

Minority Rule

A cable message in last Friday's daily papers runs in part as follows:—

'The Irish Unionists vehemently denounced Mr. Birrell's Administrative Council (Dublin) Bill, predicting religious strife, and that the minority would be at the mercy of the permanent Roman Catholic majority.'

In his great speech in the House of Commons on the second reading of the Irish Land Bill in 1870, Mr. Gladstone rightly declared that the oppression of a minority by a majority is detestable and odious, but far more detestable and odious is the oppression of a majority by a minority. And this is notoriously the condition that has prevailed in Ireland for some three hundred years. It has, in fact, become so much the settled tradition of the Ascendancy party that, like all monopolists of place and pelf and power, they 'vehemently denounce' any attempt, however halting and beggarly to interfere with their old-standing privilege of a minority rule over 'the permanent Roman Catholic majority' And as usual, they predict 'religious strife'—a feature of Irish social and public life which is, however, happily confined to the small region in north-east Ulster that returns 'Irish Unionists' to the Imperial Parliament.

In a very real and calamitous way, Ireland has been governed ever since the Union by the tap of the Orange drum—by the dying force that represents organised Ascendancy and 'religious strife.' Mr. Chauncey Depew once told a story which has an obvious application in this connection. The teacher of a country school (said he in substance) found one morning a woodchuck (a sort of marmot) which had been shot and lost by a passing sportsman. He offered the little creature as a prize to the boy who could give the best reasons for his political opinions. After a pause for reflection, the first boy stood up. 'I am a Republican,' quoth he. 'Why are you a Republican?' 'Because Abraham Lincoln was one, and he freed the slaves.' 'Next boy. What are you?' 'Sir, I'm a Prohibitionist.' 'Why?' 'Because the insane asylums are filled with the victims of strong drink; because it makes widows and orphans and criminals.' 'That will do. Next boy, stand up. What are your politics?' 'I'm a Democrat.' 'Why are you a Democrat?' 'Because I want the woodchuck.'

Irish Unionists are Irish Unionists just because they 'want the woodchuck'—they want to retain their traditional ascendancy of place and power and pelf at the expense of 'the permanent Roman Catholic majority' in the country. And the fervid outcry about 'religious strife' and the 'disruption of the Empire' is so much stage thunder, or (to use Earl Crewe's words) the 'mock heroics and simulated indignation' of a big monopoly that is threatened, of a selfish and ruinous bureaucratic minority rule that is nearing the close of its days.

The wise and witty Anglican divine, Sydney Smith, had little sympathy with the ruling of Ireland by 'ten or twelve great Orange families who,' said he, 'have been sucking the blood out of that country for these hundred years past.' 'In the name of heaven,' pleads he in his 'Peter Plymley's Letters', 'what are we to gain by suffering Ireland to be rode by that faction which now predominates over it?' And speaking of the prophecies of evil and the threats of armed rebellion with which the High Tory Irish Unionist party have met every enlargement of political rights to four-fifths of the population of the Cinderella Isle, he says (Letter ix.) 'It is better to have four friends and one enemy than four enemies and one friend; and the more violent the hatred of the Orangemen, the more certain the reconciliation of the Catholics. The disaffection of the Orangemen will be the Irish rainbow; when I see it, I shall be sure that the storm is over.'

But even among the Orangemen, there is a large and growing body of Independents who favor a measure of self-government to Ireland. E pur si muove—the world is moving; and even the lodge is being in part carried with it.

Rotten before Ripe

The French philosopher Diderot once said of the Russian Empire: 'It is rotten before it is ripe.' The saying is a glove-fit for Third Republic. In the midst of its youth—it is barely thirty-seven years old—it has become a decadent tyranny that in many respects would degrade the Turk. The Paris 'Figaro,' which cannot be accused of clerical leanings, says of it:—

'We have no idea of true liberty in France; there is no doubt as to that! It is true that in order to use anything we must first possess it. But no one will contend that in our Republic we have the use, practice or theory of liberty. If that much-abused word is still inscribed on the walls of public buildings, it is simply in order that it may not be utterly forgotten. The mistaken notion that the French entertain concerning liberty is shown sufficiently by such measures as the eviction of the religious Orders or the law of the Sunday rest. This passionate liking that we manifest for tyranny, for abuses of authority, showing itself every day, occurs so frequently that attention is no longer paid to its excesses.'

The effort to make the Church the slave of the State, in order to strangle her the more easily, was 'sized up' recently as follows by ex-Premier Kuyper, of Holland. Speaking of the attitude of the Holy See in regard to the anti-Christian policy of the dominant Radical-Socialist 'Bloc' or 'machine,' this convinced Protestant statesman says:—

'The struggle is a trying one, but it must be recognised that the Catholic Church is defending the superiority of spiritual right. Much to our regret, we cannot hide from ourselves the fact that the Catholic Church has taken a much higher stand than that occupied by French Protestants, who accommodate themselves to every situation—an attitude which may be more pacific and more practical, but which is not a noble one. . . . It is true that the Government just now is doing everything it can to facilitate the working of the law of separation, but it is as true now as it was before that the Church will have to sacrifice her spiritual autonomy before she can organise her government in conformity with the orders of an atheistic State. The command is: bow down before the State as before a god. It is to the eternal honor of Rome that she proudly refuses to obey.'

And he declares that, in forming associations for public worship in accordance with the new law, his fellow-Protestants in France have dropped into a cunning pitfall, and have sustained 'an irreparable loss.' And yet the Protestant denominations began by protesting vehemently against the law which they later on accepted rather than forfeit the use of their ecclesiastical property.

Methods of Persecution

Meantime the storm of persecution is searching into every nook and cranny of the religious life of the country. In its new role of highwayman and burglar, the Government has the eye of a microscope and the grasp of a miser. Nothing is too great, and nothing too small for its comprehensive scheme of pillage. When, for instance, it plundered and expelled the Carmelite nuns at Digne, a short time ago, it spared nothing. A letter from the superior (Mother Therese) in the 'Catholic Standard' tells the pathetic story. Says she in part:—

'The enemies of God and His Church have taken all from us by armed force. Monastery, furniture of the chapel, statues, books of piety, even our kitchen stove, our poor straw beds, our clothing, everything has been put under seal. They have not even respected our holy relics, which gendarmes have taken to the tribunal on a wheelbarrow. What a horrible profanation! We had prudently concealed all in the houses of devoted friends, but these Freemasons who govern, abusing their

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