

## Early influences

As a young student at the Friends' School in Lisburn, Bulmer Hobson was punished for an offence that he did not commit. Although it was not fair, 'it was school life' and he accepted it. He would later find political life as unfair as school life. Again he would accept it. His teacher Charles Benington subsequently came to him and said, 'Bulmer, I punished you unfairly. I am sorry.' When Hobson recalled this episode shortly before his death in 1969, his 'great white head shook gently and [his] unseeing eyes registered vividly the distant event'. 'Just think,' said Hobson, 'that he should apologise to me, a mere slip of a lad!' He paused. 'You know, you learn things at school ... things you never forget.'<sup>1</sup>

People do learn things at school that they never forget. People also learn things at home, in their religious community, and in their own neighbourhood that they never forget. This was certainly true of Hobson. At first glance his espousal of republican nationalism seems surprising in light of his comfortable middle-class Quaker background. But upon closer examination it becomes clear how exposure to key individuals and writings in his early life shaped his nationalist ideology and inspired him to become an unusually active participant in the Irish nationalist movement.

### Family

John Bulmer Hobson, who was known by his middle name 'Bulmer', was born on 14 January 1883 in Belfast to a prosperous Quaker family. The Hobsons of Ulster are among the longest established Quaker families in Ireland. Partly of English and Scottish stock, they are descended from Cromwellian planters who received 'a grant of a small parcel of land' in the Moy region of County Tyrone during the Cromwellian settlement of Ireland in the middle of the seventeenth century.<sup>2</sup>

The Religious Society of Friends, also known as the Quakers, was founded in the mid seventeenth century in the north-west of England.

The first regular Quaker meeting in Ireland was set up in Lurgan in 1654 by William Edmondson, a former Cromwellian soldier.<sup>3</sup> Edmondson took the Quaker message on the road and among the first people whom he convinced were Francis and Laurence Hobson,<sup>4</sup> two of three brothers who had recently settled in Ireland. They became members of the first Quaker meeting in Lurgan. Bulmer Hobson was a direct descendant of Laurence Hobson.<sup>5</sup>

Hobson's parents were Benjamin Hobson Jr (1852–1927), a commercial traveller, and Mary Ann Bulmer (1856–1947), an English-born women's rights activist and amateur archaeologist. Benjamin Jr was the youngest son of Benjamin Hobson, a small farmer from outside Lurgan, County Armagh, while Mary was the daughter of John Bulmer, an architect turned engineer.<sup>6</sup> The couple were married in the Friends' Meeting House in Darlington, County Durham on 22 April 1880,<sup>7</sup> and first lived in Monasterevin, County Kildare, where their eldest child, Florence Fulton Hobson (affectionately known as 'Flossie'), was born in 1881. Shortly after her birth the family moved to Belfast, where they initially settled in a house close to what was then Queen's College. Living at 5 Magdala Street, where Bulmer was born, the Hobsons were surrounded by 'indisciplined and unruly' students living in digs.<sup>8</sup> By the time the youngest member of the family, Harold Benjamin Hobson, was born in 1884<sup>9</sup> they had moved to a larger house, with a garden suitable for children, at 6 Hopefield Avenue, which ran between the Antrim and Cave Hill roads in north Belfast.<sup>10</sup>

In these early years mother and children survived many serious illnesses, like scarlet fever. Of their Hopefield Avenue home, Mary Hobson recalled: 'We were on the verge of country lanes, where we went blackberrying and picnicking; and so, despite the illnesses, the children grew and thrived in the clean air of the Antrim hills.'<sup>11</sup> The family appear to have been avid picnickers, often indulging Mary's love of archaeology and history by eating *al fresco* at local landmarks such as the Giant's Ring and Helen's Tower.<sup>12</sup> Both parents took much pleasure in reading, a trait that they passed along to their eldest son. There were visits to the Free Public Library and an annual trip on Easter Tuesday to the old museum on College Square North to see the Egyptian mummy – 'a fearful delight'.<sup>13</sup> On rainy days the children dressed up Beppo, the family's Irish terrier, and staged pantomimes.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps this was the start of Hobson's interest in theatre – an interest that he shared with his mother, whose theatre attendance once led a wealthy Quaker to reject her as a suitable marriage partner.<sup>15</sup>

Mary took the children on annual trips to England to visit her mother, Ann Bulmer, until they were old enough to make the journey on their

own. They would spend two months with their grandmother, often pottering around Darlington market spending their pocket money on gifts.<sup>16</sup> It is perhaps to these extended trips that Hobson referred when he told a republican colleague that he had lived in England and had ‘found that England despised all Irishmen’.<sup>17</sup>

The Hobson family attended the Frederick Street Meeting in Belfast. The Friends’ community was the centre of their social lives, with many Quaker families living in the Antrim Road area.<sup>18</sup> Mary Hobson once said of the Belfast Friends: ‘No group of people could be more affectionate and hospitable whilst knowing one another’s foibles and shortcomings as only a family can know its members.’<sup>19</sup> It was amongst this close-knit group of people that Hobson grew up to become an unusually confident young man: confident of his convictions, and confident of his ability to promote these convictions.

The Hobson children were educated at the Friends’ School on Prospect Hill in Lisburn, a co-educational boarding school that had about eighty students in the 1890s. The few school records that are extant indicate that fees of £16 per year were paid for Hobson’s education from 1894 to 1898. Quaker children, especially those from lower-income families, received a reduction in fees; some families, such as those who were not members of the Society of Friends, paid as much as £32 per year to send a child to the school.<sup>20</sup> Surviving records of fees paid suggest that Hobson attended the school from the ages of eleven to fifteen. In his own memoirs he stated that he left school in 1899 at the age of sixteen.<sup>21</sup>

Under the guidance of its English headmaster, Joseph Radley, the Friends’ School ‘found its identity as a small, semi-rural community in which children were helped to practise those Quaker virtues likely to make them decent men and women, and to learn enough practical skill and book knowledge to get them jobs when they were old enough’.<sup>22</sup> The curriculum included English, arithmetic, languages (French, Latin and Greek), science, art and music.<sup>23</sup> In Hobson’s case additional money was paid to cover the cost of laboratory fees (3s 6d) in 1895 and music lessons (£1 10s) in 1897.<sup>24</sup>

Hobson’s opinion of the school was mixed. Looking back on his time there, he recalled:

In my day there was much reading from the Bible and many Moody and Sankey hymns. There was a free and easy atmosphere but not many lessons were interesting ... English literature was making us learn by heart a number of lines ... sometimes sixty. The teachers were a poor lot. Charles Benington was the only good one. But in Joseph Radley’s day the school was like home. He was a bit slack, and we took advantage of him, and he knew we took advantage of him, but we all loved him.<sup>25</sup>

Considering Hobson's voracious appetite for researching topics that interested him, it is not surprising that he was critical of the school's slack academic standards. His positive attitude toward its home-like atmosphere, however, may have contributed to the decision to send his own children to a Quaker boarding school in Waterford.<sup>26</sup>

The Friends' School in Lisburn managed to maintain some Quaker traditions, such as plain dress, while losing others in the face of modernisation. In this period 'some old and distinctive Quaker customs were quietly disappearing'. Teachers were still addressed by their full names and without titles (for instance, Charles Benington, rather than Mr Benington), but it was difficult to get the students to use the old grammatical terms 'thee' and 'thou' when addressing an individual.<sup>27</sup> Both boys and girls wore plain, grey clothing. The boys sported waist-coats, knickerbockers fastened just below the knee over black stockings, and the wide, stiff, white Eton collar.<sup>28</sup> On Thursday and Sunday mornings the students attended the Meeting for Worship at the Railway Street Meeting House in Lisburn. On Sundays the boys had to wear bowler hats to the meeting. Hobson remembered 'playing football with them on the day their owners left school for good'.<sup>29</sup>

Hobson was already a committed nationalist by the time he left the school. Not surprisingly, his political viewpoint and subscription to the nationalist newspaper the *Shan Van Vocht* set him apart from his fellow students at the Friends' School. This viewpoint and the subscription were the result of influences absorbed through exposure to his parents and neighbours in the Antrim Road area.

Hobson grew up in a home where 'we argued everything, we discussed everything with good temper, and no opinion was barred'. Benjamin Hobson was a Gladstonian Home Ruler. His eldest son described him as 'a man who had strong opinions of his own', but was 'completely tolerant'.<sup>30</sup> Florence Hobson recalled that her father was the only member of the Belfast Meeting who supported Home Rule during her childhood, which was 'punctuated' by British Prime Minister William Gladstone's first and second Home Rule bills in 1886 and 1893. In her opinion, her father and brother Bulmer shared 'the same kind of moral courage' that enabled them to hold political views that went against the mainstream of their communities.<sup>31</sup>

Hobson's later devotion to the cultural, political and economic renewal of Ireland could be described as a 'concern', the Quaker term for 'an insistent internal spiritual imperative'.<sup>32</sup> In Florence's view, her brother expressed his spirituality through 'his passionate desire for justice and hatred of all oppression'.<sup>33</sup> Hobson himself asserted that it was from his father that he 'inherited a natural urge to take the weaker side in every

quarrel and to resent injustice of every kind'.<sup>34</sup>

Although he did not acknowledge it, Hobson probably inherited the same urge from his mother, who was a prominent women's rights activist in Belfast. The roots of her activism could be found in the traditional Quaker advocacy of gender equality and her resentment that the women of her day were barred from attending university. The latter circumstance was particularly provoking as she grew up a mere sixteen miles from Durham University.<sup>35</sup> Mary Hobson belonged to suffrage societies; campaigned in 1896–97 for the election of Kate Megahy, the first female Poor Law Guardian in Belfast; served on the committee formed to administer the boarding out, or fostering, of children from the Belfast Workhouse in the community; and marched with the Irish contingent in the 1911 suffrage procession from Cleopatra's Needle to the Royal Albert Hall in London.<sup>36</sup> That her daughter Florence became Ireland's first woman architect must have been a particular source of pride for Mary Hobson.

As gender equality was a principle that Hobson would have absorbed through his Quaker upbringing, his mother's gender is not likely to have been a factor in his failure to acknowledge her influence. It is more likely that Mary's English background and negative attitude toward republican nationalism may be the reason why Hobson never acknowledged her as an influence either in interviews or in his memoirs. It is clear, however, that he shared his mother's passion for history and writing – as well as her activism.

Once she had packed her children off to boarding school, Mary was free to indulge her love of archaeology. She even got her eldest son to teach her how to ride a bicycle so she could transport herself to various sites in the north of Ireland.<sup>37</sup> Between 1904 and 1911 she published a number of abstracts and articles in journals.<sup>38</sup> On at least two occasions she attended the conference of the British Association for the Advancement of Science as a delegate from the Belfast Naturalists' Field Club.<sup>39</sup> To help ease her loneliness following her husband's death in 1927, she compiled a family chronicle of the Bulmers that she deposited in various archives in England and Ireland in 1937.<sup>40</sup> Ten years later she privately published an amusing memoir of six generations of her family. Edmond Cotter, one of Hobson's colleagues in the Irish Volunteers, suggested to him that he had inherited his mother's 'fine "hand"': 'You may get qualities from your father but a mother who writes like she does is bound to have left her impress on you.'<sup>41</sup>

### Friends and neighbours

As Hobson grew older, he came into increasing contact with people outside his family and religious community. In the 1890s he was greatly influenced by two of his neighbours, the poets Alice Milligan (1866–1953) and Anna Johnston (who wrote under the pseudonym Ethna Carbery; 1866–1902). These women, closer to his mother's age than his own, provided him with nationalist reading material and later encouraged him to join the Gaelic League, which afforded him the opportunity to mix with people who shared his burgeoning views on Irish culture and politics.

The Milligans moved to the Antrim Road in 1893, the same year that Alice met Anna, who lived on a nearby side street.<sup>42</sup> At the same time Mary Hobson and Alice Milligan worked together in the Belfast branch of the Irish Women's Association, of which Milligan became president in late 1895.<sup>43</sup> The organisation's goal was to bring Protestant and Catholic women together.<sup>44</sup> Thus, even before he had been exposed to the objectives of Wolfe Tone, Hobson witnessed a project whose aim was to unite Protestant and Catholic. Many of his future nationalist projects would share the same aim.

Although Milligan and Johnston came from a similar social background, their families' political and religious affiliations were completely different, leading them to Irish nationalism by different paths. Milligan was the daughter of Seaton F. Milligan, a successful Methodist businessman who was also a noted antiquarian and fellow of the Royal Irish Academy. Alice grew up in a staunch unionist atmosphere and was formally 'educated without reference to Irish history or culture'.<sup>45</sup> As Catherine Morris notes, however, this upbringing 'was countered by an alternative political vision she encountered through songs, servants and graffiti'. One of Milligan's first flutters of nationalist sentiment was in response to the song 'The Wearing of the Green'.<sup>46</sup> As a child in County Tyrone, Milligan turned to a hired boy, 'the first native Irishman' with whom she recalled conversing, to decode the words 'Home Rule for Ireland' emblazoned on a stone wall.<sup>47</sup> When asked to explain her conversion to ardent nationalism, Milligan once said: 'Instinctively, since I was a child my heart went out to my own nation. In spite of all I heard, I knew that Ireland was my country and that its people were my people.'<sup>48</sup> In contrast, Johnston was born into the Irish nationalist tradition. She was the daughter of the veteran Fenian Robert Johnston, a timber merchant by trade and a Catholic by religion.

By the time they met, Milligan and Johnston were already published writers. Their poetry was 'enormously popular for a time', despite,

in Terence Brown's opinion, its 'generally poor quality'.<sup>49</sup> The two women went on to collaborate on two newspapers. In October 1895 they became editors of the *Northern Patriot*, the organ of the Henry Joy McCracken Literary Society. As editors, they used the paper to promote Ulster's ability 'to contribute to the national cause, in order to encourage Northern nationalists, and to assure Southern nationalists about the "hard" North's ability to contribute to a national revival'.<sup>50</sup> The pair edited the paper for three issues before they left in acrimonious circumstances.<sup>51</sup> They then bounced back in January 1896 with a new, independent monthly paper, the *Shan Van Vocht*, which took a broader approach, linking revivalist initiatives all over Ireland and beyond.<sup>52</sup> The title of the paper was an anglicised spelling of the Irish words meaning the 'poor old woman', a common metaphor for Ireland.

In 1895, the same year that she established the Henry Joy McCracken Literary Society, Milligan began lending her young neighbour Bulmer books by Standish O'Grady, such as *The Coming of Cuchulain*. He was twelve years of age, 'old enough to take a serious interest in books'. These volumes 'opened up for [him] new ranges of hitherto unimagined beauty'.<sup>53</sup> The heroes of a great but neglected literature captured his imagination: 'Balor and Lugh and the Sons of Tuireann, Mananan and the De Danaan gods, Fergus MacRoy, Cuchulain and Ferdia became my constant companions and were to me far more real than the crude town in which I lived.' Hobson later admitted that 'at school I didn't pay much attention to what they tried to teach me' because he was caught up in 'a far more vivid and interesting world' in his imagination.<sup>54</sup> As an Irish boy, he found these tales more relevant than stories of Greek heroes ploughing through the waves of the far-off Aegean Sea. He was familiar with the haunts of his heroes, having seen Oisín's grave and Grania's Cairn,<sup>55</sup> possibly on one of his family's picnics. Richard P. Davis has surmised that 'Standish O'Grady's vivid prose rendering of the sagas may have weaned the young Quaker Bulmer Hobson from his ancestral pacifism'.<sup>56</sup>

Hobson was still at the Friends' School in 1896 when Milligan and Johnston founded the *Shan Van Vocht*, the first advanced nationalist paper of its time. He had to struggle with the headmaster, an Englishman, to release his pocket money so he could subscribe to it. The subscription 'caused quite a flutter in the school and definitely marked [him] as an eccentric', but this did not perturb Hobson. Obviously, from an early age he was content to follow his own path, armed with his father's moral courage. The *Shan Van Vocht* was significant because it put him 'for the first time in touch with the new forces that were beginning to stir in Ireland'.<sup>57</sup>

While Hobson was still at school, the centennial celebration of the 1798 rebellion took place, with Milligan serving as the secretary for the Ulster-based commemoration events and the *Shan Van Vocht* playing a key role in publicising the centenary. Many nationalists, including Milligan and Johnston, saw the 1798 centenary as a chance to fuse the various strands of the nationalist movement and foster ‘a spirit of resolute patriotism by Irishmen who have hitherto stood apart, divided from each other by the supposed impassable lines of political differences’ that had hardened since the fall of Irish Parliamentary Party leader Charles Stewart Parnell (1846–91) in 1890–91.<sup>58</sup> The political faction fighters remained steadfast, however, hindering the reunification of the nationalist movement and lessening the potential impact that a carefully co-ordinated commemoration campaign could make on a nationwide basis.<sup>59</sup>

The political wrangling of the commemoration organisers did not stop the centennial celebrations from raising awareness about the 1798 rebellion and the United Irishmen. Milligan communicated a message that hit home: the United Irishmen were the first to recognise that ‘the future liberty of Ireland depended on the abolition of creed distinctions and the promotion of union amongst all those whose homes were in the land’.<sup>60</sup> Coverage of the centenary spurred on young people like Hobson and his future republican colleague Patrick McCartan (then a student at St Macartan’s Seminary in Monaghan) to delve into history books to study the lives and ideals of the United Irishmen.<sup>61</sup> The personal significance of the United Irishmen’s Belfast roots, coupled with the prominent involvement of Protestants, was not lost on Hobson. Here were some fitting role models for a Protestant boy brought up in the shadow of Cave Hill. Wolfe Tone, Thomas Russell, Samuel Neilson and Henry Joy McCracken became his heroes.<sup>62</sup> ‘I got quite enthusiastic about them,’ Hobson noted. ‘I found myself living in a city enriched by their associations. The result was that I decided to spend the succeeding years of my life in trying to complete their task.’<sup>63</sup>

By the time he left school, Hobson was a disciple of Wolfe Tone, in full accord with his much-quoted declaration from August 1796:

To subvert the tyranny of our execrable government, to break the connection with England, the never failing source of all our political evils, and to assert the independence of my country. These were my objects. To unite the whole people of Ireland. To abolish the memory of all past dissensions and to substitute the common name of Irishman in place of the denominations Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter – these were my means.<sup>64</sup>

Unlike some militant republicans or Ulster Protestants, Hobson equally embraced *both* aspects of this declaration: separatism and non-sectarianism.<sup>65</sup> Like other Irish republican nationalists, he espoused

the combination of separatism and republicanism (as opposed to other varieties of republicanism promoted in the early modern period) that Wolfe Tone adopted over time.<sup>66</sup> To Hobson, the autobiographical writings of Wolfe Tone ranked as one of the ‘two best books produced under the influence of the national idea in modern Ireland’; John Mitchell’s *Jail Journal* was the other.<sup>67</sup> While the writings of O’Grady had provided Hobson with ‘a very definite bias in a pro-Irish direction’, the ideology and models of Wolfe Tone and the United Irishmen mapped out the course of his future.<sup>68</sup>

He left school with a self-confessed ‘obsession’: ‘I was determined to devote what little talent I had to trying to upset the English government in Ireland and that was a very odd opinion to hold in those days.’<sup>69</sup> As it was time to start earning a living, he had to confine the pursuit of this unusual obsession to evenings and weekends. By day he was employed in the printers’ trade, working for various Belfast firms. He soon found it difficult to maintain a post because, as he quickly discovered, ‘if you didn’t beat the Orange drum you didn’t stay in the job very long’.<sup>70</sup>

His parents and siblings were more accepting of his obsession than were his employers. Hobson reported that his family found his views ‘rather odd’ and completely disapproved of them, but, for the most part, remained ‘peculiarly tolerant’.<sup>71</sup> In 1905 McCartan revealed to Joseph McGarrity, a fellow native of Carrickmore, County Tyrone and a leader of the Irish-American organisation *Clan na Gael*, that Hobson’s ‘father goes a little way but his mother is an Englishwoman and shows it. He dare not discuss his plans with me in her presence. At least to avoid trouble he did not.’<sup>72</sup> Outlining a practical scheme to break the connection between Ireland and Britain, in front of an Englishwoman living in Ireland, was perhaps too much, even for a ‘peculiarly tolerant’ family. After Hobson’s death his sister Florence expressed pride in his achievements: ‘My judgement is that there has been no Northern Protestant who has done so much for the nationalist cause since John Mitchel and no man of his stature.’<sup>73</sup> Hobson’s family may not have agreed with his political opinions, but they did not interfere with his determination ‘to seek out people who held similar views and to endeavour to bring the English occupation of Ireland to a timely end’.<sup>74</sup>

At Anna Johnston’s suggestion, Hobson joined the Gaelic League in 1901, which helped him to connect with like-minded people. Through the Gaelic League he met Denis McCullough (1883–1968), a Catholic from the Falls Road area who was the same age as he was. Educated by the Christian Brothers, McCullough was apprenticed to the musical instrument repair trade. Unlike Hobson, McCullough was born into the national movement. His father and grandfather were members of the

IRB.<sup>75</sup> Although his mother was raised in an area where there were no Catholics or nationalists for miles, she became the strongest republican nationalist and separatist that McCullough ever knew. She raised her four sons to believe that they had only two duties: one was to God and the other was to Ireland.<sup>76</sup> Hobson and McCullough formed a nationalist partnership similar to the one forged by Milligan and Johnston.

Another key individual whom Hobson met in this period was antiquarian solicitor Francis Joseph Bigger (1863–1926). It is unclear whether McCullough introduced them or they had met previously through the north Belfast Protestant social scene. McCullough described Bigger as ‘a rubicund, genial, pleasant man’, whose family enjoyed a positive reputation among both commercial and political circles.<sup>77</sup> Bigger had a passion for Irish art and archaeology and, as editor of the *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, he published an article by Hobson’s mother and sister in 1907. Bigger made friends with everyone who was important in the cultural and political movements of the time and had an extensive library with a noted Irish collection. He owned a large house just off the Antrim Road on the slopes of Cave Hill, overlooking Belfast Lough. He called it ‘Ardrigh’, which was Irish for ‘high king’, naming it after his mother Ardríe. There, he held gatherings attended by a range of people including diplomat, humanitarian and future martyr to the Irish cause Roger Casement (1864–1916), historian Alice Stopford Green (1847–1929) and numerous Irish and English politicians. McCullough was Bigger’s favourite of all the young nationalists, and together they visited graveyards, seeking the graves of patriots and tracing genealogies.<sup>78</sup> Hobson may not have been Bigger’s favourite, but he too became a member of the Ardrigh set, which provided him with the opportunity to mix with a variety of people who shared his enthusiasm for Irish nationalism.

### James Fintan Lalor and ‘moral insurrection’

By the age of eighteen Hobson was a committed separatist, starting to make his way in Belfast’s nationalist circles. The question of how to break the link with England and to assert Ireland’s independence was constantly on his mind. (Hobson always referred to England and English rule rather than Britain and British rule, perhaps suggesting sympathy for Scottish and Welsh nationalism.) It was a challenging question at a time when Britain enjoyed a comfortable power base and, aside from the odd protest, Irish people had abandoned the fight for complete independence. According to Hobson, the majority of Irish people, like his own father, ‘were content to ask for a subordinate parliament with very

limited powers, leaving all our most vital interests in foreign hands'.<sup>79</sup> Hobson, a voracious reader of Irish history, sought a middle road that represented neither the 'abject surrender' of constitutional agitation nor the 'futile insurrection' of past attempts at armed revolt.<sup>80</sup> He found that road in the writings of James Fintan Lalor (1807–49).

Lalor, a writer connected with the Young Ireland movement of the mid nineteenth century, had written a series of letters to *The Nation* in 1847 advocating a rent strike by small farmers. His policy of passive resistance was probably inspired by his father Patrick, even though their relationship was troubled. Patrick Lalor was a firm Daniel O'Connell supporter who rose to prominence during the Tithe War of 1830–33. At a meeting in Maryborough (Port Laoise) Patrick Lalor shocked the audience by declaring 'that he would never again pay tithes; that he would violate no law; that the tithe men might take his property, and offer it for sale; but his countrymen, he was proud to say, respected him, and he thought that none of them would buy or bid for it if exposed for sale'.<sup>81</sup> When twenty-five of his sheep were seized in payment of tithes, he branded them with the word TITHE so that they would not be sold in any Irish or English market.<sup>82</sup> Patrick did not see tithes as a morally binding debt, noting that 'there was every facility to avoid the payment of tithes, if the people were only unanimous, and acted peaceably, as the society called Quakers did'.<sup>83</sup> Boycott, or as Patrick put it, 'the non-dealing system', was the aim and result of this Quaker-influenced policy of passive resistance.<sup>84</sup> His son James advocated a similar system.

Hobson read Lalor in 1901 and took from his writings a two-pronged approach to defeating British rule. The first prong was a policy of passive resistance that was similar to Arthur Griffith's Sinn Féin policy.<sup>85</sup> The attraction of this policy to Hobson may have derived from his own Quaker upbringing. The second prong was to employ tactics that would later be labelled guerrilla warfare. Hobson's acceptance of such tactics indicates his divergence from the Quaker tradition of pacifism.

In an 1848 letter to the *Irish Felon* Lalor outlined his strategy for passive resistance followed by, if necessary, physical force. It involved the following steps: 1) a refusal to obey usurped authority; 2) resistance to attempts to exercise usurped authority and endeavours to enforce obedience; 3) taking quiet and peaceable possession of all the rights and powers of government, and then proceeding to exercise them; and 4) maintaining and defending the exercise of such rights and powers, in the event of an attack.<sup>86</sup> It was a strategy that Hobson was keen to follow, and he frequently mentioned it in the lectures and speeches that he delivered in the ensuing years.<sup>87</sup>

Lalor called his strategy ‘moral insurrection’. He asserted that ‘the right of moral insurrection is worthless without a military force to sustain it, and unless you are prepared and willing to use that force’.<sup>88</sup> The difference between moral and military insurrection lay in the defensive, rather than aggressive, use of physical force.<sup>89</sup>

In describing the use of defensive physical force, Lalor listed tactics that would later be labelled guerrilla warfare.<sup>90</sup> He advised:

The force of England is *entrenched* and *fortified*. You must draw it out of position; break up its mass; break its trained line of march and manoeuvre – its equal step and serried array. You cannot organise, or train, or discipline your own force to any point of efficiency. You must therefore disorganise, and untrain, and undiscipline that of the enemy; and not alone must you *unsoldier* – you must *unofficer* it also; nullify its tactic and strategy, as well as its discipline; decompose the science and system of war, and resolve them into their first elements. You must make the hostile army a mob, as your own will be; force it to act on the *offensive*, and oblige it to undertake operations for which it was never constructed.<sup>91</sup>

These tactics appealed to the pragmatist in Hobson: ‘With regard to physical force, I early realised the complete impracticality of insurrections on the model of 1798, but I found in Lalor a method ... which appeared to me to be the one form which physical force could take in a situation such as ours with the remotest chance of success.’<sup>92</sup> From 1901 onwards, Hobson aimed ‘to win independence by a condition of passive resistance and by guerrilla warfare if the opportunity arose’ because he was convinced that this was the only way that ‘an armed insurrection in Ireland had any hope of military success against the highly trained and well organised armies of a powerful state’ like Britain.<sup>93</sup>

## Conclusion

Hobson’s espousal of republican nationalism may seem surprising in light of his comfortable, middle-class Ulster Quaker background. Yet his home, meeting house, school and neighbourhood all exposed him to influences that helped to shape his nationalist ideology and inspired his involvement in the advanced nationalist movement. From his father he learned to fight injustice and to have the moral courage to uphold convictions even when they clashed with mainstream opinion. In contrast to his father’s advocacy of Home Rule for Ireland, which called for the creation of a devolved Irish parliament to deal with domestic issues and the maintenance of Ireland’s political connection with Britain, Hobson instead promoted separatism. His mother provided him with an example of activism. His neighbours Milligan and Johnston shared

their enthusiasm for Irish cultural and political nationalism by lending him O'Grady's books and encouraging him to join the Gaelic League, where he could mix with like-minded individuals such as McCullough and Bigger. The *Shan Van Vocht* and its coverage of the centenary of the 1798 rebellion inspired Hobson to learn more about Wolfe Tone and the United Irishmen, whose ideology provided him with a political objective. Hobson's research into Irish history led him to Lalor's policy of moral insurrection, which offered him the means to pursue his objective. His upbringing and education within the Society of Friends taught him to 'live his own truth',<sup>94</sup> as he pursued his 'concern' for the cultural, political and economic renewal of Ireland.<sup>95</sup> The roots of his future career as a republican nationalist and the controversial choices that he made during that career can be found at 6 Hopefield Avenue, in the neighbourhood of the Antrim and Cave Hill roads, at the Frederick Street Meeting House and on Lisburn's Prospect Hill.

### Notes

- 1 Neville H. Newhouse, *A history of the Friends' School, Lisburn* (Lisburn, 1974), p. 143.
- 2 Hobson, *IYT*, p. 1.
- 3 Sandra King, *History of the Religious Society of Friends, Frederick Street, Belfast* (Belfast, 1999), p. 1.
- 4 Maurice J. Wigham, *The Irish Quakers* (Dublin, 1992), pp. 18–19.
- 5 Mary Ann Bulmer Hobson, *Memoirs of six generations* (Belfast, 1947), p. 47.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 28.
- 7 To maintain cohesiveness within the Irish Quaker community, Friends favoured endogenous marriages, either between two Irish Quakers or between an Irish Quaker and an English Quaker, as in the case of Hobson's parents (Sandra Hynes, "'Walk according to the gospel order": theology and discipline in the Quaker meeting system, 1650–1700' (PhD thesis, TCD, 2002), p. 72).
- 8 Mary Hobson, *Memoirs*, p. 46.
- 9 Birth register of the Lisburn Monthly Meeting (PRONI, MIC/16, Reel 22).
- 10 Mary Hobson, *Memoirs*, p. 51.
- 11 *Ibid.*, pp. 51–2.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 66.
- 13 *Ibid.*, pp. 52–3.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 52.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 26. In the past Quakers had objected to 'fiction and drama as being untrue' and to 'musical and theatrical performances as leading to depravity and the neglect of pure religion' (Wigham, *Irish Quakers*, p. 107).
- 16 Mary Hobson, *Memoirs*, pp. 53–4.

- 17 Patrick McCartan to Joseph McGarrity, 23 Dec. 1905 (NLI, JMcG, 17,457 (2)).
- 18 Mary Hobson, *Memoirs*, p. 49.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 59.
- 20 Ross Chapman to Marnie Hay, 6 May 2003 (response to a query made to the archives committee of the Religious Society of Friends Ulster Quarterly Meeting; letter in possession of author). All reference to money is in pre-decimal £ s d.
- 21 Hobson, *IYT*, p. 2.
- 22 Newhouse, *Friends' School*, p. 63.
- 23 *Ibid.*, pp. 67–8.
- 24 Chapman to Hay, 6 May 2003.
- 25 Newhouse, *Friends' School*, p. 81.
- 26 Conversation with Robina Chapman of Newry, Co. Down, a former class-mate of Camilla Hobson (23 Apr. 2003); Declan Hobson to William Glynn, 19 Aug. 1969 (FHL D, Box 3A, No. 85).
- 27 Newhouse, *Friends' School*, p. 75. Traditionally, Quakers had used the terms 'thee' or 'thou' to address individuals and 'you' or 'ye' to address more than one person as a way of asserting their commitment to equality by not treating people with false respect. 'Thee' and 'thou' were terms generally used to address someone who was supposedly inferior. Being addressed as 'thee' and 'thou' often caused non-Quakers to feel outraged (Richard S. Harrison, *A biographical dictionary of Irish Quakers* (Dublin, 1997), p. 18).
- 28 Newhouse, *Friends' School*, p. 85.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 83.
- 30 TV interview with Bulmer Hobson, by John O'Donoghue, and featured in 'Thursday Topics', broadcast on Telefís Éireann, 5 Dec. 1963 (RTÉ Libraries and Archives).
- 31 Florence Patterson (née Hobson) to William Glynn, 21 May 1972 (FHL D, Box 3A, No. 85).
- 32 Harrison, *Dictionary*, p. 17.
- 33 Patterson to Glynn, 10 Aug. 1969 (FHL D, Box 3A, No. 85).
- 34 Bulmer Hobson, draft memoirs (NLI, BH, MS 18,283 (1)).
- 35 Mary Hobson, *Memoirs*, pp. 68–9.
- 36 Diane Urquhart, *Women in Ulster politics 1890–1940* (Dublin, 2000), p. 137; Mary Hobson, *Memoirs*, pp. 69–70. It should be noted that there were two women named Mary Hobson active in Belfast in the late nineteenth century. In addition to Mrs Mary Hobson (Bulmer Hobson's mother), there was the 'formidable' Miss Mary Hobson, daughter of the rector of Connor, who established the Belfast Association for the Employment of the Blind in 1871. See Maria Luddy, 'Isabella M.S. Tod', in Mary Cullen and Maria Luddy (eds.), *Women, power and consciousness in 19<sup>th</sup> century Ireland* (Dublin, 1995), p. 200; Alison Jordan, *Who cared? Charity in Victorian and Edwardian Belfast* (Belfast, 1992), p. 97.
- 37 Mary Hobson, *Memoirs*, p. 64.
- 38 Mary Hobson published her work under numerous, inconsistent versions of

- her name. Examples include: Mrs Benjamin Hobson, 'Some souterrains in Antrim and Down' (1904), pp. 213–4, 'Denholes and souterrains' (1906) pp. 425–7, 'Great burial mounds of Loughcrew' (1908), pp. 48–51, all of which were published in the *Belfast Naturalists' Field Club Proceedings*; Mary and Florence Hobson, 'Some rude stone monuments in Antrim and Down', *Ulster Journal of Archaeology* (May 1907), pp. 84–9; Mary Hobson, 'The great burial mounds at Loughcrew, Co. Meath', *County Louth Archaeological Society Journal* (Oct. 1910), pp. 247–53.
- 39 Mary Hobson, *Memoirs*, pp. 64–5; Mrs Mary Hobson, 'Sanctuaries for our native flora and fauna', *The Irish Naturalist*, Nov. 1908, p. 219 (PRONI, D/1831/14); Mrs Hobson, 'Report of delegate to the British Association', in *Belfast Naturalists' Field Club, Report and Proceedings, 1908–09*, pp. 181–5 (PRONI, D/1831/16).
- 40 Mary Ann Bulmer Hobson, 'Bulmer family chronicle from before 1050 to 1936' (NLI, MS 5220).
- 41 Edmond Cotter to Bulmer Hobson, 16 July 1917 (NLI, BH, MS 13,161 (3)).
- 42 Catherine Morris, 'Becoming Irish?': Alice Milligan and the Revival', *Irish University Review*, xxxiii (Spring/Summer 2003), p. 95; Robbie Meredith, 'The Shan Van Vocht: Notes from the North', in Alan A. Gillis and Aaron Kelly (eds), *Critical Ireland: new essays in literature and culture* (Dublin, 2001), p. 174. The Milligans lived at Greenwood on the Antrim Road while the Johnstons lived at Lisnaveane (or Lios na bhFionn) on Donegall Park (*Belfast and Ulster Directory*, 1894, 1896).
- 43 Sheila Turner Johnston, *Alice: a life of Alice Milligan* (Omagh, 1994), p. 81.
- 44 Mary Hobson, *Memoirs*, p. 69.
- 45 Morris, 'Becoming Irish?', pp. 82–3.
- 46 *Ibid.*, p. 83.
- 47 *Ibid.*, pp. 83–4.
- 48 *Irish Weekly and Ulster Examiner*, 7 Sept. 1940, qtd. in Morris, 'Becoming Irish?', p. 83.
- 49 Terence Brown, *Northern voices: poets from Ulster* (Dublin, 1975), p. 59.
- 50 Meredith, 'Notes from the North', p. 175.
- 51 Catherine Morris states that they resigned because the paper's sponsors opposed Johnston's editorship after they found out about her father's membership in the IRB, while Robbie Meredith suggests that they were asked to leave because of their support for Maud Gonne's amnesty campaign for Irish prisoners in England (Morris, 'Becoming Irish?', p. 95; Meredith, 'Notes from the North', p. 175).
- 52 Morris, 'Becoming Irish?', p. 80.
- 53 Hobson, *IYT*, p. 1; Ó Lúing, 'Talking to Bulmer Hobson', *IT*, 6 May 1961, p. 10.
- 54 Hobson, TV interview, 5 Dec. 1963 (RTÉ Libraries and Archives).
- 55 Hobson, *IYT*, p. 1.
- 56 Richard P. Davis, *Arthur Griffith and non-violent Sinn Féin* (Dublin, 1974), p. 95.

- 57 Hobson, *IYT*, p. 2.
- 58 *Shan Van Vocht*, 8 Jan. 1897, qtd. in Urquhart, *Women*, p. 89.
- 59 Urquhart, *Women*, p. 91. For an examination of the political wrangling within the centennial movement, see Timothy J. O’Keefe, ‘The 1898 efforts to celebrate the United Irishmen: the ’98 centennial’, *Éire-Ireland*, no. 23 (Summer 1988), pp. 51–73.
- 60 *Irish Weekly Independent*, 21 Dec. 1895, qtd. in Morris, ‘Becoming Irish?’, p. 91.
- 61 Patrick McCartan, witness statement, 15 Dec. 1952 (NAI, BMH, WS 766).
- 62 Hobson, TV interview, 5 Dec. 1963 (RTÉ Libraries and Archives).
- 63 Ó Lúing, ‘Talking to Bulmer Hobson’, *IT*, 6 May 1961, p. 10.
- 64 Wolfe Tone, qtd. in Hobson, *IYT*, p. 2.
- 65 For discussions of how various groups within Ireland have commandeered Wolfe Tone to support their own viewpoints and Wolfe Tone’s own conversion to separatism, see Marianne Elliott, *Wolfe Tone: prophet of Irish independence* (New Haven and London, 1989), pp. 411–19.
- 66 For a discussion of differences between republicanism and separatism, and Wolfe Tone’s conversion to the latter, see Thomas Bartlett, ‘The burden of the present: Theobald Wolfe Tone, republican and separatist’, in David Dickson, Dáire Keogh and Kevin Whelan (eds), *The United Irishmen: republicanism, radicalism and rebellion* (Dublin, 1993), pp. 1–15.
- 67 Bulmer Hobson (ed.), *The letters of Wolfe Tone* (Dublin, 1920), p. 1.
- 68 Hobson, *IYT*, p. 2.
- 69 Hobson, TV interview, 5 Dec. 1963 (RTÉ Libraries and Archives).
- 70 Ibid.
- 71 Ibid.; Ó Lúing, ‘Talking to Bulmer Hobson’, *IT*, 6 May 1961, p. 10.
- 72 McCartan to McGarrity, 23 Dec. 1905 (NLI, JMcG, MS 17,457 (2)).
- 73 Patterson to Glynn, 10 Aug. 1969 (FHLD, Box 3A, No. 85).
- 74 Hobson, *IYT*, p. 2.
- 75 Denis McCullough, witness statement, 11 Dec. 1953 (NAI, BMH, WS 914).
- 76 Denis McCullough, Ulster TV interview transcript, 8 Sept. 1964 (UCDA, DMcC, P 120/34).
- 77 Ibid.
- 78 Ibid.
- 79 Hobson, *IYT*, p. 2.
- 80 Ibid., pp. 2–3.
- 81 *Leinster Leader*, 31 Mar. 1883, reprinted from *Redpath’s Weekly*; qtd. in David N. Buckley, *James Fintan Lalor: radical* (Cork, 1990), p. 11.
- 82 *Leinster Leader*, 31 Mar. 1883; qtd. in Buckley, *Lalor*, p. 11.
- 83 *Second report of the Select Committee of the House of Lords appointed to enquire into the collection and payment of tithes in Ireland*, p. 248; qtd. in Buckley, *Lalor*, p. 11.
- 84 Buckley, *Lalor*, p. 11.
- 85 See Chapter 3.
- 86 James Fintan Lalor, ‘To the Irish Confederate and Repeal Clubs’, *Irish Felon*,

- 1 July 1848, reprinted in *The writings of James Fintan Lalor* (Dublin, 1895), p. 83; qtd. in Hobson, *IYT*, p. 41.
- 87 Bulmer Hobson, 'The Volunteers', *IT*, 19 Nov. 1963 (UCDA, DMcC, P 120/40).
- 88 Lalor, 'Clubs', p. 84.
- 89 *Ibid.*, pp. 83–4.
- 90 Hobson, *IYT*, p. 41.
- 91 Lalor, 'Clubs', pp. 80–1; Hobson, *IYT*, p. 41.
- 92 Hobson, 'The Volunteers', *IT*, 19 Nov. 1963 (UCDA, DMcC, P 120/40).
- 93 *Ibid.*
- 94 William Glynn, graveside tribute to Bulmer Hobson, 11 Aug. 1969 (FHLD, MSS B. 3A-87).
- 95 Harrison, *Dictionary*, p. 17.