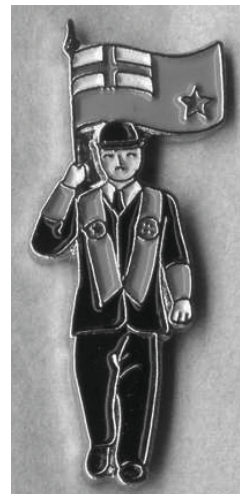


WILL ULSTER HANG PARLIAMENT?

Sean Aardvaark



As the poets have mournfully sung,
Death takes the innocent young
The rolling in money,
The screamingly funny,
And those who are very well hung.

– W.H.Auden

We are doomed.

The elections is upon us.
The jaws of the bores are opened.
Their teeth flash down on us their helpless
prey.
Their saliva drips away the last moments
of sanity.
And we are helpless!

Examples gross as earth extort us. I take but
one from the pollution infesting the front
porch.

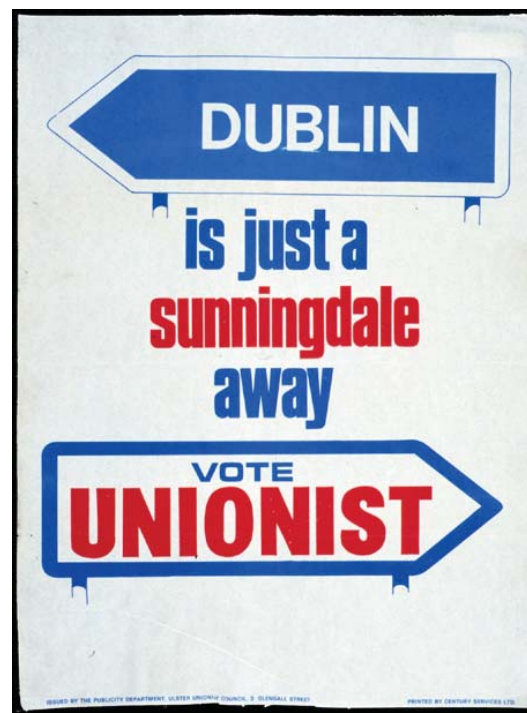
It is headed PEOPLETALK.

The title appears to be taken from a gay dial-a-dirty-story telephone link called MANTALK. And it candidly continues: 'DELIVERED BY YOUR LOCAL CONSERVATIVES + AT NO COST TO THE TAXPAYER' which may mean that in addition to heterosexualising pornography it is a privatising gynaecology for the election only irrespective of whether you want your baby by amateur extraction or not.

What follows is a picture of David Cameron open-mouthed, sharkstyle, under 'Year for Change' writ large, while his jacket and shirt-front, smeared by a Union Jack which has evidently run in the wash, are correctly labelled 'READY FOR CHANGE'. The information that these garments are laundered purely on an annual basis may allude to the Privy Council Ordinance in the reign of Elizabeth the First of England and the Nothing of Scotland that once a year her Majesty shall take a bath whether her Majesty's person may require the same, or no. But a series of five passport photographs at foot of page show countenance of less

hardihood than were evidently to be found in Tudor privies. Annabel Goldie's usually genial features are convulsed in acute nausea: George Osborne's seem to be taking credit for a stink-bomb of a good vintage; William Hague elevates his hand protesting he never touched the thing, whatever it was; Ken Clarke has evidently recognised the old, unhappy far-off stink from battles long ago; and David Cameron himself appears in this postage-stamp epiphany to demand hara-kiri.

But the occasion for this the outbreak of procrastinated hygiene is provided under 'Year of Change' – 'Scotland's crucial role in the



British General Election'. So all is now clear. Mr David Cameron, finding an annual alteration of drawers controversial, will take to a kilt.

The theme continues through the ensuing pages. The candidate pledges himself 'to fight a clean campaign', 'to show by our actions that politics need not be a dirty game, but can be a clean and positive activity', 'to tell the truth about what we stand for' &c. this last insistence is alarming given that MR Cameron's only known research on Scotland appears to have consisted of watching 'Braveheart'. Will truth-telling about what he stands for follow the kilt-flourishing at the enemy so wittily deployed in that art-movie? It has already taken Mr Cameron into interesting asides, such as his complaint that Mr Salmond's policy derives from the film, which seems to imply that Mr Salmond will confuse the Royal issue (via Camilla or via Prince William's fancy?).

Space fortunately will not permit further dissection save to notice that the package is stuffed with instructions to vote Tory on the grounds that bookmakers prefer it.

But the kilt necessarily requires more attention, since at current showing there will hardly be enough kilted Tories in Westminster to keep Mr Cameron decent. So Annabel Goldie assures the voters that if Mr Cameron becomes Prime Minister (unlike her male colleagues she is not fool enough to abandon that 'if') 'he will . . . travel to Scotland to meet with the First Minister . . . within seven days of taking office and he will come to Scotland to take questions from MSPs on any subject they choose once a year' (this presumably means after Laundry Day if the Westminster Tories remain kiltless), but the obsessiveness about the year grows Gothick). 'No other party leader has given these commitments.' But presumably Mr Salmond is ready to meet himself without having to commit.

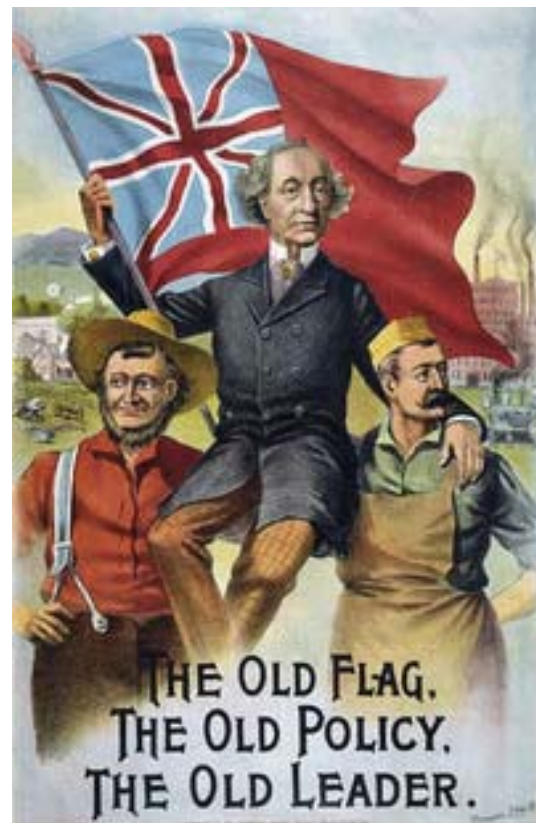
Now, all of this is merely fool-fodder. If there is one person who will value Mr Cameron's advent it is Mr Salmond, a Gulliver awaiting the Emperor of Lilliput (who has obligingly handed him credentials for inclusion in a General Election Debate by charging him with watching 'Braveheart', and if Mr Salmond gets into the Debate, Mr Cameron will discover what debating really means).

But the matter becomes rather more serious if we turn to Northern Ireland, which also has a 'crucial' role in 'the British General Election',

and one likely to be far more crucial than whether the Tories win 2, 1 or 0 seats in Scotland.

It is true that Mr Cameron adds yet another doubt about his fitness for the premiership by terming the General Election 'British' instead of giving its proper title of 'United Kingdom General Election'. It might be felt that Mr Cameron is perhaps even flirting with honesty in that if elected he will junk Northern Ireland, if he can. But he has no such choice. The leading Tories wield Mr Cameron's name with varying obeisance, Mr Osborne with his habitual mild contempt for everyone, Mr Michael Gove with the fear that someone will snigger, Dr Limey Fox with the suspicion that a Premier Cameron might abandon him in Afghanistan, Mr Ken Clarke with the tacit implication that his next joke will be better, &c, &c, . But there is no hesitation, no avoidance, no evasive footwork, in my lord Trimble. David Trimble, late Prime Minister of Northern Ireland is right behind Mr Cameron, so close that Mr Cameron has not a wriggle of room.

It has its historical precedent, however unpromising a historian we may find Mr Cameron. In the mid-twentieth century, give or take about fifty years in duration, the Ulster



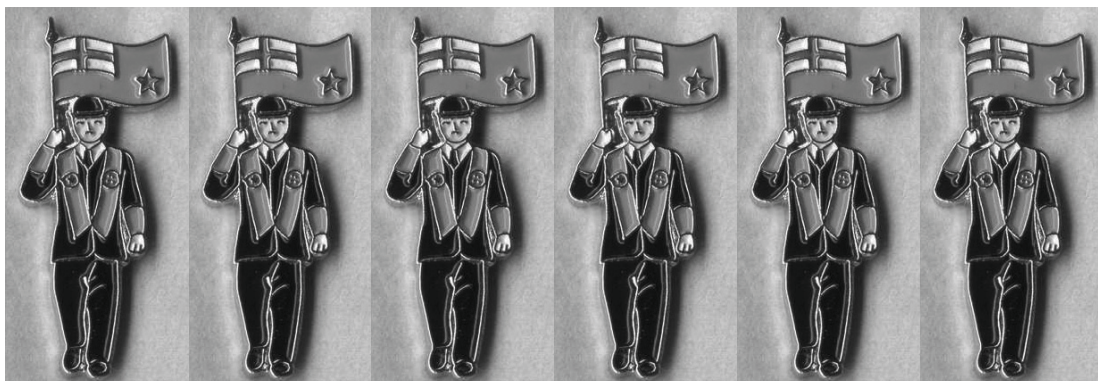
Unionists elected 10 out of 12 (out of a possible 12) MPs to the House of Commons. Man and beast (not always the easiest distinction) they could be relied on to keep the Tories in power, if the Tories were within a sniff of it. Their operations make the West Lothian Question appear the sheerest mirage in contrast to the real thing. As it happened, the first election result which might have depended on Ulster Unionist support for the Tories was February 1974, which coincided with Ulster Unionists withdrawing support because of the Sunningdale agreement or, more recently, with the presence since 1970 of their formidable rival the Revd Dr Ian R. K. Paisley alert for any sign of subordinating Ulster Protestant needs to Tory blandishments. The Ulster Unionists had enjoyed proximity to Tory gentlemen with some hopes of identification by protective mimicry, albeit when in Ulster they had to march in sashes of a garishness scarcely in keeping with dress taste in the Royal Enclosure at Ascot. But in 1950 and 1951 their votes, while not decisive in aiding the Tories, were vital to intimidate the Labour government (in 1950) and oust it by a sufficiently working majority (in 1951). This is what Lord Trimble hopes to bring about from his neo-aristocratic eminence. This is why on a recent Question Time he was full of answers that David Cameron would do this or decline to do that. The form of words was perhaps close enough to dutiful Tory lickspittling. But the manner left little doubt: my Lord Trimble's 'David Cameron will do this' was less a pre-election promise than a post-election command.

My lord's legions of yore are officially no longer than his, but his party is hardly likely to flout the spiritual authority of the elder statesman, and has no obvious alternative in leadership, apart from nominal caretakers. Dr Paisley has made mincemeat of the old Ulster Unionist Westminster forces, but his

Reverence is by now even more elder a statesman and there are all too many young or middle-aged lions in the way of his Reverence's return to leadership. His Reverence will not seek re-election to the Commons.

(Pether Robinson passed many a bitter year casting covetous eyes on the throne. His Reverence had a short way with pushy lieutenants, whose attrition reached proportions to make Stalin envious, but Pether ran him the closest, and in the end it was only the compassion of a Drogheda district justice when in 1986 he sought martyrdom by an invasion of the Republic, which neutered Pether. His first intention, when his shoulder was polluted by the arresting hand of a Garda Síochána, was to defy the foul Fenian fiend and proudly rot in a Dublin jail thus following the prominent example of innumerable Irish republicans).

His wife was apparently ready with vehement encouragement for any such course, regardless of the duration of her grass-widowhood which this must entail. But wiser spiritual counsels were at hand. His Reverence, interposing his great person between Mrs Robinson and her imprisoned lord, blocked off her prison visitation while he himself, favoured by the special accessibility for pastors in the clericalist Republic, conveyed to Pether that the Inquisition was only waiting to get its bloodstained hands on him if he was sentenced to a Dublin jail, and that the Gulag Archipelago was a Butlin's holiday camp by comparison. By the time Mrs Robinson was able to rally her forces (not to speak of tearing herself away from her other commitments), his Reverence had done his work, and the trembling Pether was pleading guilty. And then followed the magnanimity of the magistrate, and the martyrdom was reduced to a fine, most charmingly accompanied by (district) judicial



smiling compliment on his previous unblemished record. There must have been some hard thoughts on the wilder shores of the Paisleyite army at the horrid news that Pether had been acquitted of any but the most trivial foolishness by a Papist judge. Where was the stake? Where was the fire? And where, oh where, were the faggots?

His Reverence relaxed into his now unthreatened throne and Pether was left to console himself by denouncing the European Union and milking it to make himself a millionaire ice-rink owner, with subsequent bijoux residences from Florida to Finaghy. Later developments, including Prime Minister Blair's cool betrayal of David Trimble, put his Reverence on what looked like a permanent additional throne as First Minister of the new Northern Ireland. Despite all the Paisleyite bellows charging Trimble with apostacy for permitting the proximity of Papists to power, his Reverence ultimately allowed his customary assumption that all Papists are damned to dismiss any gradation in damnation such that Martin McGuinness, for all of the Protestant blood on his hands, was accepted for the Papist slot of deputy premier. They proved so amiable a couple of consumers at the public trough that they were widely known as the Chuckle Brothers. And then Dr Paisley's most conspicuous virtue, his undoubted but indulgent love for his family, proved the means of his ouster as his son trembled on the verge of suspicion of malfeasance. And Pether stepped into the reverend shoes after all the speculation of lethal rivalry from the sour Nigel Dodds or the spectacular Sammy Wilson. It was remarked that the Chuckle Brothers had been displaced by the Brothers Grim, since Pether's first concern was to preserve his reputation for intransigence up to the best price on offer, on the model of his defiance of the European Union. As for Martin McGuinness, he has always preferred a cheery smile to his friend Gerry Adam's sour milk, be the immediate agenda what it might, from bombs to babies. But if his First Minister had to be kept in sour countenance, Mr McGuinness was no less ready to impersonate The Heart Bowed Down.



And then there dawned the Irish Question

Was the First Minister's homophobe wife seeking to persuade the Butcher's boy that he wasn't gay? It is a tempting thesis, if not as tempting as the Butcher's boy himself (now Gay Ulster's leading pin-up). But its force is somewhat blunted by her previous missionary cultivation of his father, until the commercial and concubinal demands of the flesh concluded in the Butcher's boy joining the Great Abattoir

(which appears to be Mrs Robinson's Vision of Judgement Day).

In her ultimate tearful admission of adultery, Iris Robinson hinted at mental illness combined with consolation for bereavement. No doubt the mourning process has resulted in the transfer of affections from the mourned to the mourners in the past, and with a view to its discouragement the United Kingdom for aeons forbade marriage with a deceased wife's sister. Coupling with a deceased father's mistress has a rather less public precedent. Henry VIII's sixth wife married his third wife's brother, later executed by their other brother, but the nearest transfer of floozy from father to son (in that pattern of polite behaviour the British Royal Family) would seem to be George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, transferred from the deceased James VI and I to his son Charles. Charles I is usually taken to be one of the heterosexual Stuarts, and Buckingham, like most Royal toy-boys, was probably straight also, but father and son seemed to have been equally dependent on Buckingham's counsel, on a very small justification apart from pulchritude.

There is a certain Nemesis in finding Mrs Robinson's most prominent precedent in petting to be homosexual, given that her most famous public issue up to now had been uncharitable reflections about homosexually inclined persons in this world and the next. And that has made a difference in the present case. Sex scandals often invite some sympathy with the disgraced public figure. Decent people hardly want to sing from the same hymn-sheet as the *Sun*. When Sammy Wilson, staunch proletarian Paisleyite, was discovered in a field



with female friend but without nether garments, it halted but certainly did not end his political career, and the general reaction was more of amusement than of accusation. It may even have won some electoral support for the Paisleyites on the ground that at least one of them was evidently human. The problem in the case of Mrs Robinson is that adumbrated by Shakespeare via Angelo in *Measure for Measure* and by Moliere via *Tartuffe*, viz. the lecherous Puritan. The Robinsons were known not to stint themselves in the fleshpots, a somewhat dangerous self-indulgence in a pious party. His Reverence has drawn his thousands and his hundreds of thousands for the several churches of which he is pastor, prophet and Pope, but there is little sign of his having put the spiritual support to his personal use. His habitual mode of address to God is clearly that of a testy senior partner irritated by the procrastinations of his junior, but he has never shown any sign of profit outside of the partnership. He shouts at God, but will not swindle Him. Alas the Robinsons, while Protestant, are not of Dr Paisley's persuasion, and their pieties are thus less conspicuous while they adorn a party of piety. In His Reverence's house there are many mansions, and many of his political followers are not of his religious sect, while some of his spiritual following apparently vote otherwise. But the Swish Family Robinson naturally attract jeers at their opulence, such as the above popular designation, and evidently Mrs Robinson sought to plump up the pious vote by singling out witches to burn. His Reverence some years back had expressed disapproval of homosexuality in a crusade entitled 'UNITING IRELAND AGAINST SODOMY', the only form of Irish unity he was prepared to accept. What form the unity was to take was uncertain. The ribald envisaged a human chain, whose couplings were presumably strictly but covertly heterosexual. But other considerations necessarily overtook such agenda, and Ireland was left to desodomize itself while his Reverence was flattening David Trimble with the aid of Tony Blair (and if you think about it

also with that of Messrs Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness). In fact his Reverence's ultimate discovery that power could be shared with papists, provided it was he who retained the lion's share, may even have fitted into the anti-Sodomy unification process. Martin McGuinness and his merry murderers are quite as puritanical as any Paisleyite, their liberalism in regard to the fifth commandment (sixth, if you are a Protestant) being compensated for by extreme intransigence on the sixth (seventh, if you are a Protestant). Martin McGuinness would accept Irish unity against Sodomy as a suitable first instalment on the complete unity Dr Paisley would never give him. So the Chuckle Brothers chuckled away. Meanwhile the Robinsons, still with only longterm hopes of succession, could strengthen their own hands by proving their morality, whence Mrs Robinson renewed their war against Sodomy since anti-Popery was for the moment as far off her radar as anti-poverty.

And she came up with an Example. The Paisleyites had elected the youngest Parliamentarian of the Stormont Assembly, and lo! he was discovered pursuing his own forms of tea and sympathy with the aid of a masseur whose massage knew no more boundaries than Ireland against Sodomy. Masseur, not masseuse. Mrs Robinson demanded his expulsion. His Reverence demanded proof of his offence. Dr Paisley is in fact a person of genuine personal compassion. Way back in 1970 when Bernadette Devlin announced she was pregnant out of wedlock and the impartial press raced off to his Reverence for comment, Dr Paisley thundered at them 'He that is without sin among you let him throw the first stone!' It is a pity few politicians have had the courage to follow his example. But it is not unique in his career. Behind the ferocity of his damnation of Catholics, Sodomites, Fenians, English, cabinet ministers &c, &c there is a kindly man. Many an individual, Catholic as well as Protestant, has known the depth of his generosity. His interventions in Northern Ireland homosexual



scandals were less witch-hunting than damage-limitation. But his genuine kindness and good nature were confronted by proof positive of the youngest Stormont Assembly Member's pursuit of homosexual gratification, and the Robinsons were able to throw the poor wretch to their attendant jackals and hyenas.

And so when her day dawned, Iris Robinson had nowhere left to seek compassion. The cheery ribaldry which had greeted the solecisms of Sammy Wilson, the silent sympathy which saw Dr Paisley resign and knew the reason, may have obscured some harsher responses. But Iris Robinson was left to ponder the parable of the wicked servant, whose brutality to his debtor brought him ruthless demand for payment of his own debt, for which he was delivered to the torturers. And gays are not the innocuous targets they used to be. Gay song rang across the internet, the illicit radio station, the innumerable celebrations. Her attack on the poor massage-seeker had its touch of Age's envy of Youth, and Youth replied in kind with the musical heritage of Orangeism at its disposal: Mrs Robinson's wealthy pieties had been delivered with courage if not consistency in the colour of her hair, from sombre to scarlet. And so –

She is old but she is beautiful,
And her colours they are fine . . .

in parody of 'The Sash My Father Wore'. Imagination is best left to conjure up what treatment of the former paternal use was drawn from the Butcher's case. Mrs Robinson also figures in repertoires hitherto satiated with the sexploits of Eskimo Nell, in which the person of Martin McGuinness was no longer given credit for sexual austerity:

Martin McGuinness had her up the
Bogside . . .

And above all, incessantly, in parody after parody:

*So here's to you, Mrs Robinson
Pether loves you more than you will know
Woh-oh-oh!
He doesn't know you're munching
sausages . . .*

The next rhyme was 'cottages' –write it yourself. Presumably the rank and file of Mrs Robinson's Fenian partners can draw on their own traditional repertoire with suitable effects such as

The Butcher's boy to the girl has gone
In the Premier's bed you'll find him,
His father's whore he has girded on,
The taxpayer's funds behind him . . .

For the lady had considerably sweetened the pot, bearing gifts to her baby Butch. Pether himself has been acquitted of any impropriety in any direction as far as generous grunts to the young victualler are concerned. Whatever his ethics complacency in cuckoldry is unlikely to be among them.

But Pether is vulnerable on the cuckoldry. His dignity is dear to him, and this affair (or, to be accurate about the lady, these affairs) have diminished it considerably. There may, of course, be many a kind Paisleyite who would spare a tear of sympathy for Sir Clifford Chatterley in surreptitious encounter with D. H. Lawrence, but Pether is incongruous in the sympathy stakes. Moreover, Paisleyism (secular) has more in common with the culture of 1910 than with that of 2010. His Reverence when not spreading himself in his undoubted mastery of Biblical vocabulary went in for macho exhortations recalling *Boy's Own Paper* and Bulldog Drummond. Pether is heir to that tradition. And it demands that heroes be heroes such that if any women at all appear on their horizons it must be with perpetual devotion once the hero takes the one and only in his arms. Voters in revulsion from his cuckoldry are unlikely to confess to pollsters that they will no longer support Pether since his virility no longer sufficed his wife: even the *News of the World* can hardly solicit public opinion on the question with its usual probes ('how does it feel when the man you vote for turns off his wife?'). but it will not be easy either to estimate voter revulsion for the more obvious reason: that Iris Robinson is a witch-hunting hypocrite whose husband had given her a political career. Puritanism can only sustain itself by the assumption that its gods remain pure. Once the pious are proved pretenders piety loses its voter appeal. And poor Pether has no reliable way of estimating the damage this has done to him. Iris has, so to say, holed him below the water-line. Only the imminent election will tell how badly the ship of state is leaking, and here the beneficiary is obviously my lord Trimble and his vanquished Ulster Unionists. In other words, David Cameron's hopes of 10 Downing Street may depend on the number of Ulster Protestants who disapprove of the First Lady of Northern Ireland embedding herself with a Butcher's boy. PEOPLETALK is right. This is the Change for



which we are being made Ready. If elected Mr Cameron will keep his butchers in Iraq and Afghanistan. And possibly Iran.

Pether, unsurprisingly, does not intend to stand back respectfully while my lord Trimble resurrects himself and his lost legions. As we go to press he is attempting to pick a fight with the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Armagh on the question of Catholic schools. There may be some cunning in this. The Irish hierarchy might have been a tad more critical of Sinn Fein /IRA than they were, during the zenith of the murder years, but they said enough to keep themselves at a distance. The Catholic hierarchy still retain more support among nominal Catholics in Northern Ireland than they do in the Republic (proportionally speaking) but Sinn Fein covertly replied to their clerical critics by slightly discouraging religiosity among their activists. It is possible, certainly, that Pether's latest tactics may draw Sinn Fein and the bishops back into one another's arms (speaking spiritually), but the loaves and fishes of office in the Northern Ireland government are unlikely to be rejected on account of it. Since the Cardinal gave a broad hint that Catholic schools are gradually to be watered down, if not phased out, it may be difficult to make sense of Pether's complaint, but the message he is desperately hoping to deliver is that he is still the strongest and most intransigent Protestant around. E may have a few more smoke-signals to belch along the same lines before Parliament is hung. But Lord Trimble has more reason for optimism than at any time since the Chuckle Brothers took office.

So where does this leave the newly-elected Parliament? With Lord Trimble wedded to Mr Cameron in a union far steeper than that of the Robinsons, any surviving Paisleyite MPs at Westminster are not very likely to vote for a Cameron government. (It also ensures that if elected a Tory government will be on the very worst of terms with the First Minister of Northern Ireland, and Pether knows exactly how unpleasant a negotiator he can afford to be. Mr Cameron will yearn for the company of Mr Salmond by comparison.) A hung Parliament daily grows closer and in fact has always been more likely since 2005 than the simplicity-worshipping media have cared to contemplate. The Liberal Democrats dare not support any government not nailed to drastic electoral reform. The Scots and Welsh nationalists may expect more mileage from diplomacy with Mr Cameron (whose inexperience is expected to

be almost as useful to them as his vanity) but votes for a Tory Government would be very dangerous for nationalists in countries which in 1997 wiped out every Tory on the electoral map. Of course it may not end up as a matter of for or against Mr Cameron. In the Republic of Ireland coalition governments were chosen in 1948 and 1954 on the principle of all party leaders being excluded from the premiership, and there is certainly a case for turning to Mr Vince Cable as the only major politician in Westminster who manages to sound as if he knows what he is talking about.

In the words of Tennyson

In the spring a livelier Iris changes on
the burnish'd dove . . .

That is the change which may prove Mr Cameron's last hope. He bets too heavily on his own triumph to have much hope of resurrection should he fail now.

P.S. (As we go to press) The Ulster Unionist Party's refusal to accept the devolution of Law and Order to the Paisleyites and the Sinners is simply a pointed self-distancing from the Paisleyites so that they can make the most of fallout over Iris, while looking as patriotic and as protestant as possible. Mr David Cameron's attempt to prevent their conscription of him by calling on George W. Bush as an appropriate intellectual influence tells us all we need to know about his competence in domestic and foreign affairs.



