

ROGER CASEMENT

(*Born, Dublin, Sept., 1864. Hanged, Pentonville Prison, London, Aug., 1916*)

BY SEÁN O'FAOLÁIN

IN A letter to Cunningham Grahame, Joseph Conrad once spoke of landing at some African port of small dimensions and, as he strolled around the outskirts of the town, seeing a man with two bulldogs and a walking stick and a Loanda boy go off into the bush. He was a finely-built man, around forty, dark-bearded, deep and gentle of eye, with a beetling brow like an Irish terrier — a handsome fellow, a bit of a conquistador. A few months after, as he happened to be looking into the dusk of the bush at the same spot, Conrad saw the same man, with his stick, his pack, his boy, and his two bulldogs, walk out as calmly as if he had been for an afternoon stroll. "He could tell you things! Things I've tried to forget; things I never did know." That was the British consul at S. Paola de Loanda, in Portuguese West Africa, one Casement.

There are men like him in Conrad's books. They move in a cocoon of indifference that one might mistake for the absent-mindedness of a poet, or a dilettante, or the incompetent grace of a country gentleman, if there were not a slightly troubled or brooding look behind the heavy eyes. Casement's only protection in the jungle, for instance, was that walking stick and the two white and brindled bulldogs. Another man like that (and he also was executed for treason against the state except that in his case it was an Irish state and his loyalty was to an older Irish dream) was Erskine

Childers. He had been through the South African War with the Honorable Artillery Company, and later through the World War, and fought in the naval attack on Zeebrugge: yet when he was with the Irish Republican guerillas on the hills in 1922, tough ragged-breeches who looked the part, he, too, had the air of the country gentleman out for a stroll — with his flat cap, his stiff linen collar, his long raincoat, and sometimes a walking stick. One never saw a weapon on him. There was another friend of his, also with the guerillas, who had been in the Tank Corps in France. Once when we were, under his leadership, about to start a surprise morning attack on the garrison of a little mountain village, he froze us by asking to be instructed in the use of an ordinary .45 Colt revolver, explaining that he knew nothing of such things. The attack deliberately fizzled out because our fellows, who were bristling with weapons, simply could not believe in that sort of man.

Yet such men are of a type common enough, although it takes wars and adventures to disclose them. Far from being the dilettantes for whom one might mistake them, they reject not merely all pre-occupation with self but all worldly human values as well; instead of being dedicate to egotism they are dedicate to sacrifice. They have the air of old soldiers home on furlough, carrying themselves with the aloof but friendly air of men resting, looking at

everything with the casual and slightly distinguished glance of men for whom all life is either an adventure or a sequence of periods between one adventure and another. Men of action, their minds move swiftly when they are in action: when they are not they become a little tormented and tangled, and yet not even then are they self-engaged, but concerned rather with a teasing out of the values inherent in the adventures to which they have given their support, which are imposed on them by more clever men, and which could never be brought to success except by their own particular brand of conquistador enthusiasm. There is something dedicate about them all, something of the martyr or the saint, as if they had indeed come out of a world of inveterate rebels against the despotism of fact. Note the deep-set eyes, or the gentle lips: note in Casement the lifted eyebrow, as if he were asking of the world that had suddenly impinged on his dreams — "Hello! Still carrying on just the same? How do you manage it?" I feel sure that Sir Galahad wore that lifted brow, and Francis, and Dominic. It is a brow that more worldly men should fear. . . .

The truth is that these men are rebels by nature, aberrants and solitaries. That is clear if you compare a man like Casement with a man, let us say, like Dwight Morrow. Here are two lives of dedication, immutably inconsonant, and not to be compared because the one worked only partially within the world's code and the other worked wholly within it, to support it even if, also, to amend it. Or put between them another type of man, either the man who prosecuted Casement at his trial for high treason, Sir F. E. Smith, K.C., M.P., later Lord Birkenhead, or his friend and companion in another kind of high treason, the late Lord Carson. Smith closed his speech for the prosecution with the words:

The prisoner, blinded by a hatred to this country, as malignant in quality as it was sudden in origin, has played a desperate hazard: he has played it and lost it: today the forfeit is claimed.

In his last speech from the dock, the man who was about to be hanged replied to the man who had in his time led the Ulster rebels against the British Government:

The difference between us was that my treason was based on a ruthless sincerity that forced me to attempt to carry out in action what I said in words, whereas their treason lay in verbal incitements. . . .

What would Dwight Morrow have said as between these men? He would probably have said that neither of them was as good a citizen as he ought to have been and that both had been foolish. But he would not be echoed by the majority of men, and in fact the cynical Birkenhead was right — they had both gambled and Casement had lost: that was all.

There is a sense in which all history is bunk, and these three or four careers annotate it. Had Casement died in 1914 he would be on the roll of England's splendid dead. T. E. Lawrence, it is said, was willing, after the war, to come over to his native Ireland and fight with Michael Collins for Sinn Fein. Had he done so he would be now, quite possibly, on the roll of those who bowed their heads under 'Traitors' Gate. Glory is a gamble and the definitions of history go to the winning side. History can never deal with men as men because it has to start from the premises laid down by victory and consolidated by power. Its values are the values of the *fait accompli*. Occasionally, very occasionally, as with a Joan of Arc, a great power like the Church of Rome can redress a wrong; or a vast revolution can rehabilitate, though even then only for some, the reputation of a prophet. But with little nations like Ire-

land and a great Empire like the British Commonwealth, there is small hope for gallant losers such as Roger Casement. His bones still lie in Pentonville under the quicklime, while men like Dwight Morrow or Lord Birkenhead can have justice done to them because their countries were victorious in a great war. Casement's little war was won too late to save him. So the judgments remain for all time, simply because—to paraphrase Macaulay's famous fantasy—the future African tourist, sketching the ruins of Manhattan, will not be bothered to remeasure them by new values. Men should be measured as men, not as part of social trends. Lawrence knew that and so measured himself. Casement knew it and lived accordingly.

II

Yet, in and out of their cocoon of scorn, these aberrants do dally with worldly affairs. Though it was young Casement's ambition to be an explorer (and he was one for a time and toured America to tell it what an American expedition had discovered along the track of Stanley's march to the source of the Congo) he later entered the British consular service. Then from the day he took the boat to Akassa on the Niger coast he came to know Africa as few men have ever known it. He was in the French Congo, in Nigeria, in Angola, in Mozambique, working for the British Government as trade commissioner or consul, so that when he found himself in 1903 at Kinshassa in the Belgian Congo he had lived north, south, east, and west of that seventh wonder of the world, the loop of river that cuts Africa like a reaping hook. Already the stories had begun to seep down to him out of the oily and slumbrous darkness of the Upper Congo's jungle-gloom, and when Lansdowne told

him that the Foreign Office must have the truth about that private cozenage of old Leopold II, he knew what he must endure to get it, and he had some idea what it would be like when he got it.

But he had only the very vaguest idea, and not even in a nightmare horror could he have imagined it before he went. He must have had many nightmare horrors after. Out of that vast insect-buzzing silence, that welter of hot rottenness underfoot, porous branches, fallen leaves, crawling life, and overhead submarine gloom; out of the long endlessness of parched grass ten feet high, an endlessness of what Englishmen would call "damn-all," he must come in two months with his story of how Wealth can make a beast of itself. Even before he went he knew how easily anything at all can happen in a place—if such a region could be called a place—so empty that one sees with a passionate delight a hill a hundred miles away, across the glittering, murmuring scrub. Anything that a white man wished to have or do in the heart of that oozy disintegration, he could have and could do and nothing would reply but the unbroken chirruping of the globules of obscenity that one sometimes squashed underfoot. . . .

Casement knew the shy native life, and had come to have a great liking for it. He struck off alone into the bush to question it, and he found whole villages gone, disappeared, since his last visit to the same region a few years before. There had been mud huts and savages then. Farther up at the junction of the Lulanga there had been cannibals and pygmies: and slaves had been driven in herds. But now, they were gone—and he felt lonely. He was one man against a whole system and he was on the side of the natives and the flight of these natives made him feel isolated. A new silence was added to the inexorable

silence of Africa. The solitary was marooned.

Such loneliness is never kind, but it is terrifying when it is a man's direct enemy. For the thing that makes the gorge rise about the Congo brutalities is the impenetrable secrecy of the place where they occurred. The natives were safe once by reason of the darkness of Africa: it was now their foe. If they fled they knew that their taskmasters would follow them as implacably as the little cloudlets overhead, moving endlessly across the hot sky. The deeper they went into the glaucous dusk of the jungle the more did secrecy wrap their helplessness. In some clearing, because they had not brought in rubber forty times the value of what they were paid *their black fellows would fall on them, worn out and tired as they were, and then. . . . women were shot. . . . a white man used to put six natives in a row, belly to back, and kill them with one bullet. . . . or they were tied up, even the chieftains, to a post in the settlement and flogged and made to swallow the defecations of the white man. . . . soldiers were told to unman their victims, and the human parts were brought back as the sign of the kill. . . . a youth was tied to a tree all night until the thongs of his wrists cut to the bone: in the morning soldiers battered off the hands with rifle butts. . . . Casement saw the hands. . . . he saw the stumps of arms. Day after day he wrote down the details, names, dates—saw missionaries who told him in heart-breaking voices of this frustration of all they taught. And he was back at the coast under two months of the date he set out, with his mass of documents. It is thanks to him and the energy of the British Government that today Leopold-Kinshassa is ten times its size, that the natives have come back, that if a white even strikes a*

native he may have to answer for it to the commissioner. For his work Casement was made a Companion of the Order of St. Michael and St. George.

Eight years later he was Consul General at Rio de Janeiro, and was inquiring into similar evils in the Putamayo rubber industry, 3000 miles up the Amazon. He reported things that were not even printed in the Blue Book subsequently issued; for here he dealt with men who were not merely brutal but perverted, men whose "civilization" suggested to them ingenious forms of torture. A man named Jimenez took an old Indian woman, strung her naked between two trees, and lit a fire of leaves under her. The Barbados man who gave this evidence admitted that he saw the great blisters rise on her thighs while she screamed with pain. They did other things to women that one would not wish to recall. The voyage went on for months. When it was over Casement's fight to effect real reformation continued for more than a year, for he and the British were thwarted constantly by the sloth or indifference or graft of the Peruvians. In the end it was largely through Taft and the British ambassador at Washington that the report was published. For his work, the last work he did as a British servant, Casement was made a knight. There is a certain irony in the admission. He had always been a knight.

III

So far Casement had devoted himself to the magnificent task of upholding all that was best in the code of a great country. Now, forty-eight years old, he retired from the consular service on a pension. ("I served the British Government faithfully and loyally," he wrote in 1915 to Sir Edward Grey, "as long as it was possible for

me to do so.") At his trial the Crown Prosecutor was to speak of a hate for England "as malignant as it was sudden". I do not believe he ever hated England, but I think he never believed particularly in the code, and his disbelief in it was not sudden. As early as 1905, between the Congo and Brazil, he had been back in Ireland in the glens of Antrim, and like all these adventurers, brooding between their adventures, he had begun to brood on Ireland. He was a wanderer, however, and he was a Protestant Irishman, one of the minority; and he had left Ireland as a mere boy. It was in the worst period of Nationalist politics, the doldrums after Parnell's fall that he came, far from home, to his maturity. It took him a long time to work his way back, out of the tangle of his equivocal connection with the Empire, to a clear understanding of his own country's relationship to that Empire. But, even in 1906, after he had left Ireland for Santos, had the British secret service been more alert, it would have been shocked to peruse the letters of one of its apparently most devoted servants.

For Casement had (he said so himself in his diary) in the nineteen months he spent so happily among the simple Ulster folk, and in conversation with the young men and women who were already laying the mine of the 1916 rebellion, sown in his heart the seed of all his subsequent actions. I have seen letter after letter, sent from South America to his devoted friend, Bulmer Hobson, one of the most active and persistent of the secret society of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, in which he writes as an Irish Nationalist, pure and simple. He contributed to their revolutionary papers over a pseudonym; he even helped to write a pamphlet against recruiting; and, as always, his hand was ever in his pocket to help with hard cash.

Now, six years later, he was back again in Antrim, free of all avocations that might distract him from dedication to his own people. And he was back at a time when "King" Carson was already beating the big drum of Ulster and threatening the Liberal Government with civil war. But it was only a few years to the outbreak of the European war and Casement had long seen it coming; and if the fight for Home Rule had reached that stage when, as in a drawn-out boxing match, the antagonists were so weary that it seemed a matter of chance which would win, Casement had no belief in the Liberal Government, and less belief in John Redmond, the Irish leader, and he could understand Carson's deliberate defiance and the weight it would pull with the English Tories. In Coleraine, in September, 1912, the autumn of his return to Ireland, he could have heard that saturnine, ruthless, and fearless man cry, as he fought for Ulster's right to remain within the Empire: "I do not care whether it is treason or not!" So that when, in a back room of a Dublin hotel less than a year later, a few Southern Irish founded the Irish National Volunteers, Casement felt it was the only proper reply, and at once gave his name as one of the trustees.

After that things moved quickly. On the night of April 24, 1914, 35,000 rifles were landed for Carson's army at Larne from the Norwegian steamer *Fanny* out of Hamburg. On Sunday afternoon, July 26, Erskine Childers and his wife appeared off Dublin with a yacht containing 2500 rifles and 125,000 rounds of ammunition. Gun-running was the order of the day. Then at midnight on August 4, the whole Irish crisis was blown to bits by the outbreak of the World War. A month later, Casement, now in New York City plotting with the Irish revolutionaries, wrote in an *Open*

Letter to the Irish People enough treason to hang any man. He had taken the last step. His journey to Berlin via Christiania, where he landed in October, 1914, was merely the implementing of what he said in that letter. His last adventure was the effort to form in Germany, from among Irish prisoners of war, and bring to Ireland, a brigade of troops to be called the Irish Brigade. For that, precisely, they hanged him.

IV

Casement was already worn out when he reached Berlin and, like Wolfe Tone with the French Directory in 1796, found it trying and wearying day in and day out to argue with the German General Staff, and the Foreign Office in the Wilhelmstrasse: for not merely were they troubled by doubts of their own, but even from left-wing Irish-American sources doubts were being instilled into them about Casement. And he was not a young man, now, like Tone with his merry " 'Tis but in vain for soldiers to complain" that runs all through that most vivid and amusing diary of his; or Lord Edward; or Emmet. He was fifty-one, and he was a worn man.

The organizing and the persuading and the plotting went on into the spring of 1916, and then, in March, the Irish revolutionaries informed the Germans that they had decided to rise on Easter Sunday, April 23. They asked for a shipload of arms, and officers. The General Staff, after the usual haggling, agreed to send 20,000 rifles, well over a million rounds of ammunition, some machine guns and ammunition; but no field guns, and no officers. The arms would be loaded on a steamer disguised as a Norwegian trader, under a layer of lumber. They refused to provide an escort, but finally decided to send Case-

ment, his loyal friend, Captain Robert Monteith, and a Sergeant Beverley of the Brigade, a trained machine-gunner, in a submarine. The plan was that the disguised trader, the *Aud*, was to be off the Kerry coast after ten o'clock at night, on either April 20, 21, 22, or 23. The Irish revolutionaries were to station a pilot boat off Innistusket Island from that hour to dawn on each of these nights. The pilot should bear two green lights that would flash at intervals, and so meet and guide the gunrunner into Fenit Harbor.

Casement, Monteith, and Beverley left Helgoland in the *U-19* on April 14, and for five days they battered their way around the north of Scotland and Ireland, and down the west coast towards Tralee Bay. Not once did they sight a British warship. Monteith was able to spend most of the day in oilskins on the conning tower. Casement was too ill and weak to climb up into the cold air through the tiny manholes. On April 20, after dark had fallen, they throbbed past the Shannon, and as they had sighted the gunrunner two miles to starboard a few hours earlier, they had good reason to feel that things were proceeding according to plan. It was a dark night. There were no stars. The sea moved in a slight swell. They crowded the conning tower and stared and stared for the two winking green lights of the pilot. They never came. Either Stack, the local commandant, or Dublin headquarters had made a fatal error.

At last the commander of the U-boat would wait no longer. He turned and steamed swiftly into the bay. Casement was informed that they would all three be put ashore. They do not appear, any of them, to have questioned the wisdom of this, and in any case they were so ashamed and appalled at the disaster of the missing pilot and the abandoned *Aud* that they

seem not to have been able, poor devils, to think at all. The submarine wallowed slowly inshore, a big gray fish of the night. They were put into a little cockleshell of a boat—it was produced later at the trial and looks rather like a big basin with a fat tube for gasoline around it, for an out-board motor could be attached—and then the submarine vanished into the night, and they began to rise and fall on the Atlantic waves.

They rowed. It seemed to take hours, although they could see the beach with its long line of foam and hear the dull sound of pounding breakers. The waves threatened them continually and once tossed them upside down into the sea; but they were wearing lifebelts, the boat did not sink, and with effort they righted it. They rowed again; they stuck on a sand bank; and in trying to push off, Monteith fell overboard once more. At last they felt the beach grate under them and they tumbled, soaked to the skin, utterly exhausted, waist-deep into the sea. Monteith's description of this landing, in his splendid book *Casement's Last Adventure*, is one of the most moving things I have ever read:

I found my companions stretched on the sand, weary and exhausted. I do not think that Casement was even conscious. He was lying away below high-water mark, the sea lapped his body from head to foot, his eyes were closed and in the dim moonlight his face resembled that of a sleeping child. I dragged him to his feet and chafed his hands and feet as best I could, while the water ran from his hair and clothing: then I made him move about to restore his circulation. . . .

When we had warmed up a little we wrung out our clothing and felt a little more comfortable. I said to Casement, with as much cheerfulness as I could muster, "Well, Sir Roger, we've had the little adventure and got through it alright." He patted me on the shoulder as was his way

and answered smilingly, "Yes, Captain Monteith, we've had a little adventure, and are much nearer the end of the chapter." . . . Had I known what the end of the chapter was really going to be, I would have let him sleep into eternity in the foaming water of Banna Strand, the water that had tried to be kind to one of Ireland's heroes.

They hid Casement—ill, stiff, discouraged—in an old fort while they pushed on into Tralee to give warning and get help. Unknown and suspected as they were, it took time; and before a car could reach the fort Casement had been arrested by police. Even in his misery he kept something of his urbane sense of humor, for he told the police he was an author. "What book did you write?" they asked. "A life of Saint Brendan," he said. As he sat in the ancient fort, with his teeth chattering and his body feverish, he must have been ruminating on all the Irish voyagers he knew, for Brendan's *Voyage*, a ninth-century legend, is one of the most famous of the sagas of the old Celtic church. It was a voyage in which there were many visions of Heaven and Hell, and its aim was to reach the Happy Otherworld, or Land of Promise whose allure has so often inflamed the imagination of the Irish race.

The Rising broke out on Easter Monday. It was crushed in a week. By May 13 many men had been sentenced to death or to life imprisonment, and about 2500 had been deported. Among them was a young man named Michael Collins who, on his release, began to organize at once for the revolutionary years to follow. But by then Sir Roger Casement had been tried, found guilty, unknighthed, and hanged.

There it is, then. Casement is dead, and Carson is dead, and Birkenhead is dead, and every Irishman thinks Casement a patriot, and nine out of ten Englishmen

believe him a traitor, and legally and by all the forms that govern human relationships he was one. He was a traitor to British prestige, to the British code, to British history, to the long and truly admirable traditions of England—admirable for England, that is—a traitor to Elizabeth, and Peel, and Clive, and the Industrial Revolution, and Cobbett, and Tennyson, and Rudyard Kipling: in brief, to the *status quo*. He was, possibly, not a very clever man as cleverness goes, and of worldly wisdom he had little. (It might even be thought by some that because he belonged to a small nation he should have devoted his talents to a big nation: which is much like saying that there should be no small towns only big ones, no small farms only collective ones, no private ambitions only communal ones.) But we Irish revere him because, quite simply, he was that rare thing—an integrated man.

I do not believe his friends think of him entirely as that. They see him in some Dublin hotel and he is talking with the chambermaid or the boots like an old friend. "Ah, yes," he smiles to a compan-

ion's questioning glance. "Paddy is a good fellow. His wife is getting on well now, and the baby is fine." For within ten minutes he seemed to know more about people he met casually, and who liked him on the spot, than others might find out in ten years. Or they recall that although he would always arrive with, maybe, half a year's salary, he would, before he left, be living on an overdraft—the whole thing given away.

But it is the penalty of fame that men become symbols, whether for good or ill. One passes no final judgment on Casement because one knows that all human beings read these symbols out of the past, according to their own ambitions, their own desires, their own hopes or their own fears as to what life ought or ought not to be.

As I write, they are laying Carson's body in reverence in the Westminster Abbey of Belfast. As I write, Roger Casement's bones lie under a prison wall, marked by a numbered brick. It is a strange world, one thinks—and having thought it, one realizes that there is no more to say.

THE STATE OF THE UNION

BY ALBERT JAY NOCK

Progress Toward Collectivism

IN CONVERSATION with me not long ago, one of my friends was speculating on what might have happened in 1932 if the government had taken a stand directly opposite to the one it did take. "Suppose, for instance," he said, "that in his inaugural address, Mr. Roosevelt had said: 'The banks are closed, and you are all looking to the government to open them again and get them going. You will look in vain. You think it is the first duty of a government to help business. It is not. The only concern that government has with banking or any other business is to see that it is run honestly, to punish any and every form of fraud, and to enforce the obligations of contract. This government has no concern with the present plight of the banks, except to see that any banker who acts dishonestly goes to jail — and to jail he shall go.'"

My friend thought that a good many people in the business world would have drawn a long breath of relief at the announcement of such a policy. They would cheerfully have said good-bye to their dollars that had been impounded or embezzled, for the sake of hearing that the government proposed thenceforth to keep hands strictly off business, except to see that it was run honestly; or in other words, that as far as business was concerned the government would limit itself strictly to making justice costless, accessible, sure, swift, and impartial. Aside from this it would leave business free to hoe its own

row and get itself out of its own messes as best it might.

I did not agree. My belief was, and is, that the business world would have acted like a herd of drug-addicts whose rations had been suddenly cut off, for in its relations with the government that is precisely what the representative business world of America has always been and is now — a herd of addicts. It has always believed that the one governmental function which dwarfs all others to insignificance is to "help business". Let any kind of industry get itself into any kind of clutter, and it is the government's duty to intervene and straighten out the mess. This belief has prevailed from the beginning; it has seeped down from the business world and pervaded the general population so thoroughly that I doubt whether there are five hundred people in the country who have any other view of what government is really for. It seems to me, therefore, as I said, that the abrupt announcement of a change of policy would have merely thrown the people *en masse* into the imbecile hysteria of hopheads who are bereft of their supplies.

This belief being as deeply rooted as it is — the belief that the one end and aim of government is to help business — the history of government in America is a history of ever-multiplying, ever-progressive interventions upon the range of individual action. First in one situation, then in another, first on this pretext, then on that, the gov-