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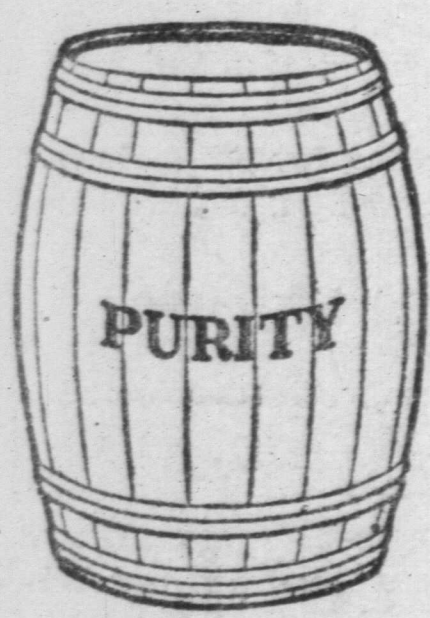
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The Problem of Ulster

A Protestant View of the Present Extraordinary Situation in that Irish Province

SYDNEY BROOK, in the North American Review.

It is well understood in Great Britain, but may not be equally appreciated in the United States, that the title itself is a misnomer, and that the question is not one of Ulster as a whole, but only a part of it. What men mean when they talk of the problem of Ulster is the problem of the four counties of Antrim, Down, Derry, and Armaugh, in which are situated the industrial centers of Belfast and Londonderry and in which the Protestants and Unionists outnumber the Catholics and Home-Rulers in the proportion roughly speaking, of seven to three.

Taking the Province from end to end, the population is pretty evenly divided between the members of the two faiths, while its representation in Parliament shows an actual majority of one in favor of Home Rule. Even in Armagh and Derry, two of the four Protestant counties, the Catholics form forty-five per cent. of the whole; and in Belfast they are a quarter of the inhabitants. These figures are worth bearing in mind because they indicate that if ever the Provisional Government were to be established it would be confronted on the spot by a considerable and exceedingly hostile Catholic minority. The four northeastern counties differ profoundly not only from the rest of Ulster, but from the rest of Ireland.

Northeastern Counties.

In the first place, Protestants predominate in them; secondly, they return twice as many Unionists as Home Rulers; thirdly, they depend for their prosperity in the main upon industrial pursuits; fourthly, their Protestant citizens are the only more or less compact body in Ireland that can trace a partial descent to the colonists, who from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries were planted in the country in the interests of England; and fifthly, and this is a curious and illuminating fact, in them alone does one encounter any real apprehension that Home Rule would lead to the persecution of the Protestants by the Catholics.

Outside of Ulster there are perhaps 250,000 Protestants scattered over Ireland. They are surrounded, and vastly outnumbered by Catholics who have no particular reason for loving them and who have all the machinery of local government in their hands. Yet from these Protestants, isolated, defenseless, virtually disfranchised, there comes hardly a single complaint of Catholic bigotry or intolerance. It is only in the counties where the Protestants form a comparatively cohesive group and where they outnumber the Catholics, as I have said, in the ratio of seven to three, that the fear is expressed that an Irish Parliament sitting in Dublin will inaugurate a regime of religious persecution. That is a paradox the significance of which will, I hope, become clear as we go along.

Protestant Industries.

It goes without saying, for any one who is acquainted with even the alphabet of Irish life, that all the Belfast industries are in the hands of Protestants, that practically every one meets in the city of any commercial or social or public importance is of the same faith, and that the Catholics belong with hardly an exception to the employed and not the employing class. For tenacity, enterprise, and in all the qualities that make for commercial efficiency of the highest order, one would instinctively match the Belfast manufacturers against any on earth. They are a rough-tongued, hard-headed, not particularly ingratiating or cultivated set of men or particularly humane or farsighted in their treatment of labor, but with a clearness of business vision, a remorseless energy and fixity of purpose in pursuing their ends, and a general ruggedness of character that command one's instant respect. And these are characteristics that run with astonishing consistency through all the Ulster Protestants of whatever class and occupation.

Taking them as a community, they are as dour, stubborn, self-willed, and self-reliant a body of men as one is ever likely to come across. Taciturn of speech, fixed in all their ideas, obstinately faithful to the men who are capable of winning their reluctant trust, approximating much nearer to the Scottish than the English type, and absolutely differentiated from the ordinary Catholic Irishman of the south and west. They have a far stronger capacity for hate than for affection; they are narrow with something of

the simplicity and earnestness of a Cromwellian Puritan; the rougher elements among them are as turbulent a mob as you will find in all Europe; and mingling with all these traits is an intense strain of emotionalism. They are the hardest workers, the best artisans and the most provident farmers in Ireland.

The Stamp of History.

History has left its stamp on them as on all Irishmen, but in their case it is like a disfiguring and even repulsive birthmark. They have inherited from the past memories and traditions of the bitterest antagonism toward their Catholic fellow-subjects. One must remember that the ancestors or at any rate the co-religionists of these Ulster stalwarts were settled in the north of Ireland to uphold Protestantism and establish a sphere of English influence; that time and again the two creeds clashed in murderous and devastating wars from which in the end the Protestants emerged victorious; that up almost to our own time their descendants lorded it over their Catholic neighbors with a high-handed ascendancy; and that they still import into their attitude toward the ancient faith and its adherents not only an almost Elizabethan fanaticism, but the unlovely truculence of "colonists" who regard "the natives" as an inferior species. Those are the two operative factors behind nine-tenths of Ulster's opposition to Home Rule—bigotry based on ignorance and a profound social contempt.

The Belfast Orangemen look upon the idea of being governed by a Parliament in which Catholics and farmers will necessarily predominate much as a white planter in Texas would regard a proposal to hand over the administration of his State to the negroes. It is not merely an insult; it seems to him positively unnatural, something that involves him in a personal degradation, and that aims at lowering him to the level of an alien and abject civilization. And if one asks how such a view can still hold its own in the twentieth century and in a great commercial city like Belfast, the answer, or one of the answers, is to be found in that strain of emotionalism which, as I have said, runs through the Ulster Protestants. They will celebrate the Battle of the Boyne and the Siege of Derry and drink to the immortal memory of William III, as though the former were events of yesterday and the latter an active figure in present-day politics. They will speak of the Pope as though a new Armada were on the point of sailing.

Religious Fanaticism.

"Were I to report the abuse with which my own creed is daily bespattered," says Mr. Nettle, "I should describe the Ulster Orangemen as the only victim of clerical obscurantism to be found in Ireland. Herded beyond the unbridged waters of the Boyne, he has been forced to live in a very Tibet of intellectual isolation." The favorite conventional objurgation of the true-blue Ulsterman is, "To Hell with the Pope!" One of his minor amusements is chaffing up reflections on the Catholics, and their religion on walls and public buildings.

The tale is told of an old Orangeman who had been called as a witness to the peaceable disposition of a friend of his. "What sort of man," asked the counsel, "would you say James Williamson is?" "A quiet, decent man." "Is he the sort of man that would be likely to be breaking windows?" "No man less likely." "Is he the sort of man that you would expect to find at the head of a mob shouting, 'To Hell with the Pope!'" Witness, with great emphasis: "No, certainly not. Jamie was never any ways a religious man." The deliciousness of that single adjective is more revealing than a whole library of labored comment. It is all of a part with the Belfast manufacturer who vehemently exclaims, "No man shall call me a bigot; but if Home Rule comes I'll sack every damned Catholic in my shop"; and with the Orange reveller who after hurling a "To Hell with the Pope" at a couple of passing Catholics, turned round to a nearby Protestant clergyman and said, apologetically, "Your reverence, there's nothin' like givin' these fellows a varse o' scripthin' now an' again!"

The Ulster Protestant

The fact is that the terms Protestant and Catholic carry with them in the northeast corner of Ireland a significance and implication that they

have long since lost everywhere else. To be an Ulster Protestant is not merely to subscribe to a certain creed, but to be the heir of a vivid and martial history and of rights and liberties fought for and won on the battle field. It is to be a member of a colonizing caste, a superior race, a higher civilization; while to be a Catholic is to be branded with the mark of a conquered people. That literally is now thousands upon thousands of Orangemen look upon themselves and upon the "Papists." They have the unmixed, unsophisticated, unconscious arrogance of men who have never been told, and most certainly have never imagined, that they are not infinitely better than their neighbors. And everything they see around them tends to confirm them in their inherited prepossessions.

One must remember, too, that the average Ulsterman knows as little of the rest of Ireland as the average American knows, say, of Mexico. He does not read anything except the Belfast newspapers; he does not travel through the south and west; if you were to tell him that it is not the factory but the farm that produces most of the wealth of Ireland, that the ratable value of Leitrim, excluding Dublin, is greater than that of Ulster, excluding Belfast, or that there are Catholic farmers who live as well as Belfast manufacturers and have as ample a bank account, he would be simply and unflatteringly incredulous. He lives in a little world of hallucinations that is all his own, and if he is a Belfast artisan or loafer there is nothing he likes better than a "mix-up" in the streets with a crowd of Catholics.

Belfast Orangemen.

"The Belfast Orangemen," Mr. Seumas MacManus has written, "who always realizes that he is the bulwark of the Protestant faith, attends his church regularly thrice in a lifetime—at baptism, marriage and burial in the cause of that faith, which he eaves to the more leisured and less worthy of practice, he is willing to sacrifice anything, even life itself—his neighbor's life, of course. He is the man who, in workman's dress, in the gallery of a theatre, passed down cabbages, curses, and aged eggs to the unfortunate fellow who played the Friar in one of Shakespeare's plays. He will unquestionably fight for Home Rule comes. He will fight if anything comes. Nor will he use he antiquated arms imported from Italy, either. He is a man whose picture of Heaven is a pocketful of iron nuts, the shelter of a side street, and a "Papist" procession passing by. The rebellion he launches will last as the supply of nuts, bolts, kidneys, and whiskey hold out."

I need hardly say that with such inflammable material to work upon there is no lack of hands willing to stoke the fire, and that the ministers of the Gospel, especially among a given sect, are, as usual, doing what they can to raise passion to a white heat. There are pastors in Belfast to-day who are talking and acting like so many Mohammedan Mullahs preaching a Holy War. All the deification of Rome that animated the England of the sixteenth century is nakedly, shamelessly alive and operative in the northeast of Ireland to-day. The Protestant pulpits resound with comparisons between the Israelites and the Ulstermen, the first leveled from the bondage of Egypt, the second from slavery to the "Papists"; and the devil's brew of sectarian bigotry is being handed out in the form of barely veiled incitements to the roughs of the city to attempt a massacre of their Catholic fellow-subjects.

Declared Intentions.

A correspondent of the Times, in the course of a pilgrimage through Ulster in July, reported a conversation he had had with an Antrim farmer. "Let them do what they will," exclaimed this stalwart, "we will have no priest-ridden Ulster. Let the word be given, and there won't be a Papist left in Antrim." There you have the brutal fact that lies behind Ulsteria. It is a fact, I need hardly say, concealed from the British public as much as possible. It wears too ugly, too antiquated, too uncivilized a look for British consumption; and Sir Edward Carson, to do him justice, is probably in his heart of hearts as much revolted by it as any one. He is an Irishman, but not an Ulsterman; there is no trace of the odium theologium in his disposition; he

(Continued on page 4.)

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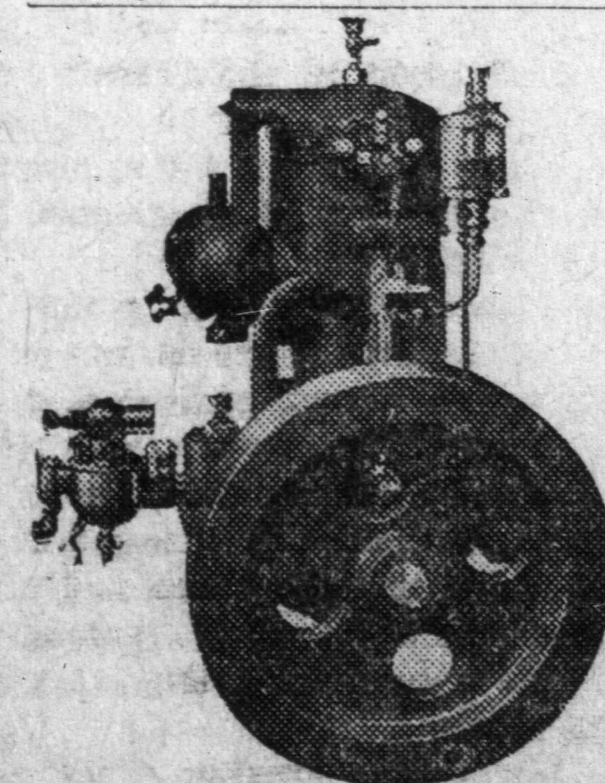
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