

**LEONARD WOOLF AND THE ROWNTREE POLITICAL MONTHLIES,
1916-1922: WITH THE IRISH REBELLION AS A CASE IN POINT**

by Wayne K. Chapman

Most people with passing knowledge of Leonard and Virginia Woolf as editors, of The Hogarth Press, and of Bloomsbury's inclination toward progressive politics and literary innovation will know how one day John Maynard Keynes gained an interest in the English paper *The Nation*, amalgamated it with *The Athenaeum*, and offered Leonard Woolf both the foreign affairs and literary editorships of the resultant *Nation and Athenaeum* newspaper. Woolf accepted the literary editorship so that the paper became for a time, like *The New Statesman*, a kind of Bloomsbury signature in the world of public affairs. He had actually distinguished himself as a political journalist and editor, in the eyes of pro-Labour chocolate mogul Arnold Rowntree, from political writing and apprentice editing at three monthlies with which both were linked, for different reasons, between 1916 and 1923. We know comparatively more about work both Woolfs published in the *Nation and Athenaeum* during Leonard's term as editor. Yet the seven years he spent working for Keynes may be viewed as a respite from his most important work as an editor, apart from the growing industry of the Hogarth Press itself. With his co-founding of *The Political Quarterly* in 1930, he returned to work that he had come to find tiring during World War I and immediately afterward, when much of his energy was focused on the discussion to end the war and to prevent new ones by practical means exerted by an enlightened but politically flawed international agency, the League of Nations.

In general, this essay is about Leonard Woolf's apprenticeship as an editor specializing on British foreign affairs. In the brief space allotted, I can give no more than an outline of the network of writers, publicists, and politicians connected with the short-lived monthlies *War and Peace*, *The International Review*, and *The Contemporary Review*. The network and the editorial ambiance that Leonard Woolf developed and moved with him from one project to another are particularly crucial to his early success as a publisher and journalist. His eventually articulated political theory, as consistent as it is with his view of the ethical core of Bloomsbury (as he explains in a famous account of his differences with Keynes over the influence of G. E. Moore), was anticipated but also made up on the fly in response to world events. War in Europe, an insurrection in Ireland, a disappointing peace under a treaty that called a "truce" rather than a permanent end to hostilities—such matters were to be understood rationally as "real standard things," as his wife called them, ruefully and as she had to, seeing that there are two sides to a looking-glass.

For context, I recommend a chapter Janet Manson and I gave to Mark Hussey's *Virginia Woolf and War* (1991), anticipating the transcription and introduction we published in Jean and Cecil Woolf's Bloomsbury Heritage Series No. 15, *Leonard and Virginia Woolf Working Together* (1997). For the paper that Leonard presented on "The Enforcement of International Law" in October 1916 at a conference sponsored by the Peace Committee of the Society of Friends, written by dictation and taken down by his convalescing wife, turns out to have been his ticket to the editorial board of a paper financed by the Rowntrees, among the most influential Quakers engaged in Labour

Party politics and the pacifist debate at a moment when Liberal momentum in the press was weakening. Leonard Woolf's argument and his role in the conference catapulted him into an assignment as editor *pro tempore* of *War and Peace*, when editor Harold Wright took leave for illness in 1917. By Wright's return, Woolf had published a special proceedings issue (in January), followed by regular issues, in February and March, in which he continued to edit and develop articles on the constructive use of force and on the feasibility of an international government from ideas in his discarded conference paper. In later months, the evolved work was reissued in book form as *The Framework of a Lasting Peace* (1917). Also, Wright asked Leonard for thoughts on the "improvement" of the paper, whereupon a scheme was drawn up and presented to Arnold Rowntree and the family trust to transform the monthly "into an important international review dealing with foreign affairs and problems of war and peace, with an advisory editorial board consisting of all the leading socialists and trade unionists in Britain and on the Continent" (*Beginning Again* 223-4). The Rowntree Trust agreed conditionally, requiring Leonard to take over as editor and enlist "the leading Labour and socialist people to join the board" (224). Except for the devious Ramsey Macdonald, Woolf's allies were Beatrice and Sidney Webb, Arthur Henderson, H. N. Brailsford, J. A. Hobson, Lowes Dickinson, Robert Smillie, and other leaders, who, in turn recruited Leonard to serve as secretary of the Labour Party Advisory Committee on Imperial Questions (220) and as secretary of a second advisory committee on International Questions (227)—in effect committing him to consecutive twenty-year sentences to two hard labors of love.

Macdonald's jealousy of the projected *International Review* is well reported in Leonard's memoirs and Virginia's diaries and letters. Ramsey's interest in the *Labour Leader* led to the withdrawal of trade union support in order to expropriate for their own ends Leonard's idea of foreign affairs coverage (see Virginia Woolf, *Diary* 1: 167, 190). In spite of Macdonald's "putting his thin little knife into [Leonard's] back and into the *International Review* in the lobby of the House of Commons" (*Beginning Again* 225; see Leonard's *Letters* 222), the paper received the financial backing of Rowntree for a year and was published monthly from January to December 1919, after which, for lack of sufficient earnings to satisfy its principal investor, its staff and editorial aims were directed to produce supplements for another Rowntree interest, *The Contemporary Review*.

Without irony, Leonard Woolf reports his "noble fee of £250 per annum" in 1920 and 1921 as a Rowntree editor (*Downhill* 90), and, uncharacteristically, he seems to have overlooked the additional £200 earned for a regular signed "Foreign Affairs" column. Although he "found it a depressing job, and was not sorry to hand it over to George Glasgow in 1921" (90), loss of this income was missed. When they first came into it, with merger of *International* and *Contemporary* reviews in late 1919, it was the "chief event" in her diary; yet she noted her loneliness in the face of so much activity on Leonard's part: "I'm on the whole glad that we draw our £250 for half L.'s work. . . . So many afternoons I walked alone, so many evenings L. sat reading proofs or papers; to me the red magazine on the first of the month seemed scarcely worth all of him that he gave" (*Diary* 1: 314). It was "galling" (314) to see work lost that had enabled him "to give up feeding" reviews to *The New Statesman's* "omnivorous & callous throated Eagle," J. C. Squire (133). It was annoying that Leonard should be kept busy with "activities . . . beyond counting," with (in her words) the "League of Nations & its evil designs" (152-3), with his monthly articles and writing "for the Webbs, for the Nation, for the Herald, for the Statesman" (*Letters* 500). He was becoming, to her alarm, "solidly, one of our public men."

She was also jealous of the women with whom Leonard worked intently to get

out each issue on schedule—Marjorie Manus, “his industrious sub-editor” at the *International Review* (Virginia Woolf, *Letters 2*: 313); Louise Ernestine Matthaei (or Matthew), a “gawky unattractive” follower from *War and Peace* to the *Contemporary Review* (*Diary 1*: 136); and his secretary, Miss Minna Green. In March 1919, his wife noted that he had “got into the habit of lunching in London twice a week, & so appeasing the gaping maws of Green & Matthew” (254). Later, at the end of the *International Review*, she seems relieved that “I. R. amalgamated with Contemporary, & L. to keep his office & his virgins” (318). Later still, in the touch and go of his first year as editor of the international supplements of the *Contemporary Review*, she complained sympathetically about the caprice of “damnably inconsiderate employers.” With intended irony, she observed: “Three hardworking people, two of them women with less than the usual feminine charm, are kept dangling while old Rowntree . . . rolls out infinite slabs of chocolate” (*Letters 2*: 446).

When Leonard Woolf resigned his post at the *Contemporary Review*, he was already a regular contributor to *The Nation*; in fact, for three months in 1920, he had substituted for H. N. Brailsford, under the editorship of the esteemed Henry William Massingham. *The Nation* was owned by the Rowntrees, too, and in 1922 Leonard slid into Brailsford’s position on the staff, though by March 1923 the “chocolate and cocoa kings of York” (*Downhill* 91) had ceded the controlling interest of the paper to Keynes. Consequently, Leonard found himself working for a new employer and replacing Massingham on the literary side of the editorship. The change is surprising because Leonard had become a name as a political journalist, issuing opinions in the corporate voice of the editor’s column, “Politics and Affairs,” a responsibility in line with his experience at the other papers. Typically, he had used the column to comment on topics that tested the resolve of the League of Nations and weighed the motives of the so-called Great Powers in frustrating the League if doing so served their individual interests. On British reprisals in Ireland, for instance, *The Nation*’s voice was Leonard’s: enlightened, logical, stern, even indignant as a parent might be in reprimanding an unruly child for a disgraceful performance—in this case England’s.

It started with the 31 July 1920 column and his premise that “an Irish Republic exists” (“The Irish Republic” 544). The question of Ireland was for England to answer in a manner that spoke well of itself and the commonwealth of nations. Coercion in Ireland led to “the ruin of liberty in England,” the “death of freedom not only at our doors but at our hands” (545). On 21 August, he derided the war in Ireland as pointless for the Government in Westminster: “it is not a war between order and anarchy, or government and anarchy; it is a war between order and order, and on both sides it is conducted by methods of lawlessness” (“The Irish War” 631). The new Coercion Act was a means of destroying the Sinn Fein courts, which made civilized autonomy possible. Extending the argument in “The End of Our Government of Ireland,” on 4 September, Woolf opined that stupidity and Machiavellian expediency in the service of certain interests in the Government were subverting both competitive systems, Monarchical and Republican, in a “cruel, unjust, and purposeless” misrule “set on a course of pure destruction” from which “the lot will have been cast against the British Empire” (685). Finally, with “A Proposal of Irish Settlement,” on 9 October 1920, Leonard again indicted the Government for hypocrisy and betrayal of its own values as a nation in continuing reprisals by British troops in Ireland while claiming not to countenance them.

To-day we govern by a military terrorism that is drawing upon us the angry eyes of all Europe. . . . To-day, after solemnly lecturing Europe on the sacred right of every small nation to its freedom in this age of

democracy, we repeat the crimes against which most decent Englishmen protested over a century ago. ("The Guilt of the Government" 34)

He went on in the column to other subjects—the League of Nations in the Polish-Lithuanian question, French imperialism, and a failed peace conference in Brussels. So, as usual, the editor's views were evenly applied.

But the Irish, in Virginia's words, were a "shriek of agony" close to home, the death of the hunger-striker McSwiney, Lord Mayor of Cork, "this afternoon & violence in Ireland" (*Diary* 2: 72-3). In "the way of history," the Germans had "gone back to Germany," but "[p]eople go on being shot & hanged in Ireland," she wrote. "Is it a proof of civilisation to envisage suffering at a distance—& then the faculty of seeing that laws matter—the constitution of Cheko-Slovakia[,] for example . . . ?" (100). In the public sphere, might her husband's example have made her less rueful of the *actual* side of the looking-glass?

In my opinion, it did. Shortly after Easter 1921, she recorded lunching with her cousin, venerable H. A. L. Fisher, member of the Coalition Cabinet's Irish Committee and thus (as Leonard argued) partly responsible for a year of brutal reprisals by the Black and Tans and the Royal Irish Constabulary. "We think he asked us [to lunch] in order to apologise for—everything," she wrote (*Diary* 2: 112).

The upshot of it all was that he couldn't be blamed for his conduct about Ireland. And he was careful to explain that the public is ridiculously in the dark about everything. Only the cabinet knows the true spring & source of things he said. That is the only solace of the work. . . . They have to make tremendous decisions with insufficient evidence on the spur of the moment. Then he pulled himself up & said, solemnly, that he is going to [a League of Nations meeting in] Geneva to initiate peace—disarmament. 'You are the great authority upon that, I understand,' he said to Leonard. Anyhow I confess it seemed to me, sitting opposite to Leonard in that brown ugly room with its autotypes of Dutch pictures & Aunt Mary on a donkey, that Leonard was an authority & Herbert a thin-shredded thread paper of a man, whose brain has been harrowed into sandy streaks like his hair. Never was there a thinner lighter airier specimen I thought; his words without body, . . . his eyes so blue, but almost vacant, & cheerful colourless words, slightly mannered & brushed up in conformity with some official standard of culture—I daresay Mr Balfour [Lord President of the Council in the Lloyd-George Cabinet] talks something like that. (112-13)

"[G]eneralizations are very worthless," she observed in her story "The Mark on the Wall"; "[t]he military sound of the word is enough [to recall] leading articles, cabinet ministers," the "real standard thing[s]" of Whitaker's Table of Precedency that deserved to be "laughed into the dustbin where the phantoms go" (86). But "all is to go," Leonard prophesied—"the Sinn Fein order . . . with the horrid apparition our misrule has conjured up" ("The End of Our Government of Ireland" 685). Solidity can be reassuring, but one does not worship "the chest of drawers, . . . the impersonal world . . . of some existence other than ours," she might have retorted ("Mark" 88). And, in truth, because of his authority on peace and disarmament, he could not have agreed with her more.

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