

**THE IRISH ON THE SOMME;
BEING THE
SECOND SERIES OF
"THE IRISH AT THE FRONT"**

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The Irish on the Somme; being the second series of "The Irish at the front" by Michael MacDonagh

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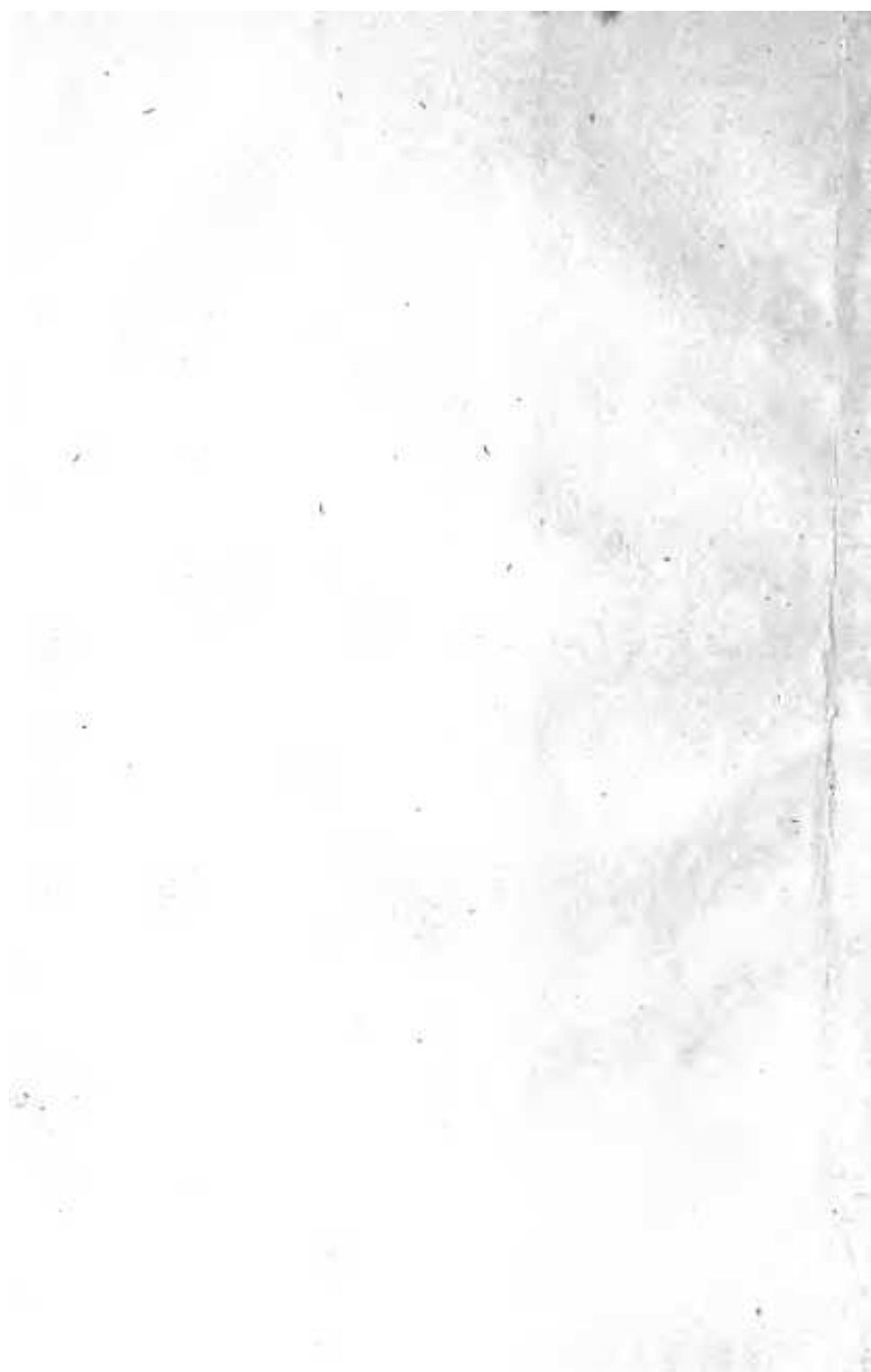
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MICHAEL MACDONAGH

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THE IRISH ON THE SOMME

*BEING THE SECOND SERIES OF
"THE IRISH AT THE FRONT"*

By MICHAEL MACDONAGH

Author of "Irish Life and Character"

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
JOHN REDMOND, M.P.

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TO
THE MEMORY OF
MAJOR WILLIAM REDMOND, M.P.
ROYAL IRISH REGIMENT (IRISH BRIGADE)
WHO DIED OF WOUNDS RECEIVED IN ACTION
JUNE 7, 1917
LEADING HIS MEN IN THE ATTACK
ON WYTSCHAETE WOOD

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INTRODUCTION

BY JOHN REDMOND, M.P.

THE RESPONSE OF THE IRISH RACE

THIS war is a war of liberation, and its battle-cry is the rights and liberties of humanity. From the very beginning of the conflict my colleagues of the Irish Party, and I myself, have availed of every opportunity in Parliament, on the platform, and in the Press, to present this view of it to the Irish race at home and abroad; and despite the tragic mistakes made in regard to Ireland by the successive Governments which have held office since war broke out, we are still unshaken in our opinion that Ireland's highest interests lie in the speedy and overwhelming victory of England and the Allies.

The response of the Irish race the world over to our appeal to rise in defence of civilisation and freedom has been really wonderful. The example was set by Ireland herself.

At the outbreak of the war I asked the Irish people, and especially the young men of Ireland, to mark the profound change which has been brought about in the relations of Ireland to the Empire by wholeheartedly

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supporting the Allies in the field. I pointed out that at long last, after centuries of misunderstanding, the democracy of Great Britain had finally and irrevocably decided to trust Ireland with self-government; and I called upon Ireland to prove that this concession of liberty would have the same effect in our country as it has had in every other portion of the Empire, and that henceforth Ireland would be a strength instead of a weakness. I further pointed out that the war was provoked by the intolerable military despotism of Germany, that it was a war in defence of small nationalities, and that Ireland would be false to her own history and traditions, as well as to honour, good faith and self-interest, if she did not respond to my appeal.

The answer to that appeal is one of the most astonishing facts in history. At the moment, fraught with the most terrible consequences to the whole Empire, this Kingdom found for the first time in the history of the relations between Great Britain and Ireland that the Irish Nationalist members, representing the overwhelming mass of the people of Ireland, were enabled to declare themselves upon the side of England. They did that with their eyes open. They knew the difficulties in the way. They knew—none so well—the distrust and suspicion of British good faith which had been, in the past, universal almost in Ireland. They recognised that the boon of self-government had not been finally granted to their country. They knew the traditional hostility which existed in many parts of Ireland to recruiting

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for the British Army. Facing all these things, and all the risks that they entailed, they told Ireland and her sons abroad that it was their duty to rally to the support of the Allies in a war which was in defence of the principles of freedom and civilisation. We succeeded far better than we had anticipated, or hoped at the commencement. This is a notorious fact. There is genuine enthusiasm in Ireland on the side of the Allies. Addressing great popular gatherings in every province in Ireland in support of the Allies, I called for a distinctively Irish army, composed of Irishmen, led by Irishmen and trained at home in Ireland. With profound gratitude I acknowledge the magnificent response the country has made. For the first time in the history of the Wars of England there is a huge Irish army in the field. The achievements of that Irish army have covered Ireland with glory before the world, and have thrilled our hearts with pride. North and South have vied with each other in springing to arms, and, please God, the sacrifices they have made side by side on the field of battle will form the surest bond of a united Irish nation in the future.

From Ireland, according to the latest official figures, 173,772 Irishmen are serving in the Navy and Army, representing all classes and creeds amongst our people. Careful inquiries made through the churches in the north of England and Scotland and from other sources, show that, in addition, at least 150,000 sons of the Irish race, most of them born in Ireland, have joined the Colours in Great Britain. It is a pathetic circumstance that these Irishmen in non-Irish regiments