THE DEADLOCK IN IRELAND

IN order to understand the present deadlock in Ireland it is necessary to study its history and the series of political blunders which has led up to the deplorable situation now prevailing in that unhappy country. For this purpose I would recommend everybody, who has not already done so, to read an article entitled "A Tragedy of Errors" that appeared in *The Nation* on January 8th, written by Mr. H. L. Hammond. This most admirable article has now been reprinted in pamphlet form and can be obtained in the offices of the "Peace with Ireland Council," 30 Queen Anne's Chambers. Also the excellent study of recent Irish history, *The Evolution of Sinn Fein*, by R. M. Henry, should be read by all.

It is difficult for those who have not been over to Ireland to realize the lamentable effect that the policy of the Government is having upon the Irish people. As soon as you cross the Channel you are in a totally different atmosphere. Everybody is living on the edge of a volcano and the talk is of reprisals, raids, murders, robberies, and the sad and dreadful events that are happening daily in town and countryside.

I should here like to state that I have no sympathy with acts of violence by whomsoever committed. Murder is murder whether it is done by the supporters of Sinn Fein or by the forces of the Crown, and some very black deeds must be laid to the charge of both sides ; but on this country rests the real responsibility for these things and upon all of us who acquiesce and do not raise any protest against the injustice and cruelty of the actions of the Government in Ireland. No crimes of bloodshed committed by the Irish can justify the methods now being employed to force British rule upon an unwilling nation. During a stay of three weeks in Ireland I was able to see a great

Blackfriars

many people of all shades of opinion and to hear their views, to obtain a great deal of first-hand information and to see for myself some of the damage inflicted upon the population, in official and unofficial reprisals. The burnings in Cork are enough to make every Englishman hang his head with shame, and not in Cork alone but all over the country, in towns and villages, can be seen the destruction committed by the forces of the Crown. Judge Bodkin's report on the damage in Co. Clare must have opened the eyes of many. The creameries that were doing such excellent work towards the prosperity of the country, have suffered severely. Some fifty of these have been destroyed, besides numbers of Co-operative stores. Apart from the moral wrong there is the senseless waste of property, and the sight of blackened ruins is a constant reproachful reminder to the Government that Civil Law has completely broken down under their regime and that the universally condemned methods of Prussianism have taken its place. Every evil deed for which the Germans were execrated in Belgium can be laid to the charge of this country in Ireland. Prisoners have been most cruelly tortured, alas, that the accumulation of evidence from various sources should no longer leave any doubt as to this. I myself saw a boy in a prison infirmary who had been most brutally used on arrest. He was only eighteen, fresh from school. There was no charge against him, and he was to be released as soon as he was well enough. Prisoners are shot "trying to escape"—a convenient way of getting rid of them. It is not possible to give the names of those from whom I obtained first-hand evidence, as summary vengeance might overtake them, but it is common knowledge now to very many that shameful things have been and are being done by the auxiliary forces. Most of the acts of reprisal fall upon the innocent, many

The Deadlock in Ireland

families are homeless and in dire distress for no crime that they have committed. Many people who have suffered and who have endured their troubles with a wonderful patience, asked me why the English Catholics did nothing to help them. Some of the leaders with whom I spoke were very bitter on this subject.

Lord Hugh Cecil asked the other day in the House of Commons, "Where are we going?" Where indeed? if this campaign of force in Ireland is carried on to the bitter end, if at last she is laid flat, what then? Will there not grow up yet another generation fed on hate and bitterness, with determination to renew the struggle for freedom when the first opportunity offers.

The past history of Ireland has always shown that the violence and outbreak have been in proportion to the distress. The distress in Ireland is now very great; both morally and economically, the situation grows worse; every ambush brings a reprisal or several reprisals in its train. Every reprisal sends a few more young men into the ranks of the Republican Army. I have heard from the lips of Bishops and Priests that the best young men in the country are being driven to join the gunmen. Although we are still so near the Great War, the war that was fought in defence of the rights of small nations, we have apparently forgotten the reason for which many of our men died. America, who at the end of the war came in to help to crush Prussianism, is now saying that we, the English, have taken the place of Germany in the eyes of the world. It is not pleasant to read such things in the American papers.

What hope is there of settlement, of a truce being put to this misery of bloodshed, this fratricidal policy? I believe that even now a cessation of hostilities on both sides could be arranged, and that if negotiations were entered upon in a generous and Christian spirit

Blackfriars

between the Government and the elected representatives of the people of Ireland, they would succeed in evolving for themselves a solution that would satisfy their national aspirations.

It is not to be wondered at that the Irish have lost all faith in the Government. They have been tricked again and again, and their hopes of a settlement dashed to the ground just when they seemed on the point of realization. Last December so near did they come to a truce that everybody concerned in the negotiations considered the arrangement settled, when suddenly some malign influence intervened and all hope was at an end. Surely it is not too late to stem this tide of official lawlessness before it carries us to we know not what abyss of anarchy and disruption. If the Government cannot really find any way out of the trouble except by making it worse, then in God's name let them resign and give place to others who may succeed where they have failed. Perhaps from the North-East corner, the originator of organized rebellion, some help may come. I believe in the ultimate union of North and South, because financially and economically they are complementary to each other, and neither can prosper without the other. The strongest party in the Government is the Ulster Party and so, as ever in Irish affairs, the settlement rests in the hands of Ulster. What could there be to fear in a free Ireland, a Kingdom within the Empire, friendly because freed from a yoke that chafes, bound to us inevitably by mutual interest. To the Irish it is unthinkable that they would destroy themselves by becoming an enemy state, and from many conversations with their leading men I know that they are fully prepared to safeguard the Empire. Upon those who think and can see into the future a great fear is dawning that the path along which this country is travelling will inevitably, if continued, end

The Deadlock in Ireland

in the breaking-up of our great Empire : its several units cannot be held together by force and injustice. The past history of our relations with Ireland will not bear looking into : a time has come when an act of reparation is called for : we fought for the rights of small nations : the world is naming us, hypocrite. How can we hold up our head amongst the nations with this scandal of Ireland at our door. English people are not cruel, they would not stand this thing for a moment if they really knew, they are simply ignorant and apathetic. I was asked over and over again in Ireland, "But do the English really know what is happening here?" I told them, "No," but that I would make it my business to tell the truth. Every man and woman who has gone over to Ireland with an open mind, free from prejudice, has come back filled with shame and indignation, determined to do their utmost to put an end as speedily as possible to this discreditable state of affairs. I think of it day and night, and shall never rest till the people of this country rise up and say with one voice, "We will not have this tyranny any more, it has got to stop."

To Catholics I would say, think with great charity of those who, mostly of the Faith, are in dire distress, living in terror of their lives, longing for peace. I believe firmly in the efficacy of prayer, especially in a great volume of united prayer. The Irish have wonderful faith, daily from every Church in Ireland prayers are rising to Heaven, Communion are being offered for deliverance. Let us in England join in this great union of prayer that Ireland may become as an Irish Professor once said to me, "perhaps the only really Christian state in the world."

EDITH SYKES.