

The Catholic Record

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LONDON, SATURDAY, OCT. 16, 1920

THE FORCE OF PUBLIC OPINION

There is abundant evidence that the conscience of the civilized world is revolted, and that civilized public opinion is hardening into unqualified condemnation of "the reign of brigandage and bloodshed," miscalled the "government" of Ireland.

It is a wholesome symptom of a change for the better in the near future that the outraged conscience of civilization is arousing the lethargic conscience of the English people; and that world indignation at English atrocities in Ireland is having its effect in informing the British public of what is being done in Ireland in their name.

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Our readers will find more interest and information in the following direct excerpts from articles in British newspapers and other periodicals than from the most accurate second-hand summary of the evidences to which we refer.

"Has the Government yet realized the depth of degradation into which it is sinking in Ireland? We can recall nothing in British annals the least comparable to the gross and scandalous excesses now almost daily committed by the agents of the law and forces of the Executive in Ireland.

"The Nation intelligently voices the desire of thinking Englishmen for peace with Ireland. 'British opinion,' says the Nation, 'has moved fast and far on the Irish question during the last few years, but the British Government has moved as fast and as far in the con-

trary direction. The British people want peace with Ireland. They have no desire to add another chapter to the history of revolting war and unnatural bloodshed; they have no relish for taking up the role that Germany and Austria-Hungary have been forced to drop; they know that no people can impose its rule on a neighbour without danger and disgrace.

The Liberal leaders and the Labour leaders have behind them a body of opinion which is not measured by their representation in a House of Commons elected to hang the Kaiser. Let them declare themselves. England is concerned for her security, and her security can be guaranteed by arrangement or treaty with an Irish Government as it is to be secured in another instance by treaty with an Egyptian Government.

"The British army and the British police are the obstacles at once to Irish unity and the friendship of Britain and Ireland. Ulster cannot do without Nationalist Ireland; Nationalist Ireland cannot do without Ulster.

"The New Witness is particularly fearless and outspoken. In a recent number its Irish correspondent writes: 'It is now possible to tell as a coherent whole the story of British policy in Ireland in the immediate past, the present, and the immediate future.'

"The Daily Herald, discussing Bonar Law's letter attempting to justify the Government's course with regard to Lord Mayor MacSwiney, brands that course as 'brutal, callous murder.'

"It is a gross insult to the intelligence of our people to argue otherwise. From the pen of Mr. Bonar Law such arguments are criminal. He and his colleagues, Lord Bickenhead, Arthur Balfour, and their supporters, Edward Carson and his followers, know perfectly well that in 1914 they should, according to their own argument, have been tried as rebels and shot.

"The case of the Lord Mayor of Cork and the treatment of Ireland generally are undoubtedly reviving upon the continent some of the feeling against England and the English that was so marked during the Boer War. The policy of repression in Ireland is doing not a little to injure British and French unity.

"There is no doubt about the other methods, which consist in the arrest and imprisonment of the Dail and hundreds of local Republican leaders, and an intensified campaign of terrorism against the mass of the Irish people, in which life is frequently taken and property not spared.

The editor of the Daily Herald concludes with an appeal to British Labor and points to the urgency for immediate action; 'for the British Government,' he avers, 'means to stamp out the Irish Republic in blood. Its intended murder of MacSwiney is merely a step to further wholesale murder.'

"The sands are running low. Unless we move swiftly it is not only the murder of a Lord Mayor we shall have to account for but the murder of a people."

"One of the most remarkable pronouncements on the Irish situation is a letter from General Sir Hubert Gough who refused to lead his troops against the Ulster rebels in 1914 and thus had his share in killing the constitutional movement in Ireland.

"Nobility pretends that this is justice or that it is aimed at the discovery and punishment of murder. It is the establishment of a military tyranny as complete as the German tyranny in Belgium. I went into the army like most Englishmen when we were engaged in that war for liberty which our Government has turned into one of the gravest jokes ever played by the devil on mankind.

"The most sinister feature of the present policy is that law discipline is actually connived at. This can only have one result—namely, create the most dangerous demoralized force, a terror not only to people in that country but eventually to the Government."

"I've some evidence I'm not at liberty to disclose which makes me strongly suspect that actual murder is organized as a method of Irish Government."

"These horrible pogroms in the North and the South, these equally terrible murders of policemen prove the hopeless breakdown of British rule; human nature cannot stand the strain. Apparently British Government in Ireland exists for no other purpose but to stir up the brute and boisterous force of violent men."

"It will be evident that all England from the rank and file of the Labor Unions to the most highly placed amongst the aristocratic ruling classes are being deeply stirred as they realize the naked and brutal facts of Irish misgovernment and feel the sting of the world's scorn of British hypocrisy.

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Though Bishop Fallon's solemn and vigorous protest wired to Lloyd George from Belfast was promptly cabled to the Canadian press, our readers will welcome the more detailed statement from Irish papers, now at hand, which we publish on page 1 of this issue of the RECORD.

All Canada knows how ardently, how consistently, through good report and evil report, Bishop Fallon believed in and worked for the consolidation of the British Empire, the perpetuation and permanence of those free institutions and ideals of liberty by which, after a wide experience in other lands, he believed the British Empire was informed and vitalized, and which, more effectively than other political entities, it tended to conserve and disseminate.

His policy on this matter earned for him the elusive and elastic title of Imperialist—a title of doubtful credit and dubious significance. Bishop Fallon himself, as those who know him intimately are well aware, not only seldom or never used the term, but studiously avoided it.

Just as in the freest communities, and for the sake of that very freedom, the individual interest must often yield to the common good. The thing may be impossible; Bishop Fallon may have been mistaken. We are not arguing, we are explaining. Commonwealth is the term he was wont to use; he eschewed the misnomer—Empire.

"The whole world was thrilled, its war-worn and heart-sick peoples fired with hope at the project of the League of Nations which was to do away with barbarous war, to establish and maintain peace on the principles of justice and right, banishing forever the savage doctrine of might and substituting therefor the rule of Right; whose guiding principle should be that so clearly enunciated by its great advocate and eloquent exponent: 'The interest of the weakest is as sacred as the interest of the strongest.'"

That the great heart of humanity leaped to welcome this great ideal is one of the things that in these days of dark and dismal disappointment gives ground for hope of better things to come and the eventual realization of that great hope which was mocked and flouted by the still-born League of Nations, fathered by the discredited political tricksters of the Paris Peace Conference.

So too, though this to hell-with-the-Pope, loyalist mob hooting and howling at the imperialist bishop is not without its elements of grim and ghastly humor, the ideal of a British Commonwealth may yet inform British policy in Ireland and elsewhere when an indignant and disgusted British electorate hurls from power the strife-breeding, murderous crew who now misgovern Ireland in their name.

And if the ideal of a British Commonwealth, where there is already a common language, common ideals and institutions, an existing political entity and a recognized common interest and purpose, be impossible, then what hope is there for a League of Nations? What hope for civilization?

The comments of the press are encouraging to those who still cherish the hope that this ideal, this first step toward the formation of a real League of Nations, may yet be realized. The Irish Times, the most influential organ of Irish Unionism, uses the selfsame terms as Bishop Fallon in respect of arming the Ulster loyalists, characterizing it as a direct incitement to civil war. Many Eng-

lish papers have expressed their horror at the callous shamelessness of the proposal to arm the Orange mob to assist the forces of law and order. One example must suffice. The Westminster Gazette thus concludes an outspoken article:

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"It is difficult to imagine anything much more inhuman than the creation of such a force in present circumstances. The troubles in Ulster have been due to political and religious faction fights between people of rival parties and hostile creeds. They were begun by those, well-disposed towards British rule, who would not allow Nationalist workmen to earn their living by their side. If there is another riot not only will the Government be known to be definitely on one side, but that side will be organized and drilled and also, we suppose, armed. We are told that the force is to be protective and not provocative. Its mere existence will be provocative, and many Ulster Nationalists must be praying to be saved from its protection. The effect of this step on the South of Ireland must be deplorable. The Sinn Fein military formation will see their rivals and their exemplars in organizing rebellion, officially blessed and recognized as an arm of the British authority. For the new force will be of necessity the Ulster volunteers in all but name. Its members will still retain their allegiance to Sir Edward Carson, and if the Government had wished to demonstrate that he rules also over their decisions in Irish matters they could scarcely have taken a more convincing step."

Here again this great journal repeats in almost identical terms, though naturally more amplified than the telegram, Bishop Fallon's solemn warning. Such comments are by no means confined to the Liberal or Opposition papers, and it may be hoped that the reckless and conscienceless "reconquest" faction in the Cabinet, which now seems to have the upper hand, may be forced by an aroused and indignant public opinion to abandon this unspeakable outrage on the decencies of civilized government.

When Mr. Asquith introduced a Home Rule Bill in 1912, the same situation existed. The two English parties were deadlocked; and the Irish M. P.'s held control of the House of Commons.

The English Liberals accepted Home Rule, under these circumstances; just as they would have accepted any other Irish policy which would keep their party in power.

The people of England care little today whether the Irish people are given over to the official banditry or not. One thing they are clear about, and that is that the Protestant minority shall not be compelled to obey a Parliament for all Ireland. But the Liberals would have swallowed even that in 1914 rather than see the Asquith Government defeated.

To sum up the case in their regard the English electors in general are coldly indifferent to Irish affairs except in so far as they affect English parties and English politics. The settlement of the Irish question depends on them only indirectly; the main anti-Irish force today is English capital; and the main English consideration is the fortunes of English profits. The banks, the railways, the mortgagees, the money-lenders, the stock brokers; it is to these that English governments are now obliged to turn for permission to settle the Irish question; and that permission is not likely to be given for a long time to come.

In all of which Anglo Irish history is once more repeating itself. [Note.—An interesting and natural point of view; but, we think, too sweepingly pessimistic. "You cannot indict a whole nation."—E. C. R.]

Over and over again the Irish people have been driven to desperation by cold-blooded financial exploitation, backed by religious hatred; the whole inextricably entangled in the exigencies of English politics and on every such occasion, the same course has been pursued by Dublin Castle bureaucrats. House to house provocation for a year or two; which was inevitably followed by sporadic acts of violence; and these followed by suspension of the ordinary laws, the setting-up of drum-head courts; and the final act in the tragedy has always been to unleash armed brigands on the homes of the people under the pretence of police and military repression.

That is what was done in 1798, and in 1810, and in 1848, and in 1867, and is now being done once more. Good-natured optimists of the type of Mr. T. P. O'Connor persuaded themselves and persuaded the people of Ireland that there was in England a wide and deep public sentiment of sympathy for Ireland. I have never seen any positive evidence of any such sentiment. English sentiment towards the Irish people was, for ages, pure hatred founded on religious prejudice and on the ages of wholesale calumny with which English politicians and English profiteers had covered their exploitation of Ireland.

Today, religious hatred is not so keen, because today the majority of the people of England care nothing about religion; but the dead weight of prejudice remains. English public opinion is indifferent in regard to Ireland. If the politicians decided to pass Home Rule, for instance, the bulk of the English people would shrug their shoulders and wouldn't care; and, on the other hand, if Dublin Castle decided to shoot or exile every tenth man in Ireland, the English public would be

equally indifferent. There is no public opinion in England in favor or in sympathy with Ireland. The English electorate have voted twice for a Home Rule policy; but in each case they did so merely because it was the policy for the time being of the Liberal party to conciliate the Irish M. P.'s; and the English people were at the time disposed to support the Liberal Party, not because of Home Rule but in spite of it.

On the other hand, the dead weight of indifference can be easily transformed into active opposition; and the traditional antipathy to allowing a Catholic majority to govern a Protestant minority can always be easily aroused in the English public.

Gladstone understood this perfectly. He knew that his English supporters stood by him not because of Home Rule but in spite of it. When the general election of 1892 was approaching, he appealed to the electors to give him a majority over all other parties. But they did not; and he found himself obliged to introduce his second Home Rule Bill. At that time, Irish mothers were teaching their children to pray for this great benefactor and friend of Ireland; but the cold fact remains that he never introduced a Home Rule Bill except when the Irish M. P.'s held the control of the House of Commons.

When Mr. Asquith introduced a Home Rule Bill in 1912, the same situation existed. The two English parties were deadlocked; and the Irish M. P.'s held control of the House. Two general elections had taken place; and with the same result: an English practical deadlock; and a chance for the Irish M. P.'s to force the hand of a government of either party.

The English Liberals accepted Home Rule, under these circumstances; just as they would have accepted any other Irish policy which would keep their party in power.

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