

# THE SPELL UNWOVEN

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This 'decade of commemorations' has become the pretext for a litany of the the most outrageous, obscene and offensive comparisons, primarily between the four-year long Saturnalian orgy of imperialist butchery and genocidal extermination waged against the 'surplus' male working class population of Europe, sarcastically referred to as 'the Great War,' and a genuinely globally inspirational struggle for the freedom of a small nation known as 'the 1916 rising.'

How can anyone in their right mind find any moral, political or historical equivalence between the butcher of Omdurman and Kilmainham, Major General Sir John Grenfell Maxwell (1) and William Pearse the man he condemned to death by firing squad for the unforgivable offence of loving his country and his brother.

The revisionist lie machine has been cranked into overdrive in an attempt to manipulate people's genuine sympathy for those who foolishly but courageously lost their lives in the killing fields of Flanders and the Dardanelles into a retrospective justification and celebration of the most pointless and unforgivable inter-imperialist slaughter, a bloodbath which directly led to a civil war in Russia from 1918-1920 that cost eight million lives and to the rise of genocidal regimes in Russia and Germany in the following decades.

This 'war to end all wars' is falsely being portrayed as a chivalrous and selfless crusade by a noble minded and peace loving 'mother of Parliaments' against a bestial and militaristic Hun to safeguard the neutrality and independence of tiny 'poor Catholic Belgium'. This myth conveniently ignores the fact 'small nations' like Belgium ruthlessly occupied and exploited an area in central Africa the size of western Europe where they openly practised, torture, mutilation and a form of slavery on their subjects, practices which were only exposed by Roger Casement, a leader of the 1916 Rising later executed by the British.

The image of the First World War presented to us by revisionist spin doctors is of the frozen and mud drenched 'Tommy' dutifully duelling it out with his Teutonic counterpart in the static trenches of the Western Front. But there was another war, one less well known, less static, more successful and altogether more profitable for the conflicts' imperialist puppet-masters. British imperialists long had the ambition to crush its emerging 'Carthaginian' commercial rival on its doorstep, Germany, which was fast overtaking the 'workshop of the world' in trade, industrial production and military strength. Clearly, this upstart would have to be taught a severe lesson which would act as an example to others that might follow. Fatefully, this necessity dovetailed with another British imperialist ambition of building a railway from Cairo to Capetown running entirely through British territory. Unfortunately, the German colonies of Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi stood in the way. The freedom of small nations was to become the fig leaf for a naked imperialist land grab.

On 29th of August 1914, twenty-five days after Britain declared war on Germany, Britain's colony and ally, New Zealand, seized the German colony of Samoa in the Pacific Ocean (not a move of pivotal strategic significance to the war in Europe but an area the size of Luxembourg).(2) On 26th August 1914, the German Colony of Togo Land, an area the size of Croatia, was surrendered to British Lt Col. FC Bryant. (3) On 19th September 1914, the British Colony of South Africa invaded German South West Africa (Namibia), by May 13th 1915 at the cost of 1769 casualties. It succeeded in capturing this vast territory, the size of Spain and Italy.(4) Another British colony, Australia, succeeded in capturing the German colonies on Papua New Guinea by 26th September 1914 and Narau within a matter of weeks at a cost of six Australian, one German and 30 native police lives.(5) Britain and France succeeded in capturing and partitioning the German colony of Cameroon by 18th February

1916. (6) Britain's conquest of the German colony of Tanzania was much more costly and protracted and it did not finally fall to Britain and her South African allies until December 1917. German Forces continued to fight on, led by Lt. Col Von Leton Vorbeck until 14th November 1918; the conflict cost the lives of 2000 Germans, 10,000 British and 130,000 civilians. At least two thirds of these died from disease.(7) Britain's ally since 1902, imperial protege, and enforcer in the pacific, Japan, was permitted to seize some minor German Pacific colonies such as Paula, Micronesia, the Marshal Islands and Tsingleo in China in 1914. While poor little Belgium was given the German colonies of Rwanda and Burundi (an area the size of Albania and Macedonia combined).

These invasions were not a spur of the moment emotional reaction but part of a long planned strategy. In 1911, at a conference on imperial defence, South African Prime Minister, Louis Botha, promised Lloyd George to invade German South West Africa with 40,000 men as soon as a war with Germany began. The Australian and New Zealand governments were also urged to invade German possessions in the pacific at the start of hostilities. (8)

However, Britain's biggest prize was not Germany's colonies at all but rather the glittering mirage of the Turkish Ottoman Empire. All European imperialist powers had been greedily eyeing 'the sick man of Europe' with a view to stealing his valuable possessions as soon as he stumbled. Italy had already captured Libya, and the Greek islands of Rhodes and the Dodecanese following the Turkish-Italian war of September 1911 to October 1912, which cost 3380 Italian and 14,000 Turkish lives. Albania won its independence from the Turks that same year. Britain had already wrested Egypt from Ottoman control in 1882 and was establishing an 'Arab facade' of puppet emirates along the Persian Gulf such as Kuwait, which became a British protectorate in 1899. If a nation of dilettantes like the Italians could defeat the Turks, surely an imperialist superpower like Great Britain could easily do the same. As early as 1906, the Committee for Imperial Defence had plans to occupy Basra and southern Iraq and colonise it with Indian immigrants.(9) The arch imperialist Winston Churchill devised a scheme whereby the 'soft underbelly of Europe' could be split open through an attack on Istanbul via the Dardanelles. When the Ottoman empire dissolved, Britain could divide up the spoils. On 3rd November 1914, the French and British navies began an unprovoked bombardment of Turkish positions in the Dardanelles This led Turkey to declare war on Britain and France the following day. Britain annexed Cyprus and Egypt the following month, leading to a failed Turkish attack on Suez in February 1915. Once again, the British and French bombarded the Dardanelles and landed 129,000 Irish, Australian and New Zealand troops at Gallipoli in April. After eight months of pointless slaughter in sweltering heat, 25,000 fatalities and 76,000 injuries, the allies gave up and evacuated Gallipoli on 20th December 1915.

This humiliating defeat did not deter Britain, however, which now tried to strike the decisive blow in the war in Europe. In Iraq, a British and Indian army invaded Mesopotamia from Kuwait along the river Tigris, occupying Basra in November 1914, while the Russians invaded from the north. After initial successes, British forces became bogged down and were besieged for 143 days in Kut el Amara, which was surrendered to the Turks with 13,000 British prisoners of war, including their commander, Major General Charles Townshend, on 29th April 1916.(10) Despite this setback, Britain persisted with her offensive in Iraq and, by 11th March 1917, Baghdad fell to British forces led by Lieutenant General Sir Stanley Maude.(11)

On the 21st June 1916, with British support, Grand Sherif Hussein of Mecca declared war on the Ottoman Empire in a bid to secure Arab independence. Strictly speaking, this was an act of 'treason' comparable with the crime Roger Casement would be sentenced to death for eight days later. In return for fighting the Turks, Britain promised the Arabs their independence; however, this was yet another cynical deception as Britain and France had

already agreed to carve up the Ottoman Empire between them in the secret Sykes -Picot agreement on 9th March 1916. In an effort to win Zionist support for the war in America and Russia, Britain offered to create a Jewish homeland in Palestine under British administration and protection; this offer was made public with the Balfour declaration on the 9th November 1917.

British forces invaded Palestine from Egypt in 1917, capturing Gaza by 27th March, and Jerusalem fell to General Allenby on 9th December. On 1st October 1918, Damascus fell to an Arab force led by British Major T E Lawrence and King Faisal. By 7th October, Britain had captured Beirut and Sidon and on 31st of that month Turkey surrendered. What followed in 1919 was the division of the spoils; France was given Lebanon and Syria, Britain got Palestine, Jordan and Iraq. As compensation, Faisal was installed as Britain's puppet king of Iraq, while his brother Abdullah was made puppet King of the artificially created state of Jordan and their father Hussein became Sultan of Nejd with a monthly British subsidy of £25,000 (12)

So why did Britain expend so much blood and treasure on what was essentially a side show in the Middle East compared to the main event on the western front? When dealing with a state which perfected the art of 'ruling by fooling', one could be forgiven for believing that the side show was the main event and vice versa. As prime minister, Lloyd George told the House of Commons before Christmas 1917: "The British Empire owes a good deal to sideshows. During the seven years' war, which was also a great European war ... the events which are best remembered by every Englishman are not the great battles on the continent of Europe but Plassey [Bengal] and the Heights of Abraham [Quebec]." (13)

Britain's self-appointed historic mission was to maintain 'the balance of power in Europe'. Less than ten years before the start of the Great War she had clashed with Russia over her expansion into Persia and with France over colonial disputes in Africa. Perhaps it was in Britain's selfish strategic interest to allow her allies and enemies exhaust themselves by slugging it out in the trenches of the western and eastern fronts, while Britain cherry picked the spoils of war. Despite having a greater population than France, Britain's fatalities (702,000) and those of her Commonwealth (205,000), were less than half the fatalities of her French allies (1.9 million) and a similar quantity as Italy (700,000) which only joined the war in April 1915. Britain lost 418,000 men or more than 40% of her entire war time casualties in the four-month Somme offensive of 1916, her first major offensive of the war. (14)

For over a century, Britain's primary interest in the Ottoman Empire and the Middle East was strategic. She seized Egypt to secure the Suez canal and her shortest route to India. She occupied Yemen as a coaling station on the route to India and the Gulf emirates to prevent them falling into the hands of potential rivals like Russia. She also sought to discourage the Turkish-German Baghdad railway and Russian expansion in Persia and Afghanistan as a potential threat to the Jewel in her crown, India. On 5th May 1903, Foreign Secretary, Lord Lansdowne, told the House of Commons: "We should regard the establishment of a naval base ... in the Persian Gulf by any other power as a grave menace to British interests, and we shall certainly resist it with all means at our disposal." (15) However, just when this strategic threat began to wane with the Japanese defeat of the Russian navy in 1905 and Britain's Entente with France in 1904 a new economic interest arose. On 8th May 1901, an English speculator, William Knox D'Arcy signed a 60-year deal that gave him exclusive rights to seek, produce and sell natural gas, petroleum and asphalt throughout the Persian Empire for the price of £20,000. Sir Marcus Samuel, owner of the Shell oil company and a close friend of First Sea Lord, Admiral John Fisher, had convinced his friend that in order to maintain the Royal Navy's supremacy over the German coal-fired Navy, British ships should be powered by oil. Securing a plentiful and secure supply of this

black gold now became part of Britain's vital strategic interest. However, Samuel's company Shell had been taken over by a Dutch company in 1905, so another British source was needed. A Scottish oil company, Burmah Oil, entered into partnership with D'Arcy in Persia and oil was discovered on 26th May 1908 at Masjid es Suleiman in British controlled southern Persia and piped to the Gulf coast at Abadan. By 1919, this refinery produced 7.5 million barrels.(16) In 1911, Britain signed an exclusive monopoly concession for Bahrein's oil.(17) On 30th November 1913, Winston Churchill signed a deal with the Ottoman empire to exploit all the oil in Iraq, Arabia and Syria. Exploration began at the start of the century but Iraq's Kirkuk oil fields in Kurdistan did not start production until 1927. (18) In the spring of 1914, the British Government bought 51% of the shares in the Anglo Persian Oil company in order to control the oil price for the Navy.

Britain had yet another reason to prioritise her aggression against the Ottoman Empire. Throughout Britain's vast empire, whether it be Nigeria, Sudan, Malaysia or Bengal, the Empire had millions of devout and reluctant Muslim subjects, and the most primal fear of her imperialists was of a pan-Islamic uprising that would call Britain's unbeatable bluff and bring down her global empire. These nightmares nearly came true in November 1914 when the Ottoman Sultan, who also held the title of Caliph, or head of the Muslim religion, proclaimed a Jihad against Britain, France and Russia. While this provided a motive for the allies to knock Turkey out of the war as soon as possible, Britain probably had the most to lose as India alone had 57 million Muslims and the preponderance of her most strategic possessions, like Egypt and the Arabian sheikdoms, were Muslim lands. Britain needed a figurehead who could appeal against the jihad and Col. T E Lawrence's Hessian ally and descendant of the Prophet Hussain Sharif of Mecca was the ideal candidate. With his voice and the appeals of various other Indian Princes and Emirs, the Muslim insurrections were kept to a minimum in Egypt in 1915 and Sudan in 1916. (19)

But before she could expand her empire, first Britain needed to pick a fight. Britain unexpectedly declared war on Germany on the 4th August 1914 on the pretext that, by invading neutral Belgium, Germany had violated the 1839 Treaty of London. Germany had earlier tried to ascertain British intentions regarding their well-known 1905 'Schliffen Plan' of a swift German hammer blow through Belgium encircling Paris and was left with the impression that this would not be seen as a cause for war with Britain. If Britain genuinely wanted to protect Belgian neutrality, and had she made her intentions known, Germany would have amended her war plans to keep Britain neutral. (20) However, what nobody knew was that, in 1908, a tiny cabal within the British cabinet comprised of Prime Minister Herbert Asquith, Foreign Minister Edward Grey and war Minister Richard Haldane had made a secret commitment to France to send a 160,000 strong British Expeditionary Force to aid the French in the event of a war with Germany. (21) This deal was kept secret from the public, the Liberal Party, Parliament, and the rest of the Cabinet (the cabinet was only informed in 1912). Sir Edward Grey went further and lied to his imperial allies at the 1911 Conference on Imperial Defence where Britain gained assurances of military assistance from her colonies in the event of war by stating Britain had no hidden understandings with any other power and would only become involved in a European war if there was a threat of 'Napoleonic' domination by one power.(22) Clearly, Britain was intent on war with Germany even if Belgium had not been invaded (23), and, twice in 1904 and 1908, Admiral Fisher had proposed an unprovoked pre-emptive strike to destroy the German fleet before it became too big. (24)

Britain and her allies were no better at respecting the rights of neutral nations. Persia, though nominally independent, had, since 1905, been divided into northern Russian and southern British spheres of influence. With the outbreak of war, Britain disregarded this fiction of independence and sent troops into Persia. By 1918, 10,000 British troops were

posted there guarding its oil wells.(25) On 3rd October 1915, British and French forces invaded neutral Greece at Salonika in order to fight Germany's ally Bulgaria. Greek politics had, since 1910, been divided by the 'National Schism' of a pro German King and a pro Allied Liberal Prime-Minister, Venizelos. In September 1915, the King sacked Venizelos over his pro-allied policies, but in August 1916 the Allies backed Venizelos in staging a coup which deposed the King in June 1917, led to a civil war on the streets of Athens, clashes with allied troops, and the allied seizure of the Greek Navy. Greece eventually joined the war on the Allies side, but the war left bitter and deep divisions in Greek society which last until the present day.(26)

The war brought to the fore a strange trait of the British national character. Just as the Germans are seen as humourless and efficient and the Americans don't get sarcasm, so too the British have an incapacity for analogy and empathy. In the hands of a skilled propagandist, she can portray the same crime as either an unparalleled outrage or an unavoidable act of God. Britain can without a twinge of irony condemn with moral outrage German atrocities against Belgian civilians, yet remain indifferent to General Lake's 'pacification' of Ireland in 1798 with a pitch cap in one hand and a gibbet in the other, or General Sir Hugh Gough's rapacious rampage across China in 1842.

German unrestricted submarine warfare after 1915, which led to the sinking of 1,069 British and 134 French ships(27), was depicted by British propaganda as a sign of German inhumanity. A single incident was highlighted globally, the sinking of the ocean liner Lusitania off the coast of Kinsale on 7th May 1917, with the loss of 1,198 lives (128 of which were American), was used by Britain to goad America into the war, despite the fact that the ship ignored warnings not to enter the war zone and was illegally carrying 4,000 cases of small arms in violation of its non-belligerent status.(28) Yet Britain ignored a greater crime than that; since 1908, Britain planned a naval blockade of Germany and did so from the very outbreak of war in 1914. Food was treated as 'war contraband' and was confiscated by the Royal Navy. This led to the deaths of 763,000 German civilians from hunger and disease during the war and another 100,000 after the war, as the blockade remained in place until July 1919 as part of a strategy of starving Germany into accepting the Versailles Treaty, war guilt and reparations. These deaths received less international attention as famine makes bad copy and typhus never makes the front pages.

Britain portrayed the 51 Germany's Zeppelin attacks against British cities, which cost Britain 2,000 lives, and her naval bombardment of English coastal towns as a new low in modern warfare, ignoring the fact that in under one hour and forty minutes on 27th August 1896, British ships killed at least 500 people in its naval bombardment of Zanzibar (29) and British planes were used to mow down Iraqi civilians in 1919-20.

Germany was portrayed as an aggressive, militarist war-monger, yet when Pope Benedict XV made a peace plan in August 1917, which proposed the return of occupied Poland and Belgium in exchange for Germany's lost colonies, freedom of the seas and disarmament, the proposal was accepted by Germany and Austria but rejected by America and Britain. (30)

Some people call this British trait hypocrisy or double standards, yet it remains one of the most formidable weapons in her psychological arsenal. Britain's apologists in Ireland seek to draw a comparison between the 2,627 people who died as a result of Ireland's struggle for independence from 1916-1921 and the 15 million who lost their lives in World War One. Even if we add the 3,738 who have died as part of the current Northern Ireland conflict since 1966, it still does not come near the slaughter of 1st July 1916 on the Somme when 20,000 British soldiers were killed. The 50,000 Irishmen, Protestant and Catholic, who died fighting for Britain in the 'Great War' were the victims of a sordid and cynical swindle. They laid down their lives so that British corporations could exploit the oil resources of the

former Ottoman Empire that Britain could impoverish her commercial rivals and retain her hegemony in world trade for another 30 years. They died in a smash and grab, which went horribly wrong. This shabby reality would be too much for the public to take, so the truth must be dressed up in sincere solemnity of remembrance day and the mythology of 'our glorious dead'.

- (1) The Rise and Fall of the British Empire, Lawrence James, (1995) Page 283.
- (2) Chronicle of the 20th Century, (1993) Page 190.
- (3) Chronicle, Page 196.
- (4) Chronicle, Page 203.
- (5) Wikipedia
- (6) Chronicle, Page 212.
- (7) Wikipedia
- (8) Rise and Fall, Page 343
- (9) Rise and Fall, Page 344
- (10) Chronicle , Page 214
- (11) Chronicle, Page 227.
- (12) The House of Saud, David Holden & Richard Johns (1981) Page 73-4
- (13) Rise and Fall, Page 364.
- (14) Our Changing Times, Kenneth Neill, (1975) Page 79, Chronicle, Page 221, Rise and Fall, Page 367, Europe Since 1870, Page 120
- (15) Saud, Page 29.
- (16) Saud, Pages 34-6 , Rise and Fall Page 403.
- (17) Saud, Page 82.
- (18) Chronicle Page 183 and Rise and Fall Page 403.
- (19) Rise and fall, page 359-61.
- (20) Unionjackery, Brendan Clifford, Page 12
- (21) The Crime Against Europe, Roger Casement, Page 39
- (22) Rise and Fall, Page 342.
- (23) Europe Since Napoleon, David Thompson, Page 552
- (24) Rise and Fall, Page 336.
- (25) Rise and Fall, Page 396.
- (26) Wikipedia
- (27) Chronicle, Page 251
- (28) Europe Since 1870, Mark Tierney , Page 118-9
- (29) Britain's Forgotten Wars, Page 402-3
- (30) Chronicle, Page 231-2.