

The Irish Revolution and How It Came About

(By WILLIAM O'BRIEN.)

INTRODUCTION V.—(Continued.)

We are plied with the consolation that the liberty accorded to Ireland is Canadian Home Rule. Again, it is simply not the truth. The Home Rule of the Irish Free State is what Canadian Home Rule would be, if the province of Quebec were separated from the Dominion, and annexed to France or to the United States, and if, moreover, Canada were subjected to a compulsory Imperial contribution, and aggressively stripped of the right of Secession. England remains in possession of an English Pale richer and more populous than she was able to maintain from the twelfth to the seventeenth century. And for the much advertised "British evacuation of Ireland," England retains within the seas of Ireland an army powerful enough to recapture Dublin within a week. The graves of St. Patrick and St. Brigid, and of the last of the High Kings of Ireland—the Derry of St. Columcille—the Armagh palaces of the Red Branch Knights of Irish chivalry—the most glorious battlefields of Ireland's history from Blackwater and Benburb to Antrim Fight—the church of the Dunganon Convention—the Cave Hill of Wolfe Tone's United Men—have all become conquered territory and foreign soil.

Affronts like these to the most cherished sentiment of a nation older than any in Europe are not to be got rid of by printing the Northern Ireland and the Southern Ireland of the British Statute Book within sarcastic "quotation marks" in our newspapers. The Treaty is a compromise, and in one respect an all but fatal compromise. Where, in our design, the varied tints of universal Ireland might have been united, rainbow-wise, to form one arch of peace, there are left, in place of one dissentient minority, three new minorities smarting under memories which it may take many years of healing patriotism to render supportable. Within the Six Counties, the Catholic minority already count their martyred dead by the thousand and their ravaged homes by tens of thousands. The Unionist minority in the South, who, had they accepted Home Rule as frankly in 1912 as they have done in 1921, might be figuring by this time amongst the foremost leaders of their countrymen, have been obliged to put up with sufferings of their own which, although immeasurably fewer than those of the Catholics of the North, are none the less cruel and detestable. Pray Heaven that certain abominations of the Civil War of 1922, from the responsibility for which neither side is free, may not finish by creating and perpetuating a Republican Minority still more dangerously discontented! Until some way can be found out of these complexities it would be wicked to flatter England into the delusion that she will not still be pursued and haunted by the disaffection of an *Irlanda Irredenta*.

For all that, there is no more reassuring proof of the prodigious advances made by the Irish Cause than the difficulty of getting the Republican youth to form a tolerant estimate of the amazing powers and liberties which the Treaty, with all its limitations, does indisputably embody. Its one organic vice is not so much the fault of the Sinn Fein negotiators as of the Hibernian negotiators who preceded them and fettered their hands. It cannot be beyond the compass of an enlightened patriotism to find a happy solution of these difficulties within the country and between the two countries, and that not by the rude hand of armed Revolution, but by unwearied good humor and by a magnanimity towards minorities that will take no rebuffs.

But three things seem to my poor vision to be essential things: (1) The old "loyalist" minority, inside and outside the Six Counties, must have their apprehensions allayed in that spirit of conciliatory tenderness, allied with quiet firmness of purpose, of which the nominations to the Free State Senate have given a substantial guarantee. (2) Love of Ireland must not be confounded with an insane hatred of England—the England of actual life. There must be a generous recognition of the extent to which the masses of the British people have come to a deep heart on the subject of their relations with Ireland. Self-interest, no less than our finer instincts, counsels us to understand and appreciate the supreme fact that nothing short of some intolerable aggression on our own part will henceforth tempt the

honest common people of Britain to undertake the armed reconquest of Ireland. (3) Before and above every other consideration whatsoever, I would place the condition that means must be found of reconciling and restoring good comradeship among those portions of the two armies of the Civil War who were comrades in a nobler war up to the Truce of July 11, 1921. Nobody is more acutely sensible than I how trying to their elders often enough are those Republican youngsters who, in their passionate devotion to the soul of Ireland, are apt to forget that there is also a body of Ireland which has some rights in the partnership. It is Tourguénief's everlasting incompatibility of "Fathers and Sons"—of the greybeards who cannot help knowing and the adolescents who need nothing but faith in their own bright imaginings. Nevertheless, fortunate is the nation the worst reproach of whose youth is the excess of spirituality and self-renunciation which impelled them, in the face of a terrorism that made the strong men stagger, to pluck up the Irish Cause out of the pit of corruption and disaster into which the "Constitutional" politicians, Irish and British, had sunk it. Unnatural, indeed, would be the Irishman who would not suffer injuries at their hands in silence—who would not extend an infinite indulgence even to their unreason—rather than find any comfort in seeing the young founders of our liberties hunted down and put to death, or traduced as the scum of the earth, by their own ungrateful countrymen.

It is too soon to say more with any confidence, excepting this: Amidst the gloom which hangs over our country as heavily as a funeral pall, while these pages are written, there shines forth one consolation of immortal efficacy—we can never permanently lose anything we have won (and we have won many and marvellous things); and whatever remains will of a certainty be added unto us—it may be through the mediation of the League of Nations, to whose council board Ireland will now have free access—not, in any case, we may pray, through any new recourse to the barbarities of armed Revolution, but through the wise exercise of the powers which the Revolution was needed in order to place within our reach. For which reason, however our hearts are saddened by the smoking monuments all around us of the existing war of fratricides, the story of the earlier and united struggle of the pre-Truce days will for centuries still in the womb of time kindle in the soul of Ireland a pride in her young men and an unconquerable faith that what they did highly and holily then, they will be found capable of doing again at need, so long as the ocean breaks against our irremovable landmarks as a Nation.

(To be continued.)

ASHBURTON NOTES

(From our own correspondent.)

March 19.

The names of Miss McIntosh, who contributed a dance, and Miss McGrath a song, at Father Price's welcome home at Methven, on the 29th ult., were inadvertently omitted from "Ashburton Notes" of the 7th inst.

The quarterly Communion of members of the Hibernian Society took place on Sunday, the 16th inst., when quite a large body in regalia approached the Holy Table.

Holy Mass was celebrated on both St. Patrick's Day and the Feast of St. Joseph (Wednesday, 19th inst.), in Ashburton and also at Hinds.

The fortnightly meeting of St. Patrick's branch (No. 420) of the Hibernian Society was held on Tuesday evening last, the vice-president (Bro. H. Lennon) presiding. One new member was elected and installed by the presiding officer. One brother was declared on the sick funds. The District Executive forwarded the agenda paper for the Triennial Moveable Meeting to be held at Westport in May, and the discussion on same, together with the appointment of a delegate to represent the branch were held over till next meeting.

There passed away in Ashburton on Wednesday, the 18th inst., a highly respected resident of Dromore, in the person of Mrs. Anthony Crowe. Since coming to Dromore, 17 years ago, she had charge of the local post office, and had won the esteem of a large circle of friends. The deceased lady was attended during her illness by the Rev. Father Brown, and died fortified by all the rites of Holy Church. To her husband, six sons, and three daughters much sympathy is extended.—R.I.P.