

PASTORAL LETTER OF THE IRISH EPISCOPATE.

The following is the full text of the pastoral address of the Archbishops and Bishops of Ireland to the clergy and the laity of their flocks:—

DEARLY BELOVED BROTHERS,—Assembled in Dublin for our Autumn meeting, we feel bound, in the present critical condition of the country, not to separate without giving expression to the convictions which we unanimously entertain on certain subjects that now deeply interest our people. Our abiding solicitude for the spiritual and temporal well-being of our flocks urges us to address to them in this trying time a few words of heartfelt sympathy and salutary instruction.

First of all, we feel called upon to bear testimony to the seriousness of the calamity now impending. From close personal observation, and from the trustworthy reports of those in daily contact with the people, we have ample evidence of a disastrous failure of the potato crop over large districts of the country. We feel it, therefore, an imperative duty to call upon the Government to take effective means, whilst there is yet time, to prevent the deplorable consequences that, more especially in the poorer parts of the country, must inevitably follow from so large a failure of that crop on which the people mainly subsist. We have seen with regret that attempts have been made to deny the seriousness of the impending danger. The history of former periods of distress in Ireland furnishes but too many examples of similar denials. That history also records the deplorable consequences of such denials in hindering the timely adoption of remedial measures by the Executive.

Most useful measures for the employment of the people, and for the permanent development of the resources of the country, have been clearly outlined by leading public men, and by representative bodies enjoying the confidence of the people. The means of averting, at all events, many of the worst consequences of the impending calamity are manifestly within reach. There can be no reason why the adoption of remedial measures should be delayed. We are the more urgent in pressing for the immediate employment of the poor at remunerative work from the sad experience we have had of the demoralising effect of wholesale eleemosynary relief.

We fully recognize the relief that may be afforded by means of the construction of railways under the scheme already sanctioned by Parliament. But it is manifest that whatever benefit is to be derived from that scheme, as a remedial measure, must largely depend upon the provisions that may be made for the employment of as many as possible of the poor inhabitants of the districts through which the projected lines are to pass. It must also be kept in view that, outside the areas of projected railway extension, there are many other districts for which it is of no less urgent necessity to make provision. We must raise our voices in protest against the notion that adequate provision can be made for such districts by throwing the people upon Poor-law relief.

Bearing upon this question of the impending distress, there is another point to which we must not omit to direct attention. The crisis now before us is one that, if it be not effectively dealt with, must bring upon our people a disaster far-reaching in its fatal results, even in future years. It is, on this score, of obvious importance that measures should be taken to enable them to provide themselves for next season with potato seed less likely to be affected by disease. Whilst we suggest these means of alleviating the distress of our suffering poor we should fail in our duty if we did not remind you, dearly beloved, that visitations such as that with which we are now threatened come from God, and that to Him above all we should have recourse for help. "Our God is our refuge and strength; a helper in troubles which have found us exceedingly" (Psalm xlv., 1). "Arise, O Lord God, let Thy hand be exalted; forget not the poor" (Psalm ix., 12).

Also, dearly beloved, we take this as a fitting occasion to discharge another duty of our pastoral office. From some recent events, as well as from the comments of certain news-

papers no less hostile to the Faith than to the national aspirations of the Irish people, we find with regret that the attitude of the Bishops of Ireland on some important questions has been misrepresented and misunderstood. Moreover, certain undoubted principles of Catholic doctrine have frequently been called in question.

We deem it our imperative duty, then, to reiterate the instruction already publicly given by us to our flocks with reference to these questions and these points of doctrine. In that instruction, issued two years ago from a general meeting of the Archbishops and Bishops of Ireland assembled in Dublin, we warned our people, as it was our duty to warn them, "against the use of any hasty or irreverent language with reference to the Sovereign Pontiff, or to any of the Sacred Congregations through which he usually issues his decrees to the faithful." Furthermore, in obedience to the commands of the Holy See, and in willing discharge of the duty thus placed upon us, we put it on public record that the decree of the Holy Office which had then recently been issued to the Irish Hierarchy had been issued in reference to the domain, not of politics, as such, but of morals alone. And we emphatically reminded our flocks that "on all questions appertaining to morals," as on those that appertain to Faith, the Sovereign Pontiff, the Vicar of Christ on earth, has "an inalienable and divine right to speak with authority."

This instruction of the assembled Bishops of Ireland was followed by a statement from the Archbishop of Dublin, in which the scope and binding force of the decree were most fully and most lucidly explained. In that statement it was pointed out, first of all, that the decree was "a decision strictly and exclusively on a question of morals;" that the point dealt with in it was as to the lawfulness, the "moral lawfulness," of employing, in the agrarian struggle described in the question, the methods of action known as the Plan of Campaign and Boycotting; and that the decision was in the negative; that is to say, "that in the struggle in question those methods of action could not lawfully be employed."

It was also pointed out by the Archbishop that whilst the matter so dealt with by the Sacred Congregation had, no doubt, a most important political aspect, "this aspect does not, and cannot, alter the essential character of the question itself." This point was developed by his Grace as follows:—"Every question as to whether a particular action, or line of action, is morally right or morally wrong, is a question of morals. As such, it comes within the sphere of the authority of the Church. The action, or line of action, in question, may, if considered from a worldly point of view, be political, or social, or medical, or legal. But the question whether that action or line of action, is, or is not, in accordance with the principles of morality—that is to say, with the natural law—is not a question of political, or of social, or of medical, or of legal science. It is essentially and exclusively a question of morals."

Every such question, the Archbishop went on to explain, "is to be dealt with by that tribunal which is competent to deal with it on moral grounds. Persons who are not Catholics have to examine such questions conscientiously for themselves, each man according to the lights of his own private judgment as to what is right or wrong. In matters not decided by the authority of the Church, Catholics are left free to do the same. But when such a question is decided by that authority, mere private judgment is called upon to give way. When there is question of the moral lawfulness of an action, or line of action, which is productive, it may be, of some enormous advantage—an advantage, for instance, in politics—the question of moral lawfulness manifestly stands altogether apart from the question of political utility. Those questions belong to different spheres. Politicians may deal with one. The Church deals with the other. The Church has no more to do with the political advantage or disadvantage of a given line of action than the constituencies, or the Houses of Parliament have to do with its morality. She deals with the moral aspect of the case, and with that only. Her decision may, of course, be set at naught, either by those who repudiate her authority, or by