

IRELAND AND THE WAR

MR. JOHN DILLON ON RECRUITING.

Mr. John Dillon, M.P., addressed a large gathering in St. Andrew's Hall, Glasgow, on April 18. The meeting was organised by the Glasgow and District Branches of the United Irish League, and nearly five thousand were present. Mr. Dillon said it would be impertinence for him to appeal to his countrymen in Scotland to join the new armies, because no class of the community had contributed so many recruits in proportion as the Irish of Great Britain. In Scotland, 27,511 Irishmen or sons of Irishmen had joined the colors, in addition to 10,000 already serving. It took a keen political instinct for the Irish race at home and across the Atlantic to realise what their duty was in this hour. They had a long and bitter memory, but there came the call of duty. And what were the reasons why Ireland was bound to take her full share in the sacrifices and suffering of this terrific struggle? The first was that in honor she was bound. Ireland had pledged her honor that when her demands were granted England and her statesmen and people would find in Ireland a loyal and a faithful friend in the hour of danger. The British Government, relying on their honor and in spite of threats and enormous pressure, passed Home Rule, and was it to be said that they who had never broken a treaty or pledged word were now to set an example of perjured men and broken faith? Ireland had kept her word, and across the Atlantic too.

Mr. Dillon proceeded to say that there was a small but noisy faction who were opposed to their policy and who declared that now was the time to strike at it. These young men who criticised them were a rapidly dwindling few. Some of them preached the doctrine of neutrality in a struggle like the present, as if anybody under the flag of England could remain neutral. To be neutral was to be hostile or to be a coward. To-day, with the exception of the very small minority alluded to, Ireland was substantially heart and soul with the Allies in the present struggle.

Recruiting in Ireland.

Now it has been said (continued Mr. Dillon) that recruiting in Ireland has not been at all up to the mark amongst the Nationalists of the South, and I should like to say a few words on that subject. There are two reasons why recruiting has not been as great amongst Nationalists there as it has been amongst you here in Scotland and England. The first is, probably, well known to you, but, I am glad of this opportunity of stating it here in Glasgow, that Ireland has not got in the South, I should say, half the number of men of military age in proportion to its population that Scotland and England have got. That is the result of the enormous, steady drain of emigration, caused by the bad laws in the past. It has raised the proportion of old people and children to a wholly abnormal extent in Ireland. We were stating that fact in Parliament for thirty years and we were not believed. We were not believed in Parliament in the old days. What happened? The Old Age Pensions Act came along and I had, I must confess, a quiet laugh up my sleeve thinking of the eye-opener the Treasury would get when the Act came into operation. Ireland and Scotland have nearly the same population, Scotland a little more. Yet, we get £2,600,000 old age pensions, and you only get about £900,000 every year. The fact is, the south-west of Ireland has been turned into a reservoir of old men and women and young children. The second reason is that, no doubt, it took a little time to impress upon the people of Ireland, living in Ireland, particularly on the older people, what their duty was now. They had seen the blight of English rule on the country and into their hearts had entered a bitterness that it has taken a good deal of time and toil to mitigate and remove. When they were called on to send the remnant of young men left in the country to spill their blood defending England in her hour of trial, it did take a little time

to make them see the situation in the new light. But it has been done, and I can say here, with the utmost confidence, that Ireland, except the small minority to which I have alluded, is heart and soul with the Allies in this struggle. There is another consideration which is bitterly impressed upon my mind and which will appeal to you here in Glasgow—a city intimately connected with the highlands of Scotland. We know, without boasting, that the world never saw finer fighting material than the peasantry of Ireland: the fame of their deeds has been sung round the world and there is not a battlefield of Europe, and there is not an army of the Great Powers whose annals are not illustrated by the gallantry and the ability of the soldiers of Ireland. To-day, now that England has changed her policy and offered the right hand of fellowship to Ireland, we could raise, not 100,000, but 400,000, as easily as I address you, if it had not been for the famines and evictions and the clearances in Ireland.

Ireland's Great Tragedy.

What a tragedy has been enacted by the stupid and perverse statesmanship which wrought this on the fertile plains of Ireland and the valleys and the hills of Scotland. From the glens of Scotland were drawn those regiments which, at Waterloo and in the Peninsular War held their line shoulder to shoulder with the Irish, and Wellington himself was forced, in the House of Lords, to declare that if it had not been for his Irish Catholic soldiers and his Highlanders he never could have won his battle. Yet for eighty years after Waterloo the main occupation of British statesmanship was to exterminate and drive beyond the Atlantic the very stock and race which had been England's right arm in those great wars. Now I come to the last reason. That tragedy is past and if we cannot forget we are willing to forgive. I rejoice that the policy of England has totally changed and that she is trying, slowly and painfully, to repeople the plains of Meath, Mayo, and Roscommon.

A Recruiting Mistake.

The other reason why there has not been such good recruiting is a delicate subject and I shall not enter into details. For the first six months of this war recruiting was carried on in Ireland by the War Office, and those placed in control in Ireland by the War Office, in such a fashion that the conviction grew in our minds that the purpose of the authorities was to get as few Irish Nationalists into the army as possible so that certain powerful gentlemen connected with the War Office might be able at the end of the war to say, 'Look at those Irish, they gave us no help at all.' That is a very serious charge to make, but I believe it. I will not go into details because I do not want to stir up bitterness. But I am able to say that this is now altogether changed. Within the last weeks recruiting in Ireland has been placed in the hands of a civilian, a man of business capacity, and it is being placed on a business footing with the result it is going on like a house on fire. Most of you have read about the great reception given to the Irish Guards in Dublin and Cork, and one might ask why on earth were they not sent before. The Irish Guards you will remember when Mr. Redmond and I were coming out of Buckingham Palace after the Home Rule Conference broke out of their barracks in hundreds and cheered us to the very echo. That fact alone was calculated to bring home to the minds of every Nationalist that the King's uniform might cover a true Irishman. Therefore, if there had been any desire really to bring in the Nationalists of Ireland to the army, and they are worth bringing, the Irish Guards would have been sent over long ago and the whole system of recruiting would have been carried on from the first on the present lines. If that had been done I say, with the utmost confidence, that more than double the number of recruits would have been obtained in the south and west than have been obtained up to the present. However, it is never too late to mend, and inasmuch as our men get ready for the front a good deal faster than some others, I might allude to, I expect the recruits now joining will be in before the fight is over.

Thos. B. RIORDAN, 183 Cashel Street, CHRISTCHURCH

DENTAL SURGEON

(Redpath's Buildings), Opposite Union Steam Ship Co's. Office. 'Phone 3975