

IRISH NEWS

DAIL EIREANN'S COURTS OF JUSTICE.

One cannot be long in Ireland without coming into contact, directly or indirectly, with the Irish Republican courts (writes Rev. James M. O'Connell in the *London Catholic Times*). A recent business trip to Ireland, extending over five weeks, carried me constantly to the offices of a solicitor, and therein I frequently heard—willy nilly—the solicitor and his clerks discuss the preparation of a case or a defence to be presented before a Dail Eireann court.

For two years, in the midst and in spite of the cruel warfare on all things Irish, these Irish Republican Courts of Justice have persistently exercised their functions, in some instances without the interruption of a single day. It will be recalled that the late Terence MacSweeney was presiding at an important sitting of the Cork Republican Court when he was arrested. Up to that time the press of this country had given much prominence to the sittings of these courts; since then it has ignored them, leaving the impression that they had ceased. On the contrary, the Cork Court has continued to sit daily, though the "Black-and-Tans" could never discover its whereabouts. The people know where to find them and always use them when necessity demands legal action.

The success of these courts is due to their strict justice and efficiency, perhaps also to the consequent fact that by the people they are regarded with a confiding trust rather than with fear. Landlords, Unionists, men of every creed and party, have told me that never before in Ireland was justice dispensed so impartially and firmly, and if one thing more than another convinces them of the practicability and reasonableness of Irish Ireland aspirations, it is the Sinn Fein administration of justice unstained, as it is, by religious, class, or political prejudice. In practically every district outside Ulster and even within the frontiers of so-called Northern Ireland, two classes of Republican Courts exist, parish courts and a district court, which roughly correspond to the English police courts and assize court. An appeal can always be made from a parish court to its district court. The decision of the latter is usually regarded as final, but the court may give leave for an appeal to a referee, to be appointed by the Dail Eireann. The British courts in Ireland are out of work. This is the simple fact. Up to the Spring of 1920 they disposed of all litigation in the country, and the Petty Sessions and Assize Courts were prosperous institutions. But a rapid change came. At the County Courts in June, 1920, and at the Assizes in July, it appeared that all the cases had been mysteriously settled, for there was no appearance of the litigants. The explanation is to be found in the Dail's Decree of June, 1920. Since then—and I have been witness to what I write in Munster—the judges have sat idle in deserted courts fortified by sandbags, barbed-wire and machine-guns. They are unemployed, only, unfortunately for the Irish taxpayer, they still continue to receive their plump salaries. On the second day of the Cork Assizes, July, 1920, the Army of Occupation, arriving to occupy the Court House, found the Republican flag floating brazenly over the Court House and held in the hand of the figure of Justice. They have not yet discovered the "boy" who got through the barbed wire, etc., and placed it there.

The story is the same throughout Republican Ireland. Usually the British courts "fall through" after a few hours. Meanwhile the Republican courts are humming with the business and settling the cases which they have taken from their defeated competitor. The position of counsel and solicitors in regard to the Dail Eireann courts presented an initial difficulty. There are legal gentlemen in sufficient number for the purposes of these courts who would not desert their national ideals for all the threats and penalties of the law societies. But an attempt was made to prevent counsel and solicitors from attending the Republican courts. At first, many of the lawyers refused to attend; then they began to attend as a matter of course. Next the Incorporated Law Society had to deal with a

resolution moved before it to prevent solicitors from attending Sinn Fein courts. That resolution drew a trenchant letter from Mr. Maurice Healy, solicitor, Cork, and the I.L.S. discreetly dropped its resolution. A similar resolution was actually passed by the Council of the Bar of Ireland. But counsel and solicitors, unlike judges, are dependent on work for their salaries, and since their clients insisted on going to the Republican courts, they ignored the resolution and also went. Finally, a general meeting of the Bar was summoned to discuss the matter and decided to take no action. Hence, counsel and solicitors regularly appear before the Irish tribunals.



IRISH RACE CONFERENCE.

Assuming that the approaching parley between the Government and the representatives of Ireland will end in the acceptance by both sides of a peace-contract, it was an excellent idea to arrange an Irish race conference in Paris or Dublin for the early days of the New Year (writes J. F. Boyle in the *London Catholic Times*). The meeting of the representatives of the Irish race will be a fitting opportunity of celebrating the end of a long quarrel notable for unsparing coercion on the one hand and for an irrepressible tendency to revival on the other. It is stated that Mr. de Valera in a recent interview with Miss Hughes, secretary of the Conference, expressed the hope that this convention would become a triennial event, as it would enable the Irish people abroad to keep in closer touch with the people at home and to obtain more reliable information about the country. The Irish are in the position to explain to the world that they have fought a unique political battle. It was a battle which showed the success of moral power contending for centuries against physical force. And whilst engaged in this struggle they were ever foremost in the democratic movement, championing advanced projects for the betterment of mankind, but carefully guarding against excesses. The Irish Self-Determination League of England, which undertook the preliminary work of organising the Conference, has transferred the responsibility to the Irish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Dublin, and a new secretariat is being opened in Paris and will make arrangements for the Conference, in co-operation with numerous organisations which have sprung up throughout the world to further Ireland's demand for liberty. One of Ireland's great claims to universal gratitude is what she did in the early years of the Christian era to evangelise Europe, and it is to be hoped that measures will be taken to bring to the notice of the public of all nations her memorable work in this respect. Much has been done to bring to light what the records of old monasteries and similar institutions throughout Europe had to tell of Ireland's zeal, but the tale of the wonderful work of the Irish missionaries has never been completely told, and it seems that a conference of this kind is a suitable occasion for letting the world know what it is in its completion. For this purpose it might be necessary to examine and investigate the history of the oldest institutions in Europe—old churches, monasteries, and libraries, but the expense and trouble would be surely repaid in the results of the researches. Then, there is a great deal that might be done to bring to the knowledge of foreign people the early state of civilisation in Ireland itself. Mrs. Green has given glimpses of early Irish skill in brass and art work of which lovers of the old country would like to see more; and more might also be told of Ireland's beautiful illuminated manuscripts. The Irish are, like their Church, though old, ever young, and now that a vision of freedom is presenting itself to their eyes, they feel as a youthful people, before whom lie the possibilities of a brilliant future. I have no doubt that, wherever their lot may be cast, they will do credit to their country in the future and will lead the way in the promotion of all that is best in our civilisation. They may well repeat, "What region on earth is not full of our labor?" And their contribution to the world's progress in the past may be taken as a pledge of what they will do in the future. They may be trusted to act as pioneers of all that makes for progress and prosperity, and, mindful of what their fathers have suffered, they may well say with the authors of England's Great Charter: "We will not deny or delay to any man justice or right." By helping to organise the Irish Race Conference, every Irishman and Irishwoman will render a valuable service to their country.