

THE CONDITION OF IRELAND

IS it too soon to write on a country after having been in it only a fortnight? Or should we not rather say, if one stayed in a country longer than a fortnight, one would not have enough courage to write about it at all. You see, a fortnight just gives one time to take the most superficial view of things. Later on, mere knowledge brings disconcertment. You might learn too many details, too many contrary instances, to fit in with the generalizations you had first made. Yet after all it is our first impressions that are nearly always truer. Instinct, the illative sense, the *intellectus* of the Scholastics, the "morning knowledge of the Angels" in the fantastic Africanism of St. Augustine, these are finer than reason, aren't they? at least more to be trusted? Why it is the very age of instinct! "We feel that we are greater than we know." So here I shall set down my account of the condition of Ireland after a fortnight in Cork.

Yes, but whom did I see and talk to? Well, there you are. That does, of course, make a great difference. The class, the temperament, the political outlook, must each give a twist to the expression of opinions and help one to know how much to accept and how much to discount. By your leave, however, I shall give no names, for a third-class railway ticket, the conversation of priests and undergraduates, oh, and nuns, why there you have the most perfect instruments whence to hear the music of real public opinion. The Press? Well, but nobody troubles about newspapers, for the influence of the Press (present company excepted) is dead. It is public talk and emotion that rule everywhere to-day, outside Russia and the Royal Academy.

The first impression that Ireland gives you is the vast importance of politics. Actually here the political

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situation looms larger than games. The arts are subordinated to it. It drives men, women, and children to wrestle with the grammar of a complicated and beautiful language. They will dare even that in the interests of a political faith. The streets are rechristened in its honour, button-holes decorated with its colours, and flag-days endured in its name. An immense sense, then, of the importance of politics strikes one as something new and strange, a trifle unhealthy perhaps, for no one ever steadied his nerves that way, and yet, well let it be said boldly, a fine passion for anyone to aim at, when public interests are set before private pleasures and natural human selfishness, and the petty provincialism that elsewhere chiefly greets one. This we feel in our bones is nearer to the ideals of Aristotle at least, nearer to the graceful hopes of Plato, than the vast indifference to everything that does not touch directly our pockets and our picture-houses.

However, beneath all this political energy one speedily detects what I suppose an eleventh-century musician would have called the separate points in counterpoint. There is an immense sense of political values, of the stir and passion of freedom. The national claims are put forward everywhere ; but these claims really vary immensely in degree and import. "We are all Sinn Feiners nowadays in Ireland" is the cry that greets you ; and the price of that unity is by no means uniformity, for Sinn Fein, like the manna in the desert, curiously suits just the palate of each one. It means just whatever you like. People are quite honest about acknowledging this, and most willingly allow in private conversation, even to an Englishman whom they had never met before and perhaps hope never to meet again, that the conversion of Ireland to Sinn Fein has meant the break-up of Sinn Fein, not as a government of the people, but

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as a definite constitution. The same rock is breaking it as has broken every great Irish party—the employment of physical force. The Irish character is too generous to keep up militancy for any long sustained time. They are good fighters by race and inheritance ; they have courage, they have a quick boiling blood ; but this is all undone by two things—a kindly heart and the Catholic Faith. The Faith may not act immediately. But what man is there whose faith acts at once in the moment of passionate temptation ? Yet it does act ultimately.

However, let us set down what all thinking people, so one gathers from the types of all sections of society one meets, state quite openly :

(1) Militant Sinn Fein has miscalculated the power of the English Government. It declared war, launched out on a real war of violence, shot and ambushed and burnt, but has gradually got to admit that this cannot really be accomplished with success. The forces against it are too powerful. The local leaders are known by name, proclaimed, pursued, and will finally be caught. So people say at any rate. They prophesy the quieting of Clare.

(2) The failure of the hunger-strike is no less apparent. The death of the Lord Mayor of Cork was no doubt a tribute to his selflessness, to his heroism ; it emphasised to the world the Irish claims. But, for all that, it proved the uselessness of the hunger-strike as a political weapon. The Government by letting the hunger-strikers die has dealt the death blow to the hunger-strike. It has probably been finished with as a lever on government, and will never be heard of again.

(3) There is among the rank and file of Sinn Fein a certain incapability of seeing the real difficulties of the Ulster question—in public utterances a determined blindness. Undoubtedly there are very many

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who deny the difficulty even in private, thinking it to be due to "Carsonism," to be artificial, the mere passing attempt to terrorise the Government. But, more commonly, people admit the problem and are troubled by its perplexity. A partition of some sort seems to be the only way thought of, though many folk suppose this would only be necessary at the beginning of things. "Ulster will come in" is the usual verdict. Sinn Fein in private is willing to allow to Ulster all that is consistent with the unity of the nation.

But there are further points to be noticed, and these no less than the others must be taken into consideration if anything is to be done. On both sides lies a heavy weight of pessimism. Neither Sinn Fein nor the British Government have much to please them. The violence of the Sinn Fein has injured its cause now, for immediate success alone can justify such a policy to a generous-hearted people. Precisely in the same fashion the Government has equally lost much of its prestige.

(1) The reprisals have undoubtedly been an effective weapon ; but they have only been winked at by the Government—never authorized or controlled. To secure peace by reprisals was the common custom of mediæval governments, and nobody ever denies their theoretic lawfulness. To make a village responsible for the crimes committed in it was the practice of our Saxon fathers, was at one time "the common law" of public Catholic morality. As a normal course, it is a barbarous experiment ; as an occasional bogey, it will always find defenders. But the Government has publicly disclaimed reprisals, has denounced the system, issued orders against it. Yet reprisals continue. So you don't wonder that people are led thereby to argue to the powerlessness of the Government, its inability to govern. Even among its disciplined forces, it

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cannot apparently command a full authority. Reprisals should either be purely governmental or they should be rigidly suppressed.

(2) It is generally admitted that the Belfast troubles are largely artificial, at least in the sense that the embers of religious hatred were slowly cooling down when they were deliberately stirred by some designing hand. It is held, moreover, that the obvious motive of that stirring was to prevent the union of Labour in Belfast. Strikes are rendered very difficult, and the whole force of the working class dissipated by dividing its strength in religious strife. It will be now very difficult to get Catholic and Protestant Labour to combine against its employers. Not unnaturally, therefore, the origins of the trouble are traced to that party which most benefits by them.

(3) The Government has further lost caste by its unfulfilled promises. The Home Rule Bill, passed by Mr. Asquith and then relegated to the Statute Book, undoubtedly shook the faith of the people. It may have been necessary or it may not. Possibly differences of opinion may exist on that point. There can be no possible difference of opinion as to the actual result on Irish public opinion. There is a fatality haunting all English promises to Ireland. They are never fulfilled. It may be a coincidence ; it is certainly a fact. The admirable legislation of George Wyndham succeeded precisely because it was never promised ; it was carried through. The country was not canvassed, but the thing done.

The pessimism that overhangs both sides in the cruel debate, while it merely touches at one point the national life in England, hangs like a dark cloud over the whole of the national life in Ireland. The children there are developing the same nervous temperament that the season of air-raids developed for a while among us ; not the children only but the whole

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population is becoming affected, undermined, demoralized by the ceaseless strain. On whatever subject conversation begins, it veers round at least to this. Imagine the hopeless oppression of such a fixed idea ! The leaders, again, hardly ever sleep in their own homes for fear of murder at night, but move from house to house under cover of darkness. Can peace ever come to a people that is being worked up to such a pitch of unsettled excitement ?

Political remedies are no business of a priest ; for the Church has exiled herself from politics. She has cut in our times the theatre and the Parliament to the loss, we are conceited enough to imagine, of both. Parliament might be saner and the stage cleaner if the clergy took a real interest in them. However, she has made " the great refusal " and must abide by her ordinances.

But whatever you have to prepare or give, give quickly. Don't promise ! Have no mere conventions. In no wise undertake to do anything (*pace* Lord Grey) " in two years' time." What has to be done, should be done at once. Whether it be the full Republic or the status of a Dominion Parliament or the present Government measure is a matter of little importance. Whatever the people really, passionately desire, they will have in the end. But settlement of some sort should come and at once, some peace before the winter breaks that menaces more terrors for either side than the forlorn horrors even of '98. But will the Irish People be contented with Dominion Home Rule, will they be contented with anything less than absolute separation ? No one on either side of the Channel really is in any position to say. This only is certain. At present Ireland is in no condition to vote other than Sinn Fein, but give her peace and settled government, and at least you are helping her to quiet her affairs and perhaps helping her, more than you can guess, on to your side.

Heaven

There are irreconcilables in both camps. These are a minority in Ireland as they are a minority everywhere, for despite appearances and as by some dreadful paradox, common sense is really common and is the heritage of the people.

“ This City of God while it is here on earth increases itself out of all languages, never respecting the temporal laws that are made against so good and religious a practice ; not breaking but obscuring their diversity in divers nations. So that you see the City of God observes and respects this temporal peace on earth and the coherence of men’s wills in honest morality, so far as it may with a safe conscience ; yea, and so far desires it, making use of it for the attainment of peace eternal.”

BEDE JARRETT, O.P.

HEAVEN

In Answer to S.B.

“ **W**HAT is Heaven like ? ” you sometimes say,
“ Tell me that I may raise my eyes above
Earth’s disappointment. Is there human love,
And human mirth in that Eternal day ?
May friend meet friend in friendship ? Lovers kiss
And know themselves as one ? Or do we change
Like seeds to flowers, beautiful, but strange ? . . .
I would not learn a newer way of bliss.”

How may I answer ! I who do not know
His meaning even here. I only tell
You this thing. He who wrought the joy of earth
And with His own hands fashioned you and me,
Buildd the kingdom of our hope as well—
Whose smallest flower may be forgotten mirth.

MARGARET MACKENZIE.