

Ireland, the Champion of Individualism and Nationalism

To the world at large, to all peoples and individuals, the Irish, although they may not realise it, have rendered a service of a still broader nature, of a more enduring and penetrating influence. They stand as the indomitable champions of individuality against uniformity, of nationalism against imperialism.

In the sphere of economics, of purely mercantile interests, huge trusts and combines, destructive of competitive emulation, are justly considered as the direst threat to the progress and prosperity of the world. Likewise, in the higher sphere of moral and mental development, the most dangerous tendency in our days is the attempt to mould all brains and characters according to the same standard pattern of thought, habits and ideals, or rather, the same lack of idealism. This is the final result, if not the ultimate object, of public school education, in most countries in Europe and America.

In his remarkable work, "The Decline of Aristocracy" (1), Mr Arthur Ponsonby, M.P., has not hesitated in laying his finger on this, as the primary cause of the loss of power and prestige of that splendid class of Englishmen to which he himself belongs:

"This stereotyping (which in many other ways is very noticeable), constitutes perhaps the strongest indictment that has to be brought against our public schools. (page 208).

"We set up an iron mould and we purposely and intentionally stamp out and bake the soft clay into a fixed pattern. We sacrifice individuality and suppress originality so as to produce a conventional average type. (page 209)."

In this is true of a class of men remarkably prepared by their family education and national traditions to resist that "stereotyping" influence, in a country where the old tenets of education still subsist in some degree, what will be the outcome in more democratic communities, in America especially, where the system of so-called public "national" schools prevails triumphantly? Will not the clearest result of that system be to bring all individuals to an equal degree of superficial knowledge and a common level of general mediocrity?

The Irish at home have resisted persistently the introduction in Ireland of that system of education. Their political leaders even went to the point of allying themselves temporarily with their traditional enemies, the Tory Unionists, in opposition to the school legislation introduced by the Liberal government headed by Sir Henry Campbell Bannerman. Let the Irish in America be faithful to that tradition and always stand by the principle that the first say in matters of education belongs to the father of the child, and

(1) London, T. Fisher Unwin, 1912.