

Current Topics

Irish Presbyterians Oppose Conscription

In addition to the news already published in evidence of a great change of opinion among Irish Protestants we now put before our readers an account of a meeting of Irish Presbyterians in General Assembly, on June 7, showing that many members of that body do not approve of the time-serving, bigoted actions of Herr Carson and his friends. The Assembly met to consider the report of the Committee on the State of Ireland. The report said that "conscription ought in justice to be applied to Ireland." The following account of the discussion is taken from the *Glasgow Observer*, June 15:—

Rev. D. D. Boyle, Belfast, moved the omission of the conscription resolutions, holding that the Church had no right to go beyond the War Cabinet, which had seen fit to withhold the application to Ireland.

"HIDEOUS RESULTS."

Rev. Dr. Osborne, Dublin, seconded, and said the application of conscription would be attended by hideous results in Ireland.

Rev. J. B. Armour, Ballymoney, said, as a matter of fact, he believed *more than one-third of their people were quite as strong against conscription at the present time as anybody in the South or West.* (Hear, hear.)

Rev. Dr. Park scouted the idea that there would be bloodshed if conscription was enforced.

"LIP-SERVICE TO CONSCRIPTION."

Rev. Mr. Boyle, replying, said Dr. Park's remarks were beside the point. If they wanted to help the Government, let the younger clergy come forward and voluntarily enlist, but he would be no party to calling for conscription of the laity while he as a minister was exempt.

The amendment was defeated.

No count was taken, but about 30 members seemed to be in favor of it.

Rev. Mr. Bartley, Ballyhenry, who rose to propose a further amendment, said *Presbyterians were paying lip-service to conscription while privately thanking God for John Dillon and Joe Devlin.* He was in favor of conscription under certain conditions, and he moved that these resolutions be burned and a resolution adopted calling on the Government to allow Irish people to conscript themselves.

The Moderator refused to accept the amendment, and the resolution was then carried.

The refusal of the Moderator to take the amendment prevented any record of the real feeling of the meeting being obtained; but it is clear that the lies about the Pope's influence inspiring opposition to conscription have little hold on these good Ulster Presbyterians who are worthy of the memory of William Orr and the other Presbyterian leaders who fought for Irish freedom in the past. There is little reason to doubt that if English gold were not so freely spread among the lower and more bigoted classes in the north the racial hatred which is fanned to flames by the Tory place-hunters and their tools would soon die a natural death. Unless we suppose that humanity has fallen very low indeed in the north it is impossible to think that in their hearts the majority of the people are not disgusted by the atrocious lies by which the Carson-Lloyd George attempts to kill a small nation are supported; and the Presbyterians, with the memory of the Larne gun-running and of the rebel speeches of Craig and Smith and the pro-German parsons in their minds, cannot have any illusions as to who are the real foes of the Empire and the friends of Germany. The desire of all Nationalists is to see Orange and Green united in reality as they are on the Sinn Fein flag. And once the deluded dupes of the Die-Hards open their eyes to the fact that they are but used as tools against their own country by foreign conspirators that union will be realised.

Catholic Revival in France

Even before the war watchers discerned signs that Catholicism was becoming a more vital thing in the life of the French people. Before Leo XIII. died he urged the French Hierarchy very strongly to take up the Republic and support it, instead of antagonising the men in power by a useless opposition. At that time the Government was far more favorable towards a rapprochement than at any time since or for years previously. A few of the bishops, notably Cardinal Lavignerie saw the wisdom of the Pope's advice; a few statesmen also saw how advantageous such a movement would be for the whole nation. But the majority on both sides were apathetic where they were not hostile, and the occasion was allowed to go by. Then in the reign of Pius X. came the definite rupture between Church and State and the annulling of the Concordat. To many it seemed as if such a drastic change would work ill for the Church; but the contrary was the case. The Church began to exhibit fresh signs of vitality from that day, and people who had looked coldly before on the clergy now became friendly towards them. It was especially remarkable in the upper circles of French society that religion was welcomed and revered where it had been given the cold shoulder: a change was evident from the fact that it was now looked on as bad form, even from a social point of view, to neglect having children baptised and to omit being married before the curé. Another sign was the interest in religion taken by the young school of French writers like Psichari and Péguy, who boldly advocated and defended the Catholic Church, and whose influence was felt through every stratum of French life. And since the war broke out a further factor in promoting Catholic ideals and attracting people to the practice of their religion was the heroic example of the soldier priests who by their conduct in the trenches won the goodwill of the most hostile anti-clericals. Beneath all this we learn that the work of organising the Catholic people is progressing quietly, and that the value of joint action and the power of combination are fully realised now. Probably all the failure of the Church in France was due to lack of organisation, through which touch with the mass of the people was lost in the past. The foes of Christianity organised their forces while the Church was depending too much on individual activities, and the men of France, though still sound at heart, were drawn away from the practice of the Faith by human respect and other powerful influences. Already several important unions have been formed with a view to uniting round the standard of the ancient Faith of France all those whose hopes and aspirations have their roots in the same Faith. *L'Union Catholique des Chemins de Fer*, a powerful union of railway workers, who glory in their shorter name of *Chemistes Catholiques*, now embraces as many as fifty thousand members, bound together in a society which has religion for its foundation. The women employees are also united, and are known as the *Chemistes*. They have a banner of their own, on which are the watchwords, *Fidem Servari*—I have kept the Faith—emblematic of their aims and aspirations. They emulate the men in their Catholic zeal, and they have been well to the front at all recent Catholic processions. Among the women of the middle class another union has been formed by the telegraph and telephone workers, known as the P.T.T. They are all eager to study and to learn as much as possible about their religion and about its bearing on social problems, and collections are taken up at their meetings for the purpose of providing libraries and study rooms for the earnest workers. In the big Paris stores, such as the *Bon Marché*, where hundreds of Catholics are employed, similar unions and clubs are formed. Recently a number of those employees had a Mass celebrated at *Notre Dame* for the fallen in the war. The celebrant was an old priest who had himself once been a worker in the *Bon Marché*. All are united by the common bond of love for their religion, and nothing is more pregnant with hope for the future than the sight of thousands of girls who are thus

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