

Current Topics

The Bolt From the Blue

Coming events do not always cast their shadows before, or at any rate the shadows, in some cases, are so faint as to be scarcely discernible. It must be noted as one of the most remarkable features of the Sinn Fein rising that the rebels succeeded in keeping their plans so completely secret. A day or two before the outbreak there may have been an uneasy feeling abroad that something was afoot; but up to a few weeks before the first shot was fired the public mind in Ireland appears to have been quite at ease regarding the general situation. So much may be plainly gathered from the leading article in the *Dublin Freeman's Journal* of March 4—the latest issue to hand—which is devoted to urging that, owing to the unprecedentedly quiet condition of the country, the members of the Royal Irish Constabulary ought to be allowed and encouraged to enlist. Under the heading 'Why Not the R.I.C.?' the *Dublin paper* writes: 'Why are not the Royal Irish Constabulary allowed to enlist? For long years Ireland has been over-policed. The Constabulary has not been a peace force; it has been an army of occupation. It was the outward and effective symbol of coercion and Unionist misrule. Possibly, in times of serious political unrest or grave agrarian trouble, there may have been reason for a strong force, at any rate from the point of view of a Government determined to repress Nationalist sentiment and bent on upholding landlord domination. There is no agrarian crime, not even a foolish cattle drive, to give an excuse for a constabulary display. Ordinary crime has almost disappeared. White gloves are becoming a nuisance to the judges. An air of desolation hangs around the jails filled in the days of Forster and Balfour.' And so on. Who could have imagined that a few short weeks later Sackville street would be in ruins, and the thoroughfares of the capital would be running with blood?

Bishop Nevill and the Irish Question

Synodical addresses have a tendency to be academic and 'in the air,' and in consequence they do not as a rule make any very strong appeal to the general public. The address delivered by the Anglican Primate (Bishop Nevill, of Dunedin) at the opening of the General Synod of the Church of England, held at Christchurch last week is, however, quite an exception—thoughtful, practical, and interesting in every part. Especially happy, coming at such a time, was his sympathetic reference to the Irish question and situation. After alluding to the unification of the Empire as one of the outcomes of the war, and to the indirect effect which such a development is likely to have upon the religious life of the nation, Bishop Nevill continued: 'To touch upon one illustration only of the unifying effect of a common danger. A few months ago there seemed to be but little prospect of averting civil war between the varying elements of the population of Ireland, but the trumpet call of a common danger awakened a common sentiment, and the Ulster man and his fellow-countryman from the south or west have cheerfully endured together the miseries of the same trench, or dashed together with equal zeal against a common foe. It has been said that when the war is over the weapons raised so gloriously against the King's enemies will be turned against each other. I refuse to believe it! Notwithstanding the outbreak of a seditious organisation instigated by our enemies, I believe that the horrors they have shared together will prove to both that war, entered upon from any motive less holy than that of self-defence, or the protection of the weak, is a crime against humanity.' That has always been our own view; and it is pleasant to know that that is also how it strikes a disinterested outsider.

The Religious Prospects of Ireland

It may seem strange to discuss such a subject at such a time—when some 15,000, as is alleged, of Ireland's population have been engaged in a deplorable

and utterly unjustified rebellion, when 3000 of them are awaiting trial for sedition, and when three of the leading spirits have just paid the death penalty for that crime. But these events have only given point to a question that has been more than once raised of late—the question, namely, whether, with the return of peace and the advent of Home Rule, there is danger to Ireland of such a calamity as the loss of Irish faith and morality. So far as recent happenings are concerned, it is safe to assert that they have little or no real bearing or significance in this connection. As we have already pointed out, this mad rising had behind it neither the spirit of Irish nationality nor of Irish faith. The leaders of the revolt were not followers of the faith of Patrick; and the Catholic population as a whole held steadily aloof and remained solidly loyal in this crisis. As a matter of fact it is recognised, even by the sober and ultra-Conservative *London Times*, that it was the splendid loyalty and steadfastness of the Irish people that really saved the situation, and proved the complete undoing of German hopes and schemes. The Larkins and Connollys and hot-head Sinn Feiners are no more typical of Irish manhood than the Pankhursts and their following are of English womanhood, or than our own 'Red Fed' extremists are of the working class population of this country.

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On the general question of the religious outlook in Ireland there is no need to take any panicky or pessimistic view. The only guide to the future is the past; and the Irish traditions of fidelity to the law of God and the See of Peter are too deeply rooted to be easily weakened or destroyed. Such is the firm conviction of so thoughtful and careful an observer as his Grace the Archbishop of Glasgow. Dealing with the subject in his Lenten Pastoral, his Grace remarks: 'Some of those who profess to know more of Ireland than the Irish do themselves, are always ready to point out signs of weakening faith, or declining morality. Let us consider this: and to help us to do so we may dwell for a little on the past history of religion in Ireland.' After a brief historical retrospect his Grace continues: 'So much for the past; what of the probable future? It is true we cannot prophesy: Christ did not promise continuance to any nation. Some that were at one time fervid have fallen away; in countries once faithful the supernatural has been almost blotted out, and men live only for money, for pleasure, for ambition. But though we cannot predict we can at least gather probabilities. And it is not unfair to read the future in the light of the past. . . . The expectation thus picturesquely fixed in Irish tradition seems to be solidly probable if we think for a moment of the dangers already described which have been met by our forefathers, and of the way in which they were met. If similar dangers are to return, why should we fear? The Irish race, as it has proved during the last eighteen months, is as steady, as cheerful under difficulties, as brave in the face of death, as devoted to its faith as ever it was. Is it likely to fail to do as much for its faith, if need be, as it has done and is doing for the British Empire? The question answers itself. Death, whether in war or in persecution, has no fears for those who do not merely profess to believe, but believe in their hearts that it is but the gate of eternal life to the worthy, and that Patrick's true sons dying will be welcomed and brought to the Saviour by him who prayed for them on the mount. Yes; we have good reason to hope that the future will be as the past, and this is founded on what we have just heard of the perseverance, the missionary zeal that brings God's blessing, the readiness to face individual martyrdom and even national extinction rather than lose the faith.'

The Church and the Rebellion

There have so far been only fragmentary references to priests and prelates in the Irish cables, but when the full story of the rebellion is told it will assuredly be found that the Church has exerted a wholesome and salutary influence throughout the whole of this very serious trouble. Thursday's cables record