

[From the (Philadelphia) Banner of the Covenant.]

The Irish Established Church—Past and future.

I. THE PAST. The vote reached on Saturday, April 4th, in the British House of Commons, in regard to the abolition of the Irish Established Church, has been received with very general satisfaction in this country. Believing that the result of that vote will be to place Protestantism on a much better footing in Ireland and elsewhere, we see no reason to regret the vote. But there are many facts in the history of the Irish Church, and many popular mistakes current in regard to it, that call for a discussion on wider grounds than it has yet received.

The grievance of an English Church established in Ireland is one of which Romanists, *as such*, have no right to complain. The English Church in Ireland—and the Establishment has been nothing more—is a part of the English conquest of Ireland, a conquest commanded by the only English Pope who ever wore the tiara. As for the first four centuries of its existence as a Roman Catholic Church, so also for the last three centuries of its continuance as a Protestant Church, it has always been simply the Church of the invading army, the Norman and Saxon garrison, as purely such as the Presbyterian Church has been the Church of the Scottish colony in Ulster. Now, if there is one historical event for which the Papacy must stand sponsor, it is that English invasion. Up to that time the Irish Church, and not the Irish Nation, was the thorn in the side of Europe. While in every other part of Europe the ecclesiastical system had been conformed to the civil Roman Constitution,—while consul, proconsul, and praetor had been everywhere else reproduced in Patriarch, Archbishop, and Bishop—while the Papacy itself held divided empire with the Caesars in the rest of Europe, in Ireland the model itself had no existence. Ireland had never formed part of the Roman Empire, and the primitive social organization, as in the Scottish Highlands, was the only one known. And so, as if by some law of assimilation, the Church took the form which most resembled the civil polity of the nation. Ecclesiastical lords or chieftains ruled ecclesiastical clans and septs. The Bishops were but a new style of Christian chieftains and lords, often seven in a town; often also, under the rule of a female abbess. The canons seem to have been as few and easy as the Brehon laws. And any proposal to change these things met with the same violent resistance that has made the Anglicization of Ireland a failure, after centuries of effort.

The Pope dealt with Ireland as the inquisition deals with heretics,—did his best for them "spiritually," and then handed them

over to the civil power. The infallible See did not perceive that the ecclesiastical institutions which he wished to thrust on Ireland were merely as human and civil in their origin and form as those that he wished to supplant.

With the Anglo-Norman army went the Anglo-Norman Church, each alike hostile to Irish Institutions. Each alike set up the Anglo-Norman institutions within the Pale around Dublin, and wherever else they could secure a footing. Each alike were opposed with the energy of every patriotic Irishman, sept and soggarth, priest and clansman.—Each alike, for four hundred years, held their ground only by the support of the English nation and the Papal See. Each alike extended its bounds or retraced its footsteps, as, by the fortune of war, a larger or more contracted territory fell to the share of the English. Each alike lost many adherents through colonies of English being so cut off from the Pale that their only safeguard was to go over to the enemy, and so becoming *Hiberniores Hibernis ipsis*—"more Irish than the Irish themselves," as an old act of the Irish Parliament declares. To such an extent was this the case, that in the intensely Irish province of Connaught, it is this day disputed whether one half, or only a third of the people are of Norman blood. Each alike received a sullen submission on the part of its foes, as the English rule extended over the whole island. Each alike exulted in the favor of the Papacy, and was sustained by the public opinion of Western Europe.

The Reformation brought a sudden change on all hands. The Anglo-Normans who had been for centuries the most subservient vassals of the Papal See, became its most determined enemies, and their Church in Ireland, like their Church in England, became Protestant. The Pope changed as suddenly as the Nobles. The Church of "the Wild Irish," against which the Papacy had unleashed all the rounds of war, was now taken under the patronage of its grand persecutor. For a while, the result seemed dubious, and a generous policy on the part of the English nation might have saved the day, so far as Irish religion went. Rome the bitterest religious enemy of all nationality, and England the bitterest political enemy of Irish nationality, competed for the favor of the outraged nationality of Ireland. Had the efforts of such men as Bale and Ussher been seconded; had the advice of Spencer, that it was "ill preaching among drawn swords;" of Bacon, that Irish Bibles and Irish preaching be provided, been taken; had they, as the dean of Cork puts it, "sheathed the sword and spelt the preacher," centuries of bitterness and rebellion might have been saved, and the grand anomaly of a Romanist nation asserting its rights against a Protestant one, would never have existed. The chance was lost. The