

Irish Protestantism and the Power of the Priests

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yond the average, but unimaginative, dull, and a Tory. He did not know what it all meant. I said nothing.

What can we do, dear M? What can we ever do to wipe out these memories? Surely we, who did such things, owe some great, some world-renowned, never-to-be-forgotten reparation to these people.

And, in the meantime, let us at least restrain all whom we can control from an unmanly and ignorant jeering at the things which they hold sacred.

Ninety-Eight and its memories would have been forgotten long, long, long ago, or remembered with pride and pleasure and all the glow and glitter of poetry and romance, but for the scaffold and the triangle. And I perceive—and I think you do too—our promoters of Empire in a certain quarter of the world, and all for lack of understanding, are laying up against themselves such century-enduring memories of horror and of hate.—ED. A.I.R.]

IRISH PROTESTANTISM AND THE POWER OF THE PRIESTS.

BY A CATHOLIC.

TO THE EDITOR ALL IRELAND REVIEW.

DEAR SIR—What was my last letter mainly about? I lamented the fact that all Irish Protestants were not as generous, as chivalrous as you and a few others that I know. I grieved over the fact that in this 20th century, because they knelt at different shrines (to one God) the Protestants looked down with contempt on Catholics, treated them always with distrust, often with contumely. And, mind you, the Protestants on their own showing, are the better Christians! Though I, as one who has humbly read and re-read the four gospel stories of the great Nazarene, recollect no passage wherein he counselled anything so cruel as contempt, anything so devilish as affected superiority over one's brother, or anything so opposed to his weak and loving nature as greedy seeking after and reserving all fat places for one's co-religionists. Did he not chiefly beg of us to love one another, not despise? Did he not say he that calleth his brother (even a poor Irish Catholic) a fool was liable to punishment? And did he not say "Take heed and beware of covetousness." "Blessed are the poor," said Christ; but, of course, he never meant the Irish Catholic poor; if he did we should be rich in blessedness.

In this matter I talk of what I know. I speak of things that once made my blood boil; if now I can discuss them calmly enough as a rule. Let you and I not argue; or at least if that is out of the question, we being Irish, let us argue as little as possible. I have faith in you, and even if you strike back and sting me, I shall still have faith. It is the bigot I cannot stand, the feud-creating, hate-breeding, loathsome bigot, whose foul breath distorts our minds, and dries up within us the milk of human kindness. Those pernicious bigots, Catholic and Protestant, are responsible for a great share of social unhappiness and downright wrong and misery in this unfortunate country.

Of this do I speak in my letter, of this phase of the question of Catholic and Protestant. And what was your reply? You directed my attention to the relations that exist between Catholics and their pastors. Altogether beside the question Sir. You therein interfered in the domestic affairs of the

camp I come from. An illogical interference, bearing in mind the nature and tone of my letter. And then you told me to put up my sword or the man who had insulted me would give me a drubbing. Now, Mr. O'Grady, did your knowledge of the Irish character guide you there? Was that caustic warning calculated to pacify a hot-headed gallow-glass who imagined himself and his people rudely insulted?

But, bless your heart, we won't quarrel; not in the least. Instead, I will discuss Mr. McCarthy to please you. And I will give you "tips" from the Catholic camp that will surprise you. And you will say "What this humble lad tells us is true, because it falls in with human nature, and particularly with Irish human nature. It is altogether true, though it agrees not with our superior Protestant intelligence, by means of which we know what is best suited to Catholics better than they do themselves."

If the Catholic faith has held its ground so tenaciously in Ireland the cause is not far to seek. The newer faith was brought over by the English, and, therefore, whether it was good or bad, was bound to get no welcome. When Patrick brought his new faith he introduced it with kind and gentle words. The Nazarene himself could not speak more meekly and eloquently. The English brought in the new faith how? Was it not with the sword and confiscation? Persuasive arguments for the stubborn Celtic nature! The Sermon of the Mount got a new reading in "Poynings Law." Then the price on the priest's head! What a lucky thing for the priests that price idea was! It has been worked by them for all it was worth ever since. Need I trace the evolution of the priest from that distant day? He usually was the most educated man in the parish, Protestants excluded (thanks to the foolish and corrupt endowment of Maynooth College), and led the people against oppressive laws. Thus grew his power, English endowment *re* English persecution, indirectly and unintentionally, but surely fed his power, until at length you have him as he is to-day, a petty tyrant of the worst kind. He is one of the worst things that foreign rule, blind, blundering foreign rule, have bred in Ireland. A home-governed Ireland would have got rid of him long ago; or would get rid of him now after the fashion of the French, or Italians. Do you not know, sir, that in America and the Colonies the power of the priest with the Irish is as nothing compared to what it is in Ireland?

This unnatural and tyrannical power of the priests is a question that at present is troubling thousands of intelligent Catholics in Ireland. It has caused, and is causing, much heart-burning. Here in our family is one who in the past was our most heroic and most truly devoted brother, the first to take risks and even lay down his life for us, and now he has grown fat and imperious and holds us even under his lash to some extent. What we shall do with this once much loved and devoted brother is a tragic and pressing question demanding from each Irish Catholic an answer of some kind. It is a question for the Irish Catholic and for him alone. He must summon up all his manhood to answer it, and on that answer much depends as regards Irish liberty, Irish

manhood, and much else. But it is a domestic question, a family question, and in the settling of it, interfere not my Protestant brother. Did you not at one time put a price on our erring one's head? Do you not treat his religion with contempt? Keep aloof, therefore, and pray for us that we may be equal for the struggle. If you want us to be brave and manly show us a good example. Have the courage and manhood to take your Catholic brother by the hand as if you were not a superior being but only poor human nature like himself. If you are full of sympathy with us in this struggle be cautious how you show it.

Yes, Mr. Editor, the Catholic who would free us from priestly power must work from within the fold. Mr. McCarthy may be honest and well meaning, but he could not take more unwise steps to accomplish his object than he has taken. See him at the Rotunda meeting. He was surrounded by the greatest bigots in the city or by men regarded by all Catholics as extreme and intolerant bigots. Do you believe that the Irish Catholic is to be led to freedom by men of that class? No; the leader, when he comes, must gain their confidence, he must be one of themselves, he must love them. He must not rush out amongst the sneerers and scorners and make fun of them. If a sheep left the flock and was seen denouncing shepherds with the wolves that sheep's character was gone, and his word would not be taken against the worst shepherd that ever lived.

Mr. McCarthy should have tried to burst the arch from beneath (or inside); the more force that presses on the arch from overhead (or outside) the stronger it becomes. So it is with outside interference and the arch of priestly power.

Some day I must fling a thousand words at you for your (to my mind) ridiculous idea and wasted loyalty for the King. Even then I shall be as I now remain, your well wisher,

BRIAN OG.

[DEAR BRIAN OG,—I do think that my reply to your last was a little ungracious; but did you not say something about killing us generally, because some of us jeered, and this led to the thought that it was a little uncertain which of us might make the bigger bag. The phrase, you know, is Kitcheners or the War Office censor's, and now good English, at least good English English.

And now, good Catholic friend from the shores of the Slaney, don't we know, you and I, that all this is only a little good-humoured and a good-natured sparring and that there will be no bags at all, never again; for that there are quite enough of us of the right sort to restrain the lunatics out of both camps, whose disordered thoughts run upon bags.

Bags, alas! and on both sides, were once made on the shores of your own beautiful river, and under the intolerable weight of those bags are we not sinking and even fast?

"Issachar is a strong ass couching down between two burthens.

And he saw that rest was good, and the land, that it was pleasant: and he bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant unto tribute."

And you know what a fine, promising young ass it was before we put those bags upon him.—ED. A. I. R.]