

in a pre-eminent degree by the land to the West, which we call Ireland."

So baseless are the assumptions underlying this paragraph, and so questionable are its terms that I cannot but wonder how a reviewer in an Irish Catholic paper could have passed it without comment.

Irish Catholics, to whom this book of Father Stebbing's has been so ably recommended, may well rub their eyes when they find, in the paragraph quoted above, the implied assertion that their country only participated in the historic title "Island of Saints" or that that appellation was ever applied, even remotely, to the land to the East, which we call England. In the circumstances, it may interest my readers if I recall for them the facts of a controversy which took place a few years ago, wherein the English assumption of this title was submitted to historical analysis by an Irish ecclesiastic living here in Rome. The incident, which offered the opportunity of this analysis, was the use of a certain phrase in a speech made by the French Cardinal Andrieu, in replying to an address presented by the English bishops on the occasion of the celebration here 13 years ago, of the beatification of St. Jeanne d'Arc. In the account of the function given in the pages of the English Catholic weekly, *The Tablet*, the Cardinal was reported to have concluded his speech with an expression of hope and prayer for the speedy return of the Island of Saints to the true Faith. In a subsequent number of the *Tablet* (May 15, 1909) a short letter appeared from the pen of the Irish ecclesiastic referred to: the letter pointed out that the Island of Saints had never abandoned the true Faith. Leading English Catholics were aghast at this implied challenge of England's right to the title of "Island of Saints," and some of them hurried to give the Irish champion a little lesson in history. They did not know their man: in the event, they were reduced to silence, and the English pretension to the appellation was shown to have no historical foundation. Some months later a historical treatment of the whole question of the title and of its English assumption of this title was published here in Rome, in a pamphlet: *Insult Sanctorum. La Storia di un Titolo Usurpato*. For the learned, that pamphlet said the last word. Yet here is "a scholarly book by Father Stebbing" repeating the same old fiction in a new and more offensive form, a book which Irish Catholics are being implicitly advised to buy.

The first English champion, in the subsequent controversy, was the well-known Bishop Vaughan, who was at the time resident in Rome. In the issue of the *Tablet* for May 29, 1909, he published a letter asserting that, while Ireland had long been known as the Island of Saints, England had equally borne the same title in the ages of Faith. In the course of the discussion it became evident that the worthy Bishop based this definite assertion on passages written by Cardinal Newman and by Dr. Lingard. It was soon pointed out to him by the Irish protagonist that the question at issue was, not what Newman said or what Lingard said, but, was this: are there any historical data of the ages of Faith to justify the assertion that England was called by that title. He was also asked to offer, in proof of his claim, some historical argument based on the ages of Faith, or at least to quote some historical authority of established reputation before Lingard's time. When he fell back on the statement of the claims of both Newman and Lingard to be accepted as first-class historians, who carefully weighed their every word, and who would never pronounce a judgment without excellent reasons for it, he was told that his two authorities were no more infallible than other historians, and he was again pressed for some historical proof of his first assertion. He failed to offer it. But he stated that it was a deplorable fact that the verdict of Lingard and Newman on England's right to the title in question, was insufficient to obtain a general recognition of that right. However, he laid the flattering unction to his soul that England enjoyed another title, "Our Lady's Dowry," which he held to be in some respects a more glorious name; with that title he was willing to be satisfied until more light should be thrown on his country's claim to the title "Island of Saints."

A subsequent issue of the *Tablet* contained a letter over the name of Canon Gunning, who was responsible for the first and only attempt in the course of the controversy to bring forward any historical authority anterior to the nineteenth century, in support of the English claim. The

Canon appealed to the last words spoken by Blessed Edmund Campion, in presence of the tribunal which sentenced him to death. The force of the argument was derived from the fact that the martyr had been sentenced in the year 1581, and that in his speech before his judges he had referred to England as the "Island of Saints." In the letter putting forward this argument, the Canon gave, as his reference page 308, of the *Life of Edmund Campion*, published in 1867, by Richard Simpson. In that work there was given a short speech as made by the martyr before his death. So far as he had gone, Canon Gunning appeared to be right. But the Irish ecclesiastic was not undone. His letter in reply to the English Canon, may justly be said to have ended the controversy, although the debate was not formally closed for some time afterwards. He stated that any respectable authority of the sixteenth century or earlier which attributed to England the title of "Island of Saints" was deserving of serious consideration. He was quite willing to consider Blessed Edmund Campion as a competent historical authority. But the trouble was that no historical proof whatever, of the kind asked for, had been offered in the name and with the authority of the Blessed Martyr. What Canon Gunning had brought forward was a quotation of a biography written in 1867. The martyr on the other hand had suffered and died in 1581. Wherefore he asked the Canon to refer him, not to the biography published by Simpson, in 1867, but to the historical sources of the alleged speech. His claim was that if Blessed Edmund Campion actually used the expression attributed to him by his nineteenth century biographer, the historical proof of such use was to be found in documents or in some such historical instruments of the sixteenth century. Unhappily, for the cause he espoused, the Canon did not give the required reference, presumably because no such documents existed. The worthy Canon, therefore, no less than the venerable Bishop, had failed to prove his case.

When we seek to trace this mistaken English notion to its source, we find that it may be attributed to a rather florid passage in Lingard's *History and Antiquities of the Anglo-Saxon Church*. On page 90, of the second volume (third edition, London, 1845) there is to be found a strangely worded passage, which is apt to deceive the inattentive reader. In that passage the learned Lingard seems to have laid aside, for the moment, his usual mood of philosophic detachment and to have allowed himself, great historian though he was, to make a definite statement, for which he had not the smallest historical evidence to offer. Lingard's book containing this error was first published in 1806. The English pretension to the title is, therefore, of no greater antiquity than 120 years. Such a pretension, so far as we know, was never even heard of in the ages of Faith. Yet, such as it is, this usurpation of Ireland's exclusive name was inserted into a public prayer for the English, as far back as 1839. According to a letter, which appeared in the *Tablet* controversy from the pen of Rev. J. Keating, S.J., the question of the justice of the English claim to this title was raised in *Catholic Opinion* in 1868, by an anonymous writer, who successfully called attention to the historical blunder involved in an English use of the appellation in question. In deference to the demands of historical accuracy, Father Keating tells us, Cardinal Manning gave the prayer a new form by substituting the expression "an Island of Saints" in the place of the more definite phrase complained of. In reference to this change, it is scarcely necessary to point out that it falls far short of what is required, for despite the alteration the false inference is conveyed to the minds of ordinary people. Father Stebbing, in employing the indefinite article before the words "Island of Saints" sins, it must be confessed, in very eminent company. But he can claim for himself all the credit of that delightful assertion, that Ireland shared in a pre-eminent degree (whatever that means), the enjoyment of a title, which, in point of historical fact, was borne by no other land.

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