

OUR ROMAN LETTER

(By "SCOTTUS.")

MONSIGNOR O'RIORDAN.

(Concluded from last week.)

Though Italy's participation in the struggle made matters appear more difficult for Mgr. O' Riordan and his College, especially for the first couple of months, the civil authorities seemed to grasp the situation and certainly showed an amount of consideration that could not have been expected towards people who had taken no pains to manifest sympathy with the Allies, however keenly they might be interested in the cause for which the Allies said they were fighting. But it should be remarked that while Mgr. O' Riordan had his own views as to the merits of the case, he repudiated the idea of being pro-German and objected to being called so. As nearly as possible his attitude may be summed up in words which he often repeated to me: "Two big bullies are up against each other—I hope each will get a good cooling and be taught a lesson." He did not wish to see Germany victorious; neither did he like to think of England coming forth from the arena with fresh laurels and added glory. But as he was certainly not pro-English, and as no Englishman could see the possibility of a half-way house between this and rank pro-Germanism, he was usually classed amongst those having tendencies or sympathies in the latter direction. I often mentioned this aspect of the case to him, and jokingly remarked to him that he might as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb: "I can't help that," was his usual reply: "if people will not use their reason the loss is their own." On the whole, however, the first year and a-half of the war glided by without much incident as far as he was concerned, and there was little apparent likelihood of his being drawn into the vortex when the Easter sun of 1916 rose brightly over the hill-tops of Ireland and ushered in another day with another day's work to do.

Into the anxieties occasioned by that memorable event there is no need to enter further than to observe that no Irish newspapers were allowed to reach us for several weeks, so that we had to depend for information on what was wired out here by the London press agencies. Fortunately, as it happened under the circumstances, we had not been accustomed to expect a whole lot of truth from these; and therefore, though they had much to tell of the thoroughness with which the Sinn Féin venture had been suppressed, we were slow to accept all we read and were inclined to hope that when the actual facts reached us the reality would be found to have been less ugly. Such hopes were doomed to disappointment in a way that readers can easily imagine; and almost at once the whole series of events in Ireland led to a situation here which had to be faced sooner or later. First of all there were a number of Irishmen in this city who thought they were doing a service to God, a supposition some of them entertain to the present day, by making it appear that the Sinn Féiners and their sympathisers were a pack of corner boys and rowdies with little respect for God or country; and secondly their views were carefully taken up and added to and ventilated by English people in high position and of considerable influence who did not hesitate to proclaim the urgent need of ecclesiastical intervention for the purpose of curbing the unheard-of audacity of any churchman who should venture to say a good word for the culprits. The outspoken language of the Bishop of Limerick naturally singled him out for special attention.

Rightly or wrongly Mgr. O' Riordan had long felt that Dr. O'Dwyer's reputation had suffered unfairly in Rome owing to the attitude he had taken up a generation ago in reference to the public policy of the day. With this in mind he had been accustomed for some years to have the Bishop's London Pastorals and the like turned into Italian and published in Rome; and now that the Bishop had by his outspoken stand drawn down on his devoted head the ire of those who once used to clap him on the back for what they believed to be his adhesion to English rule in Ireland, but who now went about proclaiming that they would see he was removed from his diocese or made to eat his words, Mgr. O' Riordan made up his mind that something had to be done to clear the air and cope with the situation that had arisen and might easily lead to grave consequences if allowed to pass unnoticed. Naturally no defence of the Bishop's attitude could be of much value without an intelligible exposition of the causes that led up to it and the events that attended it; and as I was at the time a fairly diligent student of the London *Times* and other English newspapers for the truth that was in them—and for other things as well,—he desired

me to mark and preserve everything that could throw light on the subject, while he tried as best he could to procure such information as the censor allowed to come from Ireland. He was actively engaged in putting this material together when I happened to fall seriously ill, and for a couple of months neither wars nor the rumors thereof troubled me except in dreams. When I had struggled slowly back to life and consciousness he showed me the result of his labors in a pamphlet of 43 pages beautifully printed and turned out, entitled *The Recent Insurrection in Ireland: An Exposition of Its Causes and Consequences Drawn From Official Sources and From English Newspapers*. It was not published, nor was it exposed for sale. It was simply handed or posted as a private memorandum to those likely to be interested in the question or influenced by the crisis, or who might be called upon in their official capacity to examine the situation with which it dealt. The pamphlet, which from the color of the cover and general get up soon came to be called "The Red Book," attracted much attention, diplomatic and otherwise, and led to not a little gnashing of teeth. Complaints poured in on all sides and from all sides, and the step was bluntly characterised as a blow aimed at the Allied cause. A writer who has since been using the columns of the *Morning Post* for attacks on Mgr. O' Riordan and his College vehemently objected to the pamphlet as "political" on the ground that the expression "scrap of paper" was used in reference to certain broken pledges made to Ireland, forgetting for the moment that the same expression had been England's trump card in working up a case against Germany; but as usual, any word in favor of Ireland was mere "politics," even though the same word used for purposes of English propaganda was "patriotism." Another eminent Englishman bitterly lamented that the pamphlet offended against all laws both civil and ecclesiastical, basing his statement on the fact that being printed as a private memorandum it bore neither imprimatur nor printer's name. The manager of the Rome branch of a well-known Belgian publishing house who doubtless would consider it the height of patriotism for Irish priests to purchase the liturgical productions of that house, freely entertained his clients with denunciations of the "Red Book," which he characterised as a traitorous act against the writer's *patrie*! Threats too were freely indulged, and for a time it was gleefully told round Roman tea-tables that Mgr. O' Riordan and those associated with him were to be banished from the sacred soil of Rome. Apparently the intervention of the Italian civil or military authorities was invoked, and the police made some efforts to trace the printer; but they did not seem to have their heart in the task, and took no further action beyond that of closing the post to the pamphlet. About the time these enquiries were being made he drew up a short note, a copy of which is in my possession, indicating the scope and sources of the "Red Book," as follows:—

"It is a document for private distribution. There is nothing in it which has not been already published in England, either in official documents or in the newspapers;

"It is composed of (1) a literal translation of part of Mr. Birrell's evidence given before the Royal Commission of Enquiry into the causes of the insurrection in Ireland;

"(2) Then a literal translation of the correspondence between the Bishop of Limerick and Sir John Maxwell;

"(3) Then a literal translation of several passages from official reports, from newspapers (in almost every case English newspapers), from speeches by Mr. Asquith and letters from a few military officers;

"(4) The remarks of English newspapers on the compact suggested by Mr. Lloyd George, proposed by Mr. Asquith, accepted by the Irish Party, and then broken by Mr. Asquith."

Some time in the same year he drew up and printed for private use a statement of the facts regarding the question of the chaplains in the British Army. The step was rendered necessary by an effort that was being made with some success both at home and in Rome to show that if there was a shortage of chaplains the fault lay with the Irish clergy, who, it was alleged, and urged, had failed to do their duty in the matter. Various hints and a knowledge of the actual facts led Mgr. O' Riordan to conclude that the effort amounted to an attempt to distract attention from those really responsible by drawing a red herring across the trail. As a sample of the methods resorted to it will be enough to mention that one of the statements of a semi-official nature brought to light was to the effect that the Maynooth Mission to China was simply a dodge to enable Irish priests to avoid conscription!

It was my intention to devote part of this sketch to some account of his literary labors and kindred activities in Rome; but I find the pages already written have outgrown the usual limits, and I cannot expect the reader to bear with me if I continue just now. Accordingly I must postpone this subject for consideration at a subsequent