Law,
encouraging that they have a talk. A significant ambivalence in Churchill's
attitude to the Ulster problem was revealed here. Churchill confided to the
prime minister: 'I wish it were possible to do two things: (1) treat these
Ulstermen fairly & (2) give them a lesson. But I am afraid No. (1) will get in
the way of No. (2).' In similar vein, Churchill admitted to Lord Stamfordham
that he had always recognized Ulster's case, but he strongly resented attempts
to overthrow the government by threatening civil war before the bill even passed.
Thus Churchill could be the strongest ministerial advocate of Ulster exclusion,
and also the keenest to use firm methods to control the illegal preparations of
the Ulstermen, who were not 'playing the game' by the First Lord's rules.
Asquith replied that the suggested consultations would have only 'provisional
value' without Redmond and Carson, but Churchill assured Bonar Law that he
Churchill continued his diplomatic efforts at Balmoral by informing Balfour that he had always favoured Ulster union, and that ‘many of his most important colleagues agreed with him’.

Churchill and Winston have, each in their several ways, contributed to raising the issue and suggesting a new plan. 11

Churchill learnt even more about the views of the Unionist leaders from F.E. Smith, while participating in military manoeuvres in Wootton on 24-25 September. Smith had just returned from Ulster, where he was closely in Carson’s confidence. Smith evidently had few scruples about disclosing the confidential opinions of Carson, Bonar Law and other leaders, to the King, to Churchill, and subsequently in correspondence with Lloyd George. As Fritz Ponsoby remarked: ‘F.E. Smith had long talks with the King at the manoeuvres and also Winston and now everyone writes long letters.’ 12

F.E. Smith had a considerable amount of information about the attitudes of the Unionist leaders at his disposal. Bonar Law, Balfour, Carson and Smith held fairly similar views, which were basically realistic. Bonar Law and Smith had long thought that if it were possible to leave Ulster as she is, and have some form of Home Rule for the rest of Ireland, that is on the whole the only way out.

However, as he had pointed out to Churchill, that arrangement would only be possible if it was not regarded as a betrayal by the southern Unionists. 13 Bonar Law felt strongly that Carson held the key to the situation, and wrote to him as frankly as he did to Lansdowne, though F.E. Smith’s activities caused him later to regret this. 14

Carson’s response to Lorneburn’s letter had been a flat refusal to enter a conference. 15 But Carson was far more moderate and realistic in private, as a frank letter to Bonar Law revealed on 20 September:

--- on the whole things are shaping towards a desire to settle on the terms of leaving ‘Ulster’ out. A difficulty arises as to defining Ulster & my own
view is that the whole of Ulster should be excluded but the minimum would be the six Plantation counties and for that a good case could be made. The South & West would present a difficulty & it might be that I could not agree to their abandonment that I feel certain it would be the best settlement if Home Rule is inevitable -- I have such a horror of what may happen if the Bill is passed as it stands & the mischief it will do to the whole empire that I am fully conscious of the duty there is to try & come to some terms. 16

Three weeks later, Carson confided in Lansdowne, that if separate treatment was offered to Ulster, he doubted if he would feel justified in asking men to prepare for resistance, by which they could obtain no more than was already offered there. He was very worried in case the government agreed to exclude only the four northern counties: 'Personally I could not assent to that proposition, nor indeed, so far as I can see at present, to any proposal except the exclusion of the whole of Ulster'. 17 Carson had become less inclined than in mid-September to accept the exclusion of the six counties as a minimum offer.

F. E. Smith himself believed they could not refuse an invitation to a conference, though it would be extremely unpopular with their party and might damage their position. Such an invitation must come from the king rather than the government, and he thought the Irish Unionists would ultimately be persuaded to agree to Ulster exclusion. 18 If dissolution was out of the question, Balfour was gloomily resigned to the possibility that 'the separation of Ulster from Ireland may be the least calamitous of all the calamitous policies which still remain open to us'. Ulster exclusion was preferable to the existing policy of 'letting things drift to a catastrophe', despite Balfour's sympathies with the Ulster Unionist position. However, the former Unionist leader foresaw severe difficulties in persuading both sides to accept the inevitable sacrifices which this compromise required. 19

Lord Lansdowne was the leader of the Unionist party in the Upper House, and was regarded as a legitimate spokesman for the southern Unionists. He remained isolated in Perthshire, extremely worried by the apparently conciliatory attitudes of his colleagues, even, it seemed, of
Lansdowne criticised Carson for too readily assuming that a Rowl might be inevitable, and rebuked Balfour for giving up hope of an early settlement. Churchill’s suggestion of a conference to discuss Ulster exclusion filled Lansdowne with ‘the utmost alarm’, and Lansdowne insisted that they must resist any pressure for a general election:

> If that is our mental attitude, it seems to me that we should avoid talking too much about the possible advantages of a compromise on Winston’s lines, or it will be assumed too readily that that is our price ——

If the worst came to the worst, they might have to consider some form of Ulster representation, but he feared that the Ulster Unionists and the Nationalists would each regard it as a surrender of principle, and the leaders would not be allowed to maintain the idea. Moreover, if the Unionists were forced to reject an overture in those lines, ‘we should have been manoeuvred into a very disadvantageous position’. — Fritz Pascomby reported from Balmoral on 6 October:

> ... Lansdowne was most uncompromising. He wouldn’t hear of any conference and refused to give an inch. Bonar Law was much more inclined to listen to reason —— Lansdowne and several others will not hear of Ulster contracting out as they think the position of the Protestants in the rest of Ireland would be worse than under the present Bill.

Lord Curzon was amongst those who shared Lansdowne’s views in September, leaving their colleagues pessimistic about prospects of a settlement. As Lord Selborne remarked: ‘If Lansdowne & Curzon are against contracting Belfast out, what can anyone “confer”.’

At the yeomanly manoeuvres, F.E. Smith gave the king and Churchill a selective impression of his colleagues’ opinions, dwelling on the more conciliatory statements of Carson and Bonar Law, without their qualifications or Lansdowne’s even stronger reservations. Among other things, the king learnt that ‘Carson would be quite ready to agree to leaving Belfast out, and was sure a satisfactory solution could be thus arrived at’, Lansdowne was convinced that F.E. Smith’s indiscretions had led the king and Stamfordham into ‘a kind of fool’s paradise’, and he immediately warned...
Balfour Law:

— the King has been led to believe that a reasonable settlement is within reach, and that Curzon and I are obstructing it. It is, as you say, absolutely necessary that he should understand that F.E. was much too sanguine. 26

Both Lansdowne and Law wrote to Stamfordham, attempting to correct the misunderstanding, by emphasizing that Carson's original statement was far more qualified than the king supposed. Lansdowne added sternly that it would be unfortunate if the king encouraged any such scheme until he found out exactly what was in the minds of its authors. 27— However, it was clear soon afterwards that the two Unionist leaders had not sufficiently counteracted the effects of Smith's influence on the king.

Law and Lansdowne would have been even more worried had they known of F.E. Smith's conversations with Churchill at the manoeuvres, and his subsequent correspondence with Lloyd George. Smith sent a letter to the chancellor on 26 September, marked 'secret and confidential':

I have had long & interesting talks with the King & with Winston. The basis Winston & I discussed was

(1) Exclusion of Ulster with facilities for later adherence.
(2) Acceptance of an agreed Bill by the Unionists for the rest of Ireland.
(3) A genuine attempt on our part to make the thing work in the South.
(4) A conference to be summoned to discuss matters. 28

Evidently, Churchill had not only learnt a great deal from F.E. Smith about Opposition views on Ulster, but he had also discussed a plan for temporary Ulster exclusion, combined with Unionist agreement to the more limited Home Rule bill for the rest of Ireland. Neither Churchill nor F.E. Smith had the least authority to consider the matter so specifically, but Smith was the more discreet. He discussed a plan whereby the Unionists conceded a great deal, and he also committed it to paper in his letter to Lloyd George.

As additional bait for the chancellor, F.E. Smith mentioned
...he and Churchill agreed that such a conference might be extended to cover land reform and the land, and 'anything might follow' from that. This appeal directly to Lloyd George on two counts. His current enthusiasm for land reform had already been postponed for long enough to make him compliant with the Liberal emphasis on Home Rule and Welsh Disestablishment. Secondly, Smith knew only too well that in 1910, Lloyd George and Churchill had formed ambitious ideas for a national coalition to solve all the outstanding problems. Smith probably also had some idea that the chancellor was again thinking along these lines in the autumn of 1913. Lloyd George’s reply indicated that F.E. Smith had indeed touched a sympathetic chord.

You know how anxious I have been for years to work with you & a few others on your side. I have always realised that our differences have been very artificial & do not reach the realities.

Lloyd George showed Smith’s letter to the prime minister and Churchill. No record exists of the meeting, though it is significant that Churchill was not invited. Lloyd George then sounded out the Unionists indirectly through the editor of the Glasgow Herald, F. Harcourt Kitchin. On 29 September, Lloyd George and Kitchin ‘discussed the political situation with all the cards on the table’, and Kitchin promptly passed the information on to Bonar Law, as was obviously intended. Lloyd George mentioned the Ulster exclusion proposal originally discussed by Churchill and F.E. Smith, but emphasized that the initiative must come from the Opposition. He suggested that, if the Unionist leaders would bring it forward in the Lords, the government would then be able to enter a conference to discuss terms. The chancellor and Churchill disliked Smith’s proposal that the invitation to any meeting should come from the king and they evidently enlisted help in higher places. On 1 October, Lord Stamfordham informed Bonar Law of the government’s strong reluctance to make the first move in arranging a conference, and it would look as if they were influenced by fear. Instead, he repeated the proposal made two days earlier by Lloyd George, that the Unionists should put down an Ulster exclusion amendment in the Lords and invite a conference on that basis. Bonar Law was well aware that Stamfordham’s
suggestion was 'simply a repetition of George's talk to the Editor of the Herald', but the two Opposition leaders shared F.E. Smith's opposition to a Unionist initiative.

Bonar Law reacted mildly to the kite flown through Kitchin, commenting that sooner or later the government would realize they could not resist with their bill in the face of the Ulster situation, and would have to approach the Unionists. Heresents Stanfordh's intervention fiercely, however; it stiffened Bonar Law's resistance, drawing him closer to Lansdowne's viewpoint. Bonar Law commented to Lansdowne that it would be extremely foolish to give the enemy the idea that we were not only ready but anxious for a settlement on those lines. He was willing to try to obtain a settlement by consent, but was not prepared to give away their case in advance. Bonar Law wrote a cool reply to Stanfordh, rejecting the suggestion on the grounds that a formal proposal for a conference would be regarded just as much a confession of weakness if it came from the Unionists. Meanwhile, as Bonar Law observed to Balfour, there was nothing further to be done, and they must wait for the next move from the enemy. Stanfordh was exasperated at the stalemate: '--- apparently both parties shy at excluding Ulster & giving HR to the rest of Ireland. What other basis can be found? If none, we shall all drift into Civil War!' Lloyd George was probably not surprised that the Unionists refused to make a formal compromise offer, though this had to be definitely established. Meanwhile, he turned his attention to the Nationalist leaders, since their agreement to a compromise over Ulster would be necessary, whatever form the negotiations took. The day after his discussion with the editor of the Glasgow Herald, Lloyd George assumed the chief secretary's role once more, and, on Asquith's authority, had a careful talk with his Nationalist friend T.P. O'Connor. The chancellor gave a version of the truth which suited his purpose. He claimed that the Tories would go into conference provided the Liberals consented to Ulster exclusion by plebiscite. In fact the Opposition had made no such offer, insisting rather that there should be no preliminary conditions binding any discussions, but the glass placed the necessary pressure on the Nationalists. The point was clearly
-- if there be a conference, it would involve the acceptance of the Ulster option: to refuse that, and then to have to go to extremes in putting down even a small rebellion would place the ministry in a difficult position. 46

Lloyd George also vastly understated his own part in pressing for Ulster exclusion, giving the impression that he considered the proposal 'out of date'. It is not clear how Churchill favoured it. The most favourable interpretation of Lloyd George's motives is that he wanted to retain his own freedom of manoeuvre and was acting the part of the neutral arbiter. Lloyd George also warned T. P. O'Connor not Churchill might speak in favour of Ulster exclusion at Dundee, while again implying strongly that he disapproved of this development. 47

After consulting Dillon, T. P. O'Connor sent Lloyd George a memorandum pointing out the absolute impossibility of the Nationalists supporting Ulster exclusion. 48 Then, on 7 October, O'Connor wrote to Churchill, in an attempt to persuade Churchill to moderate the speech he was due to make the following day. He argued that his friends in Ireland were irreconcilably hostile to the mutilation of their country, that the time was not yet ripe for a conference, and that feeling among the Liberal rank and file was hardening against concession. 49

Where T. P. O'Connor wrote to discourage Churchill, F. E. Smith urged him on. After suggesting points for Churchill's speech, Smith applied heavier pressure:

I think you will agree that I have played up well.
I hope you will do the same now ---. But you can do the thing much better than I can suggest. Only do play up. I have run no small risks & incurred considerable censure.

Lansdowne would have deplored the post-script: 'Carson is most reasonable. I think he wd. be glad to meet you.' 50

Churchill's Dundee speech on 8 October satisfied Smith rather than O'Connor. Churchill declared that the Unionists appeared now to be claiming only special treatment for north-east Ulster, instead of their earlier attempt to block Home Rule for the rest of Ireland. The government could not ignore the new claim for special treatment, if put forward sincerely. A settlement by agreement would
offer advantages far beyond anything currently in sight. The government's Home
Rule bill held the field — but our Bill is not unalterable, and the procedure of
parliament—act renders far-reaching alterations possible. But only upon one
position there must be agreement. Unionist reactions to the speech varied from F.E. Smith's gratified
approval to James Campbell's flat hostility. In a letter to Lloyd-George, Smith
pronounced Churchill's speech 'excellent', and promised to help the cause further
in his own speech on 19 October, though only guardedly 'so as not to cause jealousy
and do harm'. Collaboration between the three men had evidently continued,
particularly as Smith asked to see the chancellor before the next cabinet. In his
West Bromwich speech, he declared it was inconceivable that the Unionist party
should make Ulster a pawn in the party game 'instead of using her exceptional
position for the legitimate purpose of enforcing exceptional treatment'. Lord
Curzon thought the party leaders should make a rapid and conciliatory response
to Churchill's offer, before this golden opportunity passed by and they drifted to
disaster. It was wrong that 'secondary' men like F.E. Smith should speak for
the party in halting and noncommittal tones in an emergency of this kind. Curzon
had clearly become more conciliatory since late September — a particularly
significant change, because Curzon was a useful barometer of Unionist party
opinion. Lansdowne considered Churchill's meaning obscure, since it was not
clear what he really meant by the 'exclusion' of Ulster, especially as the
ministerialists insisted on maintaining the 'national integrity' of Ireland.
James Campbell spoke for the southern Unionists in condemning Churchill's
offer as a mere dishonest decoy, to induce us to admit the principle of Home
Rule & then fasten a quarrel upon us upon some mere matters of detail.
The Nationalist reactions were more uniformly hostile. The
Irish News complained that Churchill had 'made the confusion worse confounded'
by plainly inviting the Tories to concentrate on the exclusion of north-east Ulster.
John Dillon assured a Daily Chronicle correspondent that 'the whole idea of lopping
off part of Ireland is quite unworkable, and so grotesque that I am sure the
Government will never dream of it.' Redmond at Limerick condemned
Churchill's suggestion of Ulster exclusion as 'totally impracticable'. He
criticized that 'the two-nation theory is to us an abomination', though room
existed for variations in administrative treatment. 59 Churchill was evidently
anxious about the Nationalist reaction, for O'Connor replied stiffly: 'I am
sorry you think Redmond closes a door which he had been careful to keep open.
I don't think he ever kept it open, or intended to'. 60 T. P. O'Connor believed
that Churchill had enormously complicated the situation 'by his foolish and
inartistic speech at Dundee'. Churchill's private attempts to press a four-county
exclusion proposal on O'Connor inevitably fell on un receptive ground. 61

The effect of Churchill's Dundee speech on his own colleagues is
not so well documented. T. P. O'Connor had swallowed Lloyd George's assurances
that the Cabinet as a whole is perfectly sound; and that in pressing this solution
against us, Winston would stand alone. 62 Sources less dependent on the chancellor
are more reliable. The Nation commented that Churchill's speech 'was not a
Cabinet deliverance, though it does not follow that the Cabinet disapproves it';
according to Massingham, its tone was close to the real mood of the governing
minds in Liberalism. 63 Hicks-Beach remarked that: '--- from all I can hear,
I expect that Winston --- is by no means the only member of the Cabinet who is
genuinely alarmed about the future, and shrinks from coercing Ulster'. 64 Even
John Morley, while protesting that the Dundee speech did not represent the views
of the cabinet, reluctantly admitted that Asquith 'professed not to find much that was
"faulty" in Winston's speech. 65 Probably Asquith found it useful to fly an Ulster
exclusion kite from a ministerial source known to be 'independent'.

Having attempted to influence the public, Churchill turned his
attention next to his colleagues. On 14 October, a week after his controversial
speech, the First Lord appealed to the cabinet:

--- not to close the door to a temporary exclusion of
the homogeneous anti national part of Ulster, & thought
if we could avert a crisis by exempting Ulster for 5 years
we ought to do it but only 'if Carson & the Tory party
would accept the compromise & agree not to repeal it.' 66

Lloyd George thought this proposal was premature, in view of the hostility or
apathy of many of their colleagues. He passed a note across the cabinet table to
Churchill:

I was sorry you made the offer before you & I had an opportunity of talking them round. I fear it has made the position more difficult. I hope that is not so. But I fear it. 67

Consequently, Churchill was far more cautious when he spoke next at Manchester, 19 October. He welcomed every 'fair and honourable proposal' compatible with the unity of Ireland and the establishment of an Irish parliament. 68 The Unionist whip commented acidly to Bonar Law: 'I understand Winston's platitudes to mean that he has had his say & leaves the next step for Asquith.' 69

ASQUITH'S MEETINGS WITH BONAR LAW, OCTOBER-NOVEMBER 1913

Meanwhile, the prime minister was engaged in his own secret manoeuvres, almost entirely independently of his colleagues. The pressure from Churchill, Lloyd George and the king, combined with the growing volume of alarming information from Ulster, at last induced Asquith to explore the problem further. He met Bonar Law to discuss the Irish situation on 14 October and 6 November, though the cabinet was not informed of these secret talks until 11 November.

On 8 October, the day of Churchill's Dundee speech, Asquith wrote a cool letter to Bonar Law, expressing willingness to participate in 'an informal conversation of a strictly confidential character between yourself and myself.' The prime minister indicated that a conference between the party leaders was out of the question under existing circumstances, and carefully praised the invitation to place the responsibility for initiating talks on Bonar Law. 70 Asquith visited the king at Balmoral from 6 to 9 October, and George V was given the credit for persuading his prime minister to extend the invitation. 71 However, the offer was almost certainly the culmination of the activities of Lloyd George and Churchill in the preceding three weeks. Asquith had not actively discouraged their discussions with F.E. Smith, and had profited from the information Churchill obtained at Balmoral. Moreover, Lloyd George had
Ultimately consulted the prime minister before sounding out the Unionists through Lord Stamfordham and the editor of the Glasgow Herald. Consequently, Asquith knew he could not expect a formal initiative from the Unionists, despite their willingness to discuss the situation, so he finally compromised with his own carefully structured invitation. The fact that this letter was sent on the day of Churchill’s Dundee speech was probably less of a coincidence than it was made to appear.

Though the prime minister was fairly well informed of his two colleagues’ activities, they probably had no precise knowledge of the use he intended to make of their preparatory moves. Asquith appears to have kept his own counsel, and certainly assured Bonar Law on 14 October that ‘not a soul knew’ of their meeting. The prime minister’s secrecy contrasted markedly with Bonar Law’s reaction to the invitation. The Unionist leader discussed the guidelines for the meeting at length with Lansdowne and Balfour, who in turn corresponded with Carson, Curzon and Steel-Maitland. Bonar Law had recently seen Curzon, Robert Cecil and Walter Long, and thought all of them would welcome a settlement. The Unionist leader analysed the situation in a memorandum he sent to Lansdowne and Balfour. If no settlement was reached, the government’s position would be desperate, since the passage of Home Rule would be followed by a rebellion in Ulster, which would probably ruin the government and compel an election under the worst possible conditions for the Liberals. However, the position of the Unionist party was a little better. The most they could expect would be to force an election before Home Rule passed, but it was not certain that they would win, and only an improbably large majority would kill the Home Rule agitation.

Lansdowne and Balfour were alarmed about the forthcoming meeting. When he discovered that Bonar Law might be willing to compromise over the geographical boundaries of Ulster, Lansdowne replied firmly that complete exclusion of the whole province must be their aim. Lansdowne confided to Carson that he regarded the meeting with profound mistrust. He feared that the government ‘mean to offer us terms which they know we cannot
event, and then throw upon us the odium of having obstructed a settlement. 76 Lansdowne had grave doubts whether a settlement would prove possible, since the 'geographical puzzle' was one of the rocks upon which it would split. 76 Balfour, in turn, was dismayed to learn that Bonar Law intended to explain to Asquith the difficulties which the Unionists faced in carrying out some form of time exclusion. 77 Balfour warned his successor: 'I rather hope you will not make your very candid admissions to Asquith unless you can extract from him equally candid admissions as to the weakness of his own political position.' 78

Bonar Law failed to heed Balfour's warning when he met Asquith at Cheshley on 14 October 1913. 79 This was no doubt partly due to Law's nervousness and inexperience, but was also encouraged by the prime minister's ability to appear equally frank, while divulging little and minimizing the extent of his own problems. In particular, Asquith insisted that the government was by no means absolutely dependent on the Nationalists, rather the reverse, since the Nationalists were powerless without the support of the Liberal party: 'If he or the Government decided on any cause which commanded the support of their own party the Nationalists would have no choice but to accept it.' 80 Having discussed the mutual difficulties of reaching an arrangement, both leaders agreed that some efforts were worthwhile to avoid the dangers ahead. Asquith emerged as the more skillful negotiator, drawing from Bonar Law a series of frank admissions, which were barely mentioned in Law's account of the conversation. Bonar Law's most significant admission was that 'he was clearly in favour of an option of inclusion', rather than permanent exclusion. He also expressed willingness to throw the southern Unionists 'to the wolves', unless there was a general outcry led by Lansdowne, but insisted that the concurrence of his colleagues was essential. 81 The Unionist leader managed at least to avoid committing himself as to the geographical area to be excluded, while Asquith made it plain that he had in mind only the four north-east counties. The prime minister promised that, after reflection, he would communicate with Bonar Law again. 82 This first conversation had been exploratory, but Asquith had obtained the more useful information.
Moreover, Bonar Law was extremely worried that Asquith would
make a proposal for Ulster exclusion, which would appear reasonable to the
British public, but would be unacceptable to Carson. Bonar Law confided to
Lansdowne that, if Asquith could square the Nationalists, he might even suggest
excluding six Ulster counties after a plebiscite:

I don't believe that Carson could possibly accept
this solution; and yet it would be so reasonable
that I think we would be in a hopeless position if
we had to refuse it. 83

Lansdowne and Balfour shared this fear, but Balfour was less pessimistic. He
pointed out that, since Redmond refused exclusion on behalf of the Nationalists,
the Westminster Gazette rejected it on behalf of the 'ordinary, moderate
Liberal', the government were unlikely to make a proposal, even about the four
counties. 84 Lansdowne's response to Bonar Law's report of the meeting
suggested that Lansdowne had never advanced far from the 'wrecking' position
adopted by the extreme Unionists during the first parliamentary circuit:

The only consideration which disposes me to regard
a policy of exclusion with an open mind, is that,
unless I am mistaken, the omission of so important
an area would virtually knock the bottom out of the
Bill. 85

Asquith discussed the meeting only with the king and Lord Crewe,
and though he sent Bonar Law a brief note promising some comments and
suggestions, none were forthcoming. 86 The Opposition, therefore, waited
for Asquith's Ladybank speech on 25 October. The prime minister had promised
the king that this would define the ministry's attitude to conference and concession,
causing George V to issue an unnecessary warning against a public commitment
to any definite policy at this stage. 87 At Ladybank, Asquith declared that a
'complete constitutional case' existed for applying the Parliament Act to the
Home Rule bill in 1914, and insisted that the government would not be intimidated
by the threat of force. However, settlement by consent was desirable, though a
formal conference without an agreed basis would probably be abortive. Instead,
Asquith invited an 'interchange of views and suggestions, free, frank, and
without prejudice', subject to three governing conditions. Nothing must
interfere with the establishment in Dublin of a subordinate Irish legislature and
function. Secondly, nothing is to be done which would erect a permanent
insuperable barrier in the way of Irish unity; thirdly, while the importance
of the extension of devolution was fully recognized, Ireland's claim must be
honored first.

This speech lent itself to a variety of interpretations, despite
Fitzboy's view that it was 'triumph of explicit meaning'. The Liberals were
generally pleased, Morley pronouncing it 'masterly'. Lansdowne, however,
predictably objected that Asquith's three 'simple and definite propositions'
are really as astute and as hazy as they could be. Steel-Maitland recognized
that the second condition was so cautious and ambiguous that it allowed for
temporary exclusion of Ulster. Meanwhile, Bonar Law prepared his reply to
Asquith, to be delivered in a speech at Newcastle on 29 October. The king
expressed the hope that Bonar Law would meet the prime minister's overtures
half-way, and the Unionist leader dutifully promised not to 'close the door' against
agreement by consent. He added, however, that 'Asquith's speech seemed to me
very partisan, and mine will not be more polite than his!' Bonar Law decided
to take advantage of the ambiguity of Asquith's speech, and play safe by stating
that the Opposition would not decline to meet him. The Unionist leader
accordingly declared at Newcastle that the Opposition would consider carefully
any proposals the prime minister might make, with a real desire to find a
solution. However, he contended that Asquith's conditions had been so obscure
as to be meaningless, and argued that nothing would be gained, at that stage, by
laying down conditions on either side.

The prime minister wrote to Bonar Law the day after the Newcastle
speech, suggesting that time might be saved by a second conversation, rather
than written communications. The two leaders met for the second time at
Carlisle on 6 November, but neither gave much encouragement to the other,
both emphasizing the growth of opposition to settlement among their rank and
file. Bonar Law stated that he had to contend with the development of a die-hard
movement against compromise, as well as with Carsonism. The prime
Minster conceded that he might be able to carry his own cabinet and party with him, but he could not answer for that, and still less for the Nationalists. This comment on the Nationalists contradicted Asquith's statement at their previous meeting. It was also weakened by his subsequent acknowledgement that Redmond realized this was his last chance, and he must choose between a compromise or a war. Asquith further stipulated that he was no more a plenipotentiary than Bonar Law and was not even a bearer of proposals. This was only too true, since the prime minister had so far apparently only mentioned these discussions to Lord Crewe.

After this unpromising start, and with these reservations in mind, they proceeded to discuss 'hypothetical' methods of excluding part of Ulster. When Bonar Law commented that Carson would initially demand the whole province, Asquith replied that it was impossible, and asked what attitude Carson would take towards the exclusion of the four Protestant counties only. Bonar Law answered guardedly, that he did not know Carson's 'real mind', but thought: --- the very minimum which they would accept would be the six Plantation Counties. Bonar Law left the impression that Asquith tacitly agreed to the six-county definition of Ulster, but Asquith's account merely noted that Bonar Law was disposed to insist on Tyrone and Fermanagh. In view of later developments, it is important that Bonar Law specifically rejected both 'Home Rule within Home Rule', and the democratic inclusion of Ulster at the end of a specified term of years. He insisted that the excluded area must have the option of voting by plebiscite for or against inclusion, after the expiration of a prescribed period. Bonar Law suggested that this exclusion period ought to be at least ten years, five being too short, but Asquith brushed that problem aside as a matter of detail which could be considered later. When they discussed the government of the excluded area, Bonar Law insisted that legislation must remain with the imperial parliament, and Asquith made light of the administrative and financial difficulties involved. The prime minister finally emphasized that if a settlement was reached, the Unionists must try to induce the Lords to pass an agreed bill, and must give it a fair trial after its passage.
THE HOME RULE MAZE.

Mr. Asquith: "EXCUSE ME, SIR, BUT ARE YOU TRYING TO GET IN OR OUT?"

Mr. Bonar Law: "JUST WHAT I WAS GOING TO ASK YOU, SIR."
The two leaders placed different interpretations on this second conversation, causing subsequent bitterness and misunderstanding. When they parted, Asquith's recollection was that he promised only to report the substance of their conversation at the next cabinet. Bonar Law understood the prime minister to make a more explicit commitment: 'I shall definitely make this proposal to my Cabinet on Tuesday and I think I can carry my Cabinet and my own party with me.' The Unionist leader informed Walter Long that Asquith definitely that he would propose to the Cabinet the exclusion of part of Ulster, either the four or the six Counties—probably the six. Bonar Law also told Balfour that Asquith 'really means to try to force a settlement' on those lines. This news had a mixed reception. Balfour was affected by Law's optimism. The conversation seemed to indicate a courageous attempt by Asquith to cut his way out of the 'current mess', and Balfour thought that their party might support a compromise to avert rebellion in Ulster. Walter Long, on the other hand, fully shared Lansdowne's alarm at the prospect of compromise. Long warned Law that they ran grave risks of smashing their party, if they came to any arrangement with the government. Most of their supporters would believe their leaders had betrayed them, and sacrificed their loyalist friends in south-west Ireland.

Bonar Law expected to learn the result of the cabinet discussion from the prime minister within a few days. However, ten days after the meeting, the Unionist leader told Balfour that he had heard nothing from Asquith: '--- it remains to be seen whether he will show the courage and statesmanship which were indicated.' In fact, on 12 November, Asquith did inform the cabinet of his second conversation with Bonar Law, but emphasized that he had not in any way committed himself or them. The cabinet had an even more important discussion of the Ulster problem the following day, but the results were not conveyed to the Unionists.

Robert Blake has argued that Bonar Law believed Asquith had broken his word, while Roy Jenkins has defended the prime minister against this charge. In any case, Bonar Law was somewhat naive to assume that Asquith...
would make a firm Ulster exclusion proposal at the next cabinet. The Unionist
leader's bitterness increased in retrospect because he believed that Asquith had
missed him about the fundamental purpose of these meetings. Bonar Law under-
stood that the aim was to attempt to reach a definite preliminary agreement about
an Ulster compromise. The prime minister's motives can only be deduced from
his evidence; it seems unlikely that he intended to make any precise commitment
to the Unionists at this early stage. He was far more concerned to use these first
meetings to discover what the Opposition might be prepared to accept, and
unoubtedly learned a good deal more from this second conversation. Asquith
may also have talked in terms of a proposal he evidently considered "hypothetical",in order to gain the information required for effective bargaining at a later stage.

MINISTERIAL DIVISIONS OVER ULSTER EXCLUSION

Up to the autumn of 1913, a comprehensive analysis of individual
ministers' views on the Ulster question has not been possible. The Ulster problem
had received scant attention in the cabinet since the crucial meeting of February
1912, and many ministers gave it little thought. Birrell and Asquith had made
little attempt to educate their colleagues about Irish realities until October-
November 1913, when Lloyd George and Churchill demanded more information
and an appropriate policy change. Asquith's enigmatic silence and Birrell's
troubled indecision meant that their colleagues were given little clear direction.
Ministers had to draw their own conclusions from Birrell's noncommittal
remarques, from Churchill's remarks, and from press coverage of the Ulster
situation. The result was a curious mixture of views and assumptions, based
too often on superficial knowledge. The distractions created by the Marconi
scandal, industrial disputes, naval policy, and the antics of the suffragettes,
further explain the ministry's neglect and indecisiveness over Ulster.

But by the autumn of 1913, the increasing gravity of the Ulster
situation forced ministers to devote more time and attention to the problem.
Even so, surprisingly few formal cabinet meetings were held to discuss the
Ulster question in this critical period. Asquith preferred confidential talks with a few selected ministers, such as Lloyd George, Crewe, Churchill, Grey, and Birrell. No cabinets met during the busy days of the various Balmoral conversations in September. The first cabinet meeting since July was held on 11 October, when Asquith at last informed his colleagues of his communications with the king, but said nothing of his meeting with Bonar Law that same day.

A general discussion took place on the Ulster question, and Morley commented that ministers had reached no decision:

> The disposition has been not to define their attitude of the moment unnecessarily to limit freedom of opinion within their ranks either in council or on the platform.

Consequently, numerous public speeches were delivered during the next few weeks, including Churchill's address at Manchester, Asquith's at Ladybank on 25 October, and Grey's at Berwick the following day. The Ulster situation was again discussed at formal cabinet meetings on 12, 13 and 24 November, and by a select group of ministers at a dinner given by Lloyd George on 12 November. The views expressed at these important cabinets in October and November, combined with statements made in private correspondence and public speeches, provide the first reasonably comprehensive picture of ministers' attitudes and divisions over the Ulster question. At this point, then, a digression will be made to analyse these more fully, and to show how the balance of opinion in the cabinet was shifting towards a policy of Ulster exclusion.

The cabinet was badly divided on the subject of Ulster. At the two extremes were those who sought to maintain the status quo of the 1912 bill, involving Home Rule for a united Ireland, and those who favoured some form of Ulster exclusion. When the subject was last discussed in cabinet, as long ago as February 1912, Asquith, Crewe and Loreburn had been the ministers most strongly opposed to Ulster exclusion. By October 1913, all three had changed their minds, though Asquith and Crewe were more careful to keep their opinions to themselves. Haldane and Morley also revised their views, at an even later stage, to admit the need for special treatment for Ulster. The sternest opponents of Ulster exclusion, by 1913-14, were no longer Asquith and Crewe, but McKenna,
"IN THE MULTITUDE OF COUNSELLORS"

John Bull. "Ah! Now I ought to know where I am."
Runciman, Harcourt and Samuel, followed rather half-heartedly by John Burns. The views of Lloyd George, Churchill, Birrell, and Asquith, all by this time supporting Ulster exclusion, have already been considered at length. The positions taken by Crewe, Grey, Heidang and Morley, on the one side, and by McKenna, Runciman, Harcourt, Samuel and Burns on the other, require further examination.

The group of ministerial 'die-hards', who supported the 1912 Home Rule bill all the way, were dominated by McKenna and Runciman. It is significant that these two ministers were equally opposed to Churchill in the main controversy over the naval estimates. Unfortunately, the cabinet row over naval policy, lasting from October 1913 to February 1914, coincided with the escalator crisis in Ulster inflaming tempers and diverting ministers once again from Irish problems. As First Lord of the admiralty, Churchill demanded an increased naval budget for 1914-15, to double the number of dreadnoughts to be built in 1914. Churchill's 'big navy' policy offended the traditional Gladstonian isolationist element in the cabinet, and infuriated the chancellor, who was expected to finance the militaristic expansion. Thus, friction over naval policy also threatened the close collaboration on Irish policy between Churchill and Lloyd George.

"Churchill's chief critic over the naval estimates was Reginald McKenna, the home secretary, who had been most reluctantly obliged to make way for Churchill at the admiralty in 1911. The suspicion arises that the strength of McKenna's opposition to Ulster exclusion was partially inspired by resentment against its most enthusiastic advocate. Certainly the two issues were strongly connected by the end of 1913, as Riddell noted in December:

The Navy estimates and the Ulster question are causing serious differences in the Cabinet. There is, no doubt, strong opposition to Winston on both. I saw McKenna today. He has been working up the case for reducing the estimates, and is strong against concessions to Ulster."

The fact that McKenna's family were originally Catholics from county Monaghan
may well provide a more powerful explanation of his vigorous support for the 117. On 6 October 1913, McKenna delivered an outspoken attack on the policy advocated by Churchill, in a speech at Pontypool: 'Conference means nothing but procrastination, when one of the parties proposes nothing but a flat rejection of the proposals of the other'.

Churchill's Dundee speech alarmed McKenna, as he revealed to his friend and ally, Walter Runciman, on 12 October:

As for Ulster I confess the situation appears gloomy. If the public get to believe that the exclusion of Ulster from the Home Rule Parliament is practicable, they will never forgive us for bringing about even a danger of civil war at the dictation of Redmond. We know that the exclusion of Ulster is absolutely impossible in practice, and that to attempt it is to kill Home Rule. Carson knows it too, and it is merely playing into his hands to talk about it as a feasible solution. I remember that the suggestion was emphatically vetoed in the Cabinet a year ago. Has anything unexpected happened since? 119

This last question showed how far a minister like McKenna could become immersed in his own departmental problems, including the suffragettes and Welsh Disestablishment. It was also sadly typical of most ministers' ignorance of developments in Ireland, until emergencies forced the sister isle again upon their attention. However, unlike Haldane and Morley, the home secretary did not revise his opinions when the Irish office enlightened him about events in Ulster, in October and November 1913. McKenna was delighted that Redmond vetoed Ulster exclusion so forcefully at Newcastle on 14 November, and remarked to Riddell: 'That shuts the door'. 120

Walter Runciman had a deep commitment to Gladstonian Home Rule for the whole of Ireland, and shared McKenna's dislike of Ulster exclusion. From 1912 Runciman had recognized that the Ulster movement was 'an awkward and serious affair'. 121 He remained convinced, however, that Ulster exclusion was 'absolutely unworkable, for to cut out the four counties would make it impossible for any form of Irish Government to succeed on a national basis'. 122 His speech at Batley, on 17 October, gave full support to McKenna's Pontypool
position against Churchill's offer at Dundee. Runciman declared that it was impossible to abandon their principles or to cut Ulster out of the bill, so they must pass the Home Rule bill into law as it stood.\textsuperscript{123} Ten days later, Runciman assured Herbert Gladstone that they would not 'show the white feather - no matter how persuasively Bob Reid [Loreburn] may write' or Carson declare!\textsuperscript{124}

Lewis Harcourt shared the conviction of McKenna and Runciman that Ulster exclusion was out of the question. Harcourt refused to believe there might be serious trouble in Ulster, and irritated the king at Balmoral in September 1912 by his obstinate reiteration of his opposition to Ulster exclusion.\textsuperscript{125} Two months later, Harcourt declared at Bradford that 'no accommodation or agreement could be approached on a basis of the abandonment of their policy.'\textsuperscript{126} At the cabinet on 13 November he commented that: 'To pass H.R. with Ulster excluded would be impossible. Liberals would have none of it.'\textsuperscript{127} But Harcourt was far too busy at the colonial office to have much time to interfere in Irish affairs.

Moreover, Arthur Murray was probably correct in thinking that Harcourt lacked the 'virility and persistence' in cabinet to force his views through against the conflicting opinions of others.\textsuperscript{128}

John Burns, the ineffectual president of the local government board, agreed with Harcourt's judgement in the November cabinet that Ulster exclusion was impossible. Burns supported the existing bill in public speeches, arguing that civil war would not take place, and that Ireland must remain united.\textsuperscript{129} In the privacy of his diary, Burns subsequently noted that he would have preferred a more determined attempt to carry out their original policy, instead of a compromise.\textsuperscript{130} His attitude may have been influenced by his dislike of Lloyd George; but, by this time, few of his colleagues would have been much impressed by Burns' support, whatever his motives.\textsuperscript{131}

After the defection of Asquith and Crewe, the anti-exclusion lobby in the cabinet was substantially weakened, and all the more dependent on the support of Samuel, Haldane, and Morley. Of these, Herbert Samuel proved to be their only fairly reliable ally. He shared their dislike of Ulster exclusion,
especially as he had invested far more time and effort in the existing bill than any of them. If Ulster was excluded, Samuel believed that his carefully-constructed financial scheme would be wrecked. He was convinced that it would be impossible to devise a workable plan to replace it based upon a fiscal separation between Ulster and the rest of Ireland. It would be even more difficult to accomplish such a feat as part of a last-minute compromise. Samuel had just delivered a speech in Canada, insisting that the government would not abandon its Home Rule policy when he was alarmed by the news of Churchill's Dundee speech. Afraid the cabinet was already contemplating Ulster exclusion, he wrote immediately to Asquith from Montreal, on 10 October:

The total exclusion of N.E. Ulster is open to such grave disadvantages - both in the injury it would do to the idea of Irish nationality, and in the difficulty it presents in providing for the proper government of that district itself - that it seems better to submit even to further complications of the Home Rule machinery than to adopt that counsel of despair.

Samuel had already begun formulating these 'further complications', intended to avert the alternative evils of Ulster exclusion or civil war. Samuel's scheme was probably influenced by the ideas of William O'Brien and Lord Loreburn. All three sought to give the Ulster Protestant counties increased legislative and administrative powers within the Home Rule constitution for a united Ireland. O'Brien had long advocated an Ulster Unionist veto on the Irish parliament's legislation, while Loreburn's suggestion of a 'legislative enclave' had the same effect. The detailed refinements and complexities of Samuel's proposal, however, bore his own stamp. Even he admitted that it was a 'fantastic' plan, involving 'complications of the most formidable character.' He first outlined his scheme in his October letter to Asquith from Montreal. The cabinet was treated to a more sophisticated version on 13 November, and the final proposal was circulated to the cabinet on 18 December.

The different drafts provided variations on the theme, but the basic proposal was that those Ulster representatives who desired differential
treatment should constitute a third House of the Irish parliament called the Ulster House, to sit in Belfast. Members of the Ulster House would retain the alternative right to sit in one of the Dublin Houses, so that the Ulster Unionists could automatically move to Dublin when reconciliation was achieved. Bills passed by the Irish parliament would not be operative in Ulster without the consent of the Ulster House, and the chief secretary would be retained to deal with Ulster’s transferred services.

When Samuel expounded his scheme to his colleagues on 13 November, they rejected it unanimously. As Asquith explained to the king: 'It would give satisfaction to neither party and would create the maximum of friction.' The cabinet was evidently horrified at the prospect of a combination of Samuel’s complicated Ulster scheme with his ever more elaborate fiscal provisions. The only aspect of the plan which was temporarily revived was the legislative veto. Despite his personal views, Samuel was subsequently prepared to abide by the majority decision and cooperate in devising plans in 1914 for Ulster exclusion.

Haldane and Morley were initially entirely in agreement with McKenna and Runciman, but they later modified their views substantially. Up to October 1913, Haldane was a fierce supporter of the 1912 bill for the whole of Ireland. On 4 October, Harcourt told the prime minister that ‘Haldane is against any concessions on Home Rule and anxious to send a select army into Ulster at once’; Lloyd George passed on the same information to the Nationalists. Lord Esher learnt more about Haldane’s views when he visited the lord chancellor at Clan, at the end of September. Haldane firmly believed that, after thirty years of trouble with the Irish party, the government should adhere rigidly to their policy. Haldane urged the cabinet to take very strong precautions against trouble in Ulster, including the despatch of a special force there immediately. He believed a conference would be useless, but bloodshed could be avoided by good management and firm military control. These were strong words from the former war minister, and they appear to have been fairly widely known. Lloyd George probably calculated that Haldane was the most formidable opponent of his Ulster exclusion scheme, and invited
him to the select dinner party to discuss the problem on 12 November. Lloyd George apparently succeeded in converting Haldane, who made no attempt to resist the chancellor’s Ulster exclusion proposal, either then, or at the ensuing next day. Haldane’s opposition was probably directed not so much against the policy of Ulster exclusion per se, as against the Asquithian tendency to drift. He was prepared to support either the policy of full Home Rule, or Ulster exclusion, provided it was firmly conducted. Haldane probably appreciated the advantages of a clear compromise policy under Lloyd George’s direction.

John Morley’s views on the Ulster question are harder to define, especially as his abilities and insight were declining rapidly with old age. Ester commented in 1910 that Morley’s ‘power of deciding is weak’, and the following year Loreburn dismissed him as a wreck in his dotage. Even so, Morley was still highly respected on the strength of his past career as writer and politician, and continued to earn affection mingled with exasperation. His comments on the Irish problem, in particular, carried considerable weight. He had been one of the most committed Home Rulers ever since 1885, and had been Irish secretary when the two Gladstonian bills were debated. For many years the Nationalists saw Morley as ‘the repository of the Gladstonian tradition’, though Birrell gradually displaced him in their regard after 1907.

Morley’s attitude to Ulster exclusion was not unlike Birrell’s, since they were influenced by some of the same conflicting forces. Asquith later told Redmond that Morley had been one of the two most vehement opponents of Ulster exclusion in February 1912, whereas he had become one of its leading supporters by November 1913. Morley’s volte face was probably more fitful and inconsistent than Asquith’s remark suggests. Like Birrell, Morley wanted to grant Home Rule to a united Ireland. As a Gladstonian Liberal, however, he was sensitive to the charge that such a policy ignored minority rights and might involve the use of coercion. Up to October 1913, Morley tended to emphasize the difficulties of Ulster exclusion
and to oppose talk of compromise. In June 1913, he told his faithful friend, Sir Almeric Fitzroy, that no attempt to deal specifically with Ulster was administratively practicable. He also informed the editor of The Times that an Irish parliament would be a force without Ulster. After Churchill's Dundee speech, he expressed the fear that a split in the Liberal party was inevitable.

Late in September 1913, Morley was still talking of the 'uselessness of conferences, Compromise', but he gradually modified this view in subsequent months as his fears of bloodshed increased. When the cabinet discussed Lloyd George's exclusion proposal on 13 November, Morley commented that: '--- to start Home Rule with a baptism of bloodshed would be fatal to its prospects'.

Next day, Morley wrote to Carnegie that the danger of bloody collision in Ireland is a good deal more possible than people think. 'It would ruin British sympathies for Home Rule, leave Hell-fire behind in Ireland, and start Home Rule in an Ireland savagely divided.' By December, Morley was convinced that Ulster was in deadly earnest, and that attempts must be made at conciliation.

However, he was inclined to vacillate, and showed an irritating tendency to criticise all the proposals for conciliation subsequently proposed by his colleagues. Thus Lord Esher commented in January 1914:

Morley is himself very undecided and has no clear insight or opinion, at one moment overwhelmed with dismay at the prospect of armed conflict, at another using language of menace towards 'rebels'. This attitude of mind is characteristic of the whole Government.

By April 1914, Bonar Law heard that Morley threatened to resign at each cabinet meeting if a drop of blood was to be shed in Ulster. Morley feared the effects of coercion and violence, but disliked compromising on Home Rule, and had no alternative policy to offer.

Up to October 1913, then, the ministerial forces seemed weighted fairly heavily against the Ulster exclusion plans of Lloyd George and Churchill. The majority of the cabinet, through ignorance, indifference or genuine principle,
preferred to retain the 1912 Home Rule bill intact. Samuel, Haldane and Morley
ultimately admitted the need to compromise, but not until November 1913, and
they were scarcely the most vocal, convincing or enthusiastic of converts. A
great deal, therefore, depended on whether Asquith, Crewe and Grey, who held
the centre position between the two extreme groups, were ready and able to help
swing the balance in favour of a compromise solution.

Crewe and Asquith appear to have followed similar paths since
February 1912, uncertain about the effectiveness of their existing policy, but
equally uncertain that Ulster exclusion would solve their problems. Crewe
shared Asquith's cool commitment to Home Rule as a long-standing debt of
honour, and a practical necessity - a view influenced by his experience as lord-
ilutenant from 1892-5. Crewe was also on more intimate terms with Asquith
than most colleagues. Throughout the summer and early autumn of 1913,
Crewe echoed the indecision of Asquith and Birrell. His language was equally
ambiguous, admitting the likelihood of 'riots so serious as to involve the loss
of many lives', while denying the possibility of 'Civil War in the strict sense'.
When Crewe saw the king in August, Fritz Pensonby reported that Crewe had no
suggestions to offer; he admitted there would probably be civil war, but saw no
way out of it. Crewe enlightened the public no more than the king in his
speech at Ipswich on 23 October. He admitted that their Home Rule bill was
not inscribed upon brazen tablets and was capable of alteration, but 'as to
what modification would satisfy the Opposition --- he could not say'. A
week later, Crewe conceded cautiously, in a private letter, that:

--- the prospect, which some of us have always
foreseen, of some sort of coming to terms,
although without a regular conference, which I
never thought feasible, seems less remote than
it yet has.

However, though he admitted the need for a compromise, he was critical and
not particularly helpful at the cabinet on 13 November. Like so many of
his colleagues, Crewe saw the problems of every course of action and
recommended none, though he was prepared to support whatever line Asquith
ultimately adopted.
Sir Edward Grey was far more constructive. He had, in any case, been closer to the position held by Lloyd George and Churchill ever since February 1912. Grey was generally admired in the cabinet for his clear judgement, his integrity and his sense of responsibility. His reputation stood so high and his opinions commanded such wide respect, that his intermittent comments on the Irish problem were particularly influential. Like his fellow Liberal Imperialists, Haldane and Asquith, Grey’s approach to Home Rule was pragmatic and rational. He had always been far more acutely aware of the significance of the Ulster issue than most of his colleagues. Even in 1901, he had commented to Herbert Gladstone that the Ulster difficulty was the greatest obstacle in the path of Home Rule, and whatever policy was next adopted must avoid that pitfall. Grey’s well-publicised Second Reading speech on the Home Rule Bill in 1912 indicated that he was uneasy about the policy adopted in the February cabinet and prepared to consider alternative methods of dealing with Ulster. Grey’s fears increased by the autumn of 1913, as news from Ulster confirmed his stand. During his Balmoral visit, Grey informed the king that the Irish situation might become almost impossible, and he insisted in October that the government should try to pass the bill by consent.

In his Berwick speech, on 27 October 1913, Grey proposed ‘Home Rule within Home Rule’ as the most effective form of settlement by consent. He explained that this would involve a form of administrative devolution for the Protestant Ulster counties, to allay their fears that matters such as education, land, and the police would be administered unfairly. ‘Home Rule within Home Rule’ resembled the proposals of Samuel and O’Brien, except that it aimed to increase the administrative rather than the legislative powers of the Ulster Protestants. Grey’s suggestion had much to recommend it, as many Liberals and Nationalists recognized its advantages. It has already been argued that it might have been the safest way to introduce provision for Ulster into the original bill in 1912, since it did not violate the principle of a united Ireland. In the course of 1913, Dillon, T. P. O’Connor and Redmond showed willingness to accept it as a limited compromise which did not offend
their national aspirations. Dillon supported the idea in January and T. P. O'Conor in September. Redmond talked to Birrell in October, and Asquith in November, and replied similarly on each occasion, when asked how much the Nationalists were prepared to concede:

--- [Redmond] always had in his mind the possibility of a Council (not with legislative powers) in Ulster or some parts of it, with administrative authority, and autonomy over important branches of the public service. ---

Home Rule within Home Rule also had the approval of Lord Macdonnell, Sir James Doughty, Professor J. H. Morgan, and the Nation.

Despite its advantages, Grey was not prepared to press hard for Home Rule within Home Rule if his colleagues appeared to prefer Ulster exclusion. In his Berwick speech, he dismissed four-county exclusion as "not a very hopeful or a very practical solution". The following day, however, Grey told Churchill that he was afraid he might have gone too far:

I see that I summed up more decidedly against exclusion of the four counties of Ulster than I intended though I think now that solution & agreement are not to be found in that particular way. I did not intend however to rule it out or shut the door as far as I was concerned.

At the dinner on 12 November, Grey let Lloyd George sweep aside his reference to Home Rule within Home Rule, and he appears to have said nothing about it at the full cabinet next day. However, at the cabinet on 24 November, Grey mentioned 'separate administrative treatment' as a possible alternative to temporary exclusion, while he vetoed permanent exclusion. Lloyd George was probably correct in assuming that he could rely on Grey's support for an Ulster exclusion scheme, if necessary. Like Haldane, Grey's main concern was to ensure that some firm and unified policy for Ulster should be adopted rapidly. He would not allow his personal preference for Home Rule within Home Rule to impede the adoption of an alternative plan which would achieve the same goal.
Grey did not press Home Rule within Home Rule very forcefully on his colleagues and there seems to have been little cabinet discussion on the subject. Probably Grey realized that by autumn 1913, it was not likely to satisfy the Unionists, whereas in 1912 it could have been incorporated into the bill without the need for Opposition agreement. Certainly, the Unionists totally rejected the idea by November 1913, as Bonar Law emphasized when he met Asquith for the second time. 169 It is all the more surprising, then, that the prime minister formally proposed Home Rule within Home Rule to Bonar Law on 23 December 1913. By then it was too late to be anything other than a tactical manoeuvre.

The views of the remaining members of the cabinet on Ulster exclusion are obscure. The October 1913 speeches of Charles Hobhouse and John Simon welcomed a peaceful solution consistent with the establishment of an Irish parliament. 170 On learning of Churchill's Dundee speech, Rufus Isaacs expressed surprise to Lloyd George at the mention of temporary exclusion: 'initiatives we suggest will from that time be taken as the minimum to be conceded.' 171 Clearly, in October 1913, Churchill and Lloyd George had a difficult task in persuading their colleagues that some form of Ulster exclusion must be conceded. Probably those ministers who proved most influential in swung the balance of cabinet opinion towards Lloyd George's position by November were precisely those colleagues he invited to his secret dinner party - Asquith, Crewe, Grey and Haldane. No doubt Lloyd George exaggerated when he informed Redmond on 25 November that Grey, Haldane and Churchill would join him in resigning, if no offer was made to Ulster very soon. 172 But the threat was indicative of the change of mood of the influential centre group in the cabinet. However, the mixed motives of those who ultimately supported exclusion, and the continued hostility of McKenna's group, meant that Lloyd George was never able to seize the initiative as firmly and consistently as Haldane and Grey had hoped.
LLOYD GEORGE'S ULSTER EXCLUSION INITIATIVE, NOVEMBER 1913

Lloyd George timed his intervention carefully, to make the most advantage of this shift of opinion within the cabinet towards Ulster exclusion. The cabinet's morale was at a low ebb early in November 1913. Even the sympathetic Nation commented sadly on 15 November that, despite its great talents and achievements, the government was overworked:

Policies are allowed to drift on a slack rope until the vessel is on the very margin of the whirlpool, and then a belated tug is applied to it. Hints, warnings, remonstrances are unheeded. — 173

The cabinet discussion on 12 November indicated that ministers were depressed by the Ulster situation. They thought the loss of votes at two by-elections the previous week had been influenced more than usual by the Irish question. Asquith attributed the reduced Liberal poll at Reading and Linlithgow largely to 'Ulsteria'.

The cabinet also criticised Birrell for his mismanagement of the industrial agitation in Dublin, led by James Larkin. It is possibly significant that Lloyd George was the chief critic, but in any case the Larkin affair further diminished Birrell's authority in the general sphere of Irish policy.

It was a good psychological moment for Lloyd George to seize the initiative on the Ulster question, whereas Churchill's overtures in October had been premature. By the time the chancellor intervened, Birrell had at last provided detailed reports indicating the increasing gravity of the Ulster crisis, and Birrell's own reputation had sunk very low. Moreover, the cabinet also learnt for the first time, on 12 November, that Asquith had met the Unionist leader, who might be prepared to accept some form of Ulster exclusion.

Lloyd George presented his Ulster exclusion proposal to a carefully selected group of his colleagues, invited to dinner at 11 Downing Street after the cabinet on 12 November. He invited only Asquith, Crewe, Grey and Haldane. These were the four ministers he judged capable of swinging the cabinet more decisively towards Ulster exclusion. The Irish secretary was not invited. The Ulster problem was undoubtedly the chief
item on the agenda, though the discussion also covered the date of the next election, education, and the financial situation. The prime minister 'raised question of Ulster but offered no suggestion as to outlet', and Lloyd George swept aside Grey's attempt to discuss Home Rule within Home Rule. Instead, the chancellor proposed a scheme intended to:

knock all moral props from under Carson's rebellion, and either make it impossible for Ulster to take up arms, or if they did, put us in a strong position with British public opinion when we came to suppress it. Therefore suggested temporary exclusion of Ulster with an automatic inclusion at the end of the term. Proposed we should if possible put it forward as a suggestion in the House of Commons. This scheme met with general approval - no objections raised to it.

The prime minister 'expressed satisfaction' after the dinner party, while Grey and Haldane described it as the best discussion they ever had as a cabinet. 175

After winning the support of the inner circle, Lloyd George drove home his advantage when the full cabinet resumed next day. Samuel's intricate scheme was rejected, and Grey did not even attempt to propose Home Rule within Home Rule, after his experience the previous evening. The way was clear for the chancellor to present his exclusion scheme for the second time in two days. He added the new suggestion that the Ulster Protestant counties should be automatically included after a definite term of five or six years. Lloyd George argued that his plan had two powerful advantages. Firstly, immediate, violent resistance to a change which would not affect Ulster for several years would be premature and ridiculous. Secondly, two British general elections in the intervening period would give the electorate and the imperial parliament ample opportunity to reconsider the automatic inclusion of Ulster. The proposal 'met with a good deal of support', and Lloyd George passed a note to Churchill across the table commenting: 'It's going quite well I think'. 176 Asquith later confided to Redmond that Churchill and Morley were the chief enthusiasts, 177 but as has already been established, Asquith, Crewe, Haldane, Grey, and Birrell, also gave varying degrees of support. It was finally agreed that the prime minister
should discuss the exclusion proposal with Redmond the following Monday.

Lloyd George’s suggestion that two general elections would effectively postpone the ultimate decision about the fate of the Ulster counties was criticised by Samuel, and even by Churchill. The First Lord passed a note across the cabinet table to Lloyd George: ‘Your postponement is simply an invitation to the Orangemen to act so as to produce the necessary pressure.’ 178

Samuel wrote a memorandum later that day, arguing that if Ulster exclusion was necessary at all, then this particular feature was a distinct weakness. If the Imperial parliament was effectively to decide whether the Ulster counties would ultimately remain excluded, then the Ulster question would dominate the next election. If the Unionists won, the exclusion of Ulster would be made permanent as a matter of course. If the Liberals won, at the end of the specified excluded period, they would still be faced with the same problem of corrving the Ulster counties into Home Rule. What was represented as temporary exclusion would, therefore, almost certainly become permanent, whatever the election result. Samuel suggested that it would be preferable:

— to provide for the decision of the question of subsequent exclusion by plebiscites in the area in question at intervals of years, which would at least take the issue out of British politics and which might give some hope of ultimate inclusion. 179

Samuel’s proposal was remarkable for its similarity to the suggestion made by Bonar Law on 6 November, at the second meeting with the prime minister. Both Samuel and Bonar Law opposed automatic inclusion at the end of a specified period, and preferred allowing the excluded area to decide the question by plebiscite. This suggests that the two parties were closer to an agreement at this stage than Asquith was prepared to admit, at least on the method of exclusion, if not its geographical limits. The basis for further discussion between the party leaders existed, but if he recognized this, the prime minister reserved the knowledge for later use. He did not encourage cabinet discussion of Bonar Law’s proposal. No attempt was made to hammer out a compromise between the Lloyd George
scheme and the terms acceptable to Bonar Law, though Samuel's memorandum suggested this was not impossible. The Unionist leader had some reason to resent Asquith's minimal efforts to push forward towards an early settlement.

Lloyd George's secret dinner party on 12 November, and the cabinet which followed next day, marked the effective displacement of Birrell by Lloyd George as the government's chief representative in the Irish negotiations. The chief secretary had been excluded from the chancellor's inner circle, and he neither agreed nor disagreed with Lloyd George's scheme when it was discussed in cabinet. He merely repeated the essential problem - that Ulster would resist, but the exclusion of any part of the province was universally opposed by all sections of Irish opinion. Birrell's inability to take a constructive initiative to resolve the Ulster dilemma was exposed more vividly than usual at this juncture.

Ever since 1911, Birrell had appreciated that Ulster exclusion might become a practical necessity. He had even suggested that course privately to Churchill in 1911, and again to Asquith and the king two years later. Birrell disliked the expedient, and he also knew that if he was personally responsible for its adoption, the Nationalists would regard it as a deep betrayal of trust. Thus, when the cabinet majority appeared to favour the Lloyd George scheme, Birrell felt obliged to act as the Nationalists' spokesman and plead their case against it. He must have realised that the ministry's weakness and indecision were increased by his own ambivalence on the Ulster question, especially as he was distracted by the Larkin troubles and his wife's illness. Moreover, Birrell probably felt that, if Ulster exclusion had to be forced on the Nationalists, then it was better that it should be imposed by a minister with no prior commitment to the Irish leaders. Birrell naturally shrank from the ordeal of wringing humiliating concessions from his Irish friends. He may also have recognized that if Ulster exclusion was necessary, then Lloyd George was better equipped to gain full cabinet support and to handle the delicate negotiations with the Nationalists.
Therefore, immediately after the crucial cabinet of 13 November, the chief secretary sent a letter of resignation to the prime minister, couched in the strongest terms:

— having regard to the decision of the Cabinet today that *our* parliaments should be at once exchanged with Redmond — I feel convinced that in the real interests of peace and party — I ought at the earliest possible date to be relieved of my present office, which all of a sudden has become extraordinarily distasteful to me. I don't mind a bit how it is done or what people say. I hope, therefore, amidst the pressure of other things, you won't overlook this, which I don't think can stand over until after Xmas. 181

But this *cri de coeur* was overruled. Birrell was retained as a reluctant hostage to the government's doubtful good faith in maintaining its 1912 Home Rule position. The chief secretary continued to control the Irish administration from Dublin Castle, and to help Asquith keep his options open by making public speeches in support of the official policy. 182 Birrell, however, played an increasingly reluctant and nominal role in subsequent negotiations over Ulster with both Nationalists and Unionists, leaving the initiative entirely with Lloyd George and Asquith.

**SOUNDING OUT THE NATIONALISTS**

The prime minister had told Bonar Law on 6 November that Birrell would sound out the Nationalists, but a week later Asquith decided that he would himself discuss the Lloyd George scheme with Redmond. 183 Denis Gwynn has provided a masterly analysis of Redmond's situation, showing that he was angry and resentful because he believed compromise was already inevitable. 184 Redmond knew, however, that he would damage British support if he appeared unreasonable. His speech at Newcastle on 14 November accordingly combined all the traditional Nationalist objections to Ulster exclusion with the cautious admission that: 'I shut no door to a settlement by consent, but — we will not be intimidated or bullied into a betrayal of our trust.' 185 Reactions to the speech varied widely. Bonar Law, McKenna,
Riddell thought it meant that 'the Nationalists would not have the exclusion of Ulster at any price', and Lloyd George remarked that Redmond must naturally put his claims high. Lord Edmund Talbot interpreted it quite differently 'as being preparatory to a climb down'.

The prime minister met the Nationalist leader for an hour on 17 November 1913, for their first discussion together of the Ulster question. The most outstanding feature of the conversation was the complete absence of Asquith’s usual optimism. The techniques of persuasion required that he emphasize the gravity of the situation in Ulster and the king’s desire for compromise, and that he should exaggerate Bonar Law’s intransigence and the extent of his demands. Asquith briefly described his second conversation with Bonar Law, claiming that the Unionist leader demanded 'the total and permanent exclusion of Ulster from the Bill'. This claim was inaccurate. Far from insisting on permanent exclusion, the Unionist leader had expressed a preference for an 'option of inclusion', to be decided by plebiscite. Bonar Law’s actual proposal was more reasonable, and much closer to the Lloyd George plan, than Redmond was permitted to know. The reason for this deception was obvious. Redmond might be expected to concede more, if he imagined the Unionist terms to be higher. Since Bonar Law’s demands were made to appear so unreasonable, the prime minister was able to reassure Redmond that he gave them 'no countenance whatever'.

Asquith cleverly prepared the ground for the Lloyd George scheme, painting a gloomy picture of escalating military preparations in Ulster, and the probability of numerous army resignations if troops were used against Ulster. Against this background, Lloyd George’s 'modified proposal' of 13 November appeared a reasonable means of preventing a 'baptism of blood'. Moreover, the plan was presented in a misleading way, designed to undermine Redmond’s hostility. Asquith emphasized that there was little immediate prospect of an agreed settlement, so the cabinet must consider the alternative to agreement, namely the prevention, or at any rate the indefinite postponement, of the bloody prologue. Lloyd George’s exclusion plan was put forward in this guise, as
as an alternative to an agreed compromise, which would avoid bloodshed, but which
could not be regarded, and was not put forward, as a basis of settlement. 191
This argument was based on faulty logic, since the Lloyd George plan could
postpone 'the bloody prologue', only if it did receive the agreement of the
Opposition to its passage through parliament in 1914. Asquith also hinted
that the scheme might be used as a purely tactical manoeuvre, designed to
show that the government was reasonable, but never to be implemented because
it would be rejected by the Opposition. 192 Thus the plan was presented as very
moderate, possibly a mere hypothetical expedient, and unlikely to be carried.
Redmond was finally reassured by the information that the prime minister
--- did not, as at present advised, approve of this
suggestion, and stated that he told the Cabinet that,
in his opinion, 20 or 30 Liberal members would vote
against such a proposal; that the Labour members
would at best abstain. 193

Even if agreement was reached, Asquith stated that he would not dream of
making any proposal at present, or before the end of the year. 194

The prime minister's case for the Lloyd George plan involved
certain inconsistencies, illogical arguments, and misleading statements. But
Redmond must have suspected that Asquith was overstating the case to prepare
for a compromise. The Nationalist leader was too shrewd and experienced not
to be unaware of this traditional tactic. He replied at the interview that 'If put
forward at the last moment by B. Law as the price of an agreed settlement, he
might look at it. Otherwise he couldn't entertain it for a moment.' It would
split his party, and at the outside, they could only abstain from voting against
it. 195

A week later Redmond sent Asquith a lengthy memorandum providing a
forceful justification of this position. He argued that the magnitude of the Ulster
peril had been considerably exaggerated, and that the Tory party should be forced
to take the initiative in suggesting any compromise proposals. Any offer from
the government on the lines of the Lloyd George scheme would be interpreted
as conclusive evidence of the effectiveness of the Orange threats; and would
become the basis for further demands, or used as weapons to destroy the Home
Rule bill. Redmond insisted that accommodation should only be discussed when the passage of the Bill was certain, by which time Bonar Law would be forced by his own difficulties into taking the initiative, and incurring the related disadvantages. 106

The prime minister read out Redmond's letter to the cabinet on 24 November, when it was discussed at considerable length. The cabinet finally decided they should not commit themselves, as Pease recorded. Instead, they should be ready to close with any reasonable proposal which meant H.R. by Consent whenever it came—that to float H.R. in blood was not the right way to promote Home Rule as a settlement. 107 The cabinet agreed on the reply sent to Redmond on 26 November, stating that no offer would be made to Bonar Law at that stage, though Asquith might consider it expedient to conclude the previous conversation with the Unionist leader. However, before taking the responsibility of using force:

We must, of course, keep our hands free, when the critical stage of the Bill is ultimately reached, to take such a course as then in all the circumstances seems best calculated to safeguard the fortunes of Home Rule. 108

No decision was reached in cabinet and the ambiguous letter to Redmond left Asquith free to manoeuvre as he wished.

Meanwhile, Lloyd George in turn was engaged in squeezing information from Dillon, and putting additional pressure on Redmond. The chancellor interviewed Dillon shortly after the prime minister's meeting with Redmond on 17 November. 109 Whereas Redmond's response to the Lloyd George scheme had been a flat refusal, Dillon's attitude was more friendly. Lloyd George understood that Dillon was 'more favourably inclined to this scheme' than to Home Rule within Home Rule, which he had earlier supported. If it were Dillon's decision, Lloyd George concluded that he could obtain the assent of the Nationalists. However, Dillon repeatedly urged the importance of not presenting any such proposal to the Tories at that stage. It was vital that the Irish leaders should be free, during the next few months, to state that
to such offer had been made to the Opposition or accepted by the Nationalists.

It might be tactically wise to put the scheme forward at the last moment, when the Irish leaders might be able to carry it in Ireland, accompanied by the Home Rule Act. Lloyd George agreed that it would be 'highly undesirable to commit ourselves at this stage to this proposal'. Instead, he thought Asquith should announce, early in the 1914 session, that he intended to move a series of proposals dealing with the Ulster problem at the 'suggestion' stage. This would make it very difficult for the Unionists to 'indulge in rowdism' until the nature of the proposals was subsequently revealed.

Lloyd George's last admission was very significant. It suggests that Lloyd George intended all along to allow his scheme to be apparently forgotten during the winter, while the Unionists were confused by Asquith's sham manoeuvres, and the Nationalists were being pressed in the required direction. Lloyd George's scheme would suddenly be produced again at the appropriate moment in the 1914 parliamentary time-table, as if it were the natural outcome of the intervening negotiations.

The success of his interview with Dillon may well have encouraged Lloyd George to put maximum pressure on Redmond immediately, in the hope that sledgehammer techniques would succeed, where Asquith's devious methods had failed. The chancellor had exchanged information with Asquith about their respective interviews with the two Nationalist leaders on 17 November, and familiarised himself with Redmond's letter. Then on 25 November, the day after the ineffectual cabinet, Lloyd George himself interviewed Redmond. The chancellor agreed that it would be a 'fatally wrong step in tactics' for the government to make any proposals at the present, but warned that 'the time would come when some offers would have to be made sooner than we thought'. Some offer must be made to Ulster when the time came to use coercive methods to suppress the Ulster movement, and Lloyd George used powerful arguments in favour of his own proposal. He also warned Redmond that 'it had the approval of the Cabinet generally', and that:
under certain circumstances, if no offer were
made, Sir Edward Grey, Lord Haldane, Mr. Winston
Churchill—and, inferentially, I gathered, himself—
might resign, which would mean a general débâcle,
which would be a very serious thing for Home Rule
and for me personally.

Redmond stood his ground, refusing to argue, except to point out that such a
débâcle would be more serious for Lloyd George’s career than for Redmond
personally.

How far this extraordinary interview had Asquith’s blessing is not
known, and Redmond must have noticed inconsistencies in the statements of the two
ministers. Lloyd George was justified in claiming general cabinet approval for
his scheme, but the prime minister had preferred to play down that point. It is
also unlikely that Grey, Haldane and Churchill knew precisely how they fitted into
the chancellor’s plans, though the implications regarding their views were broadly
true. Lloyd George’s comments most certainly did not have the chief secretary’s
blessing. Birrell was clearly shocked when he met Redmond two days later and
learnt about the interview. In his anger and his concern to reassure his friend,
and undo some of the damage, Birrell over-reacted by discounting most of the
chancellor’s statements. The chief secretary claimed that the cabinet ‘had never
ever considered’ the adoption of Lloyd George’s proposal, and that ‘he knew for a
fact that there was very strong and bitter opposition to it amongst members of the
Cabinet.’ It was ridiculous to suppose that it could lead to any settlement by
agreement.

The Nationalist leader must have felt angry, confused and
deceived, after receiving such conflicting accounts of cabinet policy, within ten
days, from the three ministers most directly concerned with Ireland. Birrell’s
comments came closer, in some respects, to the viewpoint Asquith conveyed in
circumlocution on 17 November; but Lloyd George reflected the total
situation more accurately, if too brutally. The chancellor no-doubt over-
emphasized his colleagues’ united support for his scheme, while Birrell gave
an exaggerated impression of the size and importance of the group of ministers
who were bitterly opposed. The chief secretary may have been justified in
claiming that the full cabinet had not considered the immediate or formal
assent of the plan, but the inner circle from which he was now excluded had
advanced further in this direction than he knew.

The contradictory accounts of cabinet policy which Redmond
received illustrated the divergent viewpoints within the ministry, and the
image which could be caused when no clear collective policy was imposed.
Most of the senior ministers, including Grey, Crewe, Haldane and Morley, had
moved in the direction sought by Lloyd George and Churchill. A united,
collective policy might have been possible at this stage had there been any
collective direction from the top. Instead, Asquith kept his plans to himself.
He allowed Lloyd George to take the initiative, but he also refused to accept the
resignation of the chief secretary who represented an almost impossible policy.
The extent of the collaboration between Asquith and Lloyd George from September
1913 is not clear; for the most part, the prime minister seemed to approve the
chancellor's activities. Birrell was left with the doubtful title of Irish secretary,
while Lloyd George assumed real control of Home Rule policy. The prime minister
appears to have made no attempt to mediate between the two ministers or to
coordinate their views. Consequently, the combined effect of their three interviews
with Redmond was more harmful than constructive. It was scarcely surprising that
rumours of cabinet dissensions over Ulster policy abounded. As Bonar Law
commented on 24 November: 'It is also obvious from the Press that there are
differences of opinion in the Cabinet about it, and until they come to some decision
nothing useful can be done'. Birrell found it necessary to deny such allegations
in a public speech next day, claiming that, 'We are one and all behind the Prime
Minister; we echo every word that he uttered at Ladybank ---'. The chief
secretary might have been less forceful in his protestations of unity had he
known what Lloyd George was saying to Redmond on the same day.

By November 1913, the prime minister's secret conversations
with Bonar Law had served their main purpose. They provided Asquith with the
information to help him formulate his ultimate negotiating position. Independently
of these secret meetings, ministerial differences over Ulster became clearer, and
the balance of cabinet opinion swung gradually towards exclusion. Lloyd George's secret dinner party of 12 November, and the cabinet meeting the following day, marked an important watershed in the government's Irish policy. The chancellor took advantage of the shift in opinion within the ministry to advocate his own exclusion scheme, which received considerable support. At the same time, the chief secretary was effectively displaced by Lloyd George as Asquith's chief lieutenant in dealing with the Irish crisis.
NOTES  

CHAPTER VI

1. The King accused Birrell and Asquith of following 'a policy of drift' in July 1913 (Birrell to Asquith, 24 July 1913, MS. Asquith 38, fo. 109); see also Royal Memorandum, 11 Aug. 1913, Nicolson, George V, p. 223.


3. C. Asquith's second memorandum to the King, c. 18 Sept. 1913, MS. Asquith 38, fos. 164-173; Birrell to Asquith, 8 Sept. 1913, MS. Asquith 38, fos. 128-9.


5. Churchill to Asquith, 17 Sept. 1913, MS. Asquith 38, fos. 192-4; Law to Lansdowne, 18 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 33/5/56; Law to Carson, 18 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 33/5/57.

6. Law to Carson, 24 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 33/5/58. See also Law to Lansdowne, 24 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 33/5/59.


11. Balfour to Law, 23 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 30/2/20; Balfour Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 49693, fos. 41-7.

12. Fitz to Arthur Ponsonby, 6 Oct. 1913, Ponsonby Papers. See also Stamfordham to Law, 26 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 30/2/28.

13. Law to Carson, 18 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 33/5/57. See also Law's memorandum, 16 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 33/5/57; Law to Lansdowne, 4 Oct. 1913, B.L.P. 33/5/67.
Law to Lansdowne, 24 Sept. 1913; B.L.P. 33/5/59; Law to Carson, 24 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 33/5/57-8. Carson showed this correspondence immediately to F.E. Smith and talked freely with him (Carson to Law, 20 Sept. 1913, and Smith’s memorandum, B.L.P. 30/2/15). Law subsequently agreed with Lansdowne’s reservations about this open exchange of views with Carson (Lansdowne to Law, 30 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 30/2/37.)

Irish Times, 18 Sept. 1913; see also Carson’s letter to Daily Express, 2 Sept. 1913.

Carson to Law, 20 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 30/2/15.

Carson to Lansdowne, 9 Oct. 1913, B.L.P. 30/3/23.

F.E. Smith’s memorandum, c. 20 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 30/2/15.

Balfour to Bonar Law, 23 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 30/2/20; Balfour Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 49693, fos. 41-7.

Lansdowne to Law, 26 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 30/2/27 (commenting on Carson to Law, 20 Sept., B.L.P. 30/2/15); Lansdowne to Law, 23 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 30/2/21 (commenting on conversation with Balfour); Lansdowne to Balfour, 25 Sept. 1913, Balfour Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 49730, fos. 255-9. Stephen Gwynn described Lansdowne as ‘‘‘a great Irish landlord, representative of a class which has been hurt in its pocket, bruised in its pride, by the revolution of the last thirty years.’’ (Home Rule and the House of Lords’, Nineteenth Century, LXXIII (March 1913), 580-96.


Lansdowne to Balfour, 25 Sept. 1913, Balfour Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 49730, fos. 258-9. See also Balfour to Law, 23 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 30/2/20; Lansdowne to Law, 20 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 30/2/17.

Fritz to Arthur Ponsonby, 6 Oct. 1913, Ponsonby Papers.

Selborne to Balfour, c. end Sept. 1913, Balfour Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 49863, fos. 9-10. See also Stamfordham to Law, 26 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 30/2/28. Walter Long also shared Lansdowne’s views, but he took little part in the discussion at this stage due to illness; see e.g. Long to Law, 5 Oct. 1913: ‘‘Personal I do not believe in a Conference, except after an election, or on condition that Bill is withdrawn’’ (B.L.P. 30/3/7.) For a lengthy analysis of Long’s subsequent views, see Memorandum by Walter Long, 20 Nov. 1913, B.L.P. 30/4/46.
Lansdowne to Law, 27 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 30/2/29; Stamfordham to Law, 26 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 30/2/28. See also Selborne to Balfour, N.D.: 'F.E. Smith, who has been at the manoeuvres tells H.M. that Carson wd welcome such an arrangement!!' (Balfour Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 49863, fos. 9-10).

Lansdowne to Law, 30 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 30/2/37. See also Lansdowne to Curzon, 1 Oct. 1913, Curzon MSS, Eur. F. 112/95; Lansdowne to Law, 9 Oct. 1913, B.L.P. 30/3/8. Law also considered F.E.'s talk with the King 'just about as unwise as anything could be' (Law to Lansdowne, 4 Oct. 1913, B.L.P. 33/5/67.)

Lansdowne to Stamfordham, 29 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 30/2/37, and Curzon MSS, Eur. F. 112/95; Law to Stamfordham, 1 Oct. 1913, B.L.P. 33/5/64.

F.E. Smith to Lloyd George, 26 Sept. 1913, Lloyd George Papers, c/3/7/1.

Ibid.

F.E. Smith was partly acting on a suggestion from Steel-Maitland that a Home Rule conference should be extended to include the Land question. Lloyd George's land campaign was finally to be launched in this 11 October Bedford speech, and Steel-Maitland's motives were plain from a letter to Lansdowne, 24 Sept.: 'It would pay us well if we could hold up the Land Campaign, whether there is a Conference about Ireland or not' (B.L.P. 30/2/26).

Lloyd George to F.E. Smith, 6 Oct. 1913, Lloyd George Papers, c/3/7/2.

Ibid. Being rather more discreet than Smith, Lloyd George merely mentioned that the conversation took place, but did not reveal its contents, arranging instead to meet Smith to talk over the situation before the next cabinet.

F. Harcourt Kitchin to Bonar Law, 30 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 30/2/35.

Ibid.

See F.E. Smith to Lloyd George, 26 Sept. 1913, Lloyd George Papers, c/3/7/1; Smith's memorandum, c. 20 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 30/2/15.

Stamfordham to Bonar Law, 1 Oct. 1913, B.L.P. 30/3/1.

Law to Lansdowne, 4 Oct. 1913, B.L.P. 33/5/67.
35. See Law to Stamfordham, 1 Oct. 1913, B.L.P. 33/5/64; Lansdowne to Law, 30 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 30/2/37; Lansdowne to Stamfordham, 29 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 30/2/37.

36. Law to Lansdowne, 1 Oct. 1913, B.L.P. 33/5/63.

37. Law to Lansdowne, 4 Oct. 1913, B.L.P. 33/5/67.


39. Law to Balfour, 27 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 33/5/60.

40. Stamfordham to Balfour, 7 Oct. 1913, Balfour Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 49558, fo. 97. See also Esher to Balfour, 8 Oct. 1913 (ibid., 49719, fos. 256–7.)

41. See Gwynn, Redmond, pp. 229–241, for full account.

42. See e.g. Bonar. Law to Stamfordham, 4 Oct. 1913, B.L.P. 33/5/66.

43. T.P. O’Connor to Dillon, 30 Sept. 1913, quoted in F.S.L. Lyons, Dillon, p. 331.


47. F.E. Smith to Churchill, 5 Oct. 1913, ibid., p. 1401.


49. P.E. Smith to Lloyd George, 9 Oct. 1913, Lloyd George Papers, c.3/7/3.


42. O'Connor to Scott, 17 Oct. 1913, ibid. See also O'Connor to Dillon and Devlin, 1 Oct. 1913, Gwynn, Redmond, p. 230. The Daily Chronicle, 15 Oct. 1913, accepted the Nationalist view that the cabinet was 'firmly resolved to treat Ireland as one and indivisible'.

43. Nation, 11 and 18 Oct. 1913. See also Wrench to Lansdowne, 20 Oct. 1913, B.L.P. 30/3/47, for Birrell's comment that Churchill spoke without orders at Dundee.

44. Lady Victoria Hicks Beach, Life of Sir Michael Hicks Beach (2 vols., 1932), II, 295.


46. Pease diary, II, fos. 77-8, 14 Oct. 1913.

47. Note by Lloyd George (signed D. L.G.) on back of envelope, N.D. (Oct. 1913), Lloyd George Papers, C/12/3.


50. Asquith to Law, 8 Oct. 1913, B.L.P. 30/3/11; MS. Asquith 38, fos. 222-3; quoted in Jenkins, Asquith, p. 288. Law and Lansdowne were indignant that the responsibility for the initiative had been placed on them (Law to Lansdowne, 10 Oct. 1913, B.L.P. 33/6/73; Lansdowne to Law, 11 Oct. 1913, B.L.P. 30/3/23). Law corrected the error when he met Asquith (B.L.P. 33/6/80), though refrained from raising this 'petty' issue in his immediate reply.


52. Law to Balfour, 20 Oct. 1913, B.L.P. 33/6/85.
Law to Balfour, 9 Oct. 1913, Balfour Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 49693, fos. 57-8; B.L.P. 33/6/69.

Letters to Memorandum, 8 Oct. 1913, B.L.P. 33/5/68; Balfour Papers, BL Add. MS. 49693, fos. 65-70.


Lansdowne to Carson, 11 Oct. 1913, B.L.P. 30/3/23.

Law to Lansdowne, 11 Oct. 1913, forwarded to Balfour, Balfour Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 49693, fos. 73-6; B.L.P. 33/6/78.

Balfour to Law, 13 Oct. 1913, B.L.P. 30/3/28; Balfour Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 49693, fos. 77-9.

For their respective accounts of this conversation, see Asquith’s pencilled notes of meeting, MS. Asquith 38, fos. 231-4; Bonar Law’s Notes of Conversation with the P.M., 14 Oct. 1913, B.L.P. 33/6/80. Mostly quoted in Black, Bonar Law, pp. 161-3.

Asquith’s notes, MS. Asquith 38, fos. 231-4; Bonar Law’s Notes, 14 Oct. 1913, B.L.P. 33/6/80.

Asquith’s notes, MS. Asquith 38, fos. 231-4. Law’s own account does not mention his important admission ‘in favour of an option of inclusion’. Jenkins, Asquith, p. 200, mistakenly states that there was no discussion about whether the exclusion should be temporary or permanent.

Ibid.

Law to Lansdowne, 15 Oct. 1913, B.L.P. 33/6/80.

Balfour to Law, 17 Oct. 1913, B.L.P. 30/3/33; Balfour Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 49693, fos. 97-9.

Lansdowne to Law, 16 Oct. 1913, B.L.P. 30/3/31; see also Lansdowne to Chamberlain, 31 Oct. 1913, Politics from inside, p. 570.


Asquith’s cabinet letter to king, 18 Oct. 1913, MS. Asquith 7, fo. 67.

George V to Asquith, 21 Oct. 1913, MS. Asquith 38, fo. 239.


Morley to Rosebery, 5 Nov. 1913, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S. MS. 10048, fos. 46-7. See also Birrell to Asquith, 28 Oct. 1913, MS. Asquith 38, fos. 203-4.

Lansdowne to Law, 27 Oct. 1913, B.L.P. 30/3/56.

Scott-Maitland to Law, 27 Oct. 1913, B.L.P. 30/3/55.

Stamfordham to Law, 27 Oct. 1913, B.L.P. 30/3/57; Law to Stamfordham, 21 Oct. 1913, B.L.P. 33/6/90.

Law to Lansdowne, 28 Oct. 1913, B.L.P. 33/6/89.


Asquith to Law, 30 Oct. 1913, B.L.P. 30/3/75; Law to Asquith, 2 Nov. 1913, MS. Asquith 39, fos. 1-2.

For accounts of the conversation, see Asquith's pencilled notes, 6 Nov. 1913, MS. Asquith 39, fos. 3-6; Bonar Law's notes, B.L.P. 33/6/93; Balfour Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 49693, fos. 102-110; printed in full in Blake, *Bonar Law*, pp. 16-5.

Ibid. For evidence of this die-hard Unionist movement, see e.g. Milner to F.S. Oliver, 23 Oct. 1913, Milner Papers, Box 211; Milner to Law, 24 Oct. 1913, B.L.P. 30/3/50; Dicey to Strachey, 16 Oct. 1913, Strachey Papers, S/5/6/12; Sandars to Balfour, 4 Nov. 1913, Balfour Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 49768, fos. 69-70.

Asquith's notes, 6 Nov. 1913, MS. Asquith 39, fos. 3-6.

Law's notes, B.L.P. 33/6/93.

Asquith's notes, MS. Asquith 39, fos. 3-6.

Law's notes, B.L.P. 33/6/93.

Ibid.; Asquith's notes, MS. Asquith 39, fos. 3-6.

Law's notes, B.L.P. 33/6/93. On learning this, Balfour was surprised that Asquith did not even seem uneasy about the finance of an 'Ulsterless Ireland' (Balfour to Law, 8 Nov. 1913, B.L.P. 30/4/16).
Law's notes, B.L.P. 33/6/93.

Asquith's notes, MS. Asquith 39, fos. 3-6; c.f. Law's notes, B.L.P. 33/6/93.

Law to Long, 7 Nov. 1913, B.L.P. 33/6/94; Law to Balfour, 7 Nov. 1913, B.L.P. 33/6/93.

Balfour to Law, 8 Nov. 1913, B.L.P. 30/4/16; Balfour Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 49693, fos. 111-24. Long to Law, 7 and 9 Nov. 1913, B.L.P. 30/4/11, 18; see also Long's memorandum, 20 Nov. 1913, B.L.P. 30/4/46.

Law to Balfour, 15 Nov. 1913, B.L.P. 33/6/98; Balfour Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 49693, fo. 125. See also Chamberlain, Politics from Inside pp. 665, 611.

Asquith's cabinet letter to king, 12 Nov. 1913, MS. Asquith 7, fo. 69; Pease diary, II, fo. 79 [misdated 11 Nov.]

Blake, Donor Law, p. 165; Jenkins, Asquith, p. 292.

Jenkins, Asquith, p. 290, possibly over-emphasizes the extent to which the second discussion merely traversed 'familiar ground'.

Fitzroy, Memoirs, II, 524 (16 Oct. 1913). See also Asquith's cabinet letter to king, 18 Oct. 1913, MS. Asquith 7, fo. 67; Pease diary, II, fos. 77-8, 14 Oct. 1913.

Attitudes as well as roles were reversed. In 1909 McKenna had been the chief ministerial advocate of increased naval expenditure, while Churchill demanded that money be spent on domestic reforms rather than ships.

Riddell, More Pages, p. 189 (13-14 Dec. 1913.)

Stephen McKenna, Reginald McKenna 1863-1943: A Memoir (1948), pp. 174-6, throws no light on McKenna's actions or motives re. Ireland.

McKenna at Pontypool, 6 Oct. 1913, Liverpool Post, 7 Oct. 1913.

McKenna to Runciman, 12 Oct. 1913, Runciman Papers, R 1/39.

Riddell, More Pages, p. 186 (16 Nov.)

Emmott diary, II, fos. 77-8, 22 Sept. 1912.

123. ell.


125. Hartcourt to Gladstone, 4 Sept. 1913, H. Gladstone Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 46096, fos. 237-8; Esher, Journals, III.

126. Yorkshire Observer, 8 Nov. 1913.

127. Pease diary, II, fo. 80, 13 Nov. 1913.


129. Pease diary, II, fo. 80, 13 Nov. 1913; Burns diary, 11 April 1912, B.L. Add. MS. 46334, fo. 80; notes for speeches at Streatham (19 Jan. 1914) and Stockport (14 Feb. 1914), ibid., MS. 46307, fos. 86, 114-6.

130. Burns diary, 26 April 1914, B.L. Add. MS. 46336, fo. 83.

131. For opinions of Burns, see e.g. C.P. Scott diary, 6-8 Sept. 1911, B.L. Add. MS. 50901, fos. 37-40; Masterman to Asquith, 13 April 1908, MS. Asquith 11, fos. 95-6; Nation, 23 March and 25 May 1912.


136. Samuel to Asquith, 10 Oct. 1913, MS. Asquith 38, fos. 226-9; Samuel, A Suggestion for the Solution of the Ulster Question, 18 Dec. 1913, Samuel Papers, A/41/12 (P.R.O. Cab. 37/117/95); draft memorandum, Ulster, 13 Nov. 1913, Samuel Papers, A/41/9 (probably written after the cabinet, but not circulated).
This is a vastly over-simplified sketch, outlining the chief features common to all versions of the proposal.

Asquith’s cabinet letter to king, 14 Nov. 1913, MS. Asquith 7, fos. 71-2.

Harcourt to Asquith, 4 Oct. 1913, Harcourt Papers; Gwynn, Redmond, p. 230.

Esher to king, 29 Sept. 1913, Esher, Journals, III, 139-141.

Lloyd George’s memorandum, 12 Nov. 1913; Lloyd George Papers, C. 14/1/10.

Esher to Balfour, 10 April 1910, Balfour Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 49719, fos. 141-2; C. P. Scott diary, 6-8 Sept. and 1 Dec. 1911, 7 Jan. 1912, B.L. Add. MS. 50901, fos. 37-40, 50-52, 58-59; see also, Pease diary, 4 Oct. and 15 Dec. 1908, for Asquith’s remarks that Morley was now too old and declining. Sir Almeric Fitzrby (Memoirs, II) had an inflated estimate of Morley’s powers and influence in this period.

Esher, Journals, III, 211.

Gwynn, Redmond, p. 236.


Morley to Asquith, 30 Sept. 1913, MS. Asquith 38, fos. 214-5; Fitzroy, Memoirs, II, 522.

Asquith’s cabinet letter to king, 14 Nov. 1913, MS. Asquith 7, fos. 71-2; Pease diary, II, fo. 80, 13 Nov. 1913.

Morley to Carnegie, 14 and 28 Nov. 1913, Bodleian, MS. film 569.


See e.g. C. P. Scott diary, 17 Jan. 1914, B.L. Add. MS. 50901, fo. 95; Asquith’s cabinet letter to king, 23 Jan. 1914, MS. Asquith 7, fos. 90-91 (re. cabinet 22 Jan.)


Faber to Law, 29 April 1914, B.L. P. 32/2/67.
             Ideal* (1955), p. 139. Crewe and Asquith exchanged letters frequently
             from 1916-18, and the prime minister confided more in Crewe than in
             most men.


157. Pease diary, II. fo. 49, 13 Nov. 1913: Crewe objected that to pass
             H.R. with Ulster temporarily excluded, would arouse permanent Ulster
             question.

158. See e.g. Keith Robbins, *Sir Edward Grey* (1971), pp. 71, 127-8,
             *Haldane: Notes on letters in my boxes, 1926*, Haldane Papers, N. I. S. Ms. 5823;
             Asquith to Crewe, 30 Nov. 1911, Crewe Papers, C/40; MacCallum Scott diary, 15 March 1911;
             McKeenan to Runciman, 26 March 1910, Runciman Papers.

             43392, fos. 77-89.

160. Lansdowne's memorandum, 6 Sept. 1913, B. L. P. 39/1/7; Pease diary,
             II. fos. 77-8, 14 Oct. 1913.


162. C. P. Scott diary, 15-16 Jan. 1913 (for Dillon's views), B. L. Add. Ms.
             58451; fos. 75-6; Gwynn, *Redmond*, pp. 230-1, (for O'Connor's views).

163. Sirrell to Asquith, 16 Oct. 1913, MS. Asquith 38, fos. 235-6; Asquith's
             memorandum of his interview with Redmond, 17 Nov. 1913, *ibid*. MS. 39,
             fos. 23-6.

164. See e.g. Dougherty to Bryce, 5 Jan. 1914; uncatalogued Bryce Papers.
             J. H. Morgan to Asquith, 11 Nov. 1913 and 26 May 1914, MS. Asquith 39,
             fos. 11-2, and MS. 30, fos. 60-61; memorandum by J. H. Morgan, *The
             Possibilities of Separate or Differential Treatment of Ulster*, N. D.
             [mid 1913?], Samuel Papers, A/41/22.


168. Lloyd George's memorandum, Points discussed at dinner at 11 Downing Street, 12 Nov. 1913, Lloyd George Papers, C/14/1/10; Asquith's cabinet letters to king, 13 and 26 Nov. 1913, MS. Asquith 7, fos. 71-2, 77-8.

169. Bonar Law's note of conversation with Asquith, 6 Nov. 1913, B.L.P. 33/6/93. Asquith's notes, 6 Nov. 1913, MS. Asquith 39, fos. 3-6; see also Chamberlain to Lansdowne, 29 Oct. 1913, and reply, 31 Oct. 1913, Politics from Inside, pp. 567, 570.


171. Rufus Isaacs to Lloyd George, 9 Oct. 1913, Lloyd George Papers, C/7/4. No documents in the Reading Papers relate to Ireland, for 1910-14.


173. Nation, 15 Nov. 1913. This was very similar to hostile Unionist criticisms (see e.g. Long's memorandum, 20 Nov. 1913, B.L.P. 30/4/6.)

174. Asquith's cabinet letter to king, 12 Nov. 1913, MS. Asquith 7, fo. 69; Pease diary, II, fo. 79 (wrongly dated 11 Nov. 1913). For the attack on Birrell's management of the Larkin affair, see Jalland, 'A Liberal Chief Secretary and the Irish Question', Historical Journal, XIX, 2 (1976), 442-3.

175. Lloyd George's memorandum, Points discussed at dinner at 11 Downing Street, 12 Nov. 1913, Lloyd George Papers, C/14/1/10.

176. Asquith's cabinet letter to king, 14 Nov. 1913, MS. Asquith 7, fos. 71-2; cabinet notes, Nov. 1913, Lloyd George Papers, C/12/2; Pease diary, II, fo. 80, 13 Nov. 1913.

177. Gwynn, Redmond, p. 236.

178. Cabinet notes, Nov. 1913, Lloyd George Papers, C/12/2.

179. Samuel's memorandum on Ulster, 13 Nov. 1913; Samuel Papers, A/41/9. This does not appear to have been circulated, but Samuel presumably showed it to Lloyd George or Asquith, at least.
See e.g. Birrell's Bristol speeches in Nov. 1913, The Times, 15 and 21 Nov. 1913.

Asquith's notes, 6 Nov. 1913, MS. Asquith 39, fo. 3-6; Asquith's letter to Birrell, 14 Nov. 1913, MS. Asquith 7, fo. 71-2.

Gwynn, Redmond, p. 233. Gwynn has examined the 1913-14 negotiations from the Nationalist viewpoint extremely thoroughly and effectively, setting many documents in full. I do not, therefore, propose to repeat in detail any of the information provided by Gwynn, except where new source material indicates the need for amendments, or where it is necessary to explain the basic development of events.

Gwynn, Redmond, p. 233. See also Asquith to Redmond, 13 Nov. 1913, Redmond Papers, N. L. I. Add. MS. 15,165 (Bodleian, MS. film 1059); Redmond to Asquith, 14 Nov. 1913, MS. Asquith 39, fo. 22, for Redmond's promise not to close the door against an agreed settlement.

Law to Ballour, 18 Nov. 1913, B. L. P. 33/6/98; Riddell, More Pages, p. 186 (3 Nov. 1913); Talbot to Law, 15 Nov. 1913, B. L. P. 30/4/36.

Gwynn, Redmond, pp. 234-6, gives Redmond's final memorandum of the conversation in full. An earlier draft, which is shorter and less cautious, survives in Redmond Papers, N. L. I. Add. MS. 15,165 (Bodleian, MS. film 1059). For Asquith's version of the conversation, see MS. Asquith 39, fo. 23-26, briefly described in Jenkins, Asquith, pp. 233-4.

Gwynn, Redmond, p. 234.


MS. Asquith 39, fo. 23-26; Gwynn, Redmond, p. 235.

See Redmond's account in Gwynn, Redmond, p. 235.
Draft memorandum of Redmond's interview with Asquith, 17 Nov. 1913, Redmond Papers, N. L. I. Add. MS. 15,165 (Bodleian, MS. film 1059). Redmond's later version is similar (Gwynn, Redmond, p. 235), but Asquith's own account carefully makes no mention of any Liberal misgivings (MS. Asquith 39, fos. 23-26).

Gwynn, Redmond, p. 235.


Asquith's cabinet letter to king, 26 Nov. 1913, MS. Asquith 7, fos. 77-8; Peace diary, II, fo. 82, 24 Nov. 1913.


Memorandum: Interview with Mr. John Dillon at No. 11, Downing St., November 17th 1913, Lloyd George Papers, C/20/2/4. Percy Billingworth was also present, but made no contribution.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Redmond's notes provide the only account of this interview: see Gwynn, Redmond, pp. 237-8.

Ibid.

Gwynn, Redmond, pp. 238-9, again provides the only account, quoting Redmond's notes of his interview with Birrell, 27 Nov. 1913.

Bonar Law to A. Ward, 24 Nov. 1913, B. L. P. 33/6/100.

The Times, 26 Nov. 1913. (Bristol speech, 25 Nov. 1913). The following day, Birrell accused the press of damaging prospects of peace by interfering with 'a chorus of their own' every day (ibid., 27 Nov.).
CHAPTER VII

THE DRIFT TO CATASTROPE, NOVEMBER 1913 - MARCH 1914.

'Do settle that beastly Ulster question. The civilised world expects it!' (Gladstone to Seely, 1 Dec. 1913, MS. Mottistone 21, fo. 200).

'I believe your Aged Squiff to be a double-dealing, dishonest man. He is delaying on purpose to wear us down.' (F. S. Oliver to Milner, 25 Jan. 1914, Milner Papers, box 195).

'--- matters would now drift to a catastrophe' (Curzon to Bonar Law, 15 Dec. 1913, B.L.P. 31/1/32.)

PLAYING FOR TIME: THE CABINET POLICY OF 'WAIT AND SEE'.

The prime minister was clearly determined to keep his options open for as long as possible. It was not inconceivable that something might yet turn up to remove the necessity for excluding Ulster. The Nationalist insistence that concessions should be reserved until the last possible moment coincided with Asquith's interests, and reinforced his natural inclination to postpone unpleasant decisions. He also wanted to play for time, as he needed to convince the Nationalists gradually that concessions were crucial, to counteract the effect of the unfortunate opening negotiations with Redmond.

A shroud of secrecy surrounds the plans and the intentions of the prime minister at this stage. It was not in his temperament to reveal his aims or his motives to his colleagues, as Bonar Law did so freely. Asquith kept his own counsel, committing little to paper which might in any way incriminate him, or elucidate the working of his mind. Consequently, he has eluded historians, just as he frustrated the press, and infuriated the Opposition. More evidence survives about Lloyd George's plans, probably because these were more
precisely formulated, and the chancellor lacked his chief's addiction to secrecy.

But it is not at all clear how far the two men cooperated in these months, particularly as Asquith was generally careful not to reveal his reactions to Lloyd George's ideas.

It is probably safe to suggest, however, that Lloyd George believed his November exclusion scheme would be the best ultimate solution, and that it would be all the more effective if it were placed in cold storage for the next few months. It is more difficult to know whether Asquith shared this view. It seems likely that he did, since he eventually acted upon it, and his negotiations during the next few months prepared for it very effectively. The prime minister was probably working on the assumption that Lloyd George's plan might have to be the final negotiating position, though he was prepared to consider any better alternative if one presented itself. The conversations with the Unionist leader had almost certainly served their primary purpose, from Asquith's point of view, after the first two meetings. By that time, he had as much information as he was likely to obtain about the Unionist position from Bonar Law's perspective. Subsequent meetings with Carson might provide useful information about Ulster Unionist attitudes, but for the most part, further negotiations were designed chiefly to confuse and delay.

After the second meeting with the prime minister, Bonar Law had initially expected an early response, but by mid-November, he was more suspicious of Asquith's intentions. As Robert Blake put it: 'A black fog seemed to have settled upon the deliberations of the Liberal leaders and all through November little could be discovered except dubious gossip and distorted rumour.' H.A. Gwynne, editor of the Morning Post, reported to Steel-Maitland in mid-November that:

Asquith is refusing to do anything but keep his own counsel, and wishes to keep the matter undecided till Parliament meets, thinking that he has a greater advantage in tactics in Parliament than on the platform.

Ten days later, the Unionist leader heard rumors that the cabinet had decided to make no overtures to the Opposition, and on newspaper evidence Bonar Law
was not surprised. He told Lansdowne that they could do nothing more until Asquith made the next move, since they had expressed their readiness to exchange views.

These impressions were confirmed by a frank and discursive conversation between Churchill and Austen Chamberlain on board the Admiralty yacht, the *Enchantress*, on 27 November. Churchill stated emphatically that the cabinet had never excluded the possibility of separate treatment for Ulster. Though Redmond naturally hated it, the government was not absolutely bound to the Nationalists, and the Irish were not indispensable. Churchill 'pressed a little' for the Lloyd George plan, which was dismissed by Chamberlain, along with Home Rule within Home Rule. Chamberlain insisted that the only basis for conversations was the course urged by Bonar Law on 6 November, giving the excluded counties the option of inclusion by plebiscite in five or ten years. Churchill argued that if the Unionists would concede automatic inclusion after a fixed term, the government might be able to offer more favourable terms on the boundary question, as *a quid pro quo*. When pressed about the resumption of the conversations between the leaders, Churchill said that Asquith could make no advances at present, contending that time was on the ministry's side:

Public opinion had got to have a shock. Both sides had to make speeches full of party claptrap and no surrender — 'A little red blood had got to flow' and then public opinion would wake up and then —

Chamberlain retorted that this was a dangerous gamble on bloodshed. His subsequent conclusions were instructive:

The impression left on my mind by the whole conversation is that [Winston] genuinely wants a settlement and that so do Lloyd George, Grey and Asquith, but that as to the means they have no clear ideas and that the hot and cold fits succeed one another pretty quickly; that Asquith means to 'wait and see' and will not give his 'casting vote' till the last moment.

This analysis was probably fairly accurate. The cabinet of 24 November had decided against making any definite commitment either way.
They had agreed that no offer should be made to Bonar Law at that stage, though further discussions were not entirely precluded. But ministers were totally unprepared for Asquith's Leeds speech on 27 November. This compounded their confusion, and seemed to surprise friend and foe alike. The prime minister stated that he would close no door to a 'reasonable and honourable way of peace'. The bill was not beyond the reach of amendment, and he was still open to an exchange of opinions with the Unionist leaders. After making these conciliatory gestures, he declared that he saw no immediate prospect of a settlement. He claimed that the cabinet were united behind their Home Rule bill, and meant to see this thing through without any surrender of principle and without submitting the issue to a fresh election.  

The Nation interpreted the Leeds speech to mean that, though Ladybank was not exactly repudiated, nothing further was to be expected from the government until a Unionist offer had been extended. The Opposition press:  

— took it to mean a withdrawal. A storm of reproaches was forthwith launched from half-a-dozen platforms, and the 'Pall Mall Gazette' proclaimed the end of the truce which the first overtures were supposed to have established.  

Bonar Law replied to the Leeds speech in an equally uncompromising and far more impassioned outburst in Dublin the next day. He believed Asquith's remarks indicated that the attempts to find a compromise settlement had collapsed, because Redmond had given his orders, or Asquith was 'determined to wait and see'. Chamberlain felt particularly bitter. He had talked freely to Churchill about Ireland on the day of the Leeds speech, but received no hint that Asquith was meanwhile engaged in slamming the door in their faces:  

It is difficult now to think that the Ladybank offer was made in good faith & impossible to believe that he means business. He has blown conciliation to the winds --- I would not have his responsibility on my hands. He would scarcely have spoken differently if he had deliberately set himself to provoke strife. I presume he knew what he was doing.  

Lansdowne declared in public that the Leeds 'delivery' had 'chilled him to the
morrow', and they must prepare for the worst. But he commented privately, that the Enchantress conversation suggested they had 'by no means done with overtures yet, and that we shall find Asquith ready to go pretty far. Liberal ministers were equally bewildered by the Leeds speech, as Sir Almeric Fitzroy discovered:

Lord Morley owned to have been surprised at the stiffness of Asquith's attitude at Leeds, and believed that he had left his colleagues with the intention of reaffirming the Ladybank overtures. Morley could only assume that Asquith had been carried away by the fervour of Home Rule feeling in West Yorkshire, 'difficult as it is to reconcile this explanation with Asquith's complete self-command'. Churchill, Haldane, Grey and Morley were urging the prime minister to resume negotiations, and they attempted to repair the damage done at Leeds. Churchill and Haldane privately informed Chamberlain and Earl Grey that Asquith had not withdrawn at Leeds in the slightest from the Ladybank position. On 2 December, Haldane also poured oil on troubled waters in a speech at Birmingham, by insisting that there was no 'recessional note' in the Leeds' statement. Two days later, Sir Edward Grey repeated the same message at Bradford, protesting that the door opened at Ladybank had not been closed. He also appealed for patience, suggesting that a delayed settlement would not necessarily be catastrophic.

Asquith's motives in making his Leeds speech are impossible to fathom. It may have been an error of judgement, or a diversionary tactic intended to confuse his opponents still further. But when he appreciated the unhappy reactions of his own colleagues, the prime minister responded with a more conciliatory speech at Manchester on 5 December. Lord Crewe observed that day that the political outlook was obscure. The Nation remarked that platform speeches would be perpetually misread until the leaders actually met, giving some indication of the successful manner in which the secret meetings had been concealed from the press.

Churchill and Morley, at least, were not satisfied with the Manchester gesture. They increased their efforts to renew negotiations when
they dined with Chamberlain and F. E. Smith on 8 December 1913. The two ministers left no doubt that they objected strongly to the coercion of Ulster, Morley even more so than Churchill. They also indicated that Dillon and Redmond were in a 'chastened' mood, and though they might sulk a bit, they would not actively oppose negotiations. Finally, Churchill and Morley explained their serious anxiety about Asquith's delay in getting down to business with Bonar Law, revealing that they had both urged the prime minister to move more quickly, but without success. Both ministers asked Chamberlain to write Morley a formal letter, to be shown to Asquith, emphasizing the urgency of a rapid settlement. Chamberlain obliged with a letter warning that if the conversations did not offer prospects of success by Christmas, then revolution and civil war would replace settlement. Every day wasted allowed opinion to harden, and the extremist forces to organize and agitate. No more precious time should be wasted by these spasmodic meetings: 'If our leaders proceed in that leisurely way events will take the reins out of their hands'.

SECRET MEETINGS CONTINUED: ASQUITH AND BONAR LAW, 10 DECEMBER 1913.

However, apparently unknown to Morley, Churchill, Haldane and Grey, the prime minister had already approached Bonar Law again on 3 December, suggesting a further talk. No doubt Asquith's conciliatory phrases at Manchester, and the encouragement he gave to Haldane's Birmingham speech, had been partly designed to reassure Bonar Law that there might be some point in a third meeting. However, it was not surprising that the Unionist leader found the situation 'very funny' and hardly knew what to make of it. Asquith probably suggested this further talk partly in order to placate his anxious colleagues and the king. He may also have sought to soften the effects of his Leeds offensive, which had provoked stronger reactions than he had intended. The predominant motive, however, was probably to play for time. It was vital to prevent a deteriorating situation from collapsing into chaos before the Lloyd George scheme could be presented to parliament in the 1914 session.
Some leading Unionists entertained profound misgivings about this third meeting, fearing that Bonar Law was allowing himself to be manipulated by Asquith. James Lowther, the Speaker, was afraid that a settlement would be postponed until 'quite the last page of the Home Rule Chapter' in 1914, by then, the immediate pressure would be such that the Unionists would have to take practically anything they could get'. Lord Edmund Talbot, the Unionist chief whip, agreed that Asquith meant to keep Bonar Law occupied in the meantime, discussing unacceptably 'offers', and expecting the Unionists to keep Ulster quiet while negotiations proceeded. Talbot believed that Bonar Law placed 'implicit faith in Asquith, and — is persuaded of the expediency of telling Asquith everything'. Balfour's secretary, Jack Sandars, was the recipient of these confidences. He commented that he would not fear this 'cards on the table' game if Balfour was still handling Asquith, but Bonar Law could not equal Asquith's qualities, training, and experience. Sandars concluded that Bonar Law ought not to acquiesce in the prime minister's 'Fabian policy', and should protest against Asquith's inconsistent platform utterances: 'It seems to me that after Asquith's public behaviour since the last conversation B Law has every right to a stiff upper lip at the interview today'. These criticisms were partly justified by Bonar Law's candour at the first two meetings, but Sandars probably underestimated the new leader, perhaps out of prejudice against the man who displaced Balfour.

Lord Crewe's comments on 5 December were fairer:

Bonar Law has shown a good deal of capacity, and has added some cubits to his political stature, during the last few months. He gives the effect of being free from vanity or any self-seeking, and thus gets himself respected.

If Bonar Law had been too naive previously, he had learnt his lesson, and adopted the 'stiff upper lip' recommended by Sandars at the third meeting.

Probably neither leader hoped for much from their talk on 10 December. But its futility exceeded Bonar Law's expectations to such an extent that he could not understand why Asquith bothered to see him at all. Each leader found the other less hopeful than at their last meeting. A brief
discussion on United Kingdom devolution revealed that neither leader took the federal proposals very seriously. Both agreed that the Ulster difficulty still remained at the root of the matter. The prime minister then explained that the cabinet favoured the Lloyd George scheme, with automatic inclusion at the end of a definite period. Bonar Law predictably rejected this as hopeless, arguing as Samuel had done, that the agitation in Ulster would continue during the excluded period.

At this stage, Asquith began to prepare the ground for creating his smoke-screen. Though in 1914 he reverted to the Lloyd George plan as his fundamental negotiating base, he informed Bonar Law at this third meeting that he did not think this a feasible plan. The prime minister had thus led both Redmond and Bonar Law to believe that he personally did not approve of the Lloyd George exclusion scheme. This made his subsequent advocacy of Home Rule within Home Rule appear more plausible, as an alternative. Asquith suggested to Bonar Law that Ulster could easily be given practically complete autonomy within the Irish parliament. He implied that Home Rule within Home Rule and the Lloyd George plan were considered equally admissible by the cabinet. In fact Grey’s proposal had made no impression on the select inner cabinet at Lloyd George’s dinner, and Grey had mentioned it only half-heartedly at the full cabinet on 24 November. Since Bonar Law had rejected Home Rule within Home Rule at their second meeting, it was no surprise that he again pronounced it ‘quite useless’, since Ulster wanted to remain under the British parliament.

The prime minister’s response provided some insight into his intentions. He agreed that Home Rule within Home Rule probably would not satisfy Ulster. He argued, however, that it would appear reasonable to people in Britain, so that Ulster’s resistance would forfeit British sympathy if the Unionists rejected the plan. Bonar Law insisted that his proposal on 6 November for optional inclusion by plebiscite after a prescribed term was the only possible basis for agreement; anything else might increase the government’s tactical advantage in terms of public appeal, but could not lead to a settlement.

Neither leader seriously examined the proposals of the other, and the detailed
questions involved in each scheme were not considered. The only explanation
Bonar Law could subsequently give for the meeting was that Asquith was 'in a
funk about the whole position and thought that meeting me might keep the thing
open at least'. The Unionist leader saw no chance of a settlement. He believed
Asquith 'is simply at sea and does not in the least know what to do', and
meanwhile intended to drift.

Bonar Law's colleagues became very restless and suspicious as
a consequence of this third meeting. Lansdowne wrote a lengthy memorandum
analysing the three conversations between the leaders, concluding that:

In spite of the entire frankness with which Mr. Bonar
Law met the Prime Minister, nothing like a firm
proposal, or even a clear indication of Mr. Asquith's
own views, has been put forward.

Asquith's 'desultory and tentative' statements at the meetings contrasted sharply
with his more uncompromising references in his public speeches. Lansdowne was
extremely concerned about the effects of Asquith's procrastination upon their own
party: 'I hear from many quarters of a feeling of growing restlessness and
dissatisfaction amongst our friends'. Balfour commented:

It is tolerably clear now, I imagine, that the Government
think they will get into least trouble by letting things slide,
making professions of 'an open mind' as regards any
proposal the Opposition may make, and mitigating
hostility in England and Scotland by saying that they are
prepared to protect Ulster by a scheme of 'Home Rule
within Home Rule'.

Lord Curzon believed that 'matters would now drift to a catastrophe'. Lord
Selborne was convinced Asquith was 'simply playing with us', allowing communications
with Bonar Law to drag on indefinitely and uselessly, but encouraging press notice to
create an atmosphere of compromise. Then during the 1914 session, Asquith would
propose amendments he knew to be unacceptable to the Opposition, turning the
national disappointment at the failure of settlement against the Unionists.

Walter Long feared that the prime minister:

— is rubbing his hands over the situation, and is
congratulating himself over the fact that he has so
far succeeded in his object, namely, procrastination
and, to some extent, deception of the Opposition.
Lord Milner believed the government was 'only playing with the idea of negotiations to gain time', and Jack Sandars feared Bonar Law might be kept dangling, while Asquith used every occasion to delay. Sandars thought Asquith was only manoeuvring for position, and would move when he judged it best for his own tactical advantage. Bonar Law must, therefore, anticipate Asquith's moves, for 'if he waits on Asquith, he runs every risk of losing'. Lansdowne, Long, Robert Cecil, Sandars and Selborne pressed their leader to demand that Asquith should state his own proposals definitely in writing, if he wanted conversations to continue.

Bonar Law's colleagues had considerable justification for their fears. They guessed the prime minister's general strategy fairly accurately, but Asquith had effectively led them to assume that 'Home Rule within Home Rule' would be his ultimate negotiating position. However, the Unionists again underestimated their new leader. Bonar Law's tactics required patience to counter Asquith's policy. He agreed with his anxious colleagues that there must be a limit to their patience, but argued that they must not be accused of being unwilling to consider settlement. Bonar Law was alive to the danger that Asquith might be playing a game with them, but he believed this was more than counterbalanced by the prime minister's 'funk about the resistance of Ulster'. Like many Unionists, Bonar Law was convinced that Asquith would do almost anything to avoid coercing Ulster and would 'not face that when it comes to the point'.

**ASQUITH’S ‘SUGGESTIONS’ AND SIR EDWARD CARSON**

Sir Edward Grey's Bradford speech, on 4 December 1913, suggested that he was prepared to support Asquith’s policy of delay. Lord Crewe, another influential senior minister, told Walter Long on 14 December that 'we have no offer of any kind to make and don't intend to suggest one'. A few days later, Crewe confided more frankly that 'nothing would be done in connection with the “arrangement” for some considerable time to come', at least until parliament opened. As usual, however, ministers were not in agreement. Lansdowne discovered
that 'Morley & W. Churchill are evidently much more in earnest, or much more alive to the danger of delay than Asquith'.

On 10 December, immediately after the third meeting between the two leaders, Morley regretfully informed Austen Chamberlain that the advance was not effective. However, Morley believed that Carson held the keys to the whole situation, for nothing could be achieved until they discovered how far he was prepared to go, either to prevent Home Rule or to prevent a bloody collision. Chamberlain agreed, emphasizing that Carson had 'proved himself most moderate and deeply sensible of his heavy responsibility', and suggested that Carson ought to meet the prime minister. Morley showed Chamberlain's letter to Asquith, who immediately wrote to Carson proposing an interview.

Lansdowne and Law found the sudden transfer of the prime minister's attention from Bonar Law to Carson 'a little strange'; especially as negotiations with Carson opened on the same day they ended with Law. They both agreed, however, that it might be useful for Asquith to discover Ulster's attitude from Carson, as the main problem was to satisfy Ulster. The intervention of Morley and Chamberlain provided the opportunity to open new talks. The prime minister probably seized the chance as much because it permitted further weeks of procrastination, as for the information it might yield.

Asquith met Sir Edward Carson for the first of two informal discussions on 16 December 1913. He was well acquainted with the Ulster Unionist leader, and felt instinctively more relaxed with a barrister colleague than with a Canadian businessman. The prime minister found Carson 'on the whole less pessimistic' than Bonar Law, though Carson naturally emphasized his difficulties in going beyond the position of his Ulster following. Carson expressed his sincere anxiety for a permanent settlement which would not be followed by incessant agitation in Ulster on both sides. He repeated the conditions for settlement first mentioned in a speech early in December—chiefly that Ulster must retain the full protection of the Imperial parliament, and that Home Rule must not lead to ultimate separation. He suggested that specified Ulster counties should be excluded until the imperial parliament
decided otherwise, 'in pursuance of some general scheme of devolution'. 53 While not enthusiastic about devolution, Carson preferred it to Ulster exclusion alone, and Asquith was well practised in theoretically accommodating federal aspirations. The more important aspect of Carson's proposal bore some resemblance to the Lloyd George scheme; the latter implied that the intervention of two elections would give the Imperial parliament the opportunity to decide the ultimate fate of the excluded counties.

However, the prime minister did not follow up the suggestion, or attempt to reconcile it with the Lloyd George scheme, any more than he had pursued Bonar Law's proposal of optional inclusion by plebiscite. 54 Instead, Asquith suddenly produced a hybrid plan of his own, which was more limited than any of the proposals of Lloyd George, Carson, or Bonar Law, and bore little relation to them. Two days after their meeting, Asquith promised to send Carson 'a few rough suggestions' before they met again, 55 and these were forwarded on 23 December. A covering letter explained that the Nationalist leaders knew nothing of them, and Asquith had not submitted them to his colleagues, though he had discussed the subject with one or two of them. 56 The prime minister stated that he had no authority to make proposals at this stage. His Suggestions aimed rather at 'opening up the field for practical discussion, and inviting counter suggestions to be made upon the same terms and in the same spirit'. 57

Asquith's Suggestions were a curious cross between Grey's Home Rule within Home Rule, and Samuel's legislative veto for the Ulster members. The prime minister began with a minimal attempt to relate his Suggestions to the conversation with Carson, if only in a tangential fashion. He proposed that the bill should be prefaced by a declaration in favour of United Kingdom devolution, though this would obviously make little practical difference. The basic proposal was that an undefined area, termed 'statutory Ulster' should be granted special administrative and legislative rights. In the administrative sphere this involved a limited form of Home Rule within Home Rule, giving statutory Ulster control over the local government board, education, and local patronage, under Westminster's supervision. The legislative part of the scheme
hoje the stamp of Herbert Samuel and William O'Brien, though it lacked Samuel's subtle refinements. 59 A majority of the members representing statutory Ulster in the Irish parliament could appeal to the imperial parliament against legislation for their area concerning education, religion, land tenure, or tax increases. 60

Carson consulted Bonar Law before sending the prime minister a flat rejection on 27 December. Carson stated that it would be useless for either Bonar Law or himself to submit this memorandum to their respective colleagues, because however guarded, the basis is the inclusion of Ulster in the Irish Parliament. 61 Lansdowne commented that 'the whole scheme seems to me an indifferent piece of patchwork and would probably please no one'. He thought Bonar Law was quite right to turn down Asquith's Suggestions, which no Unionists could have accepted as a basis for an agreed settlement. Lansdowne recognized that they were no more than 'a clumsy attempt to carry out Grey's idea of giving Ulster Home Rule within Home Rule', which Bonar Law had already ruled out. 62

The Unionist leader himself commented that 'Asquith's suggestions are utterly fantastic and have no sense in them at all'. 63

The prime minister must have anticipated this rejection, for he cannot seriously have intended the Suggestions to form the basis for a settlement at this stage. The meetings with Bonar Law and Carson had clearly shown him what the Unionists might be prepared to accept. Bonar Law had rejected Home Rule within Home Rule as 'quite useless' at their meetings on 6 November and 10 December. Even with the addition of the legislative veto, the proposals were far more limited than Bonar Law or Carson had indicated they were willing to concede, especially as the Ulster Protestants were to be represented at Dublin. Moreover, the Suggestions could not even be expected to hold much appeal for Asquith's own colleagues, though they might welcome the offer as a tactical move to strengthen their position. In November, the cabinet had rejected Samuel's legislative veto proposal and shown little interest in Grey's Home Rule within Home Rule - the two components of the 'new' scheme. The only group which might conceivably acquiesce in the Suggestions was the Nationalists; Redmond and Dillon were prepared to support Home Rule within Home Rule,
and O'Brien advocated the Ulster legislative veto.

The purpose of the unexpected suggestions, then, was probably two-fold. Asquith knew that he could not hope to prolong talks with the Unionist leaders for many more weeks, unless he made some sort of offer. By deliberately making an offer which he knew the Unionists must reject, he could hope to confuse the Opposition as to his real intentions, and gain further time. Secondly, the suggestions formed the overture to a more positive attempt to negotiate with the Nationalists. The clumsy approaches to the Irish leaders in November, based on the Lloyd George scheme, had failed abysmally. The suggestions could be produced at a later stage to demonstrate that Asquith had actually made an offer based on concessions he believed the Nationalists could accept. It could then be argued that further concessions were required, since the Unionists flatly rejected the offer. A similar advantage would be gained if the British public was informed of the suggestions.

The prime minister's next move was to invite Carson to a second meeting on 2 January 1914, despite the Ulster Unionist leader's conclusive rejection of the suggestions. Asquith's intentions were soon clear. He sought to place on the Unionists the responsibility for rejecting his 'carefully considered suggestions', and to use these as a lever to induce the Opposition to formulate detailed counter-proposals in writing. The prime minister expressed his disappointment with the terms of Carson's letter. He had hoped that his suggestions for 'veiled exclusion' would be dealt with in a less summary fashion, or that some alternative proposal might have been made, since he professed to have offered 'substantial concessions'. The tactical significance of Asquith's suggestions was underlined, when he asked Carson how he could expect 'to have British sympathy on his side, if he challenged Civil War in resistance to such a proposal?' The prime minister built up to his final request that:

--- [Carson] should at least present in black & white some suggested method by which 'unveiled' exclusion could be put into effect without mutilating the Home Rule scheme as a whole, and hopelessly offending Nationalist sentiment.
Carson agreed to consider this request, but made no promises. 66

Carson adopted the formula suggested by Bonar Law, in his reply to the prime minister. He stated firmly that, until the principle of Ulster exclusion had been agreed, it was pointless to formulate detailed proposals for the administration of the excluded area. If that principle were conceded, Carson would be willing to assist in drafting a scheme, but it could be more efficiently executed by government experts with access to all the administrative details. 67

The Unionist leaders had cleverly evaded the real issue here, for Asquith had obviously not wanted administrative details, but admissions on questions of principle. The prime minister tried again to press Carson to commit himself to some definite Ulster exclusion proposal, as a quid pro quo for the Suggestions. Asquith replied that the position would be clarified if the two Unionist leaders would explain precisely what form of 'naked exclusion' they had in mind, as they rejected his own Suggestions. 68 Since Asquith already knew the preferences of the two Unionists, his request implied a desire for tactical advantage, rather than information. Carson therefore terminated the communications with a terse statement; by Ulster exclusion he meant that he had always wanted Ulster to remain under the Imperial parliament, giving the Dublin assembly no powers within the excluded area. 69

Asquith had led the Unionists to the conclusions expressed by Bonar Law:

I think that any agreement is quite impossible, for evidently the exclusion of Ulster cannot be agreed to by Asquith; and my impression is that nothing will happen; and that what probably he has already made up his mind is to happen is that at the right time they will make public some proposals, such as those suggested to Carson, which they think will improve their position in Great Britain by giving the impression that under such an arrangement Ulster will have no real grievance —— 70

They were led to assume that, when the government eventually made formal proposals, they would be on the narrow lines of Home Rule within Home Rule, rather than some form of 'naked' Ulster exclusion, such as the Lloyd George
Balfour agreed with his successor's analysis, adding that a limited proposal would be effective, since

[Asquith] wants to be able to advertise his own reasonableness, and the bigotry of the Unionist Party in general, and of Ulster in particular. The worst of it is that I think he will have a considerable measure of success with those of his own Party who are in much perturbation over the Ulster problem. 71

Bonar Law was due to speak at Bristol on 15 January, and since he knew from many sources that his supporters intensely disliked the idea of 'secret' negotiations, he felt it was vital to announce that they had failed. 72 After consulting Asquith, Bonar Law announced at Bristol that conversations had taken place between the leaders, so far without result, and he entertained no hope of a successful outcome. 73 Bonar Law's colleagues generally approved the speech, but it also suited the prime minister's purposes. Since the Unionist leader made the public announcement that negotiations had broken down, the implication was that the Opposition were responsible for terminating them, which was only partly true. The king certainly interpreted the Bristol speech in this sense, and Bonar Law received a very cool communication from Stamfordham on 20 January 1914. This letter expressed the king's regret, on learning from Asquith that Carson felt unable to consider the 'proposals' the prime minister had 'elaborated with much thought and care entirely on his own responsibility. 75 The Unionist leader, feeling he was being unfairly blamed, attempted to correct the royal misconceptions by explaining his own view of the negotiations at some length, denying that Asquith had made any firm 'proposals'. 76 Bonar Law merely incurred further royal displeasure on account of his 'totally pessimistic view of the situation'. 77

THE NAVAL CRISIS AND ULSTER: LLOYD GEORGE VERSUS CHURCHILL, JANUARY 1914.

The prime minister did not inform the cabinet about the talks with Carson, and the Suggestions he had presented to the Unionists, until 22 January 1914. Asquith kept his own counsel throughout the Irish negotiations to a far
greater degree than his opposite number. Crewe, Haldane, Grey, Morley and Simon, knew something of the developments, though probably not a great deal. The prime minister no doubt postponed discussing the Irish situation because the cabinet crisis over the naval estimates reached its climax in January 1914. Lloyd George and Churchill were the keenest ministerial advocates of Ulster exclusion, but they were also the chief protagonists in the battle over the navy. McKenna and Runciman were among the bitterest enemies of Churchill’s ‘big navy’ policy, so that Lloyd George was aligned with the firmest opponents of Ulster exclusion. The naval crisis had reached such proportions by January 1914, that there was some danger of the ministry falling, precipitated by the resignations of Churchill or Lloyd George. The situation was further complicated by suspicions that Churchill was looking for an excuse to return to the Unionist party. Asquith no doubt sought to avoid increasing the areas of conflict by maintaining his accustomed reticence on the equally explosive question of Ireland.

Lloyd George, McKenna, Runciman and Simon insisted that they would only agree to finance two capital ships, and by mid-January Churchill threatened to resign if he did not get four. Lloyd George feared the ‘Navy tangle’ would involve the ‘smash’ of the ministry. The chancellor, Simon, Runciman, McKenna and Trevelyan believed that Churchill should be allowed to resign. Runciman positively gloated that ‘—— all looks set fair for a united Liberal party minus —— this brilliant unreliable Churchill who has been a guest in our party for eight and a half years’. The significance of the naval crisis, in terms of the Irish question, was revealed by C. P. Scott’s comment, on 15 January, that Lloyd George and Simon were:

—— strongly of opinion that Churchill was only waiting for a favourable opportunity to leave the party and Simon thought that if he resigned on Home Rule and the coercion of Ulster it might be more damaging ——

Runciman agreed with Trevelyan’s view that it was vastly preferable ‘that Winston should leave as a protest against economy than against the suppression of an Ulster rebellion’. Trevelyan was anxious that Churchill ‘should be got rid of at once’, before he had chance to organize a parliamentary following over the Ulster question, where he might do more harm.
On 21 January, Lloyd George actually challenged Churchill directly, in the prime minister's presence. The chancellor alleged that it was useless to make concessions on the naval estimates, because Churchill would resign over the Irish question if he did not resign over the navy. Churchill, in confusion, disclaimed any such intention, while refusing to commit himself in advance. The prime minister no doubt disliked this incident intensely, and expressed full confidence in Churchill; but at least Lloyd George believed he had increased Churchill's difficulties in taking the course predicted. Lloyd George's own motives were not above suspicion either. Haldane considered the campaign against arms growth an excellent issue, which Lloyd George might seize, to 'break away from the Government and to take the lead of the Radical and Labour Party', and possibly escape from a bad budget. Balfour shared this view, though he also thought Lloyd George 'wants the public mind to be as far as possible, distracted from the question of Ulster'.

However, the attack was concentrated mainly on the First Lord and his aggressive intentions. Simon circulated a memorandum to the cabinet on 29 January, representing the views of McKenna, Runciman, Hobhouse, Beauchamp and McKinnon Wood. They claimed that Churchill's naval expansion would harm causes to which they were pledged, and expose the government to serious parliamentary attack from left-wing Liberals and Labour members; meanwhile Ulstermen who profess that our defeat is the only protection against "civil war" will hardly resist the temptation offered'. The letter concluded, a little smugly, that 'our single desire is to promote absolute unity under your leadership, with the view of giving Home Rule the best possible chance'. Despite the numerical superiority of his ministerial opponents, Churchill emerged the victor. At the cabinet on 29 January, Lloyd George made a final futile effort to withstand Churchill's demands, while the prime minister appealed 'for unity in face of peril of great interests', especially Home Rule. By 11 February, the First Lord secured his four capital ships, conceding only a conditional promise of reductions for 1914.

Lloyd George appeared to have abandoned the fight by February, much to the disgust of his fellow pacifists and economists. McKenna, Simon
and Hobhouse consequently wrote to inform the chancellor that they could no longer follow his lead in the cabinet, and McKenna even accused Lloyd George of having become 'Churchill’s man.' However, in one significant respect, Lloyd George’s interests conflicted with those of his fellow 'economists.' McKenna and Runciman, especially, were irreconcilably opposed to Churchill on both the naval estimates and the Ulster question. But Lloyd George did not share their view that the Home Rule cause would best be served by Churchill’s resignation. However alienated the chancellor and the First Lord had become during their struggle over the naval estimates, in the last resort Lloyd George was probably prepared to compromise over the navy to retain Churchill’s support over Ulster.

ASQUITH’S ‘SUGGESTIONS’ PRESENTED TO THE CABINET AND THE NATIONALISTS, JANUARY – FEBRUARY 1914

The crisis over the navy had reached critical proportions when Asquith informed his colleagues about the breakdown of the Ulster negotiations and the Suggestions made to Carson, in the cabinet of 22 January. The prime minister was probably not unduly disturbed that his colleagues were distracted from the Irish talks by more pressing matters. Those ministers who were normally the most concerned about Ulster were the most heavily engaged in the naval imbroglio, enabling Asquith to pass lightly over the termination of the Irish negotiations. He emphasized Carson’s ‘flat refusal’ of his Suggestions, which were represented as not only reasonable, but even generous. The cabinet remained largely ignorant of the character and context of the talks with Carson and Bopar Law, within which Carson’s ultimate response appeared less unhelpful. Asquith informed the king of the ‘general opinion’ within the cabinet that his own Suggestions went to the extreme limits of generously. This statement is hard to accept at face value. The opponents of Ulster exclusion, such as McKenna and Runciman, may well have considered the Suggestions excessively generous, but the advocates of exclusion were unlikely to share their view.

Lloyd George and Churchill admittedly urged that parliament...
and the country should be informed of Asquith's Suggestions as soon as possible.95

But this was clearly intended as a tactical move to demonstrate the government's willingness to make apparently reasonable offers to Ulster. Notes passed across the cabinet table between Churchill and Lloyd George, indicated that they had by no means abandoned the chancellor's exclusion scheme in favour of the prime minister's hybrid plan.96 For the moment, however, they appreciated the publicity value of announcing Asquith's Suggestions when parliament opened. These might temporarily appease British and Nationalist opinion, and undermine the Unionist case for supporting an Ulster rebellion,97 until the time came to surprise the Opposition with the Lloyd George exclusion scheme.

Some ministers were probably too preoccupied with other matters, or too ignorant of the detailed development of the Irish negotiations, to question the value of publicising a scheme which had been totally rejected by the Opposition. Other ministers acquiesced precisely because they saw the tactical advantages of the situation. The king, however, sought a solution, and detected the false note in the prime minister's proposal.98 Since Ulster would never agree to send representatives to a Dublin parliament, the king pointed out firmly on 26 January:

...the danger of laying before Parliament & the Country, your proposed concessions if they are to be your last word, as you run the risk of closing the negotiations which in my opinion would be disastrous.99

The king's protest did not deter the prime minister, who had probably never intended his Suggestions to be the last word, and did not propose to lose their tactical benefits.100

A speech by Birrell at Bristol the same day made the prime minister's intentions a little too obvious for comfort. The chief secretary claimed that Asquith had indicated his willingness to alter the bill by agreement: 'Before they could begin civil war Mr. Asquith would have stated to the world the opportunity that had been offered to Ulster and what [sic] Ulster had refused'.101 Presumably Birrell wanted to inform the Nationalists publicly that an offer had definitely been refused, to improve the prospects for Asquith's forthcoming meeting with Redmond. The Unionists protested to no avail, as
Birrell's remarks confirmed their suspicions regarding the true motives behind the prime minister's curious suggestions. The prime minister's next step was to communicate his suggestions to the Irish leaders, to put pressure on the Unionists by demonstrating that 'reasonable' offers would not satisfy the Unionists. Asquith met the Nationalist leader at 10 Downing Street on 2 February, in the presence of a silent Birrell. Redmond had heard nothing at all from the government since the end of November 1913, and was gravely concerned that the growing National Volunteer movement in the south would precipitate violence before a Home Rule settlement was reached. Asquith followed the technique of his previous interview with Redmond on 17 November, maximising his own problems and minimising the extent of the concessions so far contemplated by the cabinet.

The prime minister first informed Redmond of the interviews with Bonar Law and Carson, emphasising their refusal to accept anything short of the total exclusion of Ulster. Asquith twisted the truth when he claimed that he and his colleagues:

--- were all firmly opposed to the exclusion of Ulster, or any part of Ulster, even temporarily. They had come to the conclusion that a temporary exclusion on the part of Ulster would have the most disastrous results on Ireland.

The techniques of persuasion involved a further misrepresentation. Great stress was placed on the king's pressure for a dissolution, before the Home Rule bill finally passed. This argument would have been perfectly valid had Asquith employed it in the November interview when the cabinet was still seriously worried about the king's intentions, but it was not mentioned then. This consideration was reserved for use ten weeks later, when maximum pressure was required, although by this time the ministry no longer feared the king's intervention. The threat that the king might dismiss his ministers before Home Rule passed had the desired effect; Redmond assumed that royal intimidation had convinced Asquith of the need for larger concessions.

Asquith confided in Venetia Stanley that he developed the situation with such art as I could muster, until the psychological moment.
... arrived for discharging my bomb'. 109 The prime minister outlined his
Suggestions for Home Rule within Home Rule, combined with an Ulster
legislative veto, assuring Redmond that they were 'only his own personal idea,
and had not been submitted to the Cabinet or accepted by them'. This statement
was as misleading as Asquith's failure to mention that the Suggestions had already
been rejected by Carson and Bonar Law. Indeed, by stating that 'no offer' had
been made to them, he implied that they had not seen the Suggestions. The
prime minister explained that such an offer would deprive the Ulster Unionist
case of all moral force, in the event of its anticipated rejection. 110 Asquith
commented to Venetia Stanley that Redmond 'shivered visibly' when his bomb
was delivered, and was considerably perturbed, but 'the general effect was
salutary'. 111 As the prime minister informed the cabinet next day, Redmond
considered the Suggestions 'offensive to Nationalism, but the P.M. formed the
view he would accept them later on, with protest'. 112

At this stage, Asquith had not decided whether to make use of the
Suggestions during the parliamentary session, as a further device to gain time,
and to try to show the Nationalists that they constituted a genuine offer. Nor was
he sure whether it would be advisable to announce the Suggestions, if at all, during
the Address debate, when parliament opened on 10 February. Redmond's reaction
helped Asquith to reach a decision. The Nationalist leader argued at the interview,
in general terms, against making any definite offer at an early stage in the final
parliamentary circuit. After checking that Dillon and Devlin agreed, Redmond
sent a detailed reply to the prime minister on 4 February, which was printed for
the cabinet's consideration the following day. 113 Redmond refused to discuss
the merits of Asquith's Suggestions, commenting only that they were open to
grave objections. He concentrated instead on his argument that no definite
concessions of any sort should be proposed in the debate on the Address. The
Nationalists would be placed in an impossible parliamentary position in deciding
how to vote. Redmond 'might be forced into closing the door on proposals which,
if they came at a later stage in the struggle, and under other circumstances, I
might be in a position to consider in a different spirit'. Since Asquith expected
the Opposition to reject the Suggestions, they would simply provide an opportunity...
for destructive criticism by the Unionists, tending to demoralize both Liberals and Nationalists before the formal debate commenced. The Nationalist leaders privately hoped that concessions would only be announced at the 'suggestion' stage, after the Home Rule bill had passed the formal committee stage. Redmond could then say he disliked the alterations, but accepted them as the price of Home Rule.

PARLIAMENTARY BATTLE RESUMED, FEBRUARY 1914

The 1914 parliamentary session was crucial, but the three cabinet meetings in the week before the session opened were reminiscent of those held before the bill's introduction in April 1912. The cabinet not only lacked an overall strategy, but advance planning was non-existent. Problems were dealt with in a piecemeal manner at a very last conceivable moment. On 3 February, the cabinet spent considerable time drafting a conciliatory reference to the Home Rule bill for the king's speech, appealing for a spirit of mutual concession to establish a lasting settlement. When the discussion moved to specific proposals, ministers were less certain what to say & when to speak.

Two days later, the cabinet discussed Redmond's letter of 4 February. They reached no conclusion however, as to whether the Suggestions should be announced during the Address debate, at a subsequent stage, or not at all. Further consideration was postponed until the cabinet to be held on 9 February, the very day the session opened.

However, a majority of ministers evidently shared Morley's view that Redmond's letter strikes me as unanswerable. The chief secretary met Redmond after the cabinet on 5 February, and assured him that the views expressed in his letter would be carried out. Later that day, the prime minister went to Windsor, where the king repeated the warnings he gave in his letter of 26 January.

Roy Jenkins has argued that this audience helped to force Asquith beyond Home Rule within Home Rule, to the acceptance of temporary Ulster exclusion. But if the prime minister cleared himself about the value of his Suggestions, then the combination of the Unionists' rejection, the king's letter of 26 January, and the interview with Redmond, must have cleared his vision before the royal audience on 5 February.
When the adjourned cabinet met again on 9 February, the entire meeting was concerned with the question of whether Asquith should make any proposal about Ulster the following day. Birrell informed Redmond confidentially that considerable differences of opinion were revealed. The prime minister evidently still favoured a general statement on the lines of the December Suggestions, without going into details, but allowed himself to be overruled by the majority verdict that it was wiser to be even less explicit. Redmond had only just won his point, but Birrell warned him that the cabinet ’wont be willing to wait very long before making up their minds as to what ought to be offered publicly to Ulster’. 123

Since this decision was only reached the day before the Session opened, the Opposition was taken by surprise. The Unionists had decided to dramatise the opening of this vital session by moving an amendment to the Address in both Houses, demanding an election on the Home Rule bill before it was considered further. 124 On 5 February, the shadow cabinet assumed that after their amendment had been moved, Asquith would immediately follow by making an offer based on his December Suggestions. Consequently, they decided that Walter Long and Lord Midleton should move their amendment in the two Houses, leaving Law and Lansdowne free to reject the proposals, which they expected Asquith and Crewe to spring upon them. 125 Bonar Law devoted a morning to the careful preparation of a reply to Asquith’s anticipated offer, intending to argue that the plan was merely an inadequate elaboration of Grey’s Home Rule within Home Rule. 126

The Unionist amendment was debated on 10 and 11 February, after the king’s speech, but Asquith’s speech destroyed the Opposition plans, because he did not make the expected proposals. Instead he delivered a rather general speech, conciliatory in tone, repeating the well-worn arguments against a dissolution. 127 Towards the end, he stated that the conversations between the leaders had not resulted in any definite agreement, but he made a fundamental concession with the admission that the obligation of taking the initiative rested with the government.
THE GIFT HORSE.

Mr. Asquith. "There you are, Sir: warranted quiet to ride or drive. He's by conversations out of parliament, and I've called him 'The Limit.'"

Mr. Bonar Law. "Many thanks, but I don't seem to care much for his teeth."
— we recognise to the full as the situation has developed that we cannot divest ourselves of responsibility in this matter, and by responsibility I mean the responsibility of initiative in the way of suggestion —

The prime minister promised to submit suggestions to the House when the necessary financial business had been transacted. But such proposals would be presented as the price of a peaceful settlement, and should not be interpreted as an admission that their bill was defective. He refused to pronounce any final judgement at that point on the various schemes in the air, except to point out that the advocates of Ulster exclusion regarded it as a pis aller — not as desirable in itself, but as a means of escape from more serious evils. In conclusion, the prime minister found it necessary to make a forceful denial of charges that the government was

— trifling with this matter or seeking to gain time, or seeking to put off to some more convenient season, in reliance on the chapter of accidents, a duty which lies upon us now — 128

Austen Chamberlain's uncompromising reply indicated that Asquith's protests carried no conviction. 129 Chamberlain's anger was the more pronounced because he was required to wind up the first day's debate without preparation, since Carson was unwell and Bonar Law was 'entirely taken aback by Asquith's line and decided not to follow him'. Chamberlain privately felt Bonar Law made a great mistake in leaving the prime minister's speech unanswered that day. Unionist backbenchers received no guidance about the meaning of Asquith's obscure comments, causing speculation that the government was ready to adopt exclusion and even that Asquith had already made acceptable proposals to Bonar Law in secret. Chamberlain believed it was their leader's responsibility to destroy this false impression; Asquith was probably creating it quite deliberately 'to full both our men and the country into a sense of security whilst he was gaining time and waiting for something to turn up'. 130 The king evidently shared some of Chamberlain's reservations, since they were both aware that Asquith's private suggestions were unacceptable to the Unionists. George V informed his prime minister that:

Your not unfavourable attitude towards the exclusion of Ulster, which policy I have always maintained is
the only means of averting civil war seems to have given an impression that the Government may adopt such a course. If this is not the case, may not harm be done by raising false hopes & delaying the announcement of what is the precise limit of your concessions. 131

Unionist speeches from the backbenches took their lead from Chamberlain's critical tone. Ministerial speakers found difficulty in following the prime minister's enigmatic remarks. Simon discussed irrelevant details, Birrell talked in vague generalities about Irish nationalism, and Lloyd George took refuge in repeating the prime minister's obscure statements. The only remarkable speeches, which helped to change the character of the debate, were the conciliatory contributions of Carson, Bonar Law and Redmond. Carson's indisposition did not prevent him from delivering a powerful and impressive speech on the second day of the debate. 132 He accused the government of delaying their proposals because they were still 'manoeuvring for position', and insisted that he would support Ulster's resistance to the bitter end if Ulstermen were compelled to enter a Dublin parliament. The most influential part of his speech was his promise that 'it will be my duty to go to Ulster at once and take counsel with the people there', if the exclusion of Ulster was proposed to avoid civil war. His final plea to his 'Nationalist fellow countrymen' to try to win over Ulster by sympathetic understanding rather than force, had a powerful impact on the House. 133 Bonar Law supported Carson's conciliatory line, though he made it absolutely clear that the exclusion of Ulster was the only possible means of reconciling the Unionists to Home Rule. He also used part of his earlier draft, announcing that limited plans such as Home Rule within Home Rule would do great damage; they would be made only to be rejected merely to allow the government to improve its tactical position. 134 These public statements constituted a significant advance, for the Unionists now appeared ready to end their resistance to Home Rule for the rest of Ireland, if Ulster was excluded. This admission was no surprise to those familiar with the private views of the Unionist leaders 135, but equally they recognized the enormous difficulties involved in reaching agreement over 'Ulster exclusion'. Redmond maintained a conciliatory tone despite his misgivings. Since Asquith had created a new situation by agreeing to initiate proposals, the Nationalists would consider
THE MISSING WORD.

The "Premier" Parrot (emerging from profound thought). "Ex—Ex—Ex—Ex—"

John Bull. "Look here, Herbert, if you're going to say "Exclusion," for

Heaven's sake say it and get it over."

[Parrot leaps into profound thought.]
them in the friendliest spirit, provided that the Unionists in return accepted them as the price of peace.\footnote{136}

Birrell and Lloyd George also declared that the debate had created a new situation which offered prospects of an amicable solution, in view of the speeches delivered especially by Asquith and Carson.\footnote{137} Margot Asquith confided to Sir Matthew Nathan that the ‘rapprochement’ between her husband and Sir Edward Carson ‘augured possibilities’.\footnote{138} John Morley also believed that Carson’s speech had contributed powerfully to an accommodation, while Redmond’s mildness was a further favourable omen.\footnote{139} Edmund Harvey probably represented the views of the Liberal rank and file fairly accurately, when he reported that the debate had made a settlement by consent more likely.\footnote{140} Chamberlain commented that:

\[\text{—– we are all left wondering exactly the Government intend to do; but the impression is universal that they must now attempt the coercion of Ulster and that they cannot propose its exclusion. — we may all be wrong, and the Government may still be hankering after Home Rule within Home Rule. The only mention of exclusion by Ministers was to deprecate it whilst saying that they did not absolutely rule it out, and it is rather the general tone of their speeches and the atmosphere prevalent in the debate which gradually confirmed the impression that they had made up their minds to give way on this point.}\footnote{141}

\[\text{--- LLOYD GEORGE'S EXCLUSION SCHEME REVIVED, FEBRUARY 1914}\]

The general belief that the government was about to propose some form of Ulster exclusion was justified. After the cabinet on 9 February, the prime minister made no further attempt to press for the formal proposal of his December Suggestions for Home Rule within Home Rule. Probably the comments in Bonar Law’s speech combined with Redmond’s attitude to convince Asquith that the time had now passed when the Suggestions could yield tactical advantage. The prime minister must at last put forward a definite scheme, which he seriously intended to be considered as a genuine basis for an agreed settlement. During the Address debate he had finally assumed responsibility for making a proposal, and on 16 February he repeated his promise to make a statement very soon.
It had been clear since November 1913 that some form of Ulster exclusion was almost certainly the only way to gain the agreement of the Unionists to Home Rule. Asquith had known all along that Bonar Law and Carson refused to consider any variant on Home Rule within Home Rule, but the Suggestions had served a purpose. It seems likely that the Lloyd George exclusion scheme of November 1913 had never been forgotten, either by its author or the prime minister. It was merely placed in cold storage, while Asquith used his Suggestions to gain further time and keep the situation under control. By mid-February 1914, the moment had arrived for Lloyd George to step onto the centre of the stage once more with his ready-made proposals for Ulster exclusion. Asquith had allowed the Unionists and Nationalists to believe that he disapproved of the Lloyd George plan, turning attention instead to the far more limited Suggestions. An unexpected reversion to the chancellor’s exclusion plan in March 1914 was intended to surprise the Opposition by its generosity. This was probably Asquith’s general strategy, if no more congenial alternative presented itself. No doubt he would have welcomed an Opposition acceptance of his Suggestions, but he can scarcely have expected it. Meanwhile, he probably kept the November exclusion plan in the back of his mind.

On 16 February, the chancellor sent the prime minister a lengthy memorandum, presenting the case for his exclusion scheme as strongly as possible. Lloyd George may have decided independently that this was the right moment to resurrect his scheme. More likely, this was decided in collaboration with the prime minister. Lloyd George was asked to wind up the debate on the Unionist amendment on 17 February, as if Asquith was symbolically placing the next move in his hands. The chancellor may also have been worried by the current interest in an alternative plan put forward by Sir Horace Plunkett. This basically proposed that all of Ulster should be included in Home Rule for the first ten years, with the option of exclusion by referendum at the end of the trial period, if Ulster was not satisfied. Plunkett persisted in ‘solemnly hawking about his plan’ (as Dillon described it) throughout January, approaching Carson, Bonar Law, Asquith and Chamberlain. Their reactions were fairly well summed up by Chamberlain’s comment on the futility of well-meaning goodness.
Plunkett's scheme received considerably more attention as a result of his well-timed letter to The Times on 10 February, which obtained prominent mention in the Address debate. Asquith claimed to be perfectly prepared to welcome Plunkett's scheme if it were acceptable to all parties, but he doubted whether it would find favour with the Ulster Protestants. 146

Lloyd George's memorandum reached the prime minister six days later. The plan had not altered since the original proposal was made on 12 and 13 November 1913, but a few more details were provided and the justification was greatly extended. Any county in Ulster was to be allowed to contract out of the Home Rule Act, provided that at least one-tenth of the registered voters signed a requisition demanding a plebiscite, which in turn had to be passed by a simple majority. 147 At the end of an unspecified term of years, the excluded counties would be automatically incorporated with the rest of Ireland, 'unless the Imperial Parliament in the meantime provided otherwise'. The November proposal had suggested five or six years as the exclusion period and omitted the details concerning the plebiscite. The arguments for the scheme were also identical, though more fully developed. Lloyd George claimed that his scheme did not involve retarsting the whole bill, whereas plans such as Home Rule within Home Rule involved essential alterations to the structure of the bill, which could wreck it during the 1914 session. This argument was not entirely logical, since either plan would involve a separate amending bill, and Lloyd George's scheme would require more significant financial and administrative changes during the exclusion period. Lloyd George tried to minimize the effects of his plan, describing it as a limited offer allowing a small corner of Ireland to put its case once more before the British electorate. Yet this supposedly minimal change would remove the Ulster Unionist justification for resistance, since they could scarcely rebel in anticipation of future oppression.

The Unionist demand for an election was answered by the plebiscites in the affected Ulster counties, and also by the intervention of at least one general election before the termination of the exclusion period. The final sentence was clearly directed at the Nationalist leaders, for Lloyd George argued that the government's course would be much clearer if the Unionists rejected this proposal. 148 This was not at all obvious. It might put the Unionists in the wrong, but it would not ease the
Robert Blake has argued that Lloyd George's scheme was purely tactical and was never seriously intended as the basis for an agreed settlement. This was certainly true of Asquith's December suggestions, but not of the chancellor's exclusion plan. Obviously any scheme for Ulster exclusion was partially tactical; neither side sought exclusion from choice, but rather as a pis aller, as Asquith pointed out on 10 February. Therefore the chosen plan needed superior tactical advantages, and Lloyd George tended to over-emphasize these in his memorandum. But the scheme was almost certainly intended by Asquith and Lloyd George as their basis for negotiating an agreed settlement. They had no alternative except to coerce Ulster into accepting the original bill, and few ministers were prepared to contemplate coercion.

Devlin replied to Lloyd George's proposal on behalf of the Nationalists, repeating the old argument that the danger of civil war was 'prospectively exaggerated'. His main point was that, if concessions had to be made to the Ulster Protestants, then Sir Horace Plunkett's plan was less offensive to Nationalist aspirations. Presumably the Nationalists felt they must at last suggest some alternative proposal. They realized that Home Rule within Home Rule would now be dismissed as too limited, and in desperation they grasped at Plunkett's plan, which at least postponed possible exclusion for ten years. Lloyd George immediately wrote a further memorandum, indicating that the government anticipated 'riots on a large and menacing scale' which could only be quelled with 'effusion of blood'. He claimed that his own scheme was based on the recognition of Irish unity, and that Plunkett's plan would probably be rejected by the Irish Unionists.

Devlin's reaction to the Lloyd George scheme suggested the wisdom of a further demonstration of the uncompromising pressure of the Unionists, and the hopelessness of Asquith's valiant efforts to stand firm. On 24 February, the Unionists put forward a motion asking that the ministry's proposals be submitted without further delay. Birrell informed Redmond that the prime minister saw this as 'a most opportune chance of restoring the
some [redacted] to normal; he would not lift the veil on his Home proposals, but emphasize that the government would not be intimidated by threats of civil war. McKenna and Runciman were relieved to learn that Asquith intended to reassure his own party that he would stand by the bill if the Irish disliked his proposals: ‘Our people have been very disheartened by the talk of compromise with which the session opened’. Consequently Austen Chamberlain found the debate very unsatisfactory:

There was a distinct hardening of Asquith’s tone as compared with the first night of the session, and everyone draws the inference that Redmond has proved recalcitrant and that Asquith is not prepared to face his displeasure and the dissatisfaction in the Liberal ranks and has, therefore, decided against exclusion.

The Unionists concluded that the government intended to propose only Home Rule within Home Rule, and reacted accordingly. Charles Trevelyan described Bonar Law’s speech as ‘flat treason’, and the ‘uncompromising tone’ of Unionist statements earned a reprimand from the king. Bonar Law protested in reply that such violent speeches were made quite deliberately, because ‘we were convinced that Asquith had gone back on the idea of excluding Ulster’, and it was vital to insist that any other policy meant civil war. This was precisely the effect Asquith had intended to achieve, as a preliminary to the delicate negotiations needed to secure Nationalist acquiescence in the Lloyd George scheme.

FURTHER PRESSURE ON THE NATIONALISTS. FEBRUARY

TO MARCH 1914

Asquith and Lloyd George immediately re-opened negotiations with the Irish leaders, with a reluctant chief secretary in attendance. Two interviews took place, on 27 February and 2 March, though the cabinet were not informed until 4 March. Both meetings were dominated by Lloyd George, who confided to Riddell that Asquith was worried, but did not say much.
The P. M.'s trouble is that he hates anything unpleasant or in the nature of a row. He hates an unpleasant interview. He said to me, 'I think you had better have a preliminary conversation with the Irish'. He thought it would be an unpleasant and troublesome task.

Even Lloyd George complained afterwards that he had 'a tough job. The Irish are rare negotiators. They bluff so well that you really cannot tell whether they are bluffing or not'. 157 This was high praise from Lloyd George. At the first interview, Lloyd George and Birrell met Redmond, Dillon and Devlin at the Treasury, for a preliminary discussion of the chancellor's exclusion scheme.

Lloyd George agreed to Redmond's two conditions, that the Nationalists could only support a plan approved by the Unionists and that 'the scheme in substance would be the last word of the Government'. Redmond was reassured that if the plan was rejected, the government was determined to proceed with the bill as it stood and to face any consequences in Ulster. 158 The scheme was discussed more fully at the second meeting on 2 March, when Asquith and T. P. O'Connor increased the numbers to seven. Asquith confirmed Lloyd George's promise that the proposed concession would be the government's last word, and Redmond agreed to submit a memorandum that evening, defining the limits of concession they could accept. 159

Redmond explained in his memorandum that the Nationalists believed Home Rule within Home Rule had already been ruled out, and the Plunkett plan therefore appealed to them as the best of the suggested settlements, if it could be carried with Unionist assent. 160 However, the Lloyd George county option scheme was currently being urged as best suited to the existing situation and offered excellent tactical advantages. The Nationalists understood this scheme to be limited to a three year exclusion period, allowing for only one general election, and they emphasized that this plan could only be accepted 'as the price of peace'. Redmond insisted that the concession should be suggested to the House in general terms on Second Reading, possibly in the form of a White Paper. The concession should not be presented to the House as a definite motion, since a challenge to a division would mean rejection by the Opposition, and prevent the Nationalists supporting it. All the Nationalists could be expected to do was to acquiesce in the solution as the price of peace, at the enormous risk of alienating their Irish friends. Redmond repeated the condition that this must be the government's last
word, which could not be extended under any circumstances; if the Opposition rejected
the proposal, as the Nationalists expected, then the government must pass the bill
in its original form, 'and face any consequences in Ulster that may ensue'.

At the cabinet on 4 March, Lloyd George again assumed the
initiative in describing the two interviews with the Irish leaders, while Asquith
read aloud Redmond's memorandum. Charles Masterman, the most recent
recruit to the cabinet, illustrated the chancellor's predominance at this point,
when he told Riddell a couple of days later that Lloyd George was 'the only man
in the Cabinet who had initiative, and that his superiority in that respect is
marked'. Most ministers had been kept in the dark about the resurrection of
the Lloyd George scheme, and they were by no means unanimous in their
support. It was clear that if the Tories really objected, they could find 'plenty
of excuses for a wrecking malevolent policy'. Asquith informed the king of the
efforts to win round the critics:

Many difficulties, financial & administrative, were
dwelt upon by Mr. McKeogh, Mr. Samuel, & others
as necessarily involved in the adoption of any such
scheme. But it was pointed out that these were
difficulties incident to 'exclusion' in any form, and
that if the principle were agreed upon, there were
not likely to be any insurmountable differences in
the adjustment of the machinery.

The advocates of the Lloyd George scheme argued that several areas of
accommodation existed if the Unionists accepted the principle. Counties might
be considered as a group, rather than individually; concessions might be made
over the post office, finance and customs; and the period of exclusion might be
altered from three to six years. This last point was highly significant.

Redmond's letter stipulated a three year exclusion period, which was presumably
the time-limit suggested by Lloyd George and Asquith at the two interviews.
Since the chancellor had mentioned a five or six year limit even in November
1913, and clearly the Unionists would accept no less. the three year limit was
no more than a bait for the Nationalists, and was never intended to be the 'last
word' for very long. Morley was in any case surprised that government pressure
had induced the Nationalists to accept the scheme, - 'a result which a fortnight
agreed would have deemed impossible. Despite opposition from such ministers as McKenna, Samuel and Runciman, it was agreed that Asquith should recommend a settlement based on the Lloyd George plan in the Commons on 9 March. Redmond was informed that the cabinet accepted his conditions, without binding themselves regarding matters of detail, which might require further negotiation if the Opposition accepted the proposals.

The prime minister may originally have intended to propose the three-year time limit on 9 March. By the end of February, he had successfully convinced the Unionists that he intended only to offer Home Rule within Home Rule. He hoped to surprise them, by presenting them with a scheme which in principle gave them more than they expected. When they protested about such 'details' as the three-year time limit, he could then be induced to concede further magnanimous concessions. However, Asquith's careful plans were altered and he was obliged to re-negotiate 'matters of detail' with the Nationalists earlier than he may have wished. His plans may have been frustrated to some extent by the failure of his attempt to arrange a further meeting with Carson before the cabinet met on 4 March. Though Asquith and Lloyd George underlined the tactical advantages of a Unionist rejection, for the benefit of Nationalist and ministerial critics, they undoubtedly hoped their plan would ultimately be accepted. The prime minister invited Carson to have a 'little talk' on 3 March, presumably either to lay further false trails or to sound out the Ulster Unionists' reaction to his scheme. The meeting almost certainly never materialised and Carson probably pleaded that he was indisposed.

A far more serious setback was caused by the fact that the cabinet decision of 4 March was 'leaked' to the lobby correspondent of the Daily News, who published his scoop the following morning. The prime minister's angry enquiries among his colleagues failed to uncover the culprit, and the advantage of surprise was lost. The Daily News story was confirmed for Bonar Law by Bruce of the Glasgow Herald, who obtained the information on 4 March from 'reliable sources on the Government side'. Bonar Law also learnt from Bruce that the time-limit on exclusion was to be treated as a matter for bargaining. The Unionists had been annoyed on 24 February at the prime minister's...
Apparent retreat from the conciliatory position of the Address debate. The
knowledge that this move was yet another subterfuge increased their bitterness
and their suspicions. The Opposition were in no mood to be convinced that the
new proposals were intended any more seriously than the Home Rule within
Home Rule Suggestions had been. Asquith's devious manoeuvres led more
moderate Unionists to share Lord Charles Beresford's view that the prime
minister was 'trivialing, humbugging, and using the most dishonest methods'.

If the rumours in the radical press were accurate, Carson and Lansdowne
believed Asquith's offer would be 'plausible and sticky', but it would not be
acceptable to the Ulster Unionists. A royal appeal that the Opposition should
consider Asquith's proposals carefully, brought a stiff reply from Bonar Law.

He pointed out that these proposals had not been communicated to the Unionists,
but the rumours indicated that the exclusion option was to be offered for a limited
time only. Carson must refuse such a condition and Bonar Law insisted that he
would lose the confidence of his party if he accepted.

Asquith's hopes that the Unionists would accept his scheme cannot
have been high in the first place. After the press' revelations, he had no
option but to seek a further concession from Redmond on the time-limit immediately,
rather than reserving it as a bargaining counter. The reply to Asquith's cabinet
letter confirmed the necessity for this decision; the king expressed grave fears
that the proposed limit of three years' temporary exclusion would make Carson's
position almost impossible. The long-suffering chief secretary was given
the thankless task of explaining to Redmond that, within four days, the three-
year limit had ceased to be the government's last word. After this interview
with Birrell on 6 March, Redmond wrote to the prime minister:

Mr. Birrell informed us about his conversation with you this morning, and the difficulty that you felt in
making your argument complete unless the limit of three years is extended. Any extension of these
years, about which we thought we had come to an understanding, will very much increase our
difficulties, and cause the deepest disappointment.

--- Mr. Birrell, however, put it to us in such a
way that we feel we cannot refuse to consent to an
extension to five years.
The prime minister's reply was not a letter of thanks, but a demand for a further extension. The generosity of the concession was ignored, and Asquith argued that only a six-year exclusion period would allow for a second general election before the term expired. The Nationalists acquiesced, though no record survives of their reply. Devlin had only obtained the agreement of the Ulster Nationalists to the original three-year limit after sustained efforts. The discovery that this 'last word' was actually doubled after only four days must have seemed like betrayal. Two people, at least, were pleased at the outcome. Churchill sent Lloyd George a note of congratulation on the success of the negotiations for a six-year limit: 'This is a great triumph for your diplomacy.'

LIBERAL BACK BENCH OPPOSITION TO ULSER EXCLUSION, 1913-14

In their discussions of the precise conditions of an Ulster exclusion agreement, the Liberal leaders and the national press seem not to have been unduly concerned about criticisms from the Liberal rank and file. The prime minister had recognized for some months that some of his own Liberal backbenchers shared Redmond's dislike of compromise over the Home Rule bill. In September 1913, Asquith believed that Carson's 'antics' were 'stiffening the backs of the most moderate among our supporters against any concessions to such threats.' By the time Asquith met Bonar Law on 6 November, the two leaders agreed that opinion among the rank and file on both sides was stiffening against compromise. Two weeks later, when Asquith was trying to reassure Redmond that the Liberals would be reluctant to adopt the Lloyd George plan, he claimed that twenty or thirty Liberal members might vote against it. By December, Morley believed that no less than fifty Liberals would vote with Redmond if he declined to accept a compromise settlement. Harcourt and Burns, both opponents of Ulster exclusion, emphasized the opposition of the rank and file to such a solution. Loreburn also anticipated 'a strong criticism and resistance among Liberals to any such exclusion.'

Evidence certainly existed that a number of Liberal members and Liberal voters, especially in the north of England, Scotland, and Wales,
U. M. Robertson, Liberal M.P. for Northumberland, told his constituents, late in September 1913, that ‘the people of Ulster would have serious to swallow the dose’, and he subsequently claimed that the Unionists were deliberately engineering Ulster’s resistance. Sir John Jardine wrote to The Times in October 1913, announcing that Scottish members solidly supported the bill it stood, and would not allow a part of Ulster to become a separate state. Henry Williams, a Welsh Liberal M.P., shared Jardine’s fears about the bill at Ulster exclusion. Jack Seely was informed that some Nottinghamshire Liberals feared that an ‘unworthy compromise’ would be made, which would be ‘misinterpreted as a sign of weakness’; these Liberals wanted the Government to ‘stand firm and deal with Ulster rebellion if it comes when it comes’.

However, there was less evidence of such backbench opposition than might have been expected. Criticism appeared to decline while the secret conversations were in progress, and was mildly revived during the Address debates on 10 and 11 February, 1914, when conciliation again seemed possible. Bonar Law heard rumours of a ‘Radical revolt’ against the exclusion of Ulster, on the grounds that it would be a humiliating surrender to all the Unionist demands. McKenna and Runciman believed their supporters had been disheartened by the talk of compromise when the session opened. Of the nine Liberal backbenchers who spoke in the debate on the Unionist amendment to the Address, Sir Clifford Cory opposed Home Rule altogether, and Pringle and Lough objected to Ulster exclusion. Kellaway and Pringle, in particular, still underestimated the gravity of the Ulster situation, and disparaged the Ulster movement. To some extent these speeches were counterbalanced by those of Pirrie and Lees Smith, who strongly advocated a ‘far reaching proposal for conciliation’.

When Asquith finally presented the Lloyd George scheme to the Commons on 9 March, there were no other speeches from the Liberal benches and therefore no public expressions of discontent. Bonar Law was informed, however, that ‘the Radicals and the Nationalists are both depressed by the P.M.’s speech — even more than they were by his speech on the Address.’ This view was reinforced by criticism of the prime minister in the Manchester Guardian during the week that followed, attacking Asquith for his reticence and
His critical attitude. The Guardian also printed a letter from Barton, the 'radical
member for Oldham, announcing bluntly:

The fight in which many of us fought for thirty years
has ended in surrender — We are to have two
Irelands, the thing we have declared to be
impracticable, the one thing in which there was
a consensus of instructed condemnatory opinion.

Barton argued that the logical conclusion of the Lloyd George scheme must be the
permanent exclusion of Ulster; he asked that it should be submitted to the electorate,
for the Liberals of the country would unhesitatingly reject it. The editor of
the Spectator wrote to Bonar Law that the Guardian articles demonstrated that
the Lancashire Radicals are very fidgety about Ulster — and that the
Lancashire people are very nervous about the Irish Protestants. John
Morley had noted a similar strength of feeling for Home Rule in Leeds in
December 1913: 'The atmosphere — of the West Riding is strongly opposed to
any deviation from Home Rule principles of the most thorough type —'

Many of these critics were not so much opposed to Ulster exclusion
on the grounds of a deep commitment to the principle of a united Ireland. Their
hostility, in most cases, sprang from resentment and anger at the apparent weakness
involved; they disliked the implication that they were surrendering to threats and
blackmail. As Loreburn recognized in November 1913, it was 'rather a sore
point' for the Liberals 'to give up their own infallibility', though he believed it
was not the leaders, but the small fry and the caucus and the party press who
are fanatical. The prime minister himself recognized in November 1913 that
the hostility to compromise was also caused 'because the rank and file wholly
disbelieve in the reality of the Ulster threats. Such opposition as did exist
to Ulster exclusion among the Liberal rank and file was partly caused by
ignorance of the true gravity of the Ulster situation, and partly by fierce
resentment at the element of surrender involved in compromise. Had Ulster
been excluded in 1912, these forces would have been almost non-existent, and
the criticism would have been entirely based on principle. Bonar Law, at least,
did not consider this an insuperable obstacle, as he remarked to Lansdowne in
October 1913: 'The Nationalists are Asquith's only difficulty, for I am sure that
the Radical Party, if the Irish were squared would be delighted to exclude
THE SECOND READING: LLOYD GEORGE'S SCHEME OFFERED AND REJECTED, MARCH 1914

The government had to decide on the procedure for the presentation of their proposals. Only two methods existed for passing their scheme into law simultaneously with the Home Rule bill. It could be incorporated into the basic structure of the original bill by using the 'suggestion' stage, which had not been employed in the 1913 session. This involved the risk that the Opposition would seize the opportunity to try to wreck the whole bill, or at least interfere with other aspects of its provisions. It also required the cooperation of the Lords, which was hardly likely to be forthcoming, except on their own terms. The cabinet recognized these problems when the Lloyd George scheme was first discussed on 13 November 1913. They decided instead to adopt an alternative method proposed by the ingenious Samuel, which was more favourable to the government. Samuel suggested that a separate Amending bill should be introduced, embodying the agreed alterations while leaving the Home Rule Bill intact. If the Amending bill was rejected, the government still retained the option of carrying the existing Home Rule bill under the Parliament Act, with or without 'suggestions'.

The preliminary procedure for presenting the Lloyd George plan to the Commons also had to be settled. Redmond had insisted that it should be put forward in general terms only, on Second Reading, preferably in the form of a White Paper. A secret cabinet committee, consisting of Asquith, Crewe, Lloyd George, Grey and Haldane, met on 3 March to discuss the question. A White Paper was then drafted by 6 March, outlining the procedure governing optional county exclusion, and was published four days later. Lloyd George's memorandum of 16 February was faithfully followed, providing that any Ulster county might be excluded from Home Rule for six years, if a majority voted for exclusion in a county poll. The White Paper was exceptionally brief, adding that certain unspecified modifications would be needed in the operation of the Home Rule bill, if any counties decided in favour of exclusion.
The necessary financial and administrative adjustments were in the process of being drafted, though Asquith refused to reveal them to the Commons until the principle of the scheme was agreed. Before 6 March, Lloyd George had, in fact, organised the preparation of a lengthy memorandum commenting on the practical implications of the White Paper. It was proposed that the excluded counties would retain the existing administrative system as far as possible, and could be governed by the British department responsible for the Irish reserved services. The financial reorganisation would create the chief problems, since the excluded area would remain within the British taxation system, and it would be difficult to estimate how far the Irish transferred sum must be reduced to take this into account. Problems would be fewer if the Irish parliament's taxation powers were postponed until exclusion terminated, thus preventing the erection of customs barriers within Ireland. Lloyd George's memorandum concluded that if the exclusion scheme could be agreed in principle 'no doubt these difficulties, formidable as they are, and involving practically a complete re-arrangement of figures, might be got over.'

The prime minister presented his proposals to the Commons when he moved the Second Reading of the Home Rule bill on 9 March. Only the bare essentials of the scheme, as set out in the White Paper, were mentioned. Asquith concentrated on defending the general principle, refusing to discuss the practical difficulties of operating the plan. He made a significant public admission of the acute gravity of the situation, acknowledging that if the bill passed in its present form, they had to face 'the prospect of acute disension and even of civil strife'. He attempted to refute the logical corollary that his original policy had been inadequate or defective, and cleverly underlined the need to compromise between the surrender of principle and the application of force. Asquith did not expect his proposals to be received with enthusiasm in any quarter, since they were not supported on their own merits, but as the price of peace.

The prime minister admitted that the two crucial points of difficulty were exclusion area and time. But he was obviously relying upon the ambiguities in the scheme to gain the acquiescence of the Unionists and
Nationalists. The provision for inclusion after six years was intended to appease the Nationalists, whereas the Unionists were expected to concentrate their hopes on the two possibilities of reprieve provided by the intervening elections. The question of the exclusion area was deliberately left undefined, but the cabinet had estimated that the four north-east Ulster counties of Antrim, Armagh, Down and Londonderry would opt for exclusion, together with the cities of Belfast and Londonderry. In effect, then, the provisions of the scheme implied the temporary exclusion of the four north-east counties, with a strong possibility that exclusion would become permanent, if the Unionists won either of the next two general elections.

Lord Channing, a Liberal peer, commented after listening to Asquith's speech, that he could not imagine any plea by which the Unionists could resist so fair an offer. Haldane also thought the prime minister's 'great effort' should have a substantial effect on public opinion. These remarks illustrated the Liberal tendency to be over-optimistic, and to underestimate the Unionists' ability to fight back.

Carson was also capable of calculating that county option meant the exclusion of only four counties, whereas he had always demanded at least six, and preferably all nine. For the moment, however, he ignored this deficiency, and concentrated all his energies on attacking the six-year time limit, which was a more vulnerable target. He admitted that Asquith might have advanced as far as parliamentary exigencies permitted, and recognised that the acknowledgement of the principle of exclusion was a step forward. But the problems were merely being postponed and aggravated by the next two elections, and Ulster would remain a pawn in the British political game for the next six years:

'Ulster wants this question settled now and for ever. We do not want sentence of death with a stay of execution for six years ---'. Carson made an astute alternative offer, that those Ulster counties which opted for exclusion should remain in the United Kingdom parliament until that assembly decided otherwise. If the six-year time limit was thus removed, Carson would feel obliged to call a convention in Ulster to consider the scheme. However, he dropped a broad hint that further demands would later be made on the issue of geographical area; in his opinion, the proposed scheme for dividing the counties according to
Carson's alternative offer appeared deceptively similar to the prime minister's proposal, confusing and disarming the uninitiated, as intended. 220

T.P. O'Connor saw the trap only too clearly:

From the House of Commons point of view, it may seem a small thing whether the excluded counties have to come in automatically or by an express Act of Parliament. To Irish opinion it means whether exclusion is temporary or perpetual — she would regard herself as asked to surrender the unity of her Nationhood. 221

Redmond also recognized the danger. When he spoke in the debate, before Carson, he merely emphasized that the prime minister's proposal already went to the 'very extremest limits of concession', 222 without commenting on the details of the scheme. But in a speech a week later, he stressed that one of the major principles of the proposal was that the exclusion period should end automatically after a fixed period of six years. 223

Bonar Law was aware that many British voters would consider Asquith's offer reasonable, but if he reacted favourably to the proposal, he ran the danger of splitting the Unionists. Law was obviously under pressure from within his own party to reject the proposal, especially from the southern Unionists and their spokesmen. Even if the Unionist leader had been prepared to consider Asquith's scheme on its merits, the prime minister's behaviour since September 1913 left Bonar Law feeling resentful and suspicious that this was another tactical diversion. Yet Bonar Law did not want to fall into the trap of rejecting an apparently reasonable suggestion outright, and so put his party in the wrong with the British public. His immediate reply to the prime minister on 9 March was cautious, stating that Carson must speak for Ulster, but leaving no doubt that he considered the time-limit unacceptable. Bonar Law indicated the two directions which his counter-attack would follow. Firstly, he demanded that Asquith's
THE LATEST VELASQUITH.

Mr. Bonar Law is to lose in Jan., 1929. HAD IT ABOUT NOW. YOU'LL HAVE TWO CHANCES IN THE NEXT SIX YEARS.
proposals should be presented in the precise, detailed form in which they would be
enacted, so that the Opposition could examine a specific text instead of vague
intentions. Bonar Law received considerable support for this demand,
especially from Lord Robert Cecil, Balfour, and Selborne. Accordingly,
at question time on 16 March, the Unionists put down twenty-six questions,
challenging Asquith to explain in detail the implications of his proposals. The
prime minister maintained his position, and refused to be drawn when Bonar Law
enquired angrily how the proposals could be judged unseen. Carson declared that
the offer of the previous Monday had evidently been a 'hypocritical sham'. The
Opposition underlined their displeasure by moving a vote of censure on 19 March,
regretting the government's refusal to formulate their detailed proposals before
the resumption of the Second Reading.

The vote of censure debate provided the opportunity for Bonar Law
to develop the second line of counter-attack, following Carson's example in presenting
the government with an alternative offer. On 9 March the Unionist leader had demanded
that the prime minister should submit his proposals to a referendum of the whole
United Kingdom, rather than just the Ulster counties. During the intervening
week, he decided to extend this into a positive offer so that the public would see
that the Opposition met Asquith's proposal with an equally reasonable offer.
The demand for a referendum on Asquith's Ulster proposals was simply an
extension of the well-worn Unionist cry for a dissolution, and had been forcefully
advocated for some time by Selborne, Curzon and Lord Robert Cecil. When he
moved the vote of censure, Bonar Law emphasized that his party had not closed the
doors hastily upon any genuine government offer; the ministry's refusal to present
their plan in precise legislative form cast doubt on their sincerity. He tried to
convince the House of his own party's sincerity, by making a formal offer to abide
by the country's verdict on the principle of Ulster exclusion. Bonar Law's tone
was considerably more moderate than at question time on 17 March. The change
was dictated partly by tactical considerations and partly by a real desire to find a
way to avoid bloodshed.

Asquith re-stated his own proposal instead of giving a direct reply,
leaving the impression among some Liberals that he was prepared to consider the
Redmond was most concerned by the prime minister's uncertain reaction, and wrote a strongly worded letter to Birrell rejecting the referendum proposal. Birrell passed this information on to the prime minister, who informed the king that nothing would induce him to agree to a referendum. Carson congratulated Law on a masterly speech: 'I do not know what answer the P.M. can give to the referendum proposal but I imagine he is in a hopeless condition as I see Dillon refused it.' Carson underestimated Asquith's stoicism and resilience. The prime minister resumed private negotiations by letter with Bonar Law, within three days of the referendum offer of 19 March. Asquith proposed that an immediate referendum should be abandoned, in return for the definite exclusion of six counties, with a plebiscite at the end of the six-year exclusion period as to whether those counties would remain outside Home Rule. This was an attempt to retain the six-year time limit, in exchange for concessions over the area, since an initial poll would only exclude four counties. This change of tactics allowed Asquith to argue that a British referendum should then be jettisoned along with the Ulster county poll. The offer came too late. By then the Curragh incident had intervened.

Bonar Law's referendum offer effectively counteracted any public indignation which might have resulted from a direct rejection of Asquith's proposals. At the same time it increased the resentment and depression of many Liberals. The prime minister's offer had been a serious attempt to reach a settlement on this occasion, but the Opposition could hardly be blamed for suspecting otherwise, in view of Asquith's record over the preceding months. Nor was it surprising that Bonar Law should at this stage adopt the kind of tactical manoeuvre so cleverly used by Asquith throughout the winter negotiations. Unionist rejection of the Lloyd George exclusion scheme had grave repercussions. The result was stalemate and deadlock. The tension was far more acute than it had been during the deadlock of January to September 1913. It was aggravated by the false hopes generated by the 'conversations' of the previous winter, and by the increased level of unrest in Ireland.

The prime minister himself evidently attempted to treat the rejection of his proposals as a minor setback — as one more move in a highly
complicated game. It was merely a question of time and patience before move and counter-move finally achieved a compromise result which both sides could reluctantly accept as a pis aller. Asquith's attitude and assumptions depended on the continued control of Home Rule policy by politicians at Westminster.

But by 20 March 1914, Asquith's time had run out and events in Ireland overtook a rapidly deteriorating political situation at Westminster. Certain members of the Government, notably Lloyd George and Churchill, were more realistic about this situation. They were also more bitter about the rejection of the exclusion scheme, which they had regarded all along as the best possible final solution, and not merely as one possible negotiating counter among many. They felt the ministry now had no alternative but to force through the Home Rule bill as it stood, and prepare for the coercion of Ulster.
NOTES.

CHAPTER VII

1. Blake, Bonar Law, p. 166.

2. A. Steel-Maitland to Bonar Law, 16 Nov. 1913, B. L. P. 30/4/37.

3. Law to Lansdowne, 26 Nov. 1913, B. L. P. 33/6/102; Law to A. Ward, 24 Nov. 1913, B. L. P. 33/6/100.

4. A. Chamberlain, Politics from Inside, pp. 572-77, quotes full memorandum; copy in B. L. P. 31/1/3.

5. Ibid.


7. Nation, 6 Dec., 1913.

8. The Times, 29 Nov. 1913.


13. Politics from Inside, pp. 579-80, 583; Chamberlain commented that, in that case, Asquith's words were 'singularly unhappy', for he managed to convey to everyone the opposite impression (ibid., pp. 579-80).


16. Asquith at Manchester, The Times, 6 Dec. 1913. Lansdowne thought this speech indicated a real desire to come to terms (Lansdowne to Law, 7 Dec. 1913, B. L. P. 31/1/12), but Law replied that it 'leaves us exactly where we were' (8 Dec. 1913, B. L. P. 33/6/109).
17. Crewe to Lord Carmichael, Governor of Bengal, 5 Dec. 1913, Crewe Papers, C/61; Nation, 6 Dec. 1913.

18. Chamberlain to Lansdowne, 9 Dec. 1913, Politics from Inside, p. 586. See The Times, 13 Dec. 1913, and Riddell, More Pages, pp. 188-9, for camps and rumours about this 'Ulster settlement dinner'.

19. Ibid.


21. Asquith to Law, 3 Dec. 1913, B.L.P. 31/1/5; for Law's acceptance, see Law to Asquith, 3 Dec. 1913, MS. Asquith 39, fos. 40-41. The Unionist chief whip believed that the 'small fry' of the cabinet knew little about the conversations with Bonar Law (Sandars to Balfour, 10 Dec. 1913, Balfour Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 49768, fos. 76-9). It is clear, however, that even the senior members also knew little.

22. Haldane had talked to Asquith before going to Birmingham, and assured Earl Grey that the prime minister substantially agreed with his speech (Politics from Inside, p. 583; Nation, 6 Dec. 1913.).

23. Law to Carson, 3 Dec. 1913, B.L.P. 33/6/166.

24. For the king's appeal for resumption of negotiations, see George V to Asquith, 30 Nov. 1913, MS. Asquith 39, fos. 38-39.

25. J. Sandars to Balfour, 10 Dec. 1913 (passing on the views of Lowther and Talbot, after talk with Talbot on 9 Dec.), Balfour Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 49768, fos. 76-9; see also E. Talbot to Sandars, 13 Dec. 1913, Ibid., MS. 49863, fos. 44-5.

26. Ibid.

27. Crewe to Lord Carmichael, 5 Dec. 1913, Crewe Papers, C/61. Three days later, Bonar Law confided to Lansdowne that, at that moment, he would give a great deal to be out of political life (B.L.P. 33/6/109).

28. Law to Lansdowne, 10 Dec. 1913, B.L.P. 33/6/111. The two accounts of the meeting are: Bonar Law's Notes of Conversation with the P.M., 10 Dec. 1913, B.L.P. 33/6/111; Asquith's pencilled notes, 13 Dec. 1913, MS. Asquith 39, fos. 42-5.

30. Bonar Law's Notes of Conversation with the P. M., 10 Dec. 1913, B. L. P. 33/6/111. See Draft Memorandum of Redmond's Interview with Asquith, 17 Nov. 1913, Redmond Papers, N. L. L. Add. MS. 15,165 (Bodleian, MS. film 1059).

31. Law's Notes, B. L. P. 33/6/111.


33. Law to Lansdowne, 10 Dec. 1913, B. L. P. 33/6/111.


35. Lansdowne's memorandum, Possibility of a Settlement, 16 Dec. 1913, B. L. P. 31/1/38.

36. Balfour to Law, 18 Dec. 1913, Balfour Papers, B. L. Add. MS. 49693, fo. 130; B. L. P. 31/1/41.

37. Curzon to Law, 15 Dec. 1913; B. L. P. 31/1/32.

38. Selborne to Law, 21 Dec. 1913, B. L. P. 31/1/47.

39. Memorandum by Walter Long, Notes on Conversation, 18 Dec. 1913, B. L. P. 39/1/13; this belief was partly based on a letter from Margot Asquith to Long's wife, commenting: 'My husband is in the best possible form - in fact he has never been in better form all his life'. This was to some extent belied by Pease's comment on the third meeting: 'Margot told me the result discouraging under secrecy pledge at dinner' (Pease diary II, fo. 82, 17 Dec. 1913.)

40. Milner to F. S. Oliver, 30 Dec. 1913, Milner Papers, Box 211.

41. J. Sandars to Mr. Short, 17 Jan. 1914, Balfour Papers, B. L. Add. MS. 49768, fos. 85-8.

42. Lansdowne, Possibility of a Settlement, 16 Dec. 1913, B. L. P. 31/1/38. Selborne to Law, 21 Dec. 1913, B. L. P. 31/1/47. Lansdowne to Law, 21 Dec. 1913, B. L. P. 31/1/46. R. Cecil to Law, 24 Dec. 1913, B. L. P. 31/1/54.

43. Law to Lansdowne, 22 Dec. 1913, B. L. P. 33/6/115.

44. Law to Selborne, 22 Dec. 1913, B. L. P. 33/6/116.
45. The Times, 5 Dec. 1913.


47. Lansdowne to Law, 21 Dec. 1913, B.L.P. 31/1/46.


See Colvin, Carson, II, 259, for Asquith’s invitation to Carson, 10 Dec. 1913.

50. Law to Lansdowne, 22 Dec. 1913, B.L.P. 33/6/115; Lansdowne to Law, 23 Dec. 1913, B.L.P. 31/1/51.

51. The first time Asquith mentioned his talks with Carson directly to Bonar Law, he argued that they would save time, given Carson’s ‘special position & knowledge’ (Asquith to Law, 10 Jan. 1914, B.L.P. 31/2/25).

52. Asquith’s memorandum on talk with Carson, MS. Asquith 39, fos. 42-5.
Asquith later admitted to Redmond, on 2 Feb. 1914, that he found Carson ‘more satisfactory’ to deal with than Bonar Law (Gwynn, Rémond, p.250).


54. Bonar Law told Balfour, 7 Jan. 1914, that nothing happened at the first Carson interview, and the conversation was similar to that between himself and Asquith (B.L.P. 34/1/87).


56. Asquith mentioned subsequently that these colleagues had been Simon and Crewe (Politics from inside, p. 606). Samuel would have been a more likely confidant than Simon, in view of the content of the Suggestions, but Asquith could have drawn on the ideas in Samuel’s memoranda, without actually discussing the situation with him.

57. Asquith to Carson, 23 Dec. 1913, MS. Asquith 39, fos. 64-8; B.L.P. 31/1/52; Balfour Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 49693, fos. 134-7. The enclosed Suggestions were printed for cabinet use on 29 Jan. 1914 under the title, Suggestions in Regard to Irish Government Bill, MS. Asquith 39, fos. 101-2; P.R.O. Cab. 37/119/20; printed in full in Colvin, Carson, II, 264-7. These are referred to in the text as the Suggestions.
58. Lansdowne subsequently remarked that Asquith must have had his tongue in his cheek when he proposed a federal preface: 'We have surely had enough of such preliminary announcements' - a pointed reference to the preface to the Parliament Act on the intended reform of the Lords.
(Lansdowne to Law, 29 Dec. 1913, B.L.P. 31/1/63.)

59. O'Brien had most recently sent such a scheme to the News of the World on 23 Nov. 1913, and also wrote to Birrell in late Nov. 1913, urging the grant of an Ulster veto in the Irish parliament (Gwynn, Redmond, pp. 238-9). For Samuel's scheme, see A Suggestion for the Solution of the Ulster Question, 18 Dec. 1913, MS. Asquith 39, fo. 61; P.R.O. Cab. 37/117/95; Samuel Papers, A/41/12. Samuel's proposal to establish a third 'Ulster House' was abandoned.


62. Lansdowne to Law, 29 Dec. 1913, B.L.P. 31/1/63. Lansdowne noted that the legislative veto would be futile when the Liberals were in power, and that Asquith made no attempt to define 'statutory Ulster' in geographic terms, which would be one of Carson's gravest problems.

63. Law to Lansdowne, 27 Dec. 1913, B.L.P. 33/6/119.

64. Asquith to Carson, 30 Dec. 1913, Colvin, Carson, II, 268.

65. Memorandum of meeting with Carson, 2 Jan. 1914, MS. Asquith 39, fos. 72-74. For Carson's viewpoint, see brief summary in Bonar Law to Balfour, 7 Jan. 1914, B.L.P. 34/1/8; and Bonar Law's account given to shadow cabinet, 5 Feb. 1914, Politics from Inside, p. 606.

66. Ibid.

67. Carson to Asquith, 7 Jan. 1914, B.L.P. 34/1/7; MS. Asquith 39, fos. 79-80. Jenkins, Asquith, p. 295, blames Carson for the decision to make no proposals, because Carson 'was always a negative man', who rarely allowed himself to be forced into taking constructive action.

68. Asquith to Carson, 8 Jan. 1914, MS. Asquith 39, fos. 81-4; B.L.P. 31/2/24; printed in full in Colvin, Carson, II, 268-70. Asquith's original draft (MS. Asquith 39, fos. 181-4), specified three possible
forms of Ulster exclusion, namely permanent exclusion, optional inclusion by plebiscite (Bonar Law plan), or automatic inclusion after x years, with reconsideration at two general elections (Lloyd George scheme). These were omitted from the final draft, presumably because he felt he was being too specific.

69. Carson to Asquith, 10 Jan. 1914, MS. Asquith 39, fos. 95-6; B.L.P. 34/1/11. Asquith merely replied that he would consult his colleagues the following week (Asquith to Carson; 12 Jan. 1914, B.L.P. 31/2/33.)

70. Bonar Law to Balfour, 7 Jan. 1914, Balfour Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 49693, fos. 132-3; B.L.P. 34/1/8.

71. Balfour to Law, 13 Jan. 1914, Balfour Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 49693, fo. 138; B.L.P. 31/2/36.

72. See e.g. Law to Curzon, 12 Jan. 1912, Curzon Papers, MSS. Eur. F. 112/95; B.L.P. 34/1/13; The Times, 5 Jan. 1914.

73. Bonar Law at Bristol, The Times, 16 Jan. 1914. See Law to Asquith, 9 Jan. 1914, MS. Asquith 39, fos. 93-4; B.L.P. 34/1/10; Asquith to Law, 10 Jan. 1914, B.L.P. 31/2/25. See also Law to Chamberlain, 8 Jan. 1914, B.L.P. 34/1/9; Politics from Inside, p. 600.


75. Stamfordham to Law, 20 Jan. 1914, B.L.P. 31/2/51; printed in full in Blake, Bonar Law, p. 168.

76. Bonar Law to Stamfordham, 26 Jan. 1914, B.L.P. 34/1/16; printed in full in Blake, Bonar Law, pp. 169-170. See also Lord Salisbury to Law, 26 Jan. 1914, B.L.P. 31/2/62, urging Law to convince the king that the Unionists were 'very reasonable' in rejecting Asquith's 'futile and absurd' Suggestions. See Asquith to king, 4 Jan., and reply, 5 Jan., MS. Asquith 39, fos. 76-8.

77. Stamfordham to Law, 2 Feb. 1914, B.L.P. 31/3/4; printed in full in Blake, Bonar Law, p. 170. This exchange no doubt reinforced the king's preference for Asquith, with whom he was on frank and friendly terms (Esher, Journals, III, 154-6, 21 Jan. 1914.)

78. See Esher to king, 6 Jan. 1914: 'Lord Haldane told Lord Esher that the Prime Minister has had to keep his "conversations" secret from all his colleagues' (Esher, Journals, III, 151). However, Simon and Crewe knew of the Suggestions (Politics from Inside, p. 606), and Morley confided in Esher.
that Asquith had told Grey the gist of the talks with Bonar Law; on 20 January, Morley, Grey, Asquith and Haldane dined together (Esher, Journals, III, 152-4, 19 Jan. 1914).

79. See e.g. Churchill's comment in late Nov. 1913 that he favoured "the idea of fusion with an extreme left wing left out either side" (Politics from Inside, pp. 576-7).


81. Runciman to Trevelyan, 4 Jan. 1914, Trevelyan Papers.

82. C.P. Scott diary, 15 Jan. 1914, B.L. Add. MS. 50901, fos. 90-91. See also ibid., fo. 95, 18 Jan. 1914, noting that Lloyd George, McKenna and Samuel had agreed that Churchill must go.

83. Runciman to Trevelyan, 4 Jan. 1914, Trevelyan Papers; Trevelyan to Runciman, 5 Jan. 1914, Runciman Papers, R 1/17.

84. C.P. Scott diary, 21 Jan. 1914, B.L. Add. MS. 50901, fo. 99. Margot Asquith wrote indignantly to Simon on 22 January: "--- I think L. George has played a dogs trick on my husband --- Does he think it the best moment to have a smash? --- Neither he nor Winston care for any one but themselves" (Simon Papers).

85. Esher to Harcourt, 13 Jan. 1914, Harcourt Papers; Esher, Journals, III, 151 (6 Jan. 1914). Runciman noted that 'George and Winston have drifted further apart --- George drawing closer to his old Liberal associates --- while Winston has [not only] been living incessantly with his Tory friends ---' (Runciman to Trevelyan, 4 Jan. 1914, Trevelyan Papers). Trevelyan thought it crucial that Asquith should show Churchill the door, so that it should not be seen publicly as a quarrel between the two competitor's for the party leadership (Trevelyan to Runciman, 5 Jan. 1914, Runciman Papers, R 1/17).


87. Simon to Asquith, 29 Jan. 1914, MS. Asquith 25, fos. 170-177. An earlier pencilled draft by Simon on 11 Downing St. paper, (N.D., MS. Asquith 25, fo. 148), suggests that the chancellor helped draft the document, even if his name was not formally appended. Samuel's name was not included either, but he definitely associated himself with this letter (Pease diary, II, fo. 83, 1 Feb. 1914).

88. Ibid.
99. Roy Jenkins, *Asquith*, p. 301, interpreted the king's letter as a serious impediment to Asquith's policy, but this assumes that the Suggestions were seriously intended as a final proposal for an agreed settlement.

102. Bonar Law to Asquith, 28 Jan. 1914, MS. Asquith 39, fos. 99–100; B.L.P. 34/1/23. Asquith’s reply, 29 Jan. 1914, B.L.P. 29/1/14, merely stated that Birrell had not intended to refer to their private conversations. An explanation sent by Birrell to The Times, 30 Jan. 1914, was dismissed by Lansdowne as ‘a most lame apology’, and he added that Birrell has a singular knock of blurt out infelicitous remarks’ (Lansdowne to Law, 1 Feb. 1914, B.L.P. 31/3/1.)

103. Redmond’s account, interview with Mr. Asquith and Mr. Birrell, 2 Feb. 1914, Redmond Papers, N.L.I. Add. MS. 15,165 (Bodleian, MS. film 1059); most of the document is quoted in Gwynn, Redmond, pp. 250–2. Redmond noted that ‘Mr. Birrell took no part practically in the conversation, which lasted for an hour and a half.

104. See e.g. Redmond to P. Illingworth, 12 Jan. 1914, Redmond Papers, N.L.I., Add. MS. 15,257 (Bodleian, MS. film 1081), on the government’s silence. See Gwynn, Redmond, pp. 246–247, for the growth of the National Volunteer movement and Redmond’s reaction to it.

105. Interview with Mr. Asquith and Mr. Birrell, 2 Feb. 1914, Redmond Papers, N.L.I. Add. MS. 15,165 (Bodleian, MS. film 1059); Gwynn, Redmond, pp. 250–2.

106. The long section on the king’s attitude in Redmond’s memorandum is omitted by Gwynn.

107. See e.g. Esher, Journals, III, 153 (19 Jan. 1914), for Morley’s statement that Asquith had reassured his colleagues that all danger of the king’s intervention to prevent the passage of the bill was removed. Since the autumn of 1913, the king had gradually accepted his ministers’ arguments against intervention (see Esher, Journals, III, 147–9, 151, 154–6).

108. Gwynn, Redmond, p. 253; Pease diary, II, fo. 84, 3 Feb. 1914.

109. Quoted in Jenkins, Asquith, p. 301.

110. Redmond’s interview with Mr. Asquith and Mr. Birrell, 2 Feb. 1914, Redmond Papers, N.L.I. Add. MS. 15,165 (Bodleian, MS. film 1059); Gwynn, Redmond, p. 251.

111. Quoted in Jenkins, Asquith, p. 301.

112. Pease diary, II, fo. 84, 3 Feb. 1914 (wrongly dated Tuesday, 3 Jan. 1914).

113. Redmond to Asquith, 4 Feb. 1914, MS. Asquith 39, fos. 111–6; Redmond Papers, N.L.I. Add. MS. 15,165 (Bodleian, MS. film 1059); P.R.O. Cab. 37/119/22; only the final section is printed in Gwynn, Redmond,
p. 253. See also Redmond to Dillon, 2 Feb. 1914, Lyons, Dillon, pp. 345–6; Dillon to Redmond, 3 Feb. 1914, Redmond Papers, N. L. I. Add. MS. 15, 162 (Bodleian, MS film 1063), quoted in Gwynn, Redmond, p. 252.

114. Redmond to Asquith, 4 Feb. 1914, Bald.


116. See George V to Asquith, 3 and 11 Feb. 1914, MS. Asquith 7, fo. 95, and MS. 39; fos. 117–8.

117. Jack Pease to wife, 3 Feb. 1914, Gainford Papers, 2A.

118. See R. McKenna to W. Runciman, 6 Feb. 1914, Runciman Papers, R 1/17.

119. Morley to Crewe, 6 Feb. 1914, Crewe Papers, C/37.

120. Hol. note by Redmond at the end of his copy of his letter to Asquith, Redmond Papers, N. L. I. Add., MS. 15, 165 (Bodleian, MS film 1059). Jenkins, Asquith, p. 301, mistakenly dated this second interview 3 Feb. See also Birrell to Asquith, 4 Feb. 1914, Redmond Papers, N. L. I. Add. MS. 15, 169, (Bodleian, MS. film 1059), arranging a meeting between Birrell, Redmond, Asquith, Dillon and Devlin at 3 p.m. on 5 February. The evidence suggests that only Birrell and Redmond actually met.


124. See e.g. Law to Balfour, 30 Jan. 1914, Balfour Papers, B. L. Add. MS. 49653, fos. 139–40; B. L. P. 34/1/26. Balfour to Law, 3 Feb. 1914, B. L. P. 31/3/7.

125. Lansdowne to Balfour, 5 Feb. 1914, Balfour Papers, B. L. Add. MS/49730, fos. 266–7; Politics from Inside, p. 607; Law to Balfour, 5 Feb. 1914, Balfour Papers, B. L. Add. MS. 49693, fo. 158; B. L. P. 34/1/31: Law to Long, 7 Feb. 1914, B. L. P. 34/1/32. ‘Their assumption was based on a press rumour that Asquith was likely to make a statement of his new proposals on the first day of the debate.'
126. Law to Long, 7 Feb. 1914, B.L.P. 34/1/32. The text of this speech, which had to be jettisoned, is in B.L.P. 39/1/17.


128. Ibid., esp. 79-83.

129. *Hansard*, LVIII, 142-153 (Chamberlain). See also A. Salter, Unionist, commenting that Asquith 'drifts on and presses for time', as he had done from the start (ibid., LVIII, 84).


132. See comments of Lloyd George (*Hansard*, LVIII, 264); Birrell (ibid., LVIII, 211); Chamberlain, *Politics from Inside*, pp. 612-3.)


134. Ibid., LVIII, 270 ff.

135. See e.g. Law to Strachey, 14 Feb. 1914, B.L.P. 34/2/34, for the statement that he would feel bound to help Asquith if the prime minister honestly tried to arrange a settlement on the lines of exclusion, however much it might be distasteful to their supporters.


137. *Hansard*, LVIII, 211-4 (Birrell); 267-8 (Lloyd George)


140. T.E. Harvey to W. Harvey, 14 Feb. 1914, Harvey Papers.

141. Chamberlain, *Politics from Inside*, pp. 612-5 (11-12 Feb.)

142. Memorandum by Lloyd George, 16 Feb. 1914, MS. Asquith 39, fos. 119-123; also in Lloyd George Papers, C/20/2/7; printed in full in Gwynn, Redmond, pp. 256-8.

143. *Hansard*, LVIII, 264-70 (Lloyd George). Lloyd George gave no hint of his exclusion scheme, merely repeating Asquith's arguments against producing immediate proposals.

See e.g. Chamberlain, Politics from Inside, p. 601 (27 Jan. 1914), Plunkett to Law, 17 Jan. 1914, B.L.P. 31/2/46; Jack Pease to wife, 15 Feb. 1914, Gainford Papers, 2A. See also Plunkett to Asquith, 4 March 1914, MS. Asquith 36, fos. 37-41; C.P. Scott diary, B.L. Add. MS. 50901, fos. 108-9.

Hansard, LVIII, 80-81.

Memorandum by Lloyd George, 16 Feb. 1914, MS. Asquith 39, fos. 119-123; Lloyd George Papers, C/20/2/7; Gwynn, Redmond, pp. 256-8. Lloyd George's memorandum actually specified terms for excluding 'any county in Ireland'; when this proposal came to be incorporated into a White Paper, Redmond wrote to Lloyd George: 'Any County in Ireland is quite impossible. What we agreed to in our memo is "any County in Ulster". There is all the difference.' (5 March 1914, Lloyd George Papers, C/7/3/7.)

Lloyd George Memorandum, 16 Feb. 1914, MS. Asquith 39, fos. 119-123.

See e.g. Blake, Bonar Law, p. 183.

Confidential memorandum by Devlin, c. 20 Feb. 1914, Lloyd George Papers, C/20/2/6; partly printed in Gwynn, Redmond, pp. 258-260.

Memorandum by Lloyd George, 23 Feb. 1914, Lloyd George Papers, C/20/2/7; MS. Asquith 39, fos. 126-9; printed in full in Gwynn, Redmond, pp. 260-261. The copy in the Asquith Papers is marked 'seen by H.H.A. 23 Feb.'


McKenna to Runciman, 24 Feb. 1914, Runciman Papers, R 1/17.


C.P. Trevelyan to wife, 24 Feb. 1914, Trevelyan Papers.

Lord Stamfordham to Bonar Law, and reply, 25 Feb. 1914, B.L.P. 31/3/40, and 34 7/2/34.


Redmond's mémorandum of interview, 2 March 1914, Redmond Papers, N.L.I. Add. MS. 15,257 (Bodleian, MS. film 1081).

Redmond to Asquith, 2 March 1914, MS. Asquith 39, fos. 134-141; Lloyd George Papers, C/20/2/5; printed in full in Gwynn, Redmond, pp. 287-9.
161. Ibid. See also Redmond's speech in the Commons, 9 March 1914; Hansard, LIX, 928-9.

162. Asquith's cabinet letter to king, 5 March 1914, MS. Asquith 7, fos. 101-2; Pease diary, II, fo. 85, 4 March 1914; Burns diary, 4 March 1914, B.L. Add. MS. 46336, fo. 56.


164. See e.g. Pease's letter to Asquith, denying responsibility for the cabinet leak: 'Before Wednesday [4 March] I had never heard the suggestion of polling by counties ---' (Jenkins, Asquith, p. 304). Probably Pease was not the only minister who failed to connect the proposal of March 1914 with the November 1913 suggestion.

165. Pease diary, II, fo. 85, 4 March 1914.

166. Asquith's cabinet letter to king, 5 March 1914, MS. Asquith 7, fos. 101-2.

167. Pease diary, II, fo. 85, 4 March 1914.


170. Asquith to Redmond, 4 March 1914; Redmond Papers, N.L.I. Add. MS. 15,165 (Bodleian, MS. film 1059).

171. See e.g. Chamberlain, Politics from Inside, p. 619.

172. See Stamfordham to Asquith, 28 Feb. 1914, MS. Asquith 39, fos. 132-3; Asquith to Carson, 2 March 1914, Colvin, Carson, II, 287. Carson complained to Bonar Law on 5 March that he was confined to bed with a cold, making no mention of any meeting with the prime minister (Carson to Law, 5 March 1914, B.L.P. 31/4/5.) A.P. Ryan, Mutiny at the Curragh, p. 114, assumes the meeting was fruitless, while Colvin, Carson, II, 287, states that what happened at the interview is not known. In the absence of any other memoranda or references in letters, it seems more likely the interview never took place.

173. See Jenkins, Asquith, pp. 303-4, for Asquith's letter to his colleagues and their replies. See also Riddell, More Pages, pp. 202-3; Burns diary, 5 March 1914, B.L. Add. MS. 46336, fo. 56.


175. Lord Charles Beresford to Law, 2 March 1914, B.L.P. 31/4/1.

176. Carson to Law, 5 March 1914, B.L.P. 31/4/5; Lansdowne to Balfour, 6 March 1914, Balfour Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 49730, fos. 268-9.
177. "George V to Law, 7 March 1914, B.L.P. 31/4/11; Law to king, 8 March 1914, B.L.P. 34/2/36.

178. See e.g. Fitzroy, Memoirs, II, 538 (4 March 1914). Lord Esher assumed Asquith must be in a pretty quandary, 'as I do not for a moment imagine that his new proposals will be accepted by Carson'. (Esher, Journals, III, 159, 4 March 1914).

179. King to Asquith, 5 March 1914, MS. Asquith 39, fos. 143-4.


181. Asquith to Redmond, 7 March 1914, MS. Redmond, N.L.I. Add. MS. 15,165 (Bodleian, MS. film 1059); printed in full in Gwynn, Redmond, p. 273. Asquith's argument that the exact length of the term was scarcely discussed in Redmond's conversations with Lloyd George was irrelevant, since Redmond's letter of 2 March clearly stipulated this was Redmond's understanding of the discussion.

182. See Gwynn, Redmond, pp. 269-270.

183. Lloyd George Papers, C/12/3.


186. Draft memorandum of Redmond's interview with Asquith, 17 Nov. 1913, Redmond Papers, N.L.I. Add. MS. 15,165 (Bodleian, MS. film 1059). Redmond's final draft and Asquith's own account of this interview do not mention this.


188. Pease diary, II, fo. 80 (cabinet, 13 Nov. 1913).

189. Loreburn to O'Brien, 18 Nov. 1913, mfm. of N.L.I. MS. 11439, lent by Dr. P. Bull.

190. Robertson at Newcastle, 23 and 29 Sept. 1913, The Times, 24 Sept. 1913; Nation, 27 Sept. 1913; Daily Mail, 26 Sept. 1913. Robertson explained that he was 'merely expressing his own honest opinion to his constituents, and he had no Government authority behind him' (Manchester Guardian, 30 Sept. 1913). See also Robertson at Cheltenham, The Times, 11 Oct. 1913.

192. L. Williams to Lloyd George, 10 Oct. 1913, Lloyd George Papers, C/10/1/15: 'What does Winston mean by hinting at the exclusion of N.E. Ulster? Isn't he steering straight for the rocks?'


197. John Baird to Law, 9 March 1914, B. L. P. 31/4/16, reporting a conversation with Bruce of the Glasgow Herald.

198. Manchester Guardian, 12 and 17 March 1914. See also Elsie to Jack Pease, 13 March 1914, Gainford Papers, 7A, for comment that the Manchester Guardian was unenthusiastic about Asquith's offer, and was 'impressed by the unbending attitude of Ulster'.

199. J. P. Croal (Scofsman) to Law, 18 March 1914, B. L. P. 31/4/31.


201. Loreburn to O'Brien, 15 Nov. 1913, mfm. of N. L. I. MS. 11439, lent by Dr. P. Bull.


203. Law to Lansdowne, 15 Oct. 1913, B. L. P. 33/6/80.

204. See Dicey to Bonar Law, 8 Jan. 1914, and enclosed memorandum: The Parliament Act and the Home Rule Bill, B. L. P. 31/2/23; Lord Hugh Cecil to Law, 2 April 1914, B. L. P. 32/2/6, and Cecil's memorandum, 10 May 1914, B. L. P. 32/3/22, arguing that the 'suggestion' method gave the Lords the initiative; A. Chamberlain, Politics from Inside, p. 614; J. W. Lowther to Sir Henry Lucy, 15 Feb. 1914, Henry Lucy, Diary of a Journalist, III, 160-161, for the Speaker's view that 'The whole position is in a great muddle, due to the hard-and-fast limitation of the Parliament Act'.

206. See Haldane to mother, 3 March 1914, Haldane Papers, N.L.S. MS. 5991, for reference to 'secret Cabinet Committee' and names of participants; see also Lloyd George's appointments diary, 3 March 1914, Lloyd George Papers, I/33.


208. Hansard, LIX, 917, 1656–7 (Asquith).


211. Hansard, LIX, 906–918 (Asquith).

212. Ibid.


214. Lord Channing to Crewe, 16 March 1914, Crewe Papers, C/5.

215. Haldane to mother, 10 March 1914, Haldane Papers, N.L.S. MS. 5991.

216. See James Hope's question, 16 March 1914, Hansard, LIX, 1655, for confirmation that the Unionists had reached the same conclusion as Simon.

217. Hansard, LIX, 933–6 (Carson).

218. Ibid.


220. See e.g. Fitzroy, Memoirs, II, 540 (10 March 1914): '— if it is merely a question of the conditions under which the exclusion of parts of Ulster may or may not be brought to an end in six years' time, the point appears too infinitesimal on which to take the risks of civil war'.

221. T. P. O'Connor to Spender, 11 March 1914, Spender Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 46392, fo. 126.

222. Hansard, LIX, 927 (Redmond).
The Times, 18 March 1914.

Hansard, LIX, 919 (Bonar Law).

Lord Robert Cecil to Law, 7 March 1914, B.L.P. 31/4/9; Cecil to Balfour, 10 March 1914, Balfour Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 49737, fos. 124-5; Balfour to Cecil, 13 March 1914, Balfour Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 49737; fo. 126; Selborne to Law, 7 March 1914, B.L.P. 31/4/10. They all agreed that the White Paper was 'very sketchy', and the difficulties of drafting the proposals formidable.

Hansard, LIX, 1653-1661. Asquith answered the questions collectively in a perfunctory manner.

Hansard, LIX, 2256-2366.

Hansard, LIX, 922, 925. (Bonar Law).

See Law to Milner, 17 March 1914, B.L.P. 34/2/41; Milner to Law, 17 March 1914, B.L.P. 31/4/30; H.A. Gwynne (Morning Post editor), to Law, 18 March 1914, B.L.P. 31/4/31; Selborne to Law, 18 March 1914, B.L.P. 31/4/32; The Times, 17 March 1914.

See e.g. Lord Robert Cecil to Law, 20 Jan. 1914, B.L.P. 31/2/50; memorandum by Selborne and R. Cecil, 1 Jan. 1914, MS. Selborne 77, fos. 77-9. Selborne and Cecil subsequently drafted a bill to carry out their proposals for a referendum on Home Rule (Reference to the People) Bill, c. April 1914, MS. Selborne 77, fos. 169-181, and later draft sent to Law, 1 May 1914, B.L.P. 32/3/1.

Hansard, LIX, 2256-8, 2260-65. (Bonar Law).

Hansard, LIX, 2266 ff. (Asquith). See e.g. Sir George Murray to Rosebery, 20 March 1914, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S., MS. 10049, fos. 282-3; Buxton to Gladstone, 20 March 1914, H. Gladstone Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 46012, fos. 55-6. Lord Courtney of Penwith and Edmund Harvey agreed there was much to commend the acceptance of Law's offer (T.E. Harvey to parents, 22 March 1914, Harvey Papers).


Carson to Law, 20 March 1914, B.L.P. 32/1/36.

See Bonar Law to Asquith, 22 March 1914, MS. Asquith 39, fos. 152-3.
CHAPTER VIII

THE CURRAGH CRISIS AND FINAL RECKONING.

MARCH - APRIL 1914.

Bonar Law to J.P. Croal, 20 March 1914: 'The position seems to me really very serious, for I am greatly afraid that Asquith will allow things to drift on till there is an explosion in Ulster'. (B.L.P. 34/2/44).

Walter Long's Memorandum, 27 March 1914: '--- if the story told here [i.e. 'the plot'] is not correct, then I can only say it is the most wonderful combination of circumstances and coincidences that has ever been told, even in fiction'. (B.L.P. 39/2/22.)

Birrell described the crisis to Seely, 2 April 1914, as: 'an untoward incalculable incident --- the result of a number of accidents the responsibility for which can never be finally determined ---' (MS. Mottistone 22, fos. 334-5).

THE POLITICAL AND MILITARY BACKGROUND TO THE CURRAGH INCIDENT

The Curragh affair has been the subject of several detailed studies. This thesis is concerned with only a few of the many controversial themes, particularly utilising private papers to illuminate the Liberal cabinet's aims and motives, and to examine the overall significance of the crisis.

The prime minister's Ulster policy involved a massive gamble. In the first eighteen months after the policy decision of February 1912, Asquith's approach was based on the assumption that the Unionists were bluffing and the dangers of civil war vastly exaggerated. By the late autumn of 1913 the cabinet belatedly recognized the gravity of the situation, faced with overwhelming evidence that the Ulster movement had escalated sharply from June 1913 onwards. From then on, the prime minister took the risk that violence or civil strife in Ulster
IRELAND 1914
would not erupt before his last minute political compromise with the Opposition was finally settled. By 19 March 1914, the cabinet's political options had become very dangerously limited. It was vital that the ministry should be in a position to argue that they would press on with their original Home Rule bill, if the Opposition failed to agree to reasonable terms for a compromise. They must be able to show that they were willing and able to use the army effectively, to deal with Ulster's resistance, in the event of the breakdown of negotiations. The Curragh crisis undermined the government's credibility to the point where the military sanction was rendered ineffective. Asquith's options disappeared after March 1914, for he was no longer able to rely on the army to enforce his will on Ulster.

The ministry had treated Ulster's threats increasingly seriously since October 1913. This was indicated by the negotiations between the party leaders, and by the prime minister's public admission, on 9 March 1914, that the exclusion of Ulster was a regrettable necessity. Despite this, the government's long range military planning to deal with possible armed resistance in Ulster was singularly deficient. The ministry's attitude still contained a strong element of wishful thinking regarding potential violence. As Chamberlain observed in February 1914: 'the Government were at times, at any rate, calculating on an explosion in Ulster taking the form of riot instead of revolution.' The chief secretary was still prevaricating in a memorandum written for the cabinet on 5 March, despite the alarming information he provided:

The whole question as to the reality of the movement regarded from a Civil War point of view is overshadowed by the general conviction amongst the rank and file of the Volunteers that the occasion will never arise.

On the day of the Curragh incident, the king gained the impression that 'Asquith seemed to be still convinced that there could be nothing to fight about and that even if there were, there were no people in Ulster who would fight'.

The cabinet was also ambivalent in its attitude to the use of military force to deal with Ulster's opposition. Morley alternated between expressions of acute dismay at the prospect of armed conflict, and the use of menacing language against the 'rebels'. Esher considered this attitude of mind typical of the whole cabinet. Even Churchill shared this ambivalence. Although he was 'prepared to
put down disorder ruthlessly', late in November 1913, he still questioned whether the government had the right to coerce the Ulster Protestants into submission to Home Rule. The naval crisis increased the doubts about Churchill's intentions, but Lloyd George reported after the meeting on 22 January 1914: 'Cabinet united in determination to meet force by force. Churchill had now finally agreed to stand in with the rest of the Cabinet in this'.

This ambivalence was compounded by the fact that nobody was at all sure what form the anticipated trouble in Ulster would take; the nature and extent of the threatened resistance were alike ill-defined. Liberals and Nationalists tended to emphasize the practical difficulties of maintaining a rebel provisional government in opposition to the British government. J.J. Clancy, a Nationalist M.P., wrote a lengthy memorandum arguing that Ulster's trade would be destroyed, her social system shattered, and bankruptcy universal. The Unionist leaders were fully aware of the grave practical difficulties involved in the establishment of an Ulster provisional government, aiming to resist a Home Rule Act passed by the British government. They also realized that the British government could not afford to wait until these problems ultimately undermined the rebellion; an Ulster Unionist revolt was likely to be suppressed by the British army long before Clancy's predictions could be fulfilled. There was little doubt that the British army could overwhelm the Ulster Volunteers, though Captain Wilfrid Spender, quarter-master general of the rebel army described some of the military problems to his cousin, Harold Spender:

Your side can of course beat us if you are prepared to keep 4 divisions (3rds of our army) stationed in Ulster for some months but even if this did not lead to very great military difficulties, foreign complications would be a fearful risk. To use lesser force will certainly mean the most terrible loss of life, & if your side settle on force I hope you will use your influence to make it overwhelming from the first.

Other questions were raised, such as how long this military suppression would take, how much blood would be shed in the process, and the effects it would have on the army, the British government, and British public opinion. Carson obviously hoped such a situation would not arise. He admitted that Ulster could be coerced into submission, but protested that it would then have to be governed
as a conquered community, which would hardly produce a peaceful or permanent settlement. 12

Jack Seely replaced Haldane at the war office in June 1912. This helps to explain the ministry's failure to make long-range military plans to deal with Ulster's anticipated resistance, and the general lack of confidence in the government's ability to handle such a crisis. It was more common for the secretary of state for war to be a civilian, but Seely was a soldier with a reputation for gallantry in the Boer war. The qualities which distinguished him as a soldier were less helpful at the war office, where his courage turned into arrogance, and his impetuosity became lack of forethought. Seely had previously been under-secretary at the war office and the colonial office, but few of his colleagues were enthusiastic when he replaced Haldane in 1912. He was generally considered to be one of the weaker members of the ministry. Herbert Samuel expressed the hope that Seely would do well at the war office, since he was the only available candidate at the time, but admitted that no one felt very confident about it. 13 Munro-Ferguson considered Seely 'a very poor creature indeed', and Herbert Gladstone thought him 'too self-centred & having an exaggerated estimate of his own sagacity & insight'. 14

Seely's unsuitability for the position became quickly apparent, and he failed to gain the confidence, respect or affection of the officers, as Haldane had done. Colonel Repington, The Times' military correspondent, believed the general efficiency of the war office had fallen by 50% in the six months after Seely took over, and added that the new war minister 'does nothing & carries no guns'. 15 Sir Henry Wilson held a very low opinion of Seely's dealings with the General Staff 16, and Lord Roberts commented after a visit to Seely on 21 March: 'Seely appeared to me to be drunk with power, and quite unable to realise the result of the high-handed manner in which he was treating the Army'. 17 One important result of this unhappy appointment was that Churchill at the admiralty was able to exert considerable influence over his weaker colleague at the war office. 18

The uncertain military prospects in Ulster, which Seely had to evaluate, were further complicated by fears that some army officers might refuse to fight against Ulster Protestants, who merely asked to remain under
the British crown. Carson, Lord Roberts and Lord Milner claimed that British officers and men could not be expected to fire willingly upon Protestant civilians fighting under the Union Jack. To insist on their doing so would strain military discipline to breaking point and go far to destroy the army. Bonar Law passed these stern warnings on to Churchill and the king in September 1913, even telling Churchill that the Unionists might urge officers to ignore the government's orders to use force against Ulster. When the king subsequently asked his prime minister whether he intended to employ the army to suppress disorder in Ulster, Asquith replied abruptly that there was insufficient basis for fears that the troops would fail to do their duty. But Asquith told Redmond an entirely different story on 17 November; the information from the war office concerning the attitude of the army was very grave:

— pointing to the probability of very numerous resignations of commissions of officers in the event of the troops being used to put down an Ulster insurrection. Some of the authorities estimated the number of these resignations as high as 30 per cent. He did not believe in anything like this figure, but he was satisfied that there would be a number of resignations.

The prime minister may have exaggerated the dangers to put pressure on Redmond, just as he understated them for the king's benefit, but the situation was undoubtedly alarming. A police report from Belfast, in October 1913, claimed that the hopes of the Ulster resistance movement were based on the belief that the troops as a whole, particularly the officers as a body, will not serve against them. The Ulster Volunteer Force relied heavily on retired British army officers, including Lieutenant-General Sir George Richardson, and they had the encouragement of men with such distinguished military reputations as Lord Roberts. When Lord Willoughby de Broke formed the British League for the Support of Ulster and the Union, in March 1913, he obtained the support of one hundred peers and 120 members of parliament, and boasted a membership of 10,000 a year later. More dangerous was the massive agitation organised in England by Lord Milner and Leopold Amery. They obtained signatures and money for the British Covenant to aid Ulster's resistance and prevent the British army being used against Ulster. Supporters of the British Covenant were frequently
in close touch with serving officers, and there is no doubt that many British army officers did dislike the prospect of being sent to deal with resistance in Ulster. The army was theoretically non-political, but many officers were conservative by instinct, some came from Anglo-Irish families, and their sympathies were often with the Ulster Protestants. Soldiers were trained to obey orders, but the possibility that they might not do so in this case, was increased by the intrigues of Majr-General Sir Henry Wilson, the director of military operations. Wilson was an Irishman of great charm and considerable influence in Unionist political circles. Unashamedly partisan, he was a constant source of valuable information to the Unionists. He advised Bonar Law in November 1913 that there would be wholesale defections of up to forty per cent. if the army was ordered to coerce Ulster.25 By December 1913, the military problem appeared so serious that Carson felt obliged to repudiate suggestions that the Unionists were trying to 'tamper with the army', and insisted that soldiers must obey lawful orders.26

Seely's predecessor at the war office, had very firm views regarding the methods which could be used to deal with any hint of soldiers refusing to obey orders. Haldane told Esher in September 1913 that 'no resignation should be accepted, and that any officer offering to resign his commission should be placed under arrest.27 This was a clear line which the generals would normally adopt without question. Seely, however, felt that the issue required clarification in this case, and confused the generals by trying to explain the legal aspects of the problem, which were decidedly ambiguous. Seely summoned the commanders-in-chief on 16 December, to elaborate the main points of a directive issued the previous week.28 This stated that soldiers must obey orders to shoot only if those orders were 'reasonable under the circumstances'; but they were justified in 'contemplating refusal to obey' if they were likely to be called upon to take 'some outrageous action'. Seely did not explain how these vague phrases could be translated into clear military terms. His generals were not reassured by his statement that there was no intention of 'giving outrageous and illegal orders to the troops'. The final warning that each general would be held individually responsible for preventing subversive conduct in his command,29 meant that Seely's own confusion was transmitted through the generals to the lower levels of command.30
The situation was still further complicated by fears that the Unionists might try to prevent the government using troops in Ireland at all, by amending or delaying the Army (Annual) Act. 31 This measure had to be renewed each year before 30 April to legalise the existence of a standing army, and to allow the application of military discipline. As early as July 1911, Bonar Law recognized that the Unionist majority in the Lords could force a dissolution by refusing to renew the Army Act. 32 Lord Selborne and Lord Robert Cecil adopted the idea a year later, and advocated it enthusiastically from June 1913. 33 By 27 January 1914, Bonar Law was discussing the advisability of an amendment to the Army Annual Act preventing the Government employing the soldiers in Ulster, until after a general election. 34 Bonar Law himself reluctantly acquiesced on the grounds that 'if we do not adopt this method of assisting Ulster there is absolutely no other way open to us except active resistance, and that seems to me from every point of view much worse.' 35 Early in March it seemed likely that pressure from Selborne, Carson, Chamberlain and the three Cecils would succeed in getting the plan adopted, despite criticisms from Lansdowne, Curzon and Balfour. 36 Considerable opposition from the Unionist rank and file, however, led to its abandonment by 26 March. There was profound uneasiness about the implications of taking steps which appeared to justify mutiny and rebellion, and which could turn the electorate against the Lords and the Unionist party once again. 37

By 2 February, the government knew of the Opposition's plan to amend the Army Act, because the Unionists were unable to keep their secret from the press. 38 Consequently, the prime minister warned Redmond that the Opposition might try to force a dissolution on this issue, and asked the attorney-general to prepare a memorandum for the cabinet, outlining the significance of the Army (Annual) Act. 39 The question was discussed in the cabinet on 11 March with the aid of Simon's memorandum, which did not even examine the implications of a Unionist amendment. The prime minister informed the king, 'in characteristic manner, that 'as there is no evidence, so far, that such a step is contemplated, the further consideration of the subject was adjourned.' 40 This was a rather casual way to treat a potentially dangerous plan. The Unionists came very close to amending the Army Act, thereby leaving the government without the means to impose Home Rule on Ulster, if that was the option eventually chosen.
As it was, the Curragh affair deprived the government of the power to impose its will on Ulster almost as effectively as an amendment of the Army (Annual) Act could have done. It was fortunate for the Unionists that their plan was abandoned at the eleventh hour. As Sir Loe Strachey remarked to Curzon, on 23 March, the events at the Curragh indicated the dangers of rushing feverishly into unknown courses. If the Unionists had announced their determination to interfere with the Army Act before 20 March, the country would have been absolutely convinced that the Curragh resignations were deliberately manipulated by the Unionists for party purposes. The Opposition would have been unable to evade the charge of political interference with the army.

It is, then, not surprising, in view of all these difficulties and uncertainties, that Seely and the cabinet took few precautions to prepare for trouble in Ulster. One or two sensible moves were made. The decision to send Major-General Sir Nevil Macready to Ireland in November 1913 was a wise step. Macready was director of personal services at the war office, with responsibilities which included the use of troops in aid of the civil power. His previous experience in controlling labour disputes in South Wales and Lancashire proved his abilities in that delicate area, so that he was well qualified for a distasteful task in Ireland. Seely briefed Macready to report on the situation facing the civil and military administration in Ireland in the event of a disturbance — 'to watch the North', as Sir Henry Wilson put it.

The attempt to limit the accumulation of arms and ammunition in Ireland was also sensible and necessary, though the timing and effectiveness of the move were more questionable. Birrell had been concerned about the sharp rise in the estimated number of arms at the disposal of the Ulster Volunteer Force, since the summer of 1913. The cabinet discussed the question on 24 and 25 November, in the light of Birrell's reports and Simon's legal advice. Asquith informed the king:

In view of the fact that not only the Ulstermen but Nationalists and Larkinites are beginning to arm & drill, the Cabinet came to the conclusion that the powers contained in the Customs Acts should be exercised, and the importation coastwise of munitions into Ireland should be temporarily prohibited by Order in Council.
Simón explained that no special statutory power existed in Ireland to prohibit the importation and use of arms, after the Irish coercion Acts were allowed to lapse in 1906. But certain provisions of the customs legislation could be invoked to authorise the forfeiture of arms and ammunition en route from Great Britain to Ireland, and also from abroad, though the legality of the latter was more doubtful. On 1st December, the cabinet decided to issue the necessary Royal Proclamations for these purposes, in view of the evidence that three 'so-called armies' were being organized.

By February 1914, Simon concluded that the Proclamations had been fairly effective in preventing the importation of arms into Ireland. The customs officers exercised strict supervision over the importation of arms, and detained consignments when found; but between December 1913 and March 1914 they discovered no large consignments intended for the Ulster Volunteer Force. Sir Almeric Fitzroy welcomed the Proclamations as 'the first challenge to recalcitrant Ulster', which might test the strength of the spirit behind the preparations for revolt. Lord Esher, on the other hand, feared they might do 'incalculable harm' in precipitating matters, and he understood that several ministers, including Morley, shared his anxiety. These misgivings were justified. The Proclamations aroused intense resentment amongst the Nationalists. They interpreted the move as blatantly unfair discrimination against the infant National Volunteer movement, almost immediately after its inauguration. The timing was unfortunate, to say the least, since the U.V.F. had been allowed to arm for the past year with no legal intervention. Though it did not reduce the Nationalists' sense of grievance, the Proclamations actually involved a severe setback to the plans of the U.V.F., since they were still far from being effectively armed. The result was a complete reappraisal of the arms policy, culminating in the major gun-running coup at Larne in April 1914.

The only other action contemplated by the cabinet before March 1914 was the possibility of arresting Carson and the ringleaders of the Ulster movement. After the prosecution and imprisonment of James Larkin, leader of the Dublin industrial agitation, the clamour for Carson's arrest from left-wing Liberal and Labour supporters reached its height. Charles Trevelyan's
comments were typical: 'Larkin's methods may be intolerable. But most progressives think his main objects right and Carson's wrong. Yet he is imprisoned and Carson romps about free.' When the cabinet discussed the Larkin affair in November 1913, Jack Pease remarked that it was hard to justify to the voters the government's restraint in neglecting to prosecute a man in Carson's position who preached sedition and drilled forces to resist the law.

From August 1913, the chief secretary recognized that Carson was openly challenging the government to prosecute him, but Birrell hesitated. His letter to Asquith of 3 October suggests that, for a while, Birrell moved towards the view held by Morley and the Spender brothers, that Carson should be prosecuted:

--- whilst most completely convinced that to interfere with this wicked enterprise of Carson's up to the present time would have been folly (I think everybody who knows anything agrees as to this) it may at any moment become a grave question how much longer we can stand on one side & allow rebellion to be preached and prepared for --- the question is --- can he be allowed to preach & practise sedition & mutiny right up to the passage of the Bill ---

The cabinet finally answered Birrell's question in the affirmative. A few days after receiving Birrell's letter, the prime minister informed the king that the government did not intend to arrest Carson for sedition, because it would 'throw a lighted match into a powder barrel'. Sir John Simon advised his colleagues late in November, that the leaders of the Ulster movement could justifiably be prosecuted for many breaches of the law, including treason - felony and illegal drilling, but conviction on the main charges could only be obtained through the verdict of a jury.

The government decided that, however conclusive the evidence, no Irish jury would convict, and popular passions in Ulster would be inflamed, with no certain deterrent effect. Moreover, the Nationalist leaders insisted that prosecution would 'inevitably secure for the victims an invaluable and much-coveted place in the annals of Irish martyrology'.

Despite considerable justification for this policy of non-intervention, its risks increased enormously as the time for the threatened civil war drew nearer. Once the cabinet reached the decision against prosecutions, a public announcement might have been advisable, to prevent rumours to the contrary precipitating trouble. The most serious rumours that warrants were about to
be issued for the arrest of the Ulster leaders were widely circulated during the week preceding the Curragh affair. 60 No evidence exists that the government had any such intention, and the rumours may have arisen from faulty interpretation of information about the ministry’s military plans. Bonar Law commented on 20 March that he never believed in the rumour, and Carson maintained a degree of scepticism about the existence of the warrants. 61 But many Ulster Unionists took the rumours seriously enough for Captain Craig to order the Ulster Volunteer Force to prepare to mobilize at a moment’s notice, on 19 March. The prime minister did not see fit to issue a public statement dispelling the rumours until 23 March, when he announced in The Times that the government had no intention of arresting the Ulster leaders. 62 This was too late. By then the rumours had already contributed to the alarm and confusion which culminated in the Curragh incident on 20 March.

Thus few special steps were taken before March 1914, to prepare to deal with Ulster’s potential resistance to the Home Rule bill. The ministry made the minimum number of moves, and vacillated about the wisdom of others. When General Macready was sent to Ulster in March 1914, he commented:

I was convinced that through a policy of drift the Government had lost all control of the situation, which was entirely in the hands of Carson and his followers. Every Government service was either effete or unreliable, results due on the one hand to the policy of Dublin Castle, and on the other to sympathy with the Orangemen — [The Royal Irish Constabulary] had undoubtedly deteriorated into what was almost a state of supine lethargy, and had lost even the semblance of energy or initiative when a crisis demanded vigorous and resolute action. 63

Despite the minimal precautions taken up to March 1914, the government insisted on the principle that they intended to coerce Ulster if necessary. Up to the autumn of 1913, ministers generally evaded Opposition questions about whether they proposed to use the army to impose Home Rule on Ulster. 64 The Unionists frequently expressed the belief that the government would not dare to attempt the deliberate coercion of Ulster. 65 Loreburn attempted to refute this in his famous letter to The Times, in September 1913:

— an impression seems to have been created that Ministers will not under any circumstances use military force against rioters. I am convinced that no such thing can have been deliberately either said or conveyed.
The primary duty of any civilised Government is to protect life and property.66 Once ministers acknowledged that Ulster's resistance must be taken seriously and that a political compromise might conceivably prove unattainable, they were forced to examine the military implications.

Increasingly, if reluctantly, they began to echo the principle expressed in Loreburn's letter. The chief secretary wrote anxiously to Asquith on 30 August 1913:

—believing as I do in the serious character of Ulster resistance, involving as I am certain it does, military operation, which must either be on such a scale as to overawe the rebels, or to dispose of a considerable number of them 2.

the government must be ready to use the army, since the Irish police were unreliable.67 By October, Birrell thought the government might have to face up to the possibility of interfering in advance, to prevent the threatened 'anarchy, disorder & bloodshed', and they must prepare for such an eventuality.68 The prime minister responded cautiously. In September, that they must let it be known they were ready with appropriate means to maintain order in the event of a crisis.69 Accordingly, a few weeks later, Asquith informed the king that illegal resistance to the Home Rule Act would have to be crushed, though the army would only be used in the last resort, when 'more indirect means had been tried and proved to be ineffectual'.70 In his Ladybank speech, on 25 October, Asquith announced that the government would assert the law by every 'proper and adequate' method, if the Home Rule Act was met by armed resistance.71 General statements of this nature were made more frequently by ministers in subsequent months. Lloyd George declared firmly in the Commons, in February 1914, that if the government's Ulster proposals were rejected, they would not quail afterwards before threats of violence.72 When Carson rejected the exclusion scheme the following month, Redmond felt reasonably sure that he had ministerial support for his threat that 'if force is interposed, force shall be met with force'.73

In some quarters it was felt that something more was required than these general statements of intention. The views of Lord Haldane, Seely's predecessor at the war office, were particularly significant. As early as
September 1913, Lord Esher reported to the king, after a talk with the lord chancellor:

[Haldane] is urging upon the Prime Minister and the Cabinet that precisely similar precautions to those taken to guard against the strike in Wales, and the coal strike, should be taken in Ulster. He suggests sending at once for Sir Arthur Paget, and discussing with him the necessary measures: giving him General Macready (who exhibited useful qualities of judgement and tact in Wales) as a special Staff Officer, and forming a 'Composite Force', comprising battalions of southern regiments and free from Irish influences, to be sent immediately into Ulster. The Lord Chancellor obviously thinks that by a display of firmness; both as regards policy and maintenance of order, the situation can be met — with good management, and firm military handling, not a drop of blood need or would be shed.

In January 1914, Haldane was still convinced that serious trouble could be averted by sending 'an overwhelming force' into Ulster to maintain order well in advance. Sir David Harrel, Irish under-secretary in the 1890's, shared Haldane's view about the urgency of firm preparations. Harrel advised his former chief, John Morley, in January 1914, that the government should:

— prepare for the worst by the same elaborate police and military plans and precautions as he and I had made ready in 1893, — only more elaborate, because then everybody knew that Home Rule would not become law, and everybody knows today that it will.

Seely's preparations were extremely deficient measured against the policy favoured by Haldane and Harrel; for by this time he had done no more than send Macready to Ireland to explore the situation.

The government had a very strong case for making contingency plans to deal with Ulster's resistance, if the Ulster Unionists refused either to accept Home Rule or to agree to a compromise settlement. The precautions recommended by Haldane and Harrel were not only defensible, they were eminently sensible, but they were not adopted by the cabinet until March 1914. Seely's predecessor at the war office would probably have taken similar action months earlier. Sir Almeric Fitzroy later charged the government with 'slackness and want of forethought in dealing with the elements of Ulster discontent', of not having measured its force or prepared themselves for the solution of an inevitable problem. What was wrong
in March 1914 was not so much the nature of the action contemplated, but the way it was carried out. Decisions were taken far too rapidly, with little or no preliminary planning, where a more competent war minister would have made comprehensive preparations months beforehand. There is some reason to support the view of two authorities on the Curragh affair, that if Haldane had remained at the war office, 'it is probable that the Army crisis of March 1914 would have been averted. 77

The British Unionist leaders considered themselves justified in condoning resistance in Ulster against an Act of Parliament. The government had far greater cause for using force to impose a legal measure which was actively resisted. Moreover, those who did not share Asquith's temperamental inclination to wait upon events, considered advanced planning a reasonable and necessary response to the challenge from Ulster. The justification for the government's decisions of March 1914 has been obscured by the inept execution of those plans, and by the Unionists' emotive use of the term 'plot'. This 'plot' rhetoric has left the impression that the government's activities were totally reprehensible, whereas their intentions can be defended as prudent and belated precautions against an illegal Opposition enterprise.

THE CATALYSTS FOR TAKING SUDDEN PRECAUTIONS
IN MARCH 1914

One problem which has provided ammunition for Unionist critics, and which has puzzled subsequent historians, is the government's timing. Critics have asked why the government moved so suddenly to deal with Ulster in March 1914, when active resistance was not expected until the Home Rule bill passed, several months later. Robert Blake has argued that 'neither then, nor later, have any really convincing reasons been given for the Government's sudden alarm about Ulster. 78 This, of course, ignores the glaring fact that substantial cause for alarm had existed for many months before March 1914.

The ministry's sudden activity in March 1914 certainly contrasted sharply with the previous procrastination, but it was not caused by a sinister plot. Two developments coincided early in March to force the government's hands. The first was the Unionist rejection of the Lloyd George exclusion plan on
March. This came as a severe shock to several ministers, Lloyd George and Churchill especially. They regarded this proposal as eminently reasonable, and as their last word. Its rejection caused alarm and despair, as Churchill told the Commons three weeks later: 'I was wounded and grieved deeply to find that this offer, on which so many of us had pinned our hopes, was so unceremoniously rejected and repulsed.' Churchill had been the strongest advocate of Ulster exclusion from the very beginning, and was all the more frustrated and disappointed when the proposal was dismissed.

The implications seemed clear to ministers like Lloyd George and Churchill. The Unionist rejection apparently left the government with no option but to press on with their original bill, and make belated preparations to deal with unpleasant consequences in Ulster. On 14 March Churchill expressed this view emphatically in a controversial speech at Bradford, which has been interpreted as the first move in the 'plot' against Ulster. Lloyd George encouraged Churchill to make a speech that would 'ring down the corridors of history', for he shared the conviction that the time had come to make a stand. They had both sympathised with Ulster's cause all along, but 'we stand for law and order, and must see that the nation is not held up by a few malcontents'. Lloyd George assured the First Lord:

You are the only member of the Cabinet who could make such a speech. You are known to have been in favour of conciliation for Ulster. Now you can say that, having secured a compromise, the Ulstermen will either have to accept it or take the consequences.

Churchill's rhetoric at Bradford was provocative and unrestrained. He declared that the Unionists had rejected the prime minister's final and reasonable offer to provide special treatment for Ulster. But the government would not surrender to threats of force, and there were 'worse things than bloodshed, even on an extended scale'. If every concession was dismissed, and the government exposed to 'menace and brutality', then 'let us go forward together and put these grave matters to the proof'.

The Bradford speech was not part of a secret plot hatched by Churchill, Lloyd George and Seely. The prime minister had agreed beforehand that Churchill should make the speech. Admittedly, Asquith had been rather
alarmed when he learnt about it from Lloyd George, protesting that 'my game is more the olive branch', but he acquiesced. Moreover, two days afterwards, the prime minister nodded assent when challenged in the House by Lord Evelyn Cecil to say whether he endorsed the tone and substance of Churchill's speech. On that occasion, Churchill was loudly cheered by the Liberals. At a Downing Street lunch afterwards, Asquith argued that this enthusiasm proved that the Bradford speech expressed the feelings of the party. Morley sounded the only dissenting note, deploiring the Bradford speech, and warning his colleagues that bloodshed in Ireland would destroy Home Rule.

The second development which helped to precipitate the cabinet's military plans coincided almost exactly with the rejection of the government's exclusion offer. Early in March, the chief secretary prepared a synopsis of police reports reaching Dublin Castle from December 1913 onwards. Under the title Further Notes on the Movement in Ulster, these were circulated to the cabinet for discussion at the meeting on 11 March. Some ministers became fully aware for the first time of the acute gravity of the Ulster situation, precisely two days after Asquith made his parliamentary offer to the Unionists.

These police reports were undoubtedly alarming, revealing a marked escalation of the Ulster movement in the months following December 1913. The strength of the Ulster Volunteer Force was estimated at over 80,000 at the end of January 1914. Reports on the quantity of arms available varied widely, from estimates of about 17,000 rifles, to claims that the whole U.V.F. could be armed. Arms had been distributed from Belfast to various country districts, drilling was carried out in all the Ulster counties, and 'secret mobilization' was practised in some areas. A fairly typical report from Cookstown, county Tyrone, described military exercises involving about one thousand Volunteers in January. If trouble had erupted, the U.V.F. could easily have 'captured the police, the town, and done what they liked': The Cookstown inspector added:

--- It would take about 500 military, armed, and with a couple of machine-guns to restore order. I do not like the present temper of the Unionists. It is too deep and sullen to bode good for the preservation of the peace in the future.

A highly trained U.V.F. special corps was being formed for rapid movement to
trouble spots, 'street fighting' was being taught, and shooting competitions arranged. 87

All this was serious enough, but information received from county Tyrone and county Down appears to have caused the cabinet most concern. Reports from county Down between December and January, stated that a 'confidential circular' had been issued to the U.V.F., calling for information about the strength of the forces at police barracks, coastguard stations, post-offices and railways, in case these places had to be seized. This was independently substantiated by more detailed reports from Omagh in county Tyrone, on 7 February:

--- the following orders have been drawn up for the Ulster Volunteer Force in a typewritten document:-
1. Police are to be disarmed without bloodshed.
2. All arms at military barracks in Ulster are to be seized, and it is said that wax impressions of keys of military stores and magazines are in the possession of the Volunteers.
3. The number of soldiers at each military depot willing to assist the Volunteers are given.
4. Plans of Belfast Lough, Lough Swilly, and Carlingford Lough, with maps, are given, with instructions for firing mines. 88

These reports were first seen by Birrell's colleagues between 6 and 11 March. This information, combined with the Opposition rejection of the Ulster exclusion proposal, undoubtedly explains the crucial cabinet decisions taken during the week that followed. The police reports were serious enough to cause grave anxiety. Unfortunately, the ministry's credibility was subsequently weakened because Asquith persistently refused to publish these reports, in response to questions in the House. 89 The prime minister's claim that they were confidential, merely increased doubts about the existence of these alleged reports. 90 It is hard to understand why the government did not try to defend themselves by publishing these reports later. The cabinet's caution may be explained by the comment in Dublin Castle's Intelligence Notes, that no corroboration was received to prove that the significant information from Omagh was reliable. 91 The cabinet lacked confidence in the reliability of the R.I.C., and the spy system was rudimentary.

Even if the information was entirely correct, the Ulster leaders might have denied its authenticity, and diverted attention with a counter-attack on the ministry's use
of police spies.

Other sources have recently proved that the alarming information in the police reports was indeed reliable, but the cabinet could not have been sure of this. A.T.Q. Stewart has shown that the U.V.F. had developed a plan of action for assuming military control of Ulster, known as 'The No. 1 Scheme'. An important section headed 'The Coup', recommended that a sudden paralysing blow should be struck simultaneously, to sever all railway communications whereby troops could be sent to Ulster, to cut all telegraph and telephone lines, and to close all approaches to Ulster by road. In addition, 'all depots of arms, ammunition and military equipment should be captured'; careful enquiries were to be made as to the strength of such depots, and plans made to seize them by overwhelming force, or by secret arrangement with the troops. The 'confidential circular' and 'typewritten document' described in the police reports circulated by Birrell clearly refer to 'The No. 1 Scheme'. Further corroboration is provided by a memorandum sent to Seely on 14 March by Brigadier-General Count Gleichen, who commanded the infantry brigade stationed in Belfast. Gleichen stated that the U.V.F. had over 110,000 men, more than 80,000 rifles, plenty of ammunition, and some machine guns; he also confirmed that they had made arrangements to stop troops coming into Ulster.

Colonel Replington, The Times military correspondent, spent ten days in Ulster, and described the U.V.F. organisation in two articles published on 18 and 19 March. He maintained that the U.V.F. would fight if they were not left alone, they would resist desperately, and very rapid mobilization of a large force was possible. Sir Henry Wilson, General Paget, and General Macready were all aware, from November 1913 onwards, that the cabinet had reason to fear 'a Jameson raid on some depot'. Sufficient evidence survives to show that the government's concern regarding the safety of various arms depots, and the intentions of the U.V.F., was not fabricated to provide the excuse for a 'plot'.

On 11 March, the cabinet discussed the implications of the Unionist rejection of the Lloyd George exclusion plan. The police reports contained in Birrell's cabinet paper were examined at the same meeting, and the connection between the two items was all too obvious. The prime minister reported to the king:
Some considerable time was given to a discussion of the military situation in Ulster, suggested by the latest series of police reports, which indicate the possibility of attempts on the part of the 'Volunteers' to seize, by coups de main, police & military barracks, and depots of arms & ammunition. Ministers were probably uncertain whether the police reports indicated that the U.V.F. were contemplating an immediate coup, or making careful plans to come into operation when the Home Rule Act passed. Either way, the cabinet would have been foolish to ignore the information. The rejection of Asquith's exclusion offer, coming at precisely the same time, was quite enough to provoke a strong reaction. Additional fears about the army's loyalty and Opposition interference with the Army (Annual) Act probably helped to provoke an over-hasty emergency action. John Morley understood the significance of the discussion on 11 March. He wrote to Crewe immediately afterwards that 'the proceedings at the Cabinet today fill me with dismay', so that Morley was once again considering resignation.

THE CURRAGH 'PLOT' THEORY, AND THE ACTIVITIES OF THE CABINET COMMITTEE ON ULSTER.

The accusations that the government was engaged in a 'plot' sprang entirely from Unionist sources. The charges were published in full in the Daily Mail on 18 April, in The Times on 27 April, and in a pamphlet by Leopold Amery called The Plot against Ulster. They claimed that a section of the cabinet, led by Churchill and Seely, but excluding Asquith, planned a large-scale military and naval coup against Ulster. This was intended to provoke the U.V.F. into premature, reckless action, which would justify intervention by the army to smash the Volunteers, on the grounds of restoring law and order. The Unionists believed in this story, though they were forced to fabricate some of the details in the absence of solid evidence. Some of the wilder embellishments were no doubt introduced to embarrass the ministry further. Most historians have accepted the 'plot' theory, though one of its more distinguished proponents has recently conceded that:

--- If there was a 'plot' to overawe the Ulster Volunteers, rather than provoke rebellion, was it in all the circumstances so very wicked? And were the Volunteers in
any moral position to cavil at such a show of force, given their own illegal intentions.\footnote{100}

The Liberals consistently denied the existence of any such 'plot', and no evidence survives in their private papers, letters, and diaries, to disprove their claims. The most important contemporary defence of the government's activities was delivered in the Commons by Churchill on 30 March, when Burns commented that Churchill 'crumpled up the "Plot" story'. After an acrimonious debate on the subject three weeks later, Burns noted in his diary that the police reports justified any actions taken.\footnote{101} When a second White Paper on the Curragh affair was published on 22 April, Churchill wrote to his wife: 'We have now published everything and I am confident these wild charges will become gradually discredited'. A week later, Churchill replied to a Unionist vote of censure, telling his wife that 'we smashed the "plot" altogether.' Haldane likewise assured his mother that 'there never has been any plan for using military force to coerce Ulster.\footnote{102} Percy Illingworth denied the 'grotesque' charges levelled against the government, in a speech at Bradford early in May:

--- the Government was charged with unholy machinations, a plot to overrun Ulster with the whole resources of the British army and massacre its innocent and peace-loving inhabitants. It was perfectly true that precautionary measures were taken to prevent disorder, and the only fault which could be found was that those measures were not on a sufficiently large scale.\footnote{103}

Lloyd George assured Riddell that no plot existed, and Morley told Fitzroy that 'no conspiracy to precipitate bloodshed was entertained by the Cabinet'. Mildred Buxton wrote to her husband Sydney, after a heated discussion with a friend who believed in the 'plot' theory: 'I think he was really surprised that now you are out of the Government I did not believe it too.\footnote{104} Finally, if there was a plot, then presumably it would have required the cooperation of the generals most closely concerned. Yet General Ewart repudiated the legend that there has been a wicked plot to coerce Ulster or to provoke Ulster to take the initiative.

Nor were Generals French or Macready informed of secret orders for a conspiracy against Ulster.\footnote{105}

Since there is no firm evidence to substantiate the 'plot' charges,
it is all the more essential to explain why so many Unionists believed these accusations to be true, and why the government had so much difficulty in refuting them. The answer was probably provided in a memorandum written by Walter Long on 27 March. He remarked that if the story of the 'plot' was not correct, '— then I can only say it is the most wonderful combination of circumstances and coincidences that has ever been told even in fiction.' Balfour commented that the government 'seem to have made an extraordinary mess over this Army matter, and very unnecessarily to have precipitated a crisis which might otherwise, perhaps, never have occurred.' As Robert Blake has now conceded: 'Perhaps the real charge is bungling amateurish incompetence rather than conspiracy.'

Judgements on the Liberal side were naturally less harsh, but led to the same conclusions. Haldane confessed to his mother that 'there has been much misunderstanding and muddle and who is to blame it is hard to tell.' In a generous letter of condolence after Seely's resignation, Birrell described the crisis as 'an untoward and uncalculable incident — the result of a number of accidents the responsibility for which can never be finally determined.' Seely himself admitted that '— while the matter was sound the manner was, or appeared to be, faulty.' The Nation provided the biggest understatement, describing the incident as a blunder which revealed 'a certain slackness in Cabinet methods.'

Asquith's cabinet are not so much open to criticism for concocting a wicked 'plot,' or even for taking necessary steps to deal with Ulster's resistance. It was not so much their general aims which were at fault, as their attempt to translate those intentions into action. Their mistakes lay in the belated, over-hasty and uncoordinated nature of their plans, and their inept execution, which caused the entire project to misfire catastrophically. The Opposition were so amazed at the degree of confusion, the uncertainty of aims, and the appalling mismanagement, that they were convinced they could only be explained by a sinister conspiracy.

An attempt will now be made to disentangle the cabinet's intentions and actions in March 1914, from their confused and inadequate memoranda, and from the inconsistent explanations given afterwards. On 11 March the cabinet appointed a special committee on Ulster, consisting of Crewe, Birrell, Churchill,
Seely and Simon, 'to look into the matter in all its aspects'. More than enough justification existed for establishing this committee. Indeed, this step was taken months, if not years, too late. 109

The role played by Churchill and Seely, the aims and decisions of the committee, and the nature of the instructions given to General Paget, have been the subject of considerable controversy. The moderating influence of Lord Crewe, as chairman of the committee, was removed because of his sudden illness on 12 March. The chief secretary seems to have played little part, and nothing is known of Simon's contribution. With good reason, then, Churchill and Seely were widely assumed to control the committee, with the weaker man very much under Churchill's influence. Escher commented: 'Winston is running the whole show!' Marvellous that his colleagues allow him so much rope.' Leopold Amery remarked that, 'for practical purposes what counted in that Committee was Mr. Churchill', and Fitzroy thought 'the astonishing feature of the whole case is that it should be the work of a single man.' 110

If any records of the committee's deliberations ever existed, only a brief memorandum written by Seely on 16 March has survived. 111 The only written evidence of the instructions given to General Paget, commanding the troops in Ireland, is a letter from the war office dated 14 March. This advised Paget to take special precautions to safeguard arms depots, especially Armagh, Omagh, Carrickfergus, and Enniskillen, in view of reports that they might be seized by 'evil disposed persons'. 112 Seely was evidently worried by the lack of response; he wired Paget two days later asking for an immediate reply, and requesting that Paget meet him at the war office on 18 March, equipped with detailed plans. 113 On 17 March, Paget sent a telegram stating that he was not moving troops north to protect the four places mentioned. A letter followed, explaining that --- in the present state of the country, I am of opinion that any such moves of troops would create intense excitement in Ulster and possibly precipitate a crisis. 114 Paget's significant response was scarcely an auspicious beginning.

That same day, 17 March, the sub-committee reported to the full cabinet at a meeting described by Lloyd George as 'the bloody Assize'. 115 The committee outlined the instructions given to Paget. They also added that whatever
additional force might eventually be needed 'in the case of disturbance' in Ireland, should be supplied by moving regular troops from Great Britain, rather than calling up the reserves. Seely's figures indicated that about 23,000 regular troops were already in Ireland, including about 9000 quartered in the province of Ulster. 13,000 more men would be ready at Aldershot to move over 'as precautionary steps for their support in the event of the Ulster Volunteers opposing the movement' of troops. As a further precautionary measure, the Royal Irish Constabulary in Ulster, currently scattered in small detachments all over the countryside, were to be placed under General Macready, as single commanding officer at Belfast. The cabinet also learnt that Churchill was planning simultaneous naval movements, whereby the third battle squadron would engage in manoeuvres at Lamlash, off the Scottish coast seventy miles from Belfast. 116

This was the extent of the 'plot' as far as it was revealed to the whole cabinet on 17 March. The proposed military movements were no more sinister than those suggested by Haldane six months earlier, the chief difference being Churchill's independent decision to use the navy. The movements discussed by the cabinet on 17 March went beyond mere precautions to safeguard arms depots, though the evidence does not show precisely how far they did so. When ministers were subsequently questioned about their intentions, they only increased suspicions by insisting that they were only defending depots. The scale of their plans made this seem unlikely, while their protests implied that more extensive movements were not justified, placing them unnecessarily on the defensive. The limited and fragmentary sources available for this vital cabinet suggest that the sub-committee envisaged operations at two levels - the immediate plans to reinforce the arms depots, and contingency plans to send additional troops if the U.V.F. resisted the initial movement to guard the depots. The contingency plans could also be interpreted as part of a third level of longer-term preparations for moving troops and ships to deal with Ulster's resistance to the Home Rule Act. Churchill's naval movements lend credence to this possibility, as do the reports of the conferences on 18 March. But it seems highly probable that most ministers were confused as to the precise aims of the decisions taken at the 17 March cabinet.
The nature of the instructions given to General Paget at the various
meetings held at the war office, the admiralty, and 10 Downing Street, on 18 and
19 March, have also been questioned. Paget received no written instructions. The
only written record of the conferences consisted of two exceedingly brief memoranda
by Seely, noting the main decisions. This looked highly suspicious after the event,
and constitutes one of the many blunders associated with the ministry's management
of the operation. The limited sources available indicate that Seely, Paget,
French, and Ewart attended all the conferences, and Churchill most of them.

The remaining members of the cabinet committee, Crewe, Birrell and Simon, were
present part of the time, as also were Lloyd George, Asquith, and Macready. The
prime minister's participation in at least one of the crucial conferences is
especially important, in view of subsequent Unionist allegations that Asquith was
kept in ignorance of his colleagues' secret conspiracy.

According to the brief memoranda by Seely, the discussions at the
two conferences on 18 March essentially involved detailed approval of the decisions
reached by the full cabinet the previous day. Three 'precautionary moves' were to
be carried out on the night of Friday 20 March. Troops would be sent to reinforce
the four arms depots mentioned to Paget on 14 March, and also to Newry and
Dundalk. The battalion quartered at Victoria barracks in Belfast would be moved
out to Holywood, four miles outside the city, and ships would be sent to
Carrickfergus, Dundalk and Derry. Seely marked in his memorandum, against
these points: 'Prime Minister decided "yes" to move Friday night'. General
Ewart's diary entry for 20 March confirmed Seely's statement that the troop
movements were entirely precautionary, and '--- not provocative in any way.
They are merely designed to protect barracks, arms and ammunition.'

Ministers subsequently experienced difficulty in maintaining that
nothing more was discussed at these conferences than mere precautionary movements.
Too many people suspected otherwise. Even Seely's brief memoranda anticipated
the possibility of some 'overt hostile act', in which case Macready was to become
military governor of Belfast, with authority over the Ulster police. This caused
Simon to protest to Seely:

I greatly deprecate the expression 'Military Governorship'
--- nothing could be more unfortunate, as it seems to me,
than to use the language of civil war when you are only making a special command to obviate Civil War — 124

Sir John French's account of the discussions on 18 March states that, after the precautionary measures were sanctioned, 'the question was discussed as to what further and larger operations might be necessary'. An informal lunch followed, between Paget and Seely, when the conversation turned 'almost entirely on the question of large operations'. At the war office next day, Paget again talked of: — the bigger operations which might become necessary and said in a wild kind of way 'I shall lead my army to the Boyne.' Whereupon French told him not to be a 'bloody fool.' 125

The explanation subsequently drafted by Churchill and delivered in the Commons, cleverly distracted attention from the part played by himself and Seely at the war office conferences, at Paget's expense. 126 The First Lord stated that Paget took a far more serious view of the potential consequences of the troop movements than the government. Paget feared they would be provocative, but had been over-ruled when he had earlier advised against them. 127 Churchill emphasized that the government did not share Paget's misgivings, but Paget was quite justified in making preparations to deal with the hypothetical consequences he envisaged:

Sir Arthur Paget had full discretionary power if new and totally different circumstances arose; if the depots were attacked or the columns marching to reinforce them were opposed, to make such dispositions of the police force under his command as the emergency might require; and he was told that if necessary as the result of such events, large reinforcements would be sent to him from England.

Churchill enumerated several contingent possibilities, which were 'present in Sir Arthur Paget's mind', but did not 'belong to the precautionary movements alone authorised by the Government'. These included the possibility that the troop movements would precipitate an 'organised warlike movement' of the U.V.F., 'requiring to be met by concentrated Military Force'. 128 Churchill contrived to suggest that these were all Paget's private fears, rather than possible repercussions which were discussed at the war office conferences on 18-19 March.

The ministry would have been totally negligent had they not discussed the possible consequences of the proposed troop movements, and the
evidence suggests that these were considered. If Paget expressed the fears indicated by Churchill, he should have been given clear instructions regarding the ministry's intentions, rather than a dangerously vague 'discretionary power'. Even if Seely and Churchill were able to distinguish, at the time, between specific immediate orders and hypothetical contingencies, it was hardly wise to expect Paget to make the same distinction. It seems likely that Churchill and Seely were not entirely clear about their own aims, so that they were scarcely able to communicate unambiguous directions to Paget. Confusion was probably compounded by Seely's indiscreet remarks during several conversations with Paget, when no one else was present. As French remarked to Riddell: 'no doubt Paget got a wrong impression when in London, and acted on it'. Lloyd George was more expansive: 'There was no plot, but no doubt Winston and Seely talked to Paget about hypothetical situations, and led him to think active operations were intended'. Leopold Amery expressed the Unionist view:

'It is perfectly clear that Paget was summoned over and after two days', hammer and tongs talk with Seely and Churchill he was persuaded against his better judgement, worked up into a state of bellicose agitation on the plea that a short and bloody war now would be better than a long and bloodier one later, and went back in that frame of mind.'

THE INCIDENTS AT THE CURRAGH, AND THE REPERCUSSIONS IN LONDON

The other main issue discussed at the war office conferences led directly to the so-called Curragh 'mutiny'. The question of how Paget should deal with possible disaffection amongst the officers was raised at a meeting between French, Ewart, Paget and Seely on 19 March. It was agreed that officers domiciled in Ulster should be allowed to remain behind, but any other officers threatening to resign or refusing to obey orders should be dismissed without pensions. Churchill subsequently explained that the army council gave Paget these principles for his personal guidance, to be used only in the case of 'grave emergencies' arising in the case of individual officers who refused to obey orders. Paget was given no instructions to put these guiding principles as hypothetical questions to the whole body of officers in the Irish Command:
Sir Arthur Paget was never directed to subject the officers under his command to the test of whether they would declare themselves ready to take the offensive in military operations against Ulster, or be dismissed the service—133

Seely undoubtedly did not convey these instructions so clearly to Paget, who gained quite a different impression. Paget seems to have been thoroughly confused by Seely's attempts to distinguish between legal and military obligation, on the one hand, and between hypothetical and actual situations on the other.

The consequences are well known. Paget returned to Ireland in an excited, over-wrought mood, lacking both written instructions and diplomatic finesse. He summoned his seven commanders to a conference in Dublin at 10 a.m. on 20 March. No notes were taken, but several subsequent accounts survive. My account is primarily based on Paget's own report, which naturally presents his foolish behaviour in the most favourable light. His commanders were informed that certain moves were to be carried out, but that Paget did not share the government's view that these were purely precautionary in nature. Paget thought the moves would 'create intense excitement', and that the country 'would be ablaze on the following day', since the moves might lead to active operations against the U.V.F. His rambling and impassioned speech created the impression that 'active operations of an offensive and aggressive character, and on an extensive scale, were to be undertaken at once against Ulster'.

Paget then explained that, apart from officers domiciled in Ulster, those who refused to obey orders to march north would be dismissed. Any officer who 'did not feel that he could obey the orders given him in the eventuality' described, should make this clear and should not attend a second conference that afternoon. Paget subsequently claimed that he had only intended to test the attitude of his senior officers in this way; he had not meant them in turn to put the same hypothetical question to the whole body of officers. He admitted, however, that the expression he used 'undoubtedly might convey the impression that I was putting a pistol to their heads'. Paget did not appear to realize that, by giving his officers any alternatives, he was placing them in a position where choosing to obey the orders implied political approval of them. No alternatives should have been presented to any officers. As one of the seven senior officers informed General Ewart two days
If I had been ordered to Ulster with my regiment we should have carried out any order in spite of conscience and personal feeling, but being given an alternative it altered the whole situation. 140

If Paget had indeed intended only to put these alternatives before the seven senior officers, this was far from clear. Four out of the seven commanders understood that they were ordered to give their subordinate officers the alternative between doing their duty in Ulster or saying immediately that they preferred to be dismissed. 141 The two senior officers of the fifth division, Major-General Fergusson and Brigadier-General Hubert Gough, put these alternatives before their officers. Faced with the conflict between conscience and duty, however, the two commanders themselves reached different conclusions, and influenced their men accordingly. Fergusson, in command of the fifth division, based at the Curragh camp in county Kildare, decided that a soldier's first duty was to obey orders. But feeling was very strong in his division, particularly as it included Gough's third cavalry brigade. Fergusson worked extremely hard to gain support, after delivering the ultimatum. He travelled around the units, warning the officers of the dangerous consequences of disruption in the army, and assuring them that aggressive measures were contemplated. He managed to win round most officers in the division after some painful scenes, but failed to influence the third cavalry brigade. 142

Gough and the officers of his three regiments did not appear at the second conference on 20 March. 143 Instead, they sent a minute to Paget, requesting further information before they could take such crucial decisions at such short notice. They asked for clarification of their orders, explaining that they were fully prepared to undertake duties to preserve order and property. However, if the duty involved the initiation of active military operations against Ulster, the majority would prefer to be dismissed under protest. 144 This attitude was essentially reasonable, in view of the implications of the alternatives. Paget sent a series of telegrams to the war office on 20 and 21 March, stating that most officers in the three regiments of the third cavalry brigade preferred to accept dismissal if ordered north. Gough and the officers commanding the three regiments were ordered to report to the war office immediately. 145
The news reached London by Saturday 21 March. The king told Asquith he was 'grieved beyond words at this disastrous and irreparable catastrophe which has befallen my Army'. He complained bitterly that he had been kept in ignorance of 'yesterday's unhappy occurrences or of the circumstances which led up to them'. At an interview with Seely that morning, the king asked whether Paget's question had been put to the officers in an unfair manner. Seely admitted that Gough was apparently 'suddenly placed in a dilemma with which it was unfair to confront him'. One of Gough's officers wired Churchill for help:

Convinced if tactfully handled Brigade can be saved but if unconditional service demanded from outset Brigadier and practically all officers would accept dismissal.

Appeal to you to ensure sensible handling.

The prime minister himself, on the Friday evening, initially assumed that Gough had influenced his officers to 'combine for a strike'. By the Saturday Asquith had fuller information and thought it more likely that 'there was a misunderstanding'. Gough and his three officers were interviewed at the war office on 22 and 23 March, by Ewart, Macready, French and Seely. It was soon clear that Paget should never have presented the officers with any alternatives, and that direct orders to move to Ulster would have been obeyed without question. Ewart concluded that 'Paget must be mad', for putting a pistol to their heads in such an unnecessary manner.

Paget's behaviour in presenting the officers with a hypothetical question was foolish and inexcusable. Therefore, the army council felt it was vital to reinstate the cavalry brigade officers, with minimum fuss, before the effect of their resignations injured army discipline any further. Unfortunately, by this time Gough was angry, resentful, and suspicious, and quite prepared to leave the army unless he had absolute reassurance that such a situation could never recur. French tried to persuade Gough and his subordinates to return to duty as if nothing had happened, treating the whole incident as a misunderstanding. Gough refused, unless he was given a written pledge that 'they would not be employed to coerce Ulster into acceptance of the Home Rule Bill'. Seely and the army council finally gave in, because they feared 'sympathetic action at Aldershot and throughout the Army', unless the officers were persuaded to return to duty. Accordingly, Ewart drafted a memorandum on 23 March on Seely's instructions, and this was shortly afterwards revised and approved by the cabinet. This merely stated that the army
council were satisfied that the resignations were due to a misunderstanding, and that Paget's questions were only intended to ensure that lawful orders for the protection of lives and property would be obeyed. 151

The sequence of subsequent events is still not entirely clear. 152 Seely returned from his royal audience just as ministers were leaving the cabinet room, and he remained behind talking to Morley. At that moment, Seely received a note from Gough, asking for further reassurance that the army would not be required to enforce the Home Rule Act on Ulster 'under the expression of maintaining law and order.' 153 This note reinforced Seely's fear that the cabinet's revised version of Ewart's document would not satisfy Gough. Seely therefore added two sentences, which became known as the 'peculiar paragraphs', and Morley agreed to the addition, 'only half understanding what it was all about'. 154 The controversial sentences stated that the government maintained the right to use the army to maintain law and order, 'but they have no intention whatever of taking advantage of this right to crush political opposition to the policy or principles of the Home Rule Bill.' 155 This was an incredible admission that the army would not be used to coerce Ulster in order to enforce Home Rule. The amended memorandum was returned to Ewart, with instructions from Seely that he and French should sign it on behalf of the army council. French and Ewart complied, assuming that the document was sanctioned by the cabinet. When this was shown to Gough and the three colonels, they were still not satisfied. They demanded a further pledge that the last paragraph meant that under no circumstances would their troops be called upon to enforce the present Home Rule Bill on Ulster and that we can so assure our Officers'. French agreed to this in writing. 156 Armed with these written assurances, the four officers returned that night in triumph to Dublin.

One Liberal member subsequently described this incident as 'an extraordinary jumble at a Cabinet meeting—the story of which is scarcely credible & if believed indicates grotesque slackness of management—'. 157 Seely's inept foolishness rivalled that of Paget. He had given Gough a document which completely eliminated the government's option to impose Home Rule on Ulster by force. French and Ewart believed they were obeying cabinet orders, and Morley's advanced age helps to explain his part in the affair. Under the circumstances, Gough's behaviour had been entirely reasonable up to the point where he resigned and protested about
Paget's ultimatum. The Curragh officers did not 'mutiny' or refuse to obey orders. However, their own behaviour also became questionable once they took advantage of the situation to demand pledges limiting the government's policy.

By 24 March, the prime minister recognized the full extent of the crisis, after examining all the relevant documents with Ewart, Lloyd George and Churchill. Ewart was:

--- perfectly staggered for it now appeared that Seely must have added off his own bat to a Cabinet document which I and French had signed believing it to be a Cabinet decision and on the strength of which officers had been induced to return to duty. 158

It was too late to recall the document. Asquith was obliged to repudiate Seely's additions in the Commons on 25 March. This course inevitably involved the resignations of Seely, French and Ewart, who were responsible for the fatal document. Seely admitted his mistake in the cabinet on 25 March, justifying his failure to see the significance of the 'peccant paragraphs' on grounds of his 'anxiety to keep the officers & army from wholesale rebellion & resignation'. The prime minister criticised Seely's conduct 'in strong but necessary terms' and the war minister offered his resignation. The cabinet also issued a new Army Order, which essentially repeated the first three paragraphs of the memorandum given to Gough, in stronger and more general terms. 159 Since the cabinet recognized that the two generals signed the 'peccant paragraphs' under a misapprehension as to their origin, considerable efforts were made to discover a formula which would allow them to remain at their posts with honour. However, Asquith finally informed Haldane, with much regret, that we could not possibly survive any recognition, express or implied, of the Gough treaty, and it is equally clear that French will not remain except upon that footing. 160

Meanwhile, Churchill's naval movements made the situation a good deal worse. They helped to support the Unionist charge that Churchill was the mastermind behind the whole Curragh 'plot'. They were also the most awkward part of the operation to explain away in terms of precautionary moves to safeguard arms depots. It was, perhaps, inevitable, that with Churchill effectively in control of the Ulster cabinet committee, a somewhat disproportionate emphasis should have been placed on naval movements. The navy would probably have played no part at
all if Haldane had controlled the operation. But Churchill seized the opportunity to use his beloved navy with undisguised enthusiasm. 161

On 17 March, the full cabinet had confirmed the sub-committee's decision that the third battle squadron should be sent immediately from Gibraltar to engage in naval manoeuvres at Lamlash, 'so that the Admiral can be at the principal points in Ulster in less than 4 hours.' Cruisers were to guard Dundalk, Derry and Carrickfergus, and two or three destroyers sent to the south of Ireland. 162 The latter decisions were perfectly reasonable precautions for guarding arms depots, particularly as it was feared that troops might have to be transported by sea, as the board of the Great Northern Railway might refuse rail transport. 163

The controversial item was the decision to exercise the third battle squadron off the Isle of Arran, so close to Ulster. When the Unionists heard of this, they accused the government of aiming to blockade Ulster by land and sea, making 'a regular Jameson raid on some Ulster stronghold'. 164 Churchill's actual intentions are still far from clear. He claimed that he intended to use the third battle squadron as a reserve support for the army, in case the troop movements precipitated a crisis. The wisdom and tactical value of this manoeuvre as a short-term measure is questionable, especially as the battleships were not scheduled to arrive at Lamlash until the troop movements were completed. A stronger case could be made for placing the squadron at Lamlash as a long-term precaution against the crisis anticipated when the Home Rule Act was passed.

However, there is little evidence that Churchill was using the third battle squadron as an integral part of a sinister conspiracy to subdue Ulster, unknown to the prime minister. Asquith was present in the cabinet when this naval manoeuvre was discussed on 17 March, and informed the king that it was to take place. Moreover, Churchill did not issue the orders for the squadron to move to Lamlash until 19 March, though it took two to three days for the ships to travel from Arosa Bay in Spain to the Isle of Arran. As the prime minister subsequently argued in the Commons, the battle squadron could not have been at Lamlash until at least two days after the precautionary troop movements had been completed. 165 If the First Lord had sinister designs in mind, he might have been expected to issue his orders on 17 March, to ensure that the battleships were already in place before
the troop movements of 20 March. The orders for the third battle squadron to move
to Lamlash were countermanded on 21 March, by which time the ships had only reached
the Scillies. 166

The worst of the controversy might have been avoided, if a full and
clear statement had been issued when the Unionists began asking questions in the
House. The debate on the naval movements raged from 25 March until the end of
April. 167 Opposition suspicions and speculations gained strength from the glaring
gaps and inconsistencies in the statements made in reluctant instalments by Asquith
and Churchill. The prime minister had strange lapses of memory, and made little
effort to acquaint himself with the details of admiralty procedure. Communication
between the two ministers in these weeks evidently left much to be desired.

Asquith's statement to The Times on 23 March sparked off the attack,
for he claimed that the 'so-called naval movements' consisted only in the use of two
small cruisers to transport troops. The impression that Asquith had no knowledge of
the First Lord's sinister plans was apparently confirmed the following day, when the
prime minister replied to a Unionist question, that he knew nothing about eight
destroyers. 168 Asquith can be excused for his ignorance that these destroyers were
attendant ships of the battle squadron, though he might have checked this point with
the admiralty. His forgetfulness concerning the third battle squadron was another
matter, since he informed the king himself on 17 March that the ships were to be ordered
to Lamlash. Moreover, he made no great effort to refute the widely-held belief that
he knew nothing of these original orders. The assumption that he was covering up for
the First Lord's indiscretions was strengthened still further by Asquith's statement
on 22 April. He told the House that he first became aware of the admiralty orders to
the third battle squadron only on 21 March, when he immediately countermanded them.

Lloyd George confided in Riddell that the prime minister 'let Winston down badly
last night, and that Winston is much upset -- the result will be to give a fresh
impetus to the rumours regarding the alleged plot. 169 Quite apart from Asquith's
prior knowledge of the original orders, the implication about the countermanding
instructions was misleading. These were issued by Churchill himself, though with
the prime minister's agreement. 170

Equally incriminating were the statements made about the purposes of
the naval movements. At first, Churchill and Asquith argued that the battle squadron
had been moving to Lamlash to participate in perfectly normal naval manoeuvres, which had no connection with troop movements in Ireland. The Unionists soon discovered, however, that the orders to the battle squadron to move to Lamlash came suddenly on 19 March, and involved a complete change in their previous plans. The two ministers then admitted that it was thought convenient to have the squadron located so close to Ireland, in case the precautionary moves to protect arms depots led to 'bloodshed or serious military opposition'. When it was clear that the troop movements had been carried out without serious disorder, the squadron's orders were countermanded, especially in view of the sensational press reports. These contradictory statements were never reconciled. The government's case would have been far stronger if either minister had stated the perfectly reasonable justification for placing a battle squadron close enough to support the army in dealing with Ulster's threatened resistance to the Home Rule Act. Instead, the government was on the defensive from the start. This was an unusual position for Churchill, but in this case the prime minister's contradictory statements left him little alternative.

THE INQUEST ON THE CURRAGH: FROM TOTAL RETREAT TO PARTIAL RECOVERY

The controversy over the naval movements illustrates the blunders, misunderstandings, and sheer bad luck, which characterized the whole affair. The Curragh incident provoked intermittent uproar in the Commons for the next four weeks. The Unionists quickly accumulated an abundance of ammunition to use against the government. The main charge was that a section of the cabinet deliberately plotted to use the army to provoke Ulster loyalists to violence, thus providing an excuse for crushing their movement. The government's attempt to refute this charge, by dismissing the whole affair as a 'misunderstanding' was unconvincing. This was partly because the ministry was too much on the defensive in the first week of the parliamentary battle. Ministers were over-anxious to explain away the whole episode in terms of the mismanagement of precautionary moves to guard arms depots. In the first few days of their defence, the government entirely failed to justify their legitimate right to make far-reaching preparations to deal with illegal resistance to an Act of parliament. More important, the appalling
blunders and unhappy coincidences which haunted the whole affair seemed too incredible for simple belief. It made far better sense to interpret them as a sinister plot. Even the prime minister's wife believed that; if Asquith's colleagues had not deceived him, then there is something behind all this of which I know nothing.

The government's inept attempts to minimise the gravity of the crisis and explain away some of the worst blunders only increased Opposition suspicions. Confusion was compounded because many ministers knew little, and understood less, about the activities of the Ulster sub-committee. The situation was aggravated further by the long-standing divisions within the cabinet over Ulster policy, which were highlighted now they were obliged to face the issue of Ulster coercion. Confusion, ignorance, and divided counsels provoked a series of stupid mistakes and inconsistent statements, which convinced the Unionists that the government was trying to conceal a wicked conspiracy.

Paget's foolish behaviour might have been accepted as such, if it had not been compounded by Seely's inept activities at the War Office. The Liberals could believe that 'Seely made a series of the most appalling blunders', and lament with Margot Asquith that 'keeping Seely ruined us'. It was harder for the Unionists to accept that Seely's original instructions to Paget were perfectly innocent, when nothing was stated in writing, and the government was so reluctant to yield information. The 'peculiar paragraphs' were interpreted as Seely's desperate attempt to cover up after the plot had failed, 'Seely admitting an error of judgment and Winston using swear words to cover their retreat'.

Opposition suspicions were magnified by the cabinet's technique of saying as little as possible, as reluctantly as possible. On 23 March, Asquith privately informed Bonar Law that 'there has been much exaggeration in the statements which have been published, and the incident at the Curragh (which was due to a misunderstanding) is at an end'. The prime minister and Lloyd George issued a communiqué to the press on 21 March, explaining that the military movements were purely precautionary, and there was no intention to move troops into Ulster except to safeguard arms. Two days later, The Times published a statement by Asquith that the Curragh incident was an 'honest misunderstanding', and the employment of troops against Ulster a contingency which the government hoped would never arise.
Haldane and Morley tried to explain the affair in the Lords on 23 March, in ignorance of much relevant information, including Seely's 'peccant paragraphs'. Morley admitted that the government had no intention of using the army, 'as things stand', to crush political opposition to the Home Rule bill. Haldane committed himself even further:

No orders were issued, no orders are likely to be issued, and no orders will be issued for the [immediate] coercion of Ulster --- but if there is anything which amounts to a menace against the cause of law and order that must be dealt with --- No steps have been taken for an active campaign in Ulster against anybody. Everything that has been done has been in the nature of preventive measures.

Two days later, Haldane feared that he had misinformed parliament in this speech, in ignorance of what had really happened. Seely was convinced that Haldane's statement was even more conciliatory than his own 'peccant paragraphs'. Certainly its admissions were almost equally damaging, especially if read out of context, but at least they were not produced at the dictation of army officers. Haldane's foolish attempt to soften the impact of his statement by inserting the word 'immediate' in the Hansard version of his speech, provoked a further uproar. Morley escaped fairly lightly from his share in drafting the 'peccant paragraphs', probably because of his advanced years. Unfortunately, Churchill's attempt to gloss over this episode contradicted Morley's more honest account, and earned a sharp rebuke from Chamberlain in the Morning Post, condemning the 'severe economy of truth practised by Ministers'.

The government worked hard to avoid giving a detailed account of the war office discussions and the events leading to the Curragh incident. The thin White Paper published on 25 March contained only eight items. It was justly criticised by Sir Almeric Fitzroy as 'a miserable document of shifts and gaps; an explanation that will have to be much explained. It is obviously an essay, and a clumsy one, in apologetics.' The prime minister himself claimed that the first White Paper would give the House 'all the facts so far as they are contained in writing'. Intense Opposition pressure led to the publication of a much enlarged second White Paper a month later, which cast doubts on Asquith's veracity. Lewis Harcourt's wife was probably not alone in her reaction:

I am at sixes & sevens over all this fuss & 'revised'
White Paper - Wouldn't it have been better to give the
whole thing at once. It does look so much better than when it appears like hiding things & contradiction. The papers mangle things so one cannot quite understand. It was not difficult for the Opposition to believe that the cabinet had spent the long interval between the two White Papers attempting to concoct a credible story.

Fitzroy remarked on 28 March that 'the subsequent proceedings of Ministers have given to the whole transaction the character of a shuffling imbecility'. Part of the explanation is revealed by Jack Pease's note on a cabinet held on 31 March: "The discussion recalled incidents, & the small discrepancies of statements made by different ministers - all anxious to be accurate'; they agreed that twenty men observing the same incidents would always produce inconsistencies in their statements. The rest can only be explained by a mixture of confusion, ignorance, and an understandable, if misguided, attempt to conceal the more inept behaviour of those involved.

An appalling parliamentary position was improved slightly because the Unionists did not make the most effective use of their opportunities. As Pease remarked, Bonar Law came to the government's aid 'by filling up holes we had made for burying ourselves.' Asquith made the point more gracefully, when he commented to Venetia Stanley on 25 March:

Never in the whole of my experience at the bar and in Parliament have I seen a really strong and formidable case --- so miserably presented and so coldly backed up --- I am beginning to believe that we are going to score out of what seemed an almost impossible situation.

The Unionists were particularly sensitive to ministerial charges that they had encouraged army officers to allow their political views to interfere with army discipline. Herbert Samuel commented that 'the outburst of passion in the country over the idea that the army could intervene in politics has frightened the Tories', and put new spirit into Liberals throughout the country. Edmund Harvey believed that the blunders of the Opposition had united Liberals and Labour: 'there is a very strong wave of feeling in the country, especially in the North'. After a big Liberal meeting in Yorkshire, Charles Trevelyan also recognized the force of popular indignation and anger about the army. John Burns remarked on the change in the temper in the Commons on 24 March, when a Labour member
launched a powerful attack on the Unionists 'for fostering discontent in army and mutiny amongst officers.' The Opposition's vulnerability on this score made them over-cautious, and more liable to make mistakes.

The business of the 'pecant paragraphs' allowed the Unionists to recover the initiative. A week passed before ministers regained sufficient confidence to fight back strongly. It was not until 30 and 31 March, that Churchill and Grey delivered the powerful statements which should have been made many days earlier. Churchill forcefully denied that the military movements were 'the first step in an insidious but deeply laid strategy scheme for grasping the vital key positions for a general advance on Ulster.' He provided the first detailed explanation of the whole affair, emphasizing that if the Ulster Volunteers had attacked the troops making the precautionary moves, then the wider contingency preparations would indeed have been absolutely necessary. Most important, Churchill at last declared that the government had the right to coerce Ulster under certain circumstances:

So extraordinary is the position we have reached that the doctrine is seriously put forward that the only force which it is legitimate to use is rebellious force. --- But against armed rebellion, if it occurs, force is certainly justified, and it is a duty, and a sacred duty of Ministers while they assume the responsibility of Government - it is their absolute duty - to take all necessary measures in their power and at their disposal to cope with armed rebellion.---

Burns commented that Churchill replied to F.E. Smith 'in first rate fighting style. He crumpled up the "Plot" story and turned the tables against Carson Law and Lansdowne with great effect.'

The following day, Sir Edward Grey adopted the same firm line. He expressed his extreme repugnance at the use of force as a means of settling the Irish problem. Grey explained that the government did not intend to resort to such coercion until after a general election. However, if there were outbreaks in Ulster before then, 'force must be used, and we shall not be the first to use it; we shall be meeting force by force.' If an Ulster provisional government attempted forcibly to defy the imperial parliament, 'then, of course, force must be used. There is no escape from it.' If disorder broke out in Ulster, or an attempt was made to defeat the government, then the army would be used to preserve order.
Grey's speech had a profound effect, which was all the more forceful for the quietly controlled manner of its delivery. He showed that Churchill's stern line had cabinet support, and Grey's comments 'allayed temper & tone of the debates which had for days been at fever heat'. The intervention of Grey and Churchill helped to retrieve a situation which looked almost past hope. They issued a long-overdue reminder to both sides of the House that the government had every right to plan the military operations in question.

It has been argued that Asquith's unexpected assumption of the war office on Seely's resignation had a similarly bracing effect on the party, and also on the army. While the prime minister's casual behaviour since 20 March had exasperated Churchill and Lloyd George, other ministers praised Asquith's ability to remain calm in a crisis. The prime minister's announcement on 30 March, that he felt it his duty to become secretary of state for war, was enthusiastically received on the Liberal benches.

Some of Asquith's colleagues were positively eulogistic. Jack Pease noted that the House was 'taken by surprise by this masterly & plucky stroke of our great leader'. Pease attributed the ministry's survival through the crisis mainly to: --- the consummate quiet masterhand of our great Prime Minister who never lost his temper, & kept his head, & his judgement cool & collected throughout an exciting period'. John Burns admitted that Asquith's 'decisive action has quelled the storm' and paid off well, for 'in many ways this good and generous man rises to the very heights of human elevation'. Herbert Samuel believed that, by stepping into the breach, Asquith had made the party 'not only respect him as they have always done, but love him, as they never did before'. John Morley and Sydney Buxton considered Asquith's surprise move 'the only way out of the mess', and believed the government survived the crisis as a result of their immense belief in the prime minister. A Liberal backbencher commented that Asquith's unexpected announcement 'made a wonderful impression in the House & left us feeling that the tables had been effectively turned'. The prime minister was obliged to vacate his seat in the House immediately, in order to seek re-election in East Fife, - a procedure which was still mandatory on acceptance of any cabinet office. A wildly enthusiastic crowd of Liberals cheered Asquith when he departed from King's Cross station on 3 April.
AN ASQUITH TO THE RESCUE!

War Minister: "Thacker, hold tight! I'll see you through!"
By taking the war office from Seely, the prime minister undoubtedly went some way to restore the army's morale and to revive its shattered confidence in the government. The officers respected Asquith, and were relieved by his public announcement at Ladybank that 'the Army will hear nothing of politics from me, and in return I expect to hear nothing of politics from the Army.' As the Yorkshire Observer commented: '--- one does not exactly see Curragh brigadier-generals coming to dictate terms' to the prime minister.

Even so, the emotional reaction to Asquith's announcement was perhaps a little excessive. The wisdom of the move was questionable in some respects. Asquith had made himself war minister, as well as premier, at a time of acute crisis, and was consequently absent from the Commons from 30 March until 14 April. Bonar Law declared that it was absolutely wrong that the Second Reading of the Home Rule bill should take place in the prime minister's absence at such a critical time. Leopold Amery later derided the move as

--- a climax to the comedy of errors --- Here, at last, was the strong man taking charge --- There was, indeed, nothing in the circumstances, in Asquith's temperament or in the subsequent course of events, to warrant this enthusiasm.

Few of Asquith's colleagues expressed similar reservations, though Haldane was more critical because he knew how much work was required at the war office. He admitted that Asquith's move was very dramatic and useful, but warned that the new war minister would find his task a heavy one. Not many people, apparently, shared Sir Almeric Fitzroy's view that Asquith's decision to become his own war minister was quite extraordinary: 'what, then, will befall the functions of the Premier?'

The rather short-sighted ministerial reaction can probably be explained partly in terms of sheer relief. Morley shared Fitzroy's belief that 'most of the mischief arose from the reluctance of Asquith to be master in his own house.' The prime minister appeared to be taking control in a firm manner that was rare in his management of Irish affairs. Most ministers were also more familiar with other aspects of government, where their high praise of Asquith's talents was often better deserved.
THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE CURRAGH

The government's partial retrieval of the situation was purely parliamentary in nature. Up to 20 March, the ministry's declarations that the army would be used to impose Home Rule on Ulster, if a political compromise was rejected, held a high degree of credibility. This was lost after the Curragh fiasco. When the crisis was at its height on 22 March, even the prime minister admitted the gravity of the military consequences:

The military situation has developed --- and there is no doubt if we were to order a march upon Ulster that about half the officers in the Army - the Navy is more uncertain - would strike. The immediate difficulty in the Curragh can, I think, be arranged, but that is the permanent situation, and it is not a pleasant one.195

Asquith's fears were confirmed a month later by reports from the commanders of the two divisions of the British army in Ireland. Major-General Pulleyn stated that his troops would not enforce Home Rule on an actively reluctant Ulster. Major-General Fergusson agreed that the great majority of officers would refuse to act aggressively against the Ulster Volunteers. He believed that the weak treatment of Gough, combined with the subsequent repudiation of the guarantees he was given, had increased the bitterness, resentment and mistrust of the troops in Ireland. Consequently:

--- the troops can only be depended on to do their duty up to a certain point --- if the situation develops into civil war they will in the end disintegrate. This is tantamount to saying that they are not to be depended on to coerce Ulster into accepting the Home Rule Bill.

Birrell confirmed these reports that army morale was very low, and informed Asquith that even the optimistic General Paget was by no means confident that all the troops would move north if ordered.196 Asquith's assumption of the war office had evidently by no means counter-acted the damage already done.

Before the Curragh affair, troops would almost certainly have obeyed direct orders to march to Ulster, so long as they were presented with no alternatives. But afterwards, it could no longer even be assumed that they would simply obey orders. General Macready was more optimistic than the other commanders that troops would continue to obey orders, but he fully recognized
"THERE'S MANY A SLIP..."
that the cabinet had no confidence that this was so:

The nerves of the Government had been rudely shaken by the Curragh incident -- I have always been devoutly thankful that the question was never put to the test because, with the absurdly inadequate number of troops, any attempts of the U.V.F. to gain their objective by force of arms would have resulted in very serious bloodshed — 197

Macready's opinion was important, since he was given command of the troops in Ulster 'for all purposes connected with the rendering of support to civil power'. He found the whole situation 'so impossible, in view of the numerical weakness of the troops and the nervous excitement in Belfast', that he went to London on 29 April to explain the situation personally to the prime minister. He discovered that the government were unwilling to assert their authority over the Ulstermen, and was informed that there was no intention of reinforcing the garrison in Ulster. By 19 May, Macready was far more anxious, but when he again saw Asquith, he was given the 'heroic instructions', that if Carson proclaimed his provisional government, 'the only course was to remain on the defensive and do nothing'. Even as late as 24 July, when Macready received further instructions from the prime minister:

There was to be no change from the former policy, troops were to 'sit tight' and make no moves of any kind. If a provisional Government was proclaimed the consequential proclamation by Carson would be awaited to enable the Cabinet to determine their next move. A more thoroughly unsatisfactory position for any soldier it is hard to imagine.

The important point then, is that whether or not Macready's estimate of the army's loyalty was correct, the government believed that it could not trust the army. The cabinet assumed that it had lost the military power required either to enforce their original Home Rule policy, or to impose a compromise settlement on their own terms on an unwilling Ulster. The fiasco of 20 March had effectively deprived them of the power to meet force with force. Lord Esher had recognized this two days afterwards:

Of course, the net result of the whole business is that the two instruments the Government possess have broken in their hands. The Home Rule Bill, even if they get it through, is useless against the resistance of Ulster. The army is smashed.
Fitzroy shared Esher's gloomy view of the government's position:

Their cardinal error throughout has been that they never made up their minds, first, whether in the last resort they would coerce Ulster, and, secondly, whether they were able to do so. Owing to maladroit manipulation, the instrument has now broken in their hands before they were ready to use it. 199

Evidently Asquith appreciated these realities at the height of the crisis, though he subsequently regained his customary composure and his myopic complacency. On 25 March, Fitzroy noted that the shock to the prime minister had been terrible: 'George Murray was with him on Sunday, and never saw him so overcome. The folly of having created such a situation, without the power to handle it successfully, is incalculable.' A month later, Asquith told Jack Pease that 'we must settle somehow', since they could not rely on the army if they tried to force the Home Rule bill through parliament and precipitated riots. Early in May, Morley revealed to Lord Esher that 'Asquith had stated at the Cabinet that the army could not be used in or against Ulster. 200

The Curragh crisis also brought the cabinet at last face to face with the issue of coercion, and aggravated the existing divisions. Some ministers refused to accept the stark implications of the Curragh affair. Lord Crewe considered the press reports on the subject 'amazingly distorted and exaggerated.' He continued to insist that the possibility of violence in Ulster was remote: 'I do not believe that the untoward Army trouble will have any real effect in preventing some sort of deal over Ireland.' Herbert Samuel shared the complacent view that an agreement would be reached 'by the usual process of bargaining between the two Houses'. 201 A few ministers wanted to stand by Redmond and 'damn the consequences.' 202 Simon deplored the 'ministry's weakness, which inevitably gave Carson the upper hand: 'whereas if we said we were going on & got our own people to believe us, C[arson], wd. regard a Provisional Government as a false step.' John Burns also claimed that Ireland would be 'permanently tranquillised' if the government determined to see their policy triumph, and immediately handled the situation 'very forcibly'. 203 But this kind of attitude was more common among the rank and file than in the cabinet. As Lloyd George told the king on 15 May: 'at the present time the Liberal Party as a whole are against any concessions; they do not realise the danger of the situation'. The chancellor himself was convinced that
civil war was inevitable if a political compromise was not reached. 204

The Curragh fiasco effectively strengthened the influence of that section of the cabinet, led by Morley and Grey, which had always opposed the use of force against Ulster. This was demonstrated only too clearly by General Macready's account of the government's feeble, defensive instructions for conducting military policy in Ulster. Morley regularly threatened to resign 'if a drop of blood is shed in Ulster.' 205 He believed that the Curragh incident gave 'an immense momentum to the pacifists in the Cabinet and on both sides of the House of Commons'. The crisis convinced him that 'the Carsonites will get everything they ask for'. After a cabinet on 13 May, Morley confided in Fitzroy that the majority of ministers favoured 'purchasing peace in the last resort on Carson's terms'. 206 Six weeks later, Dillon was dismayed to learn Morley's opinion that 'Carson has won & the sooner the public know it the better'. Jack Pease also concluded that 'the Irish Nationalists must see they must exclude Ulster till it was ready to come in without coercion'. 207

Sir Edward Grey's previous misgivings about the coercion of Ulster were powerfully reinforced by the Curragh incident. His views had a profound influence on the prime minister and the cabinet. Grey wrote to Asquith at the height of the crisis on 23 March, insisting that 'we cannot and ought not to use force to bring the Home Rule Bill into operation till the opinion of the country has been taken.' He felt that an immediate public statement to this effect would relieve the tension and prevent more misunderstandings:

> Probably, till such a statement is made, we shall be confronted with one unforeseen incident after another, each of which will weaken our hands and bring the situation nearer to becoming impossible ---

This accounted for the qualifications in the foreign secretary's otherwise firm speech of 31 March, which led to ambiguity as to when precisely force was to be used. 208

Two months later, on 20 May, Grey warned Asquith even more strongly, that the cabinet's position regarding the coercion of Ulster should be made absolutely explicit in a public statement:

> The Cabinet has not and has never had, I believe, the intention of using armed force to impose upon the Protestant Counties of Ulster summary submission to Nationalist Home Rule, but it has
been assumed and believed that this was our intention; in this belief the Protestants of Ulster have made and are still making all their preparations to resist force by force; and from this belief has arisen a great part of the trouble in Ulster and the whole of the trouble in the Army. As things are at present I think we run an increasing risk of finding ourselves unable to use force when we ought to use it, and of being despised for not resorting to the use of force when it would not be either necessary or politic to use it.

Grey believed that a more emphatic explanation of their intentions would diminish the risk of outbreaks in Ulster, and would check the growth of false expectations among their supporters.

The gun-running coup organised by the Ulster Volunteer Force on the night of 24-25 April dramatically underlined the consequences of the Curragh. About 35,000 rifles were landed at Larne and distributed throughout north-east Ulster in a brilliantly organized operation. The secret was remarkably well kept, the volunteers encountered no effective resistance, and the news did not reach Dublin Castle until the following morning. Viewed from a strictly limited parliamentary perspective, this coup could be interpreted as giving the government a tactical advantage. Churchill commented that the Ulstermen 'have put themselves entirely in the wrong, & justified to the full the modest precautions wh. were taken' in March. It was perfectly true that the Larne gun-running coup was a far more comprehensive exercise in illegality than anything contemplated by the government. Birrell remarked that 'as Plotters, they beat us hollow'. But the government might have shown more anxiety about the practical long-term consequences than about scoring a debating point.

The gun-running exploit at Larne left the U.V.F. more effectively armed at precisely the time when the government's military confidence had been shattered. Leopold Amery commented:

The challenge to the Government was direct and unmistakable. For a night all Government services had been suspended and the Government's servants forcibly coerced, while measures of the most effective character were being carried out to provide Ulster with the means of wrecking the Government's policy. No self-respecting Government could afford to be treated with such contumely.
General Macready was not in the least surprised at the news of the coup. He believed that 'the continued policy of drift had enfeebled the resources at the disposal of the Government in the North of Ireland to an extent which gave the Orangemen practically a free hand'.

Moreover, the cabinet's weak and vacillating reaction to the coup only encouraged Ulster Unionist recalcitrance. The Lord Lieutenant felt strongly that a definite announcement should be made that the government intended to arrest all the Larne ringleaders. Lord Aberdeen argued that:

--- any appearance of doubt or hesitation at this juncture will not only bring disaster to the Government, but will leave a stigma which would afterwards be felt to be almost intolerable.

Macready shared the view that strong action might have led to bloodshed, but might have allowed the government to regain its prestige and recover some measure of control.

Instead, the government wavered for five days, while Asquith sought legal opinions. Initially the cabinet agreed that such an unprecedented provocation required 'instant & effective action'. But after three more cabinet meetings, Asquith decided on 30 April against prosecuting the gun-runners, or even moving extra troops into Ulster. Pease noted that the party was anxious that a strong line should be taken, but the cabinet felt 'tact & patience' were required.

The chief secretary advised against criminal proceedings, pointing out the practical difficulties involved in prosecuting such large numbers of the 'representative Ulster. 'Rabble'.' Birrell was influenced by the views of the Nationalist leaders, and by police reports from Belfast indicating that:

any attempt to arrest leaders or to seize the arms of the Ulster Volunteers would without doubt lead to bloodshed and precipitate what would practically amount to war all over Ulster.

A carefully timed conciliatory statement by Carson in the Commons on 29 April made certain that the cabinet would once again retreat. No action was taken to prosecute the gun-runners, or to strengthen the armed forces in Ireland. Yet Birrell knew as well as Macready that the Irish police were outnumbered throughout Ulster, and that a substantial increase in military strength
was necessary to protect and support them against the U.D.F. The Curragh crisis left the government demoralised, divided, and bereft of the means to enforce its policy. The two armies continued to organise in Ireland, and the Larne coup increased the amount of force required to impose a settlement, just when Asquith's ability to command a force was called into question. The Curragh crisis compounded the confusion within the cabinet over the coercion of Ulster. The optimists continued to hope for the best, with no idea how this might be achieved. The realists accepted the implications of the Curragh, but saw absolutely no solution. Most ministers believed the Curragh crisis had effectively removed their option to proceed with the original bill and coerce Ulster into submission if necessary. Instead, they had little choice but to seek a political settlement on Unionist terms. They had no clear idea what they would do if the pressures acting on the Opposition prevented such a settlement. The Liberal government's Home Rule policy was undermined far more effectively by the Curragh crisis than by the intervention of the First World War.
CHAPTER VIII.

NOTES


2. A. Chamberlain, Politics from Inside, p. 609. See also Birrell to Asquith, 8 Sept. 1913, MS. Asquith 38, fos. 126-8, drawing a distinction between 'riots and disturbances' and 'civil war'; Asquith's memorandum for king, c. mid-Sept. 1913, MS. Asquith 38, fos. 164-173, stating that it was a 'misuse of terms to speak of what is likely to happen as Civil War'.


7. C. P. Scott diary, 22 Jan. 1914, B.L. Add. MS. 50901, fo. 100.


9. See e.g. Law to Carson, 18 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 33/5/57; memorandum of Law's talk with Churchill, 18 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 33/5/57; memorandum by Carson on plan for proclaiming the provisional government through the magistrates, N.D. (c. May 1914), B.L.P. 33/2/40; Law's memorandum, 8 Oct. 1913, B.L.P. 33/5/68.

10. Harold Spender used his influence, as requested, by forwarding this letter to Lloyd George, [Oct. ?] 1913, Lloyd George Papers, C/101/50. See also Pease diary, II, fo. 80, 13 Nov. 1913, for Seely's statement that 'the soldiery could be relied on to overcome Ulster's opposition.

11. See e.g. Law's memorandum, 8 Oct. 1913, B.L.P. 33/5/68.


14. Munro-Ferguson to wife, 5 Aug. 1911, Novar Papers, file 39; Gladstone to Samuel, 6 May 1914, H. Gladstone Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 45992, fos. 279-82 Morley described Seely as 'not a Socrates', Fitzroy, Memsies, II, 542.

15. C. Repington to Haldane, 27 Nov. 1912, Haldane Papers, N.L.S. MS. 5909, fos. 272-3; some discount should be allowed here for Repington's flattery of Haldane.


17. Field Marshall Roberts' Memorandum, N.D., Milner Papers, Box 100.

18. John Burns described a Speaker's dinner a month before the Curragh incident, at which Churchill and Seely sat side by side '--- Mars & Neptune w. medals on breasts - both from Harrow & both ex-Tories, as chirupy as 2 boys at a Tuck shop' (Burns diary, 20 Feb. 1914, B.L. Add. MS. 46336, fo. 48).

19. Richard Holt remarked that Churchill had great influence on Seely, who was a much weaker character. (Holt diary, 10 April 1914).

20. Carson's speech at Hotel Cecil, 10 May 1912, Gwynn, Redmond, p. 206; Roberts to Law, 14 Sept. 1913, B.L.P. 30/2/11, and 4 Jan. 1914, B.L.P. 31/2/15; Law to Roberts, 27 Jan. 1914, B.L.P. 34/1/21; Roberts to Milner, 2 Nov. 1913, Milner Papers, Box 195.


25. See e.g. Stewart, Ulster Crisis, pp. 73, 130-40. See Hansard, LX, 905-11 (30 March 1914), for Churchill's detailed accusations that the Opposition attempted to seduce the army, to prevent its use against Ulster.


27. Carson at Manchester, The Times, 4 Dec. 1913; Nation, 6 Dec. 1913. See also Dicey to Strachey, 14 July 1913, Strachey Papers, S/5/6/12, and Strachey to
27. Esher to George V, 29 Sept. 1913, Esher, Journals, III, 139-141; see also Lord Stamfordham’s diary, 17 Sept. 1913, R.S.C., Churchill, II, Companion, pp. 1399-1400, for Churchill’s equally tough attitude.

28. Seely’s memorandum, printed for cabinet use, Position of the Army with regard to the situation in Ulster, 9 Dec. 1913, MS. Asquith 40, fos. 1-4; Seely’s earlier draft, with his own corrections, MS. Mottistone 22, fos. 158-9. See also Memorandum of an interview between the Secretary of State for War and the General Officers Commanding-in-Chief, 16 Dec. 1913, MS. Mottistone 22, fos. 152-3. The two documents are almost identical.

29. Ibid.

30. See e.g. General Macready’s misgivings about Seely’s directive, Macready, Annals of an Active Life, I, 157.

31. See Blake, Bonar Law, pp. 173-7, 180-2, for an excellent account of the significance of this legislation, and the Unionist campaign to amend it. See also The Necessity of the Army Act, 10 March 1914, by Sir John Simon, MS. Mottistone 16, fos. 185-6; P.R.O. Cab. 37/119/41.

32. Law’s letter to The Times, 27 July 1911.

33. Memorandum by Selborne and R. Cecil, 5 June 1913, MS. Selborne 77, fos. 41-7; B.L.P. 32/3/1. Selborne to Law, 20 July 1914, B.L.P. 26/5/34.

34. Law to Sir Robert Finlay, prominent Unionist lawyer, 27 Jan. 1914, asking for a legal opinion on this course, B.L.P. 34/1/20. See also Law to Lord Roberts, 27 Jan. 1914, B.L.P. 34/1/21; Balfour to Law, 3 Feb. 1914, B.L.P. 31/3/7; Law to Balfour, 30 Jan. 1914, Balfour Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 49693, fos. 139-40; B.L.P. 34/1/26.

35. Law to Sir Henry Craik, 16 March 1914, B.L.P. 34/2/39.

36. Law to Lansdowne, 30 Jan. 1914, B.L.P. 34/1/25; Balfour Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 49693, fos. 140-5. Law to Balfour, 5 Feb. 1914, Balfour Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 49693, fo. 158; B.L.P. 34/1/31. Lansdowne to Balfour, 6 March 1914; Balfour Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 49730, fos. 268-9. Lansdowne to Law, 1 Feb. 1914, B.L.P. 31/3/1. Law to Lansdowne, 2 Feb. 1914, B.L.P. 34/1/28; Balfour to Law, 3 Feb. 1914, B.L.P. 31/3/7; Balfour Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 49693, fos. 146-157.

37. See e.g. Sir Henry Craik to Law, 13 March 1914, B.L.P. 31/4/27. J.H. Howell to Law, 8 March 1914, B.L.P. 31/4/44. St. Loe Strachey to Goldman, M.P., 19 March 1914, Strachey Papers, S/18/1/1. Law to J.P. Croal, editor of Scotsman, 20 March 1914, B.L.P. 34/2/44.

38. See e.g. Law to Hugh Cecil, 3 Feb. 1914, commenting that the press was a great difficulty with them, ‘for our Press is both unreliable and dangerous —— The
difficulty in all such cases, as you know, is Northcliffe.' (B.L.D. 34/1/29.)


40. Asquith's cabinet letter to king, 12 March 1914, MS. Asquith 7, fo. 103.

41. St. Loe Strachey to Curzon, 23 March 1914, Curzon MSS, Eur. F 112/95. The Liberals raised this charge in any case (see e.g. Hansard, LX, 905-II, for Churchill's accusations, 30 March 1914); but they were less damaging.

42. Macready, Annals of an Active Life, I, 171; Callwell, Wilson, I, 131. Margot Asquith privately urged Mrs. Illingworth to use her influence with her husband to get Macready moved to Ireland (3 Oct. 1913, Illingworth Papers).

43. Asquith's cabinet letter to king, 26 Nov. 1913, MS. Asquith 7, fo. 78.


45. Asquith's cabinet letter to king, 2 Dec. 1913, MS. Asquith 7, fo. 81.


47. Intelligence Notes, 1913, p. 33.


50. See e.g. Gwynn, Redmond, p. 246.

51. See Stewart, Ulster Crisis, pp. 107 ff. for detailed examination of this development.

52. C.P. Trevelyon to W. Runciman, 3 Nov. 1913, Runciman Papers, R/1/17. See also C.R. Addison to Lloyd George, 10 Nov. 1913, and Lloyd George's reply, 11 Nov. 1913, Lloyd George Papers, C/10/2/24.

53. Pease diary, II, fo. 79, 11 Nov. 1913. The same view was also expressed by the Nation, 6 Sept. 1913.

54. Birrell to Asquith, 30 August 1913, MS. Asquith 38, fos. 122-5.

55. See e.g. Harold Spender to Lloyd George, 22 Sept. 1913, Lloyd George Papers, C/9/5/38; J.A. Spender, The Public Life, II, III. Morley at first advocated striking Carson's name from the list of privy councillors (Morley to Rosebery, 19 Sept. 1913, Rosebery Papers, N.L.S. MS. 10048, fo. 42), but by Dec. 1913...
favour'd prosecution (Fitzroy, Memoirs, II, 528, 4 Dec. 1913.)


58. Illegali ties in Ulster, 29 Nov. 1913, J.A.S., MS. Mottistone 15, fos. 447–8; P.R.O. Cab. 37/117/82. Birrell received the same legal opinion from the Irish attorney-general in autumn 1913 (Intelligence Notes 1913, pp. 22–3, 31.)

59. Lord Oxford and Asquith, Fifty Years of Parliament, (2 vols., 1926), II, 139–142. Asquith's recollection that the cabinet judgement was 'quite unanimous and never wavered' is open to question, for Morley, at least, disapproved (Fitzroy, Memoirs, II, 528.) See also Nation, 20 Sept. 1913: 'No Government could willingly prosecute a political opponent, and no sensible Administration would care to risk an unsuccessful prosecution before a Belfast or even a Dublin jury'.

60. See e.g. Colvin, Carson, II, 309–310, for claims that McKenna was 'supposed to be active in the business' of preparing warrants, despite the opposition of Asquith, Crewe and Grey; Colvin's evidence is exceptionally flimsy (pp. 310–311). See also Stewart, Ulster Crisis, pp. 151–3; and Observer, 19 March 1914, for unsubstantiated statement that the government intended to issue about 200 warrants for the arrest of the Ulster leaders.

61. Carson to Law, 20 March 1914, B.L.P. 32/1/56. Bonar Law told J.P. Croal (editor of Scotsman), 20 March 1914, that he never believed the government intended to arrest the Ulster leaders 'for it is contrary to Asquith's whole nature to precipitate anything, and Illingworth told Talbot last night that there was nothing in it!' (B.L.P. 34/2/44).

62. The Times, 23 March 1914.


64. See e.g. Asquith on Third Reading, 1913: 'I hope and believe that it will never be necessary to apply coercion to Ulster!' (Hansard, LV, 91). Birrell at Bristol stated that the British army would not be used to 'mow down' peaceful Ulster Protestants (The Times, 12 Feb. 1913), and on Second Reading, 1913, expressed his disbelief that the occasion would ever arise (Hansard, LIII, 1581).

65. See e.g. Law's speech, Hansard, LV, 80.


69. Asquith to Birrell, 2 Sept. 1913, points noted on back of Birrell to Asquith, 30 Aug. 1913, MS. Asquith 38, fo. 125.
70. Asquith to king, 1 Oct. 1913, MS. Asquith 38, fos. 216-7.


72. Hansard, LVIII, 270 (1 Feb. 1914, Lloyd George).

73. Redmond's speech, The Times, 18 March 1914.

74. Esher to king, 29 Sept. 1913 and 6 Jan. 1914, Esher, Journals, III, 139-41 and 151-2.


76. Fitzroy, Memoirs, II, 548 (29 April 1914). See also W. S. Blunt, My Diaries Being a Personal Narrative of Events 1888-1914 (2 vols, New York, 1923), II, 423, for the view that the decisions of March 1914 should have been taken a year earlier.

77. Stewart, Ulster Crisis, p. 108; Ryan, Mutiny at Curragh, p. 17.

78. Blake, Bonar Law, p. 186. See also, Blake, 'The Curragh Incident and U.D.I.', Listener, 21 March 1914; Stewart, Ulster Crisis, p. 175; Fergusson, Curragh Incident, pp. 25-6.


80. See e.g. Blake, Bonar Law, p. 185; Colvin, Carson, II, 303.

81. Lloyd George's recollection of conversation with Churchill, as told to Lord Riddell, More Pages, pp. 203-4 (14 March 1914).

82. The Times, 16 March 1914. See Hansard, LX, 904, for Churchill's powerful defence of his speech, on 30 March 1914.

83. Lloyd George's recollection of conversation with Asquith, Riddell, More Pages, pp. 203-4 (14 March 1914).

84. Hansard, LIX, 1662.

85. Morley's account of a luncheon at 10 Downing St., Fitzroy, Memoirs, II, 541.

86. Further Notes on the Movement in Ulster, printed 6 March 1914, circulated with a note by Birrell, MS. Mottistone 16, fos. 177-81; P.R.O.: Cab. 37/119/36.

87. Ibid., p. 7.

88. Ibid., pp. 6-7.
89. See e.g. Asquith's reply to Locker-Lampson's question, 27 April 1914, Hansard, LXI, 1330; Birrell's reply to F. Hall, 30 March 1914, ibid., 852. The government revealed only that police reports indicated that 'evil disposed persons' were contemplating the seizure of arms and arms depots in Ulster. (Correspondence Relating to Recent Events in the Irish Command, Cd. 7329, April 1914, MS. Mottistone 22, fos. 385-92.)

90. See e.g. Fergusson, Curragh Incident, pp. 25-6; Blake, Bonar Law, p. 186; Blake, 'The Curragh Incident and U.D.I.', Listener, 21 March 1974; Stewart, Ulster Crisis, p. 175. Even Gwynn, Redmond, p. 289, commented that 'the immediate pretext for these sudden orders is not apparent'.

91. Intelligence Notes, 1913, p. 36.

92. Stewart, Ulster Crisis, pp. 126-8, describes this document in considerable detail. Stewart either did not know of Birrell's cabinet paper, Further Notes on the Movement in Ulster (March 1914), or did not connect the information with the 'No. 1 Scheme'. See also document sent by Kincaid Smith to Nicholson, 9 April 1914, MS. Mottistone 22, fos. 340-41, which refers to 'No. 1 mobilization'.


94. 'The Volunteers of Ulster, The Times, 18, 19 March 1914.

95. Callwell, Wilson, I, 132 (13 and 15 Nov. 1913); Fergusson, Curragh Incident, pp. 25-6.

96. Asquith's cabinet letter to king, 12 March 1914, MS. Asquith 7, fo. 103; see also Haldane to mother, 11 March 1914, Haldane Papers, N. L. S. MS. 5991.

97. Morley to Crewe, 11 March 1914, Crewe Papers, C/37. Asquith, by contrast, characteristically dismissed the meeting as 'a rather tame affair'. (Asquith to Venetia Stanley, quoted in Jenkins, Asquith, p. 306).

98. 'The Plot against Ulster', Daily Mail, 18 April 1914; 'The Plot that Failed', The Times, 27 April 1914; L.S. Amery, The Plot Against Ulster, Union Defence League Pamphlet, Milner Papers, Box 100.

99. See e.g. Carson to Law, 'Friday' [20 March], 23 and 26 March 1914, B. L. P. 32/1/36, 54, 65, commenting that the government possibly wanted 'to provoke an outbreak', and 'to destroy our movement'. See also Long to Law, 23 March 1914, B. L. P. 32/1/63; Midleton to Law, 3 April 1914, B. L. P. 32/2/9; H.A. Gwynne to Law, 11 April 1914, B. L. P. 32/2/29; Derby to Law, 22 March 1914, B. L. P. 32/1/43.

100. Blake, 'The Curragh Incident and U.D.I.', Listener, 21 March 1974. See also Fergusson, Curragh Incident, p. 212; Blake, Bonar Law, p. 205: 'The circumstantial evidence for the Unionists' suspicions was very strong and
it is hard to believe that the whole affair was merely a misunderstanding'. Stewart, Ulster Crisis, p. 175, and Ryan, Mutiny at Curragh, pp. 180–191, have more cautiously evaded final judgement, though Stewart has no doubt ‘that an operation was planned for the coercion of Ulster’. Jenkins, Asquith, on the other hand, is the only source which simply assumes that no plot existed.

101. Hansard, LX, 898–904 (Churchill); Burns diary, 30 March and 22 April 1914, B.L. Add. MS. 46336, fos. 69, 80.


103. Manchester Guardian, 4 May 1912.

104. Riddell, More Pages, p.209 (20 April 1914); Fitzroy, Memoirs, II, 542 (29 April 1914); Mildred to Sydney Buxton, 26 March 1914, Buxton Papers.


106. Long's memorandum, 27 March 1914, B.L.P. 39/2/22; Balfour to a correspondent, 24 March 1914, Balfour Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 49863, fos. 154–5; Blake, 'Curragh Incident', Listener, 21 March 1914.

107. Haldane to mother, N.D. [c. end March 1914], quoted in Maurice, Haldane, I, 344; Birrell to Seely, 2 April 1914, MS. Mottistone 22, fos. 334–5.


109. Asquith's cabinet letter to king, 12 March 1914, MS. Asquith 7, fo. 103. Blake expressed puzzlement concerning the reasons for creating this sub-committee ('Curragh Incident', Listener, 21 March 1914).

110. Esher, Journals, III, 159 (22 March 1914); Fitzroy, Memoirs, II, 544 (25 March); L.S. Amery, The Plot Against Ulster, Union Defence League pamphlet, Milner Papers, Box 100. See also Derby to Law, 22 March 1914, B.L.P. 32/1/43; Balfour to Amery, 24 March 1914, Balfour Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 49863, fos. 154–5; W.S. Blunt, My Diaries, II, 423.

111. Seely's memorandum, 16 March 1914, MS. Asquith 40, fo. 5.

112. B.B. Cubitt (secretary of the army council) to Paget, 14 March 1914, MS. Asquith 40, fo. 6; printed and circulated to cabinet by Seely, 17 March, MS. Mottistone 22, fos. 195–203; subsequently printed in Correspondence Relating to Recent

113. Seely to Paget, 16 March 1914, Correspondence Relating to Recent Events in the Irish Command, Cd. 7329, 22 April 1914, MS. Mottistone 22, fos. 385-92 (cited henceforth as White Paper II, Cd. 7329).

114. Paget to Seely, 17 March 1914, White Paper II, Cd. 7329. It is significant that neither the telegram nor the letter were printed in the first White Paper of 23 March.

115. Pease diary, II, fo. 85, 17 March (Pease missed the cabinet and probably based this entry on Lloyd George's information). The sub-committee's report appears to have been based on the brief memorandum prepared the previous day by Seely (MS. Asquith 40, fo. 5).

116. This account is pieced together from the following fragmentary sources on the cabinet discussion: Asquith's cabinet letter to king, 18 March 1914, MS. Asquith 7, fos. 105-6; Seely's memorandum, 16 March 1914, MS. Asquith 40, fo. 5; Runciman's pencilled cabinet note, 17 March 1914, MS. Runciman, R/11/5; Pease diary, II, fo. 85, 17 March 1914.

117. Memoranda by Seely, 18-19 March 1914, MS. Asquith 40, fos. 8-10. See e.g. comments by Ferguson, Curragh Incident, p. 212.

118. Apart from Seely's memoranda, few other sources may be considered at all reliable. These include Churchill's account in his Commons' speech on 30 March 1914 (Hansard, LX, 898-902). This was carefully prepared in collaboration with Paget, (see Churchill's memorandum, c. 25 March 1914, MS. Asquith 40, fos. 88-94; Paget's lengthy commentary on it, 28 March, MS. Asquith 40, fos. 85-7, 85-100, and MS. Mottistone 22, fos. 268-74.) The speech was approved by Asquith and Seely (see Seely to Churchill, 27 March, MS. Mottistone 22, fos. 265-6). Other useful sources are: H.A. Gwynne's memorandum of conversation with Sir John French [mid April 1914], forwarded to Law, 22 April, B.L.P. 39/2/25; extracts from Ewart's diary quoted by J. Gooch, 'The War Office and the Curragh Incident', B.I.H.R., XLVI (Nov. 1973), 202-7. Gwynne's account needs to be used with caution, as does Sir Henry Wilson's diary, 18 March 1914.

119. See Gwynne's memorandum, B.L.P. 39/2/25. A second draft of Seely's memorandum, 19 March 1914, MS. Asquith 49, fo. 10, contains marginal comments in red ink, noting Asquith's agreement to the main decisions. See also telegram, MS. Mottistone 22, for. 413, stating that Paget only saw the prime minister on 18 March.

120. See e.g. The Times, 29 April 1914; for Unionist speculations see: H.A. Gwynne to Law, 27 April 1914, B.L.P. 32/2/61; Walter Long's memorandum, 27 March 1914, B.L.P. 39/2/22; Balfour to L.S. Amery, 24 March 1914, Balfour Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 49863, fos. 154-5.
121. Seely's two memoranda, 18 March 1914, MS. Asquith 40, fos. 8-10. For discussion on the significance of abandoning Victoria Barracks, see Stewart, Ulster Crisis, pp. 145-6; Fergusson, Curragh Incident, Appendix A, p. 220; Gwynn, Redmond, p. 289.


123. Seely's memoranda, 18 March 1914, MS. Asquith 40, fos. 8-10.

124. Simon to Seely, 19 March 1914, MS. Asquith 40, fos. 13-14. The title was altered to 'General Officer Commanding the Belfast District'.

125. H.A. Gwynne's memorandum of conversation with French, B.L.P. 39/2/25.


127. Ibid. Churchill had intended to say that no one believed these precautionary moves to be provocative, but Paget disputed this interpretation, citing his 17 March letter to the war office (Paget's memorandum, MS. Asquith 40, fos. 85-7, 95-100).


129. See e.g. Gwynne's memorandum, B.L.P. 39/2/25.

130. Riddell, More Pages, p. 269 (20 April 1914).

131. Amery to Law, 3 April 1914, B.L.P. 32/2/10.


133. Churchill's memorandum, [c. 25 March 1914], MS. Asquith 40, fos. 88-94. See also Riddell, More Pages, p. 266 (29 March) for French's statement: 'Paget had no instructions or authority from me to put the questions he addressed to Gough and the others'.

134. See the sources cited in note 1. above.

135. See Fergusson, Curragh Incident, pp. 32-4, for Paget's personality and weaknesses.


137. Churchill's memorandum, [c. 25 March], MS. Asquith 40, fos. 88-94.

139. Paget's earlier draft statement, 28 March 1914, MS. Mottistone 22, fos. 268-274.

140. Colonel MacEwen's statement, Notes by the Adjutant General, 22 March 1914, MS. Asquith 40, fos. 69-72. For similar sentiments, see e.g. J.J. Pawson to Law, 29 March 1914, B.L.P. 32/1/82.

141. Paget's statement, 2 April 1914, White Paper II, Cd. 7329; see Fergusson's account, Ryan, Mutiny at Curragh, p. 132.

142. Statement of the G.O.C., 5th division [Fergusson], dated 27 March 1914, MS. Asquith 40, fos. 104-6. For detailed account of Fergusson's part, see Fergusson, Curragh Incident, passim, and Ryan, Mutiny at Curragh, pp. 144-6. Although the cavalry brigade was attached to the fifth division, it was under direct orders from Paget.

143. For details see: Instructions Received by Sir Arthur Paget from the Government, so far as they were communicated to officers present at the Second Conference on 20 March, 1914, N.D., A. Paget, MS. Asquith 40, fos. 25-26; Fergusson, Curragh Incident, pp. 76-78; Ryan, Mutiny at Curragh, pp. 135-136.

144. Gough to Paget, 20 March 1914, MS. Mottistone 22, fo. 20 (printed in both White Papers). See notes by Ewart on his interview with Gough, 22 March 1914, MS. Asquith 40, fos. 69-72, for Gough's protest. See also B.L.P. 39/2/19, for typed copies of statements by army officers re. interviews on 20 March.


146. George V to Asquith, 21 March 1914, MS. Asquith 40, fos. 27-8; memorandum by Seely of his interview with the king, 21 March 1914, MS. Asquith 40, fos. 32-7.


149. Notes by J.S. Ewart, Adjutant-General, on his interview with Gough, McEwen, Parker and Hogg [Macready also present], 22 March 1914, MS. Asquith 40, fos. 69-72; Ewart diary, 22 March, Gooch, 'The War Office and the Curragh Incident', B.L.H.R., XLVI (Nov. 1973), 204.

150. Ewart diary, 22-23 March, ibid. See also Ryan, Mutiny at Curragh, pp. 151-5, for details.

151. Asquith's cabinet letter to king, 24 March 1914, MS. Asquith 7, fo. 107. For the complete version of the army council memorandum, 23 March 1914, see MS. Mottistone 22, fo. 231; White Paper II, Cd. 7329.
152. For conflicting accounts, see Pease diary, II, fos. 86-7, 23 March 1914; W.S. Blunt, My Diaries, II, 423; Mottistone, Adventure, passim; Runciman's pencilled annotations on White Paper I, Cd. 7318, MS. Runciman, R/11/5; Ryan, Mutiny at Curragh, pp. 153-5; Ewart diary, Gooch, B.I.H.R., XLVI, 204-5.

153. Gough to Ewart, 23 March 1914, White Papers I and II, Cd. 7318 and 7329. This appears to be the letter sent to Seely in the cabinet room, mentioned in Ewart diary, 23 March (Gooch, B.I.H.R., XLVI, 204) and Pease diary, 24 March (II, fo. 87).

154. Pease diary, II, fos. 86-7, 23 March 1914; W.S. Blunt, My Diaries, II, 423 (information obtained through one of Asquith's private secretaries, Baker).


156. Note signed by Gough, 23 March 1914, with statement 'This is how I read it' signed below by French, MS. Mottistone 22, fo. 232. See also Ewart diary, 23 March 1914, Gooch, B.I.H.R., XLVI, 204-5.

157. Richard Holt diary, 10 April 1914.


159. Asquith's cabinet letter to king, 28 March 1914, MS. Asquith 7, fo. 109; Pease diary, II, fos. 87-8, 25 March 1914. Riddell noted: 'Painful scene at the Cabinet, I hear, when the P. M. lectured Seely on the enormity of his offence' (Riddell, More Pages, pp. 204-5). See MS. Mottistone 22, fo. 263 and B.L.P. 39/2/21, for copies of new Army Order.

160. Asquith to Haldane, 29 March 1914, Haldane Papers, N.L.S. MS. 5910, fos. 180-81. On attempts to save French and Ewart see also e.g. memorandum by Seely, 26 March 1914, MS. Asquith 40, fos. 80-82; French to Asquith [drafted by Haldane c. 28 March], Haldane Papers, N.L.S. MS. 5910, fos. 186-7; Beauchamp to Crewe, 27 March, Crewe Papers, C/2; Lloyd George to Sir Edward Russell, 26 March, Lloyd George Papers, C/7/6/10.

161. Mrs. Lucy Masterman exaggerated only slightly when she commented: 'When Churchill went to the Admiralty he got lost to almost every political question. L.G. complained that 'he pins me in the corner and talks to me about his blasted ships!' (Masterman interview, 3 Feb. 1974). For the extremely hostile view of a Unionist naval officer, see Lt.-Col. E. Laurie to L.S. Amery, 27 March 1914, Milner Papers, Box 100.

162. Runciman's cabinet note, 17 March 1914, Runciman Papers, R/11/5; Seely's memorandum, 16 March 1914, MS. Asquith 40, fo. 5; Pease diary, II, fo. 85, 17 March 1914; Asquith to king, 18 March 1914, MS. Asquith 7, fos. 105-6. See also Seely's memoranda, 18 March 1914, MS. Asquith 40, fos. 8-10.

164. Sir Henry Wilson's diary, 24 March 1914 (Wilson's source was Lt. Col. Ollivant, a general staff officer, who added that 'Winston was both bad & mad'.) See also Ulster Unionist Council statement, 'The Plot against Ulster', Daily Mail, 18 April 1914.

165. Asquith's cabinet letter to king, 18 March 1914, MS. Asquith 7, fos. 105-6; Churchill's cable to Vice-Admiral Lewis Bayley, 19 March 1914, White Paper II, Cd. 7329; Hansard, LXI, 1108-9 (23 April 1914, Asquith).

166. Admiralty to 3rd battle squadron, 21 March 1914, White Paper II, Cd. 7329. They were directed instead to participate in tactical exercises in the Channel, as previously intended before the orders of 19 March.

167. For a detailed account of the parliamentary battle, see Ryan, Mutiny at the Curragh, pp. 183-94.


169. Hansard, LXI, 924 (22 April, Asquith); see also note in MS. Asquith 40, fos. 153-4. Riddell, More Pages, p. 209 (24 April 1914).


171. Hansard, LX, 378 (25 March 1914, Churchill); LXI, 1108-9, (23 April 1914, Asquith). For Unionist information, see e.g. Memorandum as to the Movements of the Fleet (Very Secret), 28 March 1914, B.L.P., 39/2/23.

172. Hansard, LX, 504-6 (25 March 1914, Churchill); LXI, 1108-9 (23 April 1914, Asquith).


174. Ibid.; Samuel to Gladstone, 14 April 1914, H. Gladstone Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 45992, fos. 276-7. See also Bryce to H. White, 27 March 1914: '[Ministers] allowed one of their weakest members to get them into a sad mess' (MS. Bryce U.S.A. 22, fos. 246-7); Mildred to S. Buxton, 26 March: 'I suppose he [Seely] lost his head — it was a most dreadful error of judgement.' (Buxton Papers).

175. See e.g. W.S. Blunt, My Diaries, II, 423 (28 March 1914).

176. Asquith to Law, 23 March 1914, B.L.P., 32/1/51; 'Communique to press', 21 March 1914, MS. Asquith 40, fos. 29-31 (see also Asquith to Lloyd George,
21 March 1914, Lloyd George Papers, cabinet notes, C/12/2); The Times, 23 March 1914.

177. Hansard, Lords, XV, 627 (Morley); XV, 637 (Haldane); The Times, 24 March 1914.


179. See e.g. M.E. Harcourt to Loulou Harcourt, N.D. [early April 1914], Harcourt Papers; Mildred to S. Buxton, 27 March 1914, Buxton Papers; Morning Post, 27 March 1914.


181. White Paper II, Cd. 7329, 22 April 1914. See Asquith’s cabinet letter to king, commenting on its compilation (23 April 1914, 5’ Asquith 7, fo. 113). This second publication included many telegrams and letters between Paget and the war office, correspondence on the naval movements, and a written statement by Paget, in addition to the eight items published earlier.


183. Fitzroy, Memoirs, II, 544; Pease diary, II, fo. 88, 31 March 1914.


185. Samuel to Gladstone, 14 April 1914, H. Gladstone Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 45992, fos. 276-7; T.E. Harvey to mother, 28 March 1914, Harvey Papers; C.P. Trevelyan to mother, 4 April 1914, Trevelyan Papers; Burns diary, 24 March 1914, B.L. Add. MS. 46336, fo. 66.

186. Hansard, LX, 893, 902-5 (30 March 1914, Churchill); Burns diary, 30 March 1914, B.L. Add. MS. 46336, fo. 69.

187. Hansard, LX, 1061-3 (31 March 1914, Grey); Pease diary, II, fo. 88, 31 March 1914.

188. See e.g. Jenkins, Asquith, pp. 313-5; Ryan, Mutiny at Curragh, pp. 159-60.

189. Pease diary, II, fo. 88, 30-31 March 1914; Burns diary, 27, 30, 31 March, and 8 April 1914, B.L. Add. MS. 46336, fos. 67, 69, 74 (Burns gallantly dismissed his own hopes of 26 March: 'A large number of MPs would be pleased if I went to War Office' (fo. 67).

190. Samuel to Gladstone, 14 April 1914, H. Gladstone Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 45992, fos. 276-7; Buxton to Gladstone, 10 April 1914, ibid. M S. 46012, fos. 65-8; Buxton to Margot Asquith, 4 May 1914, Buxton Papers; Morley

192. Hansard, LX, 843-4 (Bonar Law); L.S. Amery, My Political Life, I, 452.


195. Asquith to Venetia Stanley, 22 March 1914, quoted in Jenkins, Asquith, p. 310.

196. Reports by W. P. Pulteney (6th division) and Ferguson (5th division), c. 19 April 1914, MS. Asquith 40, fos. 118-20; Birrell to Asquith, N.D. [c. 27 April 1914], MS. Asquith 41, fos. 71-2. For further statements to same effect, see e.g. C. P. Scott diary, 6 May 1914 (interview with Lord Esher), B. L. Add. MS. 50901, fos. 119-122; Marquess of Tullibardine to Seely, 22 March 1914, MS. Asquith 40, fos. 48-4; Major G. S. Tweedie (Royal Scots) to Bonar Law, 25 March 1914, B. L. P. 32/1/62.


198. Ibid., 187-8. 190-1, 194.


201. Crewe to Lord Pentland, Governor of Madras, 8 and 23 April 1914, Crewe Papers, C/61; Samuel to Gladstone, 14 April 1914, H. Gladstone Papers, B. L. Add. MS. 45992, fos. 276-7. See also Crewe to Lord Hardinge and Lord Carmichael, 1 May 1914, Crewe Papers, C/24 and C/61; Richard Holt diary, 10 April 1914.


203. Note in pencil by Simon, 25 May 1914, Lloyd George Papers, cabinet notes, C/12/2; Burks diary, 26 April 1914, B. L. Add. MS. 46336, fo. 82.

204. Memorandum on Lloyd George's interview with the king, 15 May 1914, transcript from the Royal Archives, Geo. V., K 2553 (5), seen by kind permission of Dr. Cameron Hazlehurst.

205. See e.g. Walter Faber, Unionist M.P., to Law, 29 April 1914, B. L. P. 32/2/67.

206. Fitzroy, Memoirs, II, 547, 549 (29 April, 13 May 1914).
207. C. P. Scott diary, 30 June 1914 (interview with Dillon), B. L. Add.-MS. 50901, fos. 140-141; Pease diary, II, fo. 89, 24 April 1914.

208. E. Grey to Asquith, 23 March 1914, Grey Papers, P.R.O. F.O. 800/100/307-9; Hansard, LX, 1061-3 (Grey).


210. For detailed accounts of the Larne coup, see Stewart, Ulster Crisis, passim; Ryan, Mutiny at Curragh, pp. 170-182.

211. Churchill to wife, 27 April 1914, R.S.C. Churchill, II, Companion, p. 1417. The Larne coup allowed the government to take the offensive on 28 April during the debate on the Unionist motion for an inquiry into the 'plot'.

212. Birrell to Asquith, 26 April 1914, MS. Asquith 41, fos. 25-31.


214. Aberdeen to Birrell, 26 April 1914, MS. Asquith 41, fos. 18-24; Macready, Annals, I, 185.

215. Birrell to Asquith, 28 April 1914, MS. Asquith 41, fo. 55; Asquith's cabinet letter to king, 27 April 1914, MS. Asquith 7, fos. 115-6.

216. Asquith's cabinet letter, 2 May 1914 (re. cabinets of 28, 29, 30 April), MS. Asquith 7, fo. 117; Asquith to Birrell, 30 April 1914, MS. Asquith 41, fo. 83; Pease diary, II, fo. 89, 22 April 1914.

217. Birrell to Asquith, 26 and 28 April 1914, MS. Asquith 41, fos. 25-31, 60-62; T. J. Smith (R.I.C. Commissioner in Belfast) to Macready, 28 April 1914, MS. Asquith 41, fo. 58. For the views of the Nationalists, see Redmond to Asquith, 27 April 1914, MS. Asquith 41, fos. 51-3; C. P. Scott diary, 26 April 1914 (interview with Dillon), and 4-6 May (interview with T. P. O'Connor), B. L. Add. MS. 50901, fos. 112-3 and 119-122.

218. Asquith's cabinet letter to king, 2 May 1914, MS. Asquith 7, fo. 117; Asquith to Birrell, N.D., MS. Asquith 41, fo. 79; Pease diary, II, fo. 90 (re. cabinet of 30 April).

219. Birrell to Asquith, 26 April 1914, MS. Asquith 41, fos. 25-31; Redmond to Asquith, 27 April 1914, MS. Asquith 41, fos. 51-3; C. P. Scott diary, 26 April 1914 (Dillon interview), B. L. Add. MS. 50901, fos. 112-3. The only action taken was that the 4th torpedo flotilla was sent to patrol the coast of N.E. Ireland (cabinet letter, 2 May 1914, MS. Asquith 7, fo. 117).
EPILOGUE

THE LAST MONTHS OF THE LIBERAL IRISH QUESTION:
DEADLOCK AND DESPERATION, APRIL - JULY 1914

Asquith had lost a major political advantage in 1912 when he failed
to take the opportunity of excluding Ulster from the bill during the first parliamentary
circuit. After January 1913, the terms of the Parliament Act made the agreement
of the Opposition essential to any settlement. From then on, the government had
only two alternatives. They either had to reach a compromise over Ulster with
the Unionists, or they had to overcome Ulster's resistance to the Home Rule Act
by force. The significance of the Curragh affair was that it effectively removed
the second option. The government no longer believed it could use the army to
impose its will on Ulster. A political settlement with the Opposition seemed the
only way out. Sir Almeric Fitzroy commented that after the Curragh the
government had little alternative but 'coming to terms with the malcontents.
Ulster controls the situation, and, it would seem, the fate of the Ministry'.
Churchill defined the dilemma slightly differently: 'It was no longer a question
of our coercing Ulster; it was a question of our preventing Ulster from coercing
us'. Balfour found the situation alarming and obscure: 'The Government are in
very deep water, and are ready to clutch at anything which will save them from
drowning'.

The gun-running coup at Larne had emphasized the government's
impotence, while simultaneously increasing the military power of the Ulster
Volunteers. The possibility of a bloody confrontation increased when the Irish
National Volunteers followed the U.V.F. lead. By the summer of 1914 they
could equal U.V.F. numbers, and they organized their own gun-running
operation at Howth on 26 July. Once again, inapt management by the
government made matters worse. The police and the army intervened this
time, causing direct confrontation with a Dublin crowd, and consequent blood-
shed. This led to an outcry from the Nationalists. Dillon complained bitterly
that Ireland was now convinced that the government was deliberately treating the south more harshly than the north. The attempt to disclaim responsibility in the subsequent White Paper did not help. General Macready commented: 'A more disgraceful exhibition of weakness on the part of a Government it would be hard to find.' The Howth tragedy increased the Irish pressure on the Nationalists to reject compromise, and it underlined the government's ineffectiveness yet again. As the two armies faced each other, the preparations for the establishment of Ulster's provisional government were accelerated.

The situation in Ireland was deteriorating so fast that the government had all the more reason to strive for a political compromise, but far less chance of reaching one. Some ministers, such as Crewe, Buxton, Samuel and Asquith regained an amazing complacency in the weeks after the Curragh. But their optimism was based on the assumption that the Unionists would eventually agree to a settlement. In fact, the Curragh incident and the two gun-running coups which followed, made this far less likely. After these crises, the Ulster Unionists expected minimal resistance to the establishment of their provisional government. They had little incentive to make concessions, and consequently increased their demands. Bonar Law underlined this point in a desperate last-minute talk with Asquith on 17 July:

--- the people of Ulster knew that they had a force which would enable them to hold the Province, and with opinion so divided in this country, it was quite impossible that any force could be sent against them which could dislodge them, and that therefore they knew that they could get their own terms, and that it was certain they would rather fight than give way ---

Consequently, Carson was far more intransigent after the Curragh than he had appeared to be throughout the negotiations of the winter of 1913-14. Lord Stamfordham rightly commented to Crewe on 5 June: 'Every day it seems more apparent that the question is becoming one only to be decided by the Irishmen themselves'. After January 1913, the government had placed itself in a position where it needed the agreement of the Unionist Opposition to a settlement. But after the Curragh and Larne, the Ulster Unionists were in a
... powerful bargaining position, and far less inclined to allow their British Unionist allies to agree to any compromise.

Desperate attempts to reach a political settlement had, therefore, to be resumed in the worst possible circumstances for the Liberals. The gravity of the deadlock was underlined by the resort to two expedients which had been abandoned in 1913—Home Rule all round, and a conference of the party leaders. The Unionist Round Table group seized the opportunity to launch an intensive campaign for a federal solution, from March to May 1914. 6 Churchill and F.E. Smith returned enthusiastically to the cause. 7 They helped the Round Table group to draft a House of Commons' appeal for the exclusion of six Ulster counties until United Kingdom devolution could be established. This appeal secured the signatures of 78 Liberal members and 56 Unionists, 8 but it had little success with the party leaders. Asquith, Lloyd George, Carson, Bonar Law, and Chamberlain, expressed interest, but none of them saw federalism as a real solution at this stage. When Asquith met Bonar Law and Carson on 5 May, discussion focused in futile fashion on the terms for Ulster exclusion, and did not even 'touch on the "Federalist" aspect of the question'. 9 The federal proposals aroused intense hostility and anger among the Nationalists and some sections of the Liberal party. Robert Harcourt warned Churchill of the extent of the fury among those who felt strongly that 'this was not the moment to parley with the enemy'. The radicals saw the proposal as humiliating surrender, while Redmond protested to Asquith that it was 'impossible and even disastrous'. 10 By mid-May the federal proposals were abandoned yet again.

Any real hopes of a political settlement were concentrated on the negotiations for Ulster exclusion which meandered on from April to July 1914. 11 The sheer futility of these efforts was the inevitable consequence of the ministry's impotence. The last stages of the interminable progress of the Home Rule bill assumed a farcical character. Asquith's offer of the Lloyd George scheme for six year exclusion by county option (which effectively meant four counties only), had been rejected by Carson on 9 March. Ten days later, Bonar Law had made his counter-offer, that Asquith's proposal be decided by referendum, and Carson suggested permanent exclusion for an unspecified area of Ulster.
After the Curragh crisis, the Second Reading of the bill was resumed on 31 March, and 1, 2 and 6 April, with Grey speaking for the government, while the prime minister was away defending his seat. Grey's speech was conciliatory, but he vetoed the referendum proposal, and stated that the six-year time-limit could not be extended. Agar-Robartes condemned the government's policy, proposing instead that Ulster should be given a second option at the end of six years. He joined Sir Clifford Cory in voting against the Second and Third Readings, while Captain Pirrie supported William O'Brien's Cork contingent in abstaining. The Committee stage and the 'suggestion' stage were dispensed with, in the absence of any agreement, and the unamended bill passed its Third Reading in the Commons on 25 May.

After considerable debate in cabinet, Asquith decided on 23 May to introduce a separate Amending bill in the Lords, to receive the royal assent at the same time as the main bill. He proposed merely to repeat the six-year county option scheme of 9 March. The king protested strongly that mere repetition of the same offer would be useless, since those terms were 'repudiated by Ulster'. A minority in the cabinet, led by Lloyd George and Grey, shared the king's view. By the end of May, the pressure to abandon the time-limit intensified. Lloyd George had discovered early in May that the Nationalists were really far more concerned about the question of area. He therefore tried to persuade the cabinet that 'limited exclusion is already gone; all the fight will be over area'. Sir Edward Grey gave him firm support, even contemplating resignation unless Ulster was excluded indefinitely. Birrell also agreed, on 15 June, that the proposals in the Amending bill 'present no solution to the difficulties of the situation'.

Despite these powerful protests, Asquith persisted with his plan to re-introduce the six-year county option scheme as the Amending bill in the Lords on 23 June. It was hopelessly inadequate by then. The Lords allowed it to pass Second Reading, so that they could transform it in Committee to suit the more extreme Ulster Unionist ideas. When the bill reached the Third Reading on 14 July, the Lords had struck out the six-year time-limit and the provisions for county option. They substituted an amendment by Lansdowne,
THE NEW SHYLOCK.

Mr. Balindore: "Look here, I understood you were to get me my full pound of flesh!"

Mr. Asquith (the grocer): "Yes, yes, I know, but it rather looks now as if we might have to settle for three-quarters."
permanently excluding all nine counties. Roy Jenkins has argued that:

for the first time Asquith was brought up against a complete impasse — The time had clearly arrived to put into practise his theory that negotiations were most likely to succeed when the pressure for settlement had become urgent upon both sides ——.

But this deadlock had existed since March 1914, and it should have been obvious that the Lords’ rejection of a patently inadequate Amending bill was inevitable. To gamble on such a theory, at this dangerously late stage, verged on the suicidal. Moreover, the government’s show of weakness since the Curragh had substantially reduced the pressure for compromise on the Ulster Unionists.

The pressure on the government was far more intense. The transformed Amending bill was scheduled for consideration by the Commons on 20 July, leaving only six days in which to reach an agreement. There was, in any case, very little time left, since the Home Rule bill and its Amending bill had to receive the Royal Assent by the end of the 1914 session, to conform with the Parliament Act’s provisions. The pressure from Redmond, and the deteriorating international situation, increased Asquith’s difficulties. Consequently, he gave his approval to a series of informal negotiations with the Opposition leaders in July, conducted by Lord Murray of Elmbank, the former chief whip, and Harold Harmsworth while Lloyd George, Asquith, Birrell and J.A. Spender talked at various times to Redmond and Dillon. The government was in a desperate position. They had admitted that the Home Rule bill and the Amending bill were interdependent, yet they were at the mercy of the Opposition and the Nationalists for an agreement on the latter. They could not now return to their original position, even if the king would allow it, because their Amending bill had publicly acknowledged the glaring deficiency in their measure.

After these informal negotiations, Asquith finally agreed to the king’s persistent request that all the party leaders should meet together. A conference was held at Buckingham Palace from 21–24 July. The reasons for this conference are somewhat obscure. Jenkins has suggested that, by mid-July, Asquith thought he had succeeded in narrowing the differences to a simple and limited question of geography — both sides seemed likely to
acquiesce in the exclusion, without a time limit, of the resultant five or five-and-a-half county bloc. 19 Therefore, the time was at last ripe for the king's long-awaited conference.

But if this was indeed Asquith's reasoning, it had no justification whatever. The informal negotiations had been entirely fruitless. The prime minister's report to the cabinet on 13 July indicated no reason for optimism:

--- Carsonites not prepared to give up Tyrone as in H.R. area. Nationalists equally strong --- The issues so far reaching not only civil war, but interests in India, industrial world & throughout empire might be broken up by catastrophe in Ireland.

Two days later, after talking to Bonar Law, the prime minister told Jack Pease that Carson and Law 'said they could not give way'. Asquith also informed the king, after a further cabinet on 17 July, that 'neither party is prepared to give way, in the sense of partition in regard to the county of Tyrone'. 20

Admittedly the negotiations had shifted attention from the question of time-limit to that of area, since the latter was evidently the more intractable problem. In discussing details on 17 July, Carson insisted that all of Tyrone must be excluded, but the Nationalists would obviously reject this. Asquith urged Bonar Law when they met the same day:

--- that it would be a crime if civil war resulted from so small a difference -- the Unionist Party should not allow such calamities to happen merely because we could not induce the people of Ulster to give way.

Later that day, Law discovered that Asquith still thought 'there was so much chance of agreement' that it would be wrong to risk it for the sake of a few days' delay. 21 The prime minister might have persuaded himself that the difference between the two sides was really so small. But the dispute over the exclusion of area was symbolic of a far wider gulf, which was possibly unbridgeable by July 1914. Morley commented on 20 July that:

The issue of Tyrone is narrow enough, but then, as history so abundantly shows, when men want to fight, a narrow issue will do just as well as a broad one.
Lansdowne made a similar remark to Stamfordham:

The Government and the Opposition are [therefore] still widely separated, and I fear in some cases upon questions which are fundamental. It seems probable that the divergence of opinion between the Ulster and Nationalist leaders is not less complete.  

Asquith seems never fully to have appreciated the fundamental difference in principle which divided the two Irish parties.

Bonar Law and Lansdowne certainly gave Asquith no reason to expect that an agreement would follow from the Buckingham Palace Conference. When Bonar Law learnt of the suggestion that the king should call a conference, he told Asquith on 17 July:

--- in the plainest way, that in our view a conference called while the question of Tyrone was not agreed upon would be perfectly useless, as it would be utterly impossible for Carson to give way on that point.  

Bonar Law told Lord Stamfordham three days later that:

--- there was so little prospect of agreement that we should not have been prepared to enter into a conference, summoned at the last moment, and without any definite basis of discussion, except in deference to the wishes of His Majesty.

Lansdowne sent an equally gloomy letter to Stamfordham, warning that no bases existed as a preliminary for discussion between the two sides.  

It is difficult to accept that the prime minister can really have been hopeful of a successful outcome in the light of these comments. A more convincing explanation of his reason for calling the conference is provided in his own letter to the king on 17 July. He explained that if the Amending bill was debated on 20 July, as scheduled, neither side could offer any acceptable form of compromise, 'in view of the dominating opinion of their respective followers.' The significant sentence followed:

It may be that such a Conference will be unable at the moment to attain a definite settlement, but it will certainly postpone, & may avert dangerous & possibly irreparable action ---.
In the course of his talk with Carson and Bonar Law the same day, Lord Murray of Elibank had also suggested that 'delay might be gained' by a conference, providing more time for negotiations. Precisely what Asquith hoped to gain by a further delay is not at all clear, but at least the dreaded consequences would be postponed a little longer.

The Buckingham Palace conference only emphasized the bankruptcy of Asquith's policy and the hopelessness of the deadlock. From 21-24 July, Asquith, Lloyd George, Lansdowne, Law, Redmond, Dillon, Carson and Craig represented the two Irish and the two British parties. Instead of the gap between the two sides being narrowed, it seemed to broaden. Redmond continued to insist on county option, which meant the exclusion of only four counties, while Bonar Law wanted six, and Carson demanded the 'clean cut' of the whole province of Ulster. It was clear by this time that Asquith was prepared to give way on the time-limit, but his proposal on area seemed to the Unionists little better than four county exclusion. He suggested leaving out of the bill South Tyrone, North Fermanagh, and the four north-east counties, except for South Armagh. Neither the Unionists nor the Nationalists could accept this, or a similar alternative proposed by the Speaker. Bonar Law's account concluded: 'It was then evident that all hope of settlement was gone'. The prime minister reported to the cabinet that the Unionists 'did not mean to settle & all expedients had failed'. The Nationalists and the Ulster Unionist representatives at least agreed that the division between them was far wider than the question of partitioning Tyrone. Even Asquith admitted to Venetia Stanley that 'nothing could have been more amicable in tone or more desperately fruitless in result --- I have rarely felt more hopeless in any practical affair: an impasse, with unspeakable consequences ---'.

How Asquith intended to break this deadlock remains a mystery. The debate on the Amending bill in the Commons had been postponed from 20 July until 28 July, in the faint hope that the conference might resolve the issue. When that collapsed, Asquith decided to proceed with the original Amending bill for exclusion by county option, 'but with the omission of automatic inclusion after a term of years, & the substitution of a fresh power of option' at the end of the initial time-limit. This would clearly settle nothing. But once again
the parliamentary farce was interrupted. The gun-running coup at Howth on 26 July made a further postponement necessary. The fury of the Nationalists needed time to cool, but it was obvious that they would now be even more reluctant to agree to concessions. Lord Esher commented on 30 July that Asquith had now reduced the south of Ireland to such a condition of chaos as to make any concession to Ulster valueless as a method of pacifying Nationalists and Covenanters. 29

The pressure on the prime minister against surrendering to Unionist demands was increasing. Apart from the Nationalists, he had to contend with a growing volume of criticism from the Liberal rank and file. A section of the party had objected to the government’s policy of drift since 1913, more on account of the weak and uncertain methods, than because they opposed the principle of exclusion. The critics disliked the continual series of delays and retreats, and the possibility of impending surrender. They also sympathised with Redmond’s position, and felt the government had broken too many promises.

The views of L.T. Hobhouse and C.P. Scott were typical of the Liberal critics. They had been prepared to come to terms with Carson before March 1914, but they interpreted the government’s renewed negotiations after the Curragh and Larne as total surrender. By May, they preferred to lose Home Rule altogether, rather than accept a compromise based on the dictation of Carson with the backing of the army ——. 30 Christopher Addison subsequently described the anger of the Liberal critics in parliament by July:

The Home Rule issue inflamed the rank and file Members of the Liberal Party, and they were almost as angry at the handling of it by their own leaders as they were at the violent conduct of its opponents ——. Few of us could understand, and it is impossible to understand now, how the Government could look on at the organised and-open preparations for civil war without making an attempt to put them down ——. If concessions with regard to Ulster had to be made — as they clearly had — why had things been allowed to drift so far? This was the question men were asking, and
it was directed more against Asquith than against anyone. Most of us certainly were convinced that if the situation had been more firmly handled before it had become thus desperate, we should have been spared many distresses.

Such dissatisfaction was growing among the Liberal voters in the country, as well as in the House of Commons. At the end of May, Lloyd George received a memorandum from the Yorkshire Liberal Association, which revealed the exasperation among Liberal voters: 'If Home Rule is not settled without a general election we are all wasting our time on land and housing'. They demanded that Home Rule must become law as fast as possible. If the government failed to prove that the Parliament Act was an effective means of passing their bills against the will of the Tories, 'the working people will drop us for a long time to come'. Discontent in Yorkshire mounted during the next three weeks, as Charles Trevelyan discovered after attending a meeting there on 25 July:

--- they say that the whole of the Liberal working-class is on the point of revolt, that the prestige of the government is gone, and that the great mass of working-men think that the government is fumbling. They have never approved of leaving Carson alone, they were more angry about the gun running, and they are quite furious about the Conference --- Any further delay will mean a violent explosion of Liberal feeling which will be immediately reflected in the House --- You must suppress Carson, if it becomes necessary, without an election. If you appeal to the country on Carson's rebellion without having taken the most drastic steps to suppress it, you won't have the support of the mass of working-men. --- The long and the short of it is the government has got to show itself top dog now, or the Liberal Party will disintegrate, even in the West Riding.

This pressure on the prime minister was further increased because his time was running out so fast. Under the provisions of the Parliament Act, the Home Rule bill must pass by the end of the 1914 session. The ministerial backbenchers were exhausted after an arduous session, and adamantly opposed to prolonging it. As early as 6 May, Percy Illingworth, the chief whip, warned the
cabinet:

There is a point of exhaustion beyond which it is impossible to drive the House of Commons --- I think we should be inflicting a fatal blow to our prospects at the next General Election [in 1915] by keeping the House sitting during the Autumn ---

He thought it might be possible to keep the House sitting until the end of August at the very latest, but after that he could not ensure the safety of the government. 35

This gloomy verdict was confirmed when the government's majority fell to twenty-three on a guillotine motion on Lloyd George's 1914 budget. This was chiefly a protest against the drastic methods of closure employed to enable the government to complete its parliamentary business.

The next day 'a largely signed memorial' was sent to the chief whip, demanding that business be confined to August, with no autumn session, 'unless the exigencies of Ireland imperatively demand one'. 36 Percy Billinghurst replied on 13 July with a memorandum to all Liberal members, stating that the current session would end as soon as the Home Rule Amendment bill was disposed of:

The time has arrived for a sustained effort, and with everything at stake for which generations of Liberals have laboured, I am relying on your constant attendance and support for the remainder of the Session. 37

On 13 and 16 July, Redmond warned Asquith that he would be forced to vote against the Second Reading of the Amending bill, if the government's concessions went too far. In that case, he believed 'a very large proportion' of the Liberal and Labour parties would support the Nationalists. 38 Christopher Addison reported that the intense bitterness and anger of the Liberal rank and file reached a climax during the week beginning 20 July. They received Asquith's announcement of the Buckingham Palace conference and the postponement of the Amending bill with profound mistrust:

Whatever Cabinet Ministers might be disposed to do, there was no doubt that the bulk of the Liberal Party were vehement in their intention to support Redmond and the Irish Members.

The next day, 'a largely attended' meeting of Liberal members determined 'to apply ginger to the Government; to stick to the Nationalists throughout ---' 39
Dillon commented that one of the most valuable results of the Buckingham Palace conference was 'the explosion of feeling in the Radical Press and the Liberal Party'. These backbench views had some impact on the cabinet. On 22 July ministers vetoed a suggestion by Churchill and Grey that a 'British decision' should be imposed on the two hostile Irish factions, over their heads if necessary. Apart from the fact that the Unionists could not agree to this, Pease argued that it would be futile to press their own proposals against Nationalist opposition, 'as our people would side with Redmond & against our solution'.

The deadlock was absolute, and Asquith's Irish policy seemed about to lead to disaster, but total humiliation was averted by two unexpected events. The first was the outbreak of war in Europe early in August 1914. The second was the Opposition offer of a political truce in the cause of national unity. Cameron Hazlehurst has suggested that:

Imminent civil conflict and industrial turmoil at home made a brisk little continental war tantalizingly convenient --- the intractability of the Irish problem rendered Asquith susceptible to an adventurous diversion across the Channel.

Hazlehurst emphasizes that these domestic calculations did not influence the actual decision to enter the war, but 'the looming presence of Ireland' at least made the decision easier to bear.

This judgement is sound, for other Liberals as well as the prime minister. After discussing the grave European news with the Asquith family on 23 July, Gladstone's daughter noted in her diary:

Could not help saying to [Asquith], 'if ever a war takes place in the world again, I hope it will be now.' He turned on me a look of understanding & mischief. 'Why?' 'To settle Ireland'. He said, 'You're as bad as Winston; who last night seeing there was more hopeful news said, I'm afraid we shall have a bloody peace'.

On 26 July, Samuel remarked to his mother, 'how infinitely small, in the shadow of this awful catastrophe, appear the petty troubles of Ulster'. Three days later he commented to his wife: 'The only consolatory fact at the moment
is that the big storm cloud of Europe makes the Irish sky seem by comparison quite bright'. Lloyd George made a similar remark to his wife: 'Crisis upon crisis. Ireland is serious but Austria-Servia is pandemonium let loose'. Charles Trevelyan --- ceased to care about Ireland. The bigger question overshadows it utterly.\textsuperscript{44}

Asquith's remark to Pease on 3 August that 'the one bright spot in this hateful war --- was the settlement of Irish civil strife'\textsuperscript{45} was then, a natural and fairly typical reaction. By 29-30 July, the critical situation in Europe diverted political attention from Ulster. The outbreak of the First World War enabled Asquith to extricate himself from a hopeless Irish policy, with some tactical gain, though with little moral or permanent achievement. He was relieved that an apparently insoluble problem could be shelved.

The prime minister was also lucky that the British and Irish Unionists placed the need for national unity in wartime before their concern for Ulster. On 30 July, Bonar Law and Carson took the initiative, offering to shelve controversial domestic quarrels in the interests of a united war effort. The Unionists gave priority to the needs of the country, placing party interests second, and expecting Asquith to do the same. The prime minister eagerly accepted the offer and postponed the debate on the Amending bill once more. Bonar Law's offer of a political truce was a godsend to Asquith, who proceeded to abuse a generous and patriotic gesture.

John Stubbs has argued convincingly that the government lost a good opportunity to forge a national consensus at the start of the war by the mishandling of the Irish question in these first six weeks of war.\textsuperscript{46} By July 1914, the Unionists had reluctantly acquiesced in Home Rule for part of Ireland, and the Nationalists had accepted the need for some form of Ulster exclusion. Asquith might have been sufficiently far-sighted to use the emergency of war to induce both sides to agree to the kind of exclusion compromise he suggested at the Buckingham Palace conference. Instead, he sought a narrow party political advantage, which gave the Nationalists only a pyrrhic victory, and in the long term helped to destroy his own party, as well as any remaining chance of an Irish solution. Asquith missed this
last unexpected opportunity to deal boldly and generously with Ulster.

The Home Rule bill was placed on the Statute Book in mid-September, without any agreement having been reached over Ulster. The Amending bill was replaced by a Suspensory Act, which postponed the operation of the Home Rule Act until after the war. Unionist bitterness was not mitigated by Asquith's promise that an Amending bill providing for Ulster exclusion would be introduced during the suspensory period. The Opposition felt strongly that Asquith 'took advantage of our patriotism to betray us', by using the political truce to pass Home Rule without the Amending bill. This would have been impossible before the war, because Asquith admitted then that the two bills were interdependent. The Unionists believed Asquith had not even tried hard enough in August and September to reach a compromise on Ulster exclusion, because he preferred to abandon the Amending bill entirely. John Stubbs has concluded that:

Asquith, by following what appeared to be a policy of drift and indecision over the resolution of Home Rule, put a severe strain on an ill-defined 'political truce', and, by so doing, heightened Unionist suspicions of him. --- The Nationalists got the 'trophy' of inoperative Home Rule; the Unionists got only the assurances of an Amending Bill during the suspensory period --- 47

Asquith justified his action by emphasizing the need to win Nationalist support for the war. But he might have given more thought to a compromise solution which did not, at the same time, arouse intense bitterness and resentment among the Unionists. The prime minister's 'settlement' of the Irish question in September 1914 created a legacy of embittered relations with the Opposition, at a time when party cooperation and trust were so urgently needed.

The outbreak of the First World War thus allowed Asquith to escape the consequences of his Irish policy. There is no evidence to suggest that a political solution would otherwise have been reached, given a little more time. Indeed, the Buckingham Palace conference indicates quite the opposite. General Macready stated subsequently that he did not know what would have happened in Ireland in 1914-15, if European war had not intervened. In May 1914, however, he warned that when the Amending bill became law,
--- disturbances, if they occurred, would be more in the nature of civil war than of faction fights.\(^{48}\) Only two weeks before the outbreak of war, Bonar Law told Asquith that if he proceeded with his existing Amending bill, "--- an independent state would be set up within the United Kingdom and there would be nothing left for us but to support Ulster to the utmost." Carson agreed that "if any attempt to coerce any part of Ulster were made, a united Ireland within the lifetime of any one now living would be out of the question."\(^{49}\) Birrell believed in June 1914 that "a great conflagration cannot be avoided", if the discipline of the U.V.F. broke down. A.T.Q. Stewart has concluded that: "at the very end of July war in Ulster seemed certain, and only the outbreak of the war in Europe averted it.\(^{50}\)

SOME CONCLUSIONS

Lord Wolverhampton had predicted in 1910 that the attempt to carry out Home Rule would break up the Liberal party.\(^{51}\) The Irish question contributed more to the decline of the party than has generally been recognized, though in a more complex manner than Fowler expected. By 1911, as Peter Clarke has shown, the Liberal party had proved its ability to adapt to the changing needs of a new working class electorate. The party appeared to be in no danger of extinction, though a fourth consecutive victory at the polls in 1915 may have been unlikely.

The passage of the Parliament Act in 1911 placed the Liberal party under an obligation to fulfill its longstanding commitment to carry Irish Home Rule. The provisions of the Parliament Act, combined with the intractable Ulster, meant that the Irish crisis consumed the time and energy of the cabinet and parliament for three years. These turned out to be three crucial, testing years in the history of the Liberal party, because the First World War intervened. The general election which should have been held in 1915 was postponed until after the war. By then, the Labour party had increased in strength, organization and popular appeal. The Liberal party, by contrast, was deeply split into two factions led by Asquith and Lloyd George, and its most fundamental principles had been undermined by the demands of war.
Those former Liberals and working class voters who had to choose between Liberal and Labour in 1918, looked back on the last years of peace as a time of relative stagnation in social and economic affairs. From 1911-14, the Liberal government had ambitious plans for land, fiscal, and educational reform. But the need to concentrate on Home Rule and Welsh Disestablishment left little time for other important measures.

The Irish question had a substantial impact on British party politics at a time when the Liberal party was soon to be replaced by the Labour party. The Irish problem of 1911-14 weakened the Liberal party at a critical time, by forcing it to revert to the traditional constitutional and religious issues of Gladstonian Liberalism, which no longer held much appeal for the electorate. At the same time, the renewed emphasis on Irish Home Rule prevented the government maintaining the momentum of socio-economic reform, which reached a premature climax in the 1911 Insurance Act.

After 1911, then, the Liberal government was unable to give the necessary attention to the demands of the radical elements within the party for increased state intervention in the interests of the working classes. Churchill had forecast as early as 1907:

No legislation at present in view interests the democracy. All their minds are turning more and more to the social & economic issue. This revolution is irresistible -- Minimum standards of wages & comfort, insurance in some effective form or other against sickness, unemployment, old age, these are the questions and the only questions by which parties are going to live in the future. Woe to Liberalism, if they slip through its fingers.

It was scarcely surprising that the progressive wing of the party resented the preoccupation with Home Rule from 1912 to 1914. Even in July 1911, Murray Macdonald complained that the Labour party came into existence in the first place, because of impatience 'at the slow rate of progress made in securing those social and political reforms to which the Liberal party was pledged.'

In January 1913, Lloyd George commented that 'for Liberalism stagnation was death.' Unfortunately the Parliament Act and the Home Rule
bill impeded progress from 1912-14 in those areas of reform which appealed most to the radicals and the electorate. During the 1913 Home Rule debate, Edward Hemmerde declared that he shared Lloyd George's impatience with the Irish question. He was convinced that 'the country is sick and tired of this question', and many Liberals were eager to move on with socio-economic reforms. Arthur Ponsonby expressed his frustration with the delayed negotiations over Home Rule, in the *Contemporary Review* in November 1913. He emphasized that the radicals were 'impatient to proceed with drastic social and land reforms'. In January 1913, the *Nation* regretted that 'parliament has been engaged upon issues which were ripe twenty years ago', and had consequently been forced to neglect the more urgent and relevant 'schemes of social regeneration'. Exactly a year later, the *Nation* commented that 'all politics are overshadowed, all other issues rendered insignificant, by the question of Ulster', but 'the politics of the future do not turn on this particular issue'.

Unfortunately for the Liberal party, its last years of government were dominated by issues like Home Rule, Welsh Disestablishment, and the entry into war, which so powerfully alienated the radicals. The Home Rule issue highlighted the essential problem for Liberalism of coming to grips with the 'progressive' demands of the twentieth century, while still haunted by the commitments of nineteenth-century Gladstonian Liberalism. In June 1914, C.P. Scott confessed to L.T. Hobhouse that he was beginning to share J.A. Hobson's view that 'the existing Liberal party is played out and that if it is to count for anything in the future it must be reconstructed largely on a Labour basis'. After the outbreak of war, Scott remarked gloomily to Dillon:

> We have I think no longer a Liberal Government - had we really one before? - and to all intents and purposes there is a coalition --- This state of things is likely to continue and develop and will have tremendous reactions on our politics, including all that relates to Ireland.

Morley was equally pessimistic: 'however else we may pick up the pieces, there is an end of the Liberal party & all its landmarks'. In 1913 the *Nation* reflected on the future of Liberalism:
With the passage of Home Rule and 'Welsh' Disestablishment, the birth of the old political Liberal Party comes practically to an end. What is to emerge as the new moral basis, the intellectual stimulant of the spirit of Liberalism? --- Liberalism cannot stand still; another Session like the present one would kill it, and it is therefore the true wisdom of statesmanship to map out new territory, first for exploration, then for action. 59

The war prevented this search for new directions after 1914, even more effectively than Home Rule had done before. Continued emphasis on the socio-economic aspirations of the radicals during the crucial years 1912-14 might have ensured that the loose coalition of 'progressive' forces was less pessimistic when war broke out, and correspondingly less inclined to turn to the Labour party after 1918.

The Liberal government proved unable to deal effectively with the Irish question itself, despite its near-monopoly of parliamentary attention from 1912-14. Asquith missed one of the best opportunities history has ever offered for the solution of the Ulster problem. He had a chance to deal with it after the Parliament Act at last made it a practical possibility, and before bloodshed irrevocably embittered feelings on both sides.

The cabinet did not even bother to examine the Ulster dimension in 1911, and Asquith rejected the appeal of Lloyd George and Churchill that special provision should be made for Ulster in the 1912 bill. Under the conditions of the Parliament Act, it was still possible to incorporate terms for Ulster into the bill during the 1912 session, without the agreement of the Opposition. Despite the publicity given to the Ulster exclusion proposal by the Agar-Robartes and Carson amendments, Asquith failed to seize the opportunity for dealing with Ulster on his own terms before January 1913.

The Liberal government's myopia over Ulster throughout 1911-12 compared strangely with the Unionist party's obsession with the issue. Even as late as November 1912, the Liberals were more concerned with their backbench revolt over the financial aspects of the measure, than with the Unionist campaign of 'Ulsteria', which was rapidly gathering momentum. The cabinet did not treat Ulster's resistance to Home Rule seriously until autumn 1913, when it was far
too late to avert the growing crisis.

As was so often and so tragically the case with British policy in Ireland, on each occasion too little was offered too late. If Asquith had made his March 1914 offer before January 1913, compromise might have been possible, before the two sides became so intransigent, and while Asquith still controlled the parliamentary situation. Asquith lacked Gladstone's boldness and generosity in relation to Ireland. Caution and procrastination were not effective substitutes. Asquith's failure was all the more tragic since the years between the Parliament Act and the Easter Rebellion probably offered the first and last opportunity to settle the Irish question in peace.

It is by no means certain, of course, that the Irish question would have been solved between 1911-14 if Asquith's government had provided special terms for Ulster in the 1912 bill. Redmond's opposition created one of the biggest obstacles to this course. But Redmond agreed to Ulster exclusion in 1914 as the price of peace. It seems at least possible that he might have acquiesced in 'Home Rule within Home Rule,' or even Ulster exclusion, as the price of Irish self government in 1912. Instead, the Nationalists were offered their ultimate goal at the start, only to see it pulled away from them bit by bit, leaving their faith in the government shattered.

But Asquith's policy of procrastination was most decidedly not successful. Nor is there any substantial evidence to suggest that it might have been had the European war not broken out. Moreover, if it was clear to many on both sides, by late 1913, that Ulster exclusion was the only practicable solution, it was equally clear that innumerable obstacles blocked the path to a settlement on those lines. These barriers were unlikely to be surmounted in a brief last-minute conference at Buckingham Palace in July 1914. How Asquith ever expected to settle the complexities of Ulster exclusion and Irish finance, in a matter of weeks, remains a mystery.

Asquith's mismanagement of Irish policy had already undermined his credibility as a leader to some extent before the European war broke out. Lloyd George, Churchill and Birrell disagreed with his Ulster policy from the first. It was remarkable that the policy of 'wait and see' did not provoke more
criticism from Asquith's colleagues than it did. Most of them did not even become aware of its implications until late in 1913. But from that point, the cabinet was deeply divided over its Ulster policy and over the action necessary to meet Ulster's resistance. If Liberal ministers had been more interested in Ireland, and less preoccupied with their own departmental business, Asquith might have been less free to pursue his own negative policy.

G. P. Gooch has expressed the common view that: 'Many people in both parties came to feel that Asquith was an excellent leader in peace but lacked the dynamism and the drive required in a life-and-death struggle'. C. P. Scott commented in May 1914: 'Of course Asquith is strong only in words and in a situation needing immediate decision and action would always fail.' Asquith's weaknesses as a war-time leader were already foreshadowed in his handling of the Irish crisis before the war. In some respects, the problems presented by Ireland and the problems of war were similar. They both challenged some of the fundamental tenets of the Liberal philosophy, such as the use of coercion. They both demanded precisely those qualities of leadership which Lloyd George could supply more effectively than Asquith. The dilemma of Asquith and Liberalism in facing European war, was already powerfully reflected in the Ulster crisis.
NOTES.

1. Fitzroy, Memoirs, II, 543 (24-25 March 1914); Hansard, LXI, 1581 (28 April 1914, Churchill); Balfour to a correspondent, 24 March 1914, Balfour Papers, B. L. Add. MS. 49863, fos. 154-5. See also H. A. Gwynne to Law, 11 April 1914, B. L. P. 32/2/29; The Times, 29 April 1914.

2. C. P. Scott diary, 27 July 1914 (interview with Dillon), B. L. Add. MS. 50901, fos. 144-7; The Landing of Arms at Howth, Cd. 7631, MS. Asquith 41, fos. 111-5; Macready, Annals of an Active Life, I, 196. For detailed accounts of the Howth coup, see e.g. Ryan, Mutiny, pp. 201-8; Stewart, Ulster Crisis, p. 217.


4. At the Buckingham Palace conference, Carson demanded the exclusion of the whole province of Ulster (Law's memorandum, Conference at Buckingham Palace, 21 July 1914, B. L. P. 39/4/44), whereas his comments before March 1914 had suggested that the Ulster Unionists might be satisfied with 6 counties.

5. Stamfordham to Crewe, 5 June 1914, Crewe Papers, C/58.


7. See e.g. C. P. Scott diary, 1 and 4 May 1914, B. L. Add. MS. 50901, fos. 117-8, 119-122; Churchill to Lloyd George, 3 April 1914, Lloyd George Papers, C/3/16/11; Churchill to wife, 23 and 29 April 1914, R.S.C. Churchill, II, Companion, 1416, 1418; Hansard, LXI, 1591 (28 April 1914, Churchill).

8. See printed appeal on House of Commons notepaper, no title or date [c. late April - early May 1914], MS. Asquith 39, fo. 159. See also H. E. Duke to Law, 5 May 1914, B. L. P. 32/3/12, enclosing similar memorial to Law, B. L. P. 39/4/33; Suggestions for a Settlement of the Irish Question, 6 April 1914, printed cabinet paper, for more detailed account of the aims of the appeal, MS. Asquith 39, fos. 155-6.


10. Robert Harcourt to Churchill, 28 April 1914, R.S.C. Churchill, II, Companion, 1418-19; Redmond to Asquith, 28 April and 5 May 1914,
MS. Asquith 36, fos. 47-9, and MS. 39, fos. 167-171. See also T.P. O'Connor to Lloyd George, 3 April 1914, Lloyd George Papers, C/6/10/7.

11. These negotiations are beyond the scope of this thesis, and only a brief summary outline is possible here. The events of May to August 1914 have already been given more than due emphasis in the following, which may be consulted for further information: Jenkins, Asquith, pp. 315-323; Blake, Bonar Law, pp. 202-215, 227-230; Ryan, Mutiny at Curragh, pp. 195-212; Stewart, Ulster Crisis, pp. 213-236.

12. Hansard, LX, 1054-64 (31 March 1914, Grey); LX, 1467-72 (2 April 1914, Agar-Robartes).

13. See George V to Asquith, 3 and 23 May, MS. Asquith 39, fos. 161-2, 180-1. See also Asquith's cabinet letter, 23 May 1914, ibid., MS. 7, fo. 129.

14. C.P. Scott diary, 4 May 1914 (interview with Lloyd George), B.L. Add. MS. 50901, fos. 119-122; Esher to king, 22 May 1914, Esher, Journals, III, 167-8.

15. Cabinet paper by Birrell, 15 June 1914, giving his impressions on returning from a visit to Ulster, Birrell Papers, Bodleian, dep. c. 301, fos. 341-8.


17. For these negotiations, see e.g. Blake, Bonar Law, pp. 213-4; Gwynn, Redmond, pp. 327-30, 332-5; memorandum by Bonar Law, 17 July 1914, B.L.P. 39/4/43.

18. Asquith admitted to Law on 17 July that the king could not agree simply to put the original Home Rule bill on the Statute Book (Law's memorandum, B.L.P. 39/4/43.)


20. Pease diary, II, fo. 92, 15 and 17 July 1914; Asquith to king, 17 July 1914, MS. Asquith 7, fos. 143-4.


Asquith to Venetia Stanley, 22 July 1914, Jenkins, Asquith, p. 321.

Asquith's cabinet letter to king, 25 July 1914, MS. Asquith 7, fo. 147.

Esher to Balfour, 30 July 1914, Esher, Journals, III, 173.

Hobhouse to C. P. Scott, 2 May 1914, quoted in C. P. Scott, Political Diaries (ed. T. Wilson), p. 84.

C. Addison, Politics from Within, I, 33-36.


See e.g. Birrell's cabinet paper on procedure, Home Rule Bill, 9 Aug. 1913, MS. Mottistone 15, fos. 347-9; P.R.O. Cab, 37/116/54. The first meeting of the Irish parliament must be held within twelve months of the passing of the Home Rule Act (Government of Ireland Bill 1912, clause 49). A general election would take place before the establishment of the Irish parliament, under this schedule, sometime in 1915.

Memorandum by Percy Illingworth, 6 May 1914, Illingworth Papers. See also L. Harcourt to Munro-Ferguson, 2 July 1914, Harcourt Papers; Burns' diary, 8 July 1914, B. L. Add. MS. 46336, fo. 116.

Glasgow Herald, 8 July 1914 (press cutting in Illingworth Papers). See also C. Addison, Four and a Half Years, I, 23.

Illingworth's memorandum to Liberal members, 13 July 1914, Illingworth Papers.

Redmond's memoranda of interviews with Asquith, Birrell and Dillon, 13 and 16 July 1914, Gwynn, Redmond, pp. 334-5.

C. Addison, Four and a Half Years, I, 27-8 (diary entry for 21 July 1914); Addison, Politics from Within, I, 35-6. See also W. S. Blunt, My Diaries, II,
429: 'I see the Labour members are threatening a revolt from Asquith and a hundred Liberals as well'—(entry for 27 July).

40. C. P. Scott diary, 25 July 1914 (interview with Dillon), B. L. Add. MS. 50908, fos. 23-4.

41. Pease diary, II, fo. 95, 22 July 1914. See also Churchill to Grey, 22 July 1914, Grey Papers, P.R.O. F.O. 800/88/93-4.

42. C. Hazlehurst, Politicians at War, pp. 31-33.

43. Mary [Gladstone] Drew diary, 28 July 1914, B. L. Add. MS. 46265, fo. 70.

44. Samuel to mother, 26 July, and to wife, 29 July, Samuel Papers, A/156/466, A/157/691; Morgan, Lloyd George: Family Letters, p. 166 (27 July 1914); Trevelyan to wife, 30 July 1914, Trevelyan Papers.

45. Pease diary, II, fo. 105, 3 Aug. 1914; see also Pease to J. B. Hodgkin, 4 Aug. 1914, Gainford Papers.


47. Ibid., pp. 79-81. See also Hazlehurst, Politicians at War, pp. 136-9.


50. Birrell's cabinet paper, 15 June 1914, Bodieian, dep. C. 401, fos. 341-8; Stewart, Ulster Crisis, p. 231. See also Blake, Bonar Law, p. 218.

51. Fowler to Crewe, 9 March 1910, Crewe Papers, C/54.

52. Churchill to Spender, 22 Dec. 1907; Spender Papers, B. L. Add. MS. 46388, fo. 220.


54. C. P. Scott diary, 16 Jan. 1913 (interview with Lloyd George), B. L. Add. MS. 50901, fo. 79.

55. Hansard, LV, 149-50 (7 July 1913, Hemmerde).


APPENDIX: LIBERALS WHO FAILED TO VOTE ON CRUCIAL
HOME RULE DIVISIONS IN 1912.

Key:
- x failure to vote (caused either by absence or deliberate abstention).
- (x) some evidence that absence was unavoidable.
- p paired. Names known only for First and Second Reading—
  including only those who were also absent unpaired at other times.
- * speech hostile to government position or qualified support only.
- ○ voted with Unionists.

Federalists. Signed May 1914 federal appeals or gave other evidence
of federalist sympathies.

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<tr>
<th>REGION</th>
<th>FEDERALIST</th>
<th>NONCONFIRMIST</th>
<th>On Home Rule</th>
<th>On Ulster exclusion</th>
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SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

My thesis has been largely based on about fifty collections of private papers, supplemented by official publications, Hansard, and newspapers and periodicals. Few sources of a strictly secondary nature have been particularly valuable, and these are mainly biographies, such as Jenkins' Asquith, and Gwynn's Redmond. Otherwise, the more useful secondary works have been contemporary published diaries and memoirs, such as Riddell, More Pages from my Diary, which are more in the nature of primary material. I have only included those secondary sources which have been of direct relevance and value for the years 1911-14. General histories and works which provide helpful background information have been cited only in the Preface and Introduction. Asterisks indicate sources which were especially helpful. The place of publication is London, unless cited otherwise.

I. PRIVATE PAPERS

An excellent account is provided of the location, contents, and accessibility of many of the following collections in: A Guide to the Papers of British Cabinet Ministers 1900-1951, compiled by Cameron Hazlehurist and Christine Woodland, Royal Historical Society, 1974. Information which would otherwise have been included here can now be obtained easily from the Guide. This was still in the process of compilation while my research was in progress, and I am most grateful to both editors for opening up their files to me, and providing so much helpful information.

I should also like to thank all those who allowed me to consult the papers cited below, and frequently gave generously of their time and hospitality.

ABERDEEN MSS.  The papers of the first Marquess of Aberdeen and Temair, Haddo House, Aberdeen. Seen by kind permission of the fourth Marquess.

ASQUITH MSS.  The papers of the first Earl of Oxford and Asquith, Bodleian Library, Oxford. Consulted by courtesy of Mr. Mark Bonham-Carter.
BALFOUR MSS. (British Library) (Whittingehame)

The papers of the first Earl of Balfour. British Library.
Additional papers of the first and second Earls of Balfour, consulted in the National Register of Archives at Edinburgh, by kind permission of the third Earl.

Augustine BIRRELL MSS. (Oxford) (Liverpool)

Bodleian Library, Oxford. Consulted by kind permission of Mr. J.C. Medley
Additional personal papers at Liverpool University Library, presented by Birrell's stepson, Sir Charles Tennyson.
Further personal letters, especially those from Birrell to his first wife's sister, Maida Mirrielees.

R.D. BLUMENTHAL Mss. BRYCE MSS.

Beaverbrook Library, London.

John BURNS MSS.

British Library.
The papers of the first Earl Buxton. Newtimber Place, Hassocks, Sussex. Seen by kind permission of his grand-daughter, Mrs. Elizabeth Clay.

BUXTON MSS.

CREWE MSS.
The papers of the first Marquess of Crewe. Cambridge University Library.

CURZON MSS.
The papers of the first Marquess Curzon of Kedleston. India Office Library.

ELIBANK MSS.
The papers of the first Baron Murray of Elibank. National Library of Scotland.

EMMOTT MSS.
The papers of the first Baron Emmott. The Library, Nuffield College Oxford.

ESHER MSS.
The papers of the second Viscount Esher. The Library, Churchill College Cambridge. Consulted by courtesy of the present Viscount Esher.

GAINFORD MSS.
The papers of J.A. Pease, first Baron Gainford. The Library, Nuffield College Oxford. I am grateful to Dr. Cameron Hazlehurst and Mrs. Christine Woodland for allowing me to use Pease's diary, while they were editing it for publication.

H. GLADSTONE MSS.
The papers of the first Viscount Gladstone. British Library.

Mary [GLADSTONE] DREW diary

The papers of the first Viscount Grey of Fallodon. Public Record Office.

GREY MSS.

HALDANE MSS.
HARCOURT MSS. The papers of the first Viscount Harcourt. Seen at Stanton Harcourt, by courtesy of his son, the second Viscount. (Now deposited in the Bodleian).

T. E. HARVEY MSS. The Friends' Library. I am grateful to Harvey's biographer, Mr. Edward Milligan, for allowing me to see his own TS. synopsis of relevant letters.

Richard HOLT MSS. Liverpool City Library.

Sir Courtenay ILBERT MSS. House of Lords Record Office.

P. ILLINGWORTH MSS. Seen by kind permission of Illingworth's son, Mr. Henry Illingworth, at Carron-on-Spey, Morayshire, Scotland.

Bonar LAW MSS. Beaverbrook Library, London (now moved to the House of Lords Record Office). Cited as B. L. P.

LLOYD GEORGE MSS. The papers of the first Earl Lloyd-George of Dwyfor. Beaverbrook Library (now in House of Lords Record Office).

A. MacCALLUM SCOTT MSS. My thanks are due to Dr. Cameron Hazlehurst for allowing me to see his transcripts.

Reginald McKENNA MSS. The library, Churchill College, Cambridge. Consulted by permission of his son, Mr. D. McKenna.

MILNER MSS. The papers of the first Viscount Milner. Deposited at the Bodleian and examined by courtesy of the librarian of New College, Oxford.

MOTTISTONE MSS. The papers of J. E. B. Seely, first Baron Mottistone. The Library, Nuffield College Oxford.

Sir Matthew NATHAN MSS. Bodleian Library, Oxford.

NOVAR MSS. The papers of R. Munro-Ferguson, first Viscount Novar. Scottish Record Office.

William O'BRIEN MSS. National Library of Ireland. I am grateful to Dr. Philip Bull for allowing me to use his microfilm of this collection.


READING MSS. The papers of Rufus Isaacs, first Marquess of Reading. India Office Library.


RUNCIMAN MSS. The papers of the first Viscount Runciman. The Library, University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

SAMUEL MSS. The papers of the first Viscount Samuel. House of Lords Record Office.

J. SANDARS MSS. Bodleian Library, Oxford.

C. P. SCOTT MSS. Political memoranda in diary form in the British Library. Very little of the substantial amount of material relating to Ireland was published by T. Wilson in C. P. Scott. Political Diaries 1911-1928 (1970)

Manchester Guardian MSS) I am grateful to Dr. Peter Clarke for allowing me to use his transcripts.


SIMON MSS. The papers of the first Viscount Simon. My thanks are due to Dr. Hazlehurst for allowing me to see some of his transcripts.

J. A. SPENDER MSS. British Library.

Sir A. STEEL-MAITLAND MSS. Scottish Record Office.

J. ST. LOE STRACHEY MSS. Beaverbrook Library.

Sir Charles TREVELYAN MSS. The Library, University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Consulted with the permission of Trevelyan's daughter, Mrs. Pauline Dower, who kindly allowed me to see some of the family letters not normally open to researchers. I am also grateful for the help of Mr. A. J. A. Morris, who is writing a biography based on the papers.

Sir Harry VERNEY MSS. The late Sir Harry Verney allowed me to see the papers at his home in Bucks, shortly before his death. I also taped an interesting conversation in which he described his experiences as P. P. S. to Birrell, 1910-14 (interview, 15 Nov. 1972).


T. McKinnon WOOD MSS. Bodleian Library, Oxford.

I am grateful to Mrs. Lucy Masterman for her reminiscences of the years 1906-14 (taped interview, 3 Feb. 1974). I was unable to examine the Churchill Papers, which were closed while Mr. Martin Gilbert was working on the biography.
However, the Companion volumes to R. S. Churchill, Churchill: Young Statesman 1901-14, provide substantial primary material dealing with Ireland. John Morley’s Papers are in the possession of Mr. A. F. Thompson of Wadham College Oxford, Mr. Thompson regretted that this collection was not available for consultation, but assured me that there is literally nothing on the Irish issue between 1910 and 14. The microfilm of letters between Morley and Andrew Carnegie in the Bodleian (MS. film 569) helped to fill this gap. I did not consult the Carson Papers, since many of them were destroyed in the blitz. Correspondence with the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland revealed that there was little of value for my subject. The papers of John Dillon were closed, but F. S. L. Lyons’ excellent biography compensates for that.

II. OFFICIAL PUBLICATIONS


b) Cabinet Papers. Many of the cabinet papers dealing with Ireland, 1910-14, are not yet deposited in the Public Record Office. Consequently, I used the copies in private collections, especially the Asquith, Birrell and Lloyd George Papers. These have the advantage that they sometimes contain ministerial annotations. I have generally cited the P.R.O. reference for convenience (if it exists) after that of the collection used.

c) Government of Ireland bills of 1886, 1893 and 1912, together with various early drafts for 1911-12. Also consulted in private collections. (16 April 1912 bill: H.C. 1912-13 (136), II, 505.)

d) Parliamentary Papers

- Correspondence Relating to Recent Events in the Irish Command, 1914, Cd. 7318, Cd. 7329.
- Royal Commission into the Circumstances Connected with the Landing of Arms at Howth, 1914, Cd. 7631.

e) Records of the Irish Office in P.R.O. London, Colonial Office Papers. CO 903/17-18: Intelligence Notes, 1912-14. These contain police reports of criminal and political activities in Ireland, and information on the growth of the Ulster Volunteers and Irish Volunteers. They have been edited and published for the years 1913-16 by Brendan MacGillia Choille: Intelligence Notes 1913-16, Dublin Stationery Office, 1966.
III. NEWSPAPERS, PERIODICALS AND PAMPHLETS

a) Newspapers

The Times and the Nation were consulted regularly for the whole period, since they provided good news accounts and representative opinion for both main parties, with some inside information. Other papers were used in a highly selective manner. The Westminster Gazette, Daily News, Daily Chronicle and Manchester Guardian were examined at crucial times for Liberal opinion, though they rarely added anything to my evidence from other sources. Newspapers from particular local areas were consulted on a random sample basis e.g. the papers from S.W. England were checked for comment on the Agar-Robartes' debate. Essentially, the press was used to supplement information from private papers and Hansard.

b) Periodicals

The following proved the most useful, though others were consulted:
- Contemporary Review (vols. XCIX - CVI)
- National Review (vols. LVIII - LXIII)
- Nineteenth Century (vols. LXX - LXXXVI)
- Quarterly Review (vols. CCXVI - CCXXI)
- Round Table

c) Contemporary pamphlets and other works

The following were the most helpful from the Liberal and Nationalist viewpoint:

- Brassey, Thomas A. The Case for Devolution and a Settlement of the Home Rule Question by Consent (1913)
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IV. REFERENCE WORKS

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Michell's Newspaper Press Directory
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Who's Who
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V. SECONDARY SOURCES

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