

Current Topics

A 'Tablet' Veteran

The following letter from an old subscriber who had got somewhat in arrears, and whose circumstances were not known to us at the office, speaks eloquently for itself. 'Orepuki, July 5, 1915. Dear Sir,—I am sending you £2 for the *Tablet*, hoping you will give me a clean sheet, as I don't know when I will be able to give you any more money. I am sending you my old-age pension, and doing without myself, as I don't like to stop getting the paper as I have got it for over forty years. It is not worth while to stop now, and I want to help, and I hope for better times. I remain, yours sincerely, MICHAEL REID.'

This veteran subscriber has supported the *Tablet* through all these unbroken years not because of its literary merits although during the ten or eleven years in which Dr. Cleary graced the editorial chair the paper reached an exceptionally high level in that direction—but out of simple loyalty to the faith, of which the *Tablet* is the acknowledged defender and exponent, and because he 'wanted to help.' What a fine example this humble old-age pensioner sets to those wealthy Catholics who, in some cases, are too mean to take the paper at all, and in other cases are willing to squabble and haggle for weeks as to whether they will pay—under circumstances in which it is justly due—the paltry few shillings which represent the difference between our advance and our booked rate of charges. What a contrast to the splendid type of Irish pioneers who, generous and open-handed, filled with the spirit and traditions of the Old Land, ever placed the interests of faith and fatherland before mere worldly considerations, and who, through all their ups and downs, were ready at all times to make cheerful sacrifice for every good cause. Verily, they have their reward—in the respect and admiration of all whose good opinion is worth anything, and in the assurance of a still higher recompense to come. Needless to say, our subscriber's request for consideration in the matter of accounts was met in the generous spirit it so well deserved. We are proud to number amongst our supporters men of the sterling stuff of Michael Reid.

Sir Edward Carson's Stay-at-Homes

Lovers of Gilbert and Sullivan will remember the entertaining scene in 'The Pirates of Penzance' in which the chorus of maidens warble inspiring and inspiring sentiments to the burly sergeant of police and his followers, in order to spur them on to do their duty and engage the foe. If we can trust to memory, the maidens sing somewhat thusly:

'Go, ye heroes! Go to glory!
Though you fall in combat gory,
You shall live in song and story,
Go, to immortality!'

To which the ponderous sergeant and his followers keep responding lustily:

'Yes, forward on the foe,
We go, we go!'

and at length the maidens reply cynically and disgustedly, 'Yes, but you don't go.' The situation has its parallel in the present position of the much-boomed and much-belauded force of stalwarts organised some three years ago by Sir Edward Carson to fight to the last ditch against the establishment of Home Rule. After the outbreak of the war, this body was understood to volunteer for service at the front, and Sir Edward Carson received much kudos and limelight for his patriotic and fine-spirited offer. The Ulster Division had at that time already had two years' training as volunteers; and its members were, according to Orange oratory, quite a match for the pick of his Majesty's forces. Nevertheless, they were not sent to the front.

They have now had seven or eight months' training in England, but still not one of them has seen the firing line. They are back in Ulster again, and on Saturday, May 8, were to hold a parade in Belfast. 'May 8,' says an extract from a letter of Sir James H. Stronge, Imperial Grand Master of the Orangemen, 'will be memorable for the parade in Belfast of the fine force which Ulster Unionists have contributed to the defence of the Empire, and I am sure that we shall have reason to be proud of the men themselves and of the efficiency which they have acquired.' At present this fine force, of which the Orange Grand Master is so proud, is 'defending the Empire' in comfortable quarters at Ballykinlar, Finner, and other places in Ireland.

In the meantime, the Irishmen from the South and West who quietly joined the colors at the end of last year and in large numbers since, are facing bullet and gas and shrapnel on the fields of Flanders and France. Why are the men of the Ulster Division not by their side? The only excuse that is given is a very lame and halting one. 'We are told,' (Sir James further states) 'that every unit which has been sent out has been kept up to its full strength by drafts from reserve battalions, and we are also told that our Division will not leave home until provision has been made for its maintenance by the formation of reserves 5000 or 6000 strong.' At a public meeting held in the City Hall, Belfast, on April 29, Major-General C. H. Powell gave the same explanation of the puzzle. The Ulster Division, he said, cannot be allowed to go out 'without some formation of reserves behind them to fill up gaps.' The Major-General said he was there to ask for between six thousand and seven thousand men. He confessed that he had been hoping to secure the men after the last visit of Sir Edward Carson. 'Here they were, however, at the beginning of May, and they had only got three hundred and seventy in one reserve battalion and in the other battalions hardly one.' If that is the state of affairs, and if this Division is not to move until the reserves have been made up exclusively from Ulster Volunteers, it is clear that the Carsonite brigade will be kept marking time at Ballykinlar until the end, and until the greatest war in history has been fought and won without their aid. Supposing that even 20,000 of them have joined the colors, why have matters been arranged so that all this number have been allotted to first units and not part of them to first units and part of them to reserves, thus completing an efficient force available for field service? It is not fair, of course, to blame the men of the Division; they have no say in the matter. They cannot go unless they are ordered; and if the order is given, they must go. It is impossible to escape from the conclusion that they are being kept at home for purely political reasons; and that the War Office, in collusion with Sir Edward Carson, is the party responsible. Apart from the wretched party spirit shown by the authorities and apart from the ugly look of the whole business, the action or inaction—of the War Office at this juncture is a piece of deplorably bad policy. There has now arisen a unique opportunity for healing the dissensions that have so long divided Irishmen and for bringing about a real and genuine union of hearts. 'I would appeal,' said Mr. John Redmond, in the noble declaration issued by him in September last, 'to our countrymen of a different creed, and of opposite political opinions to accept the friendship we have so consistently offered them, to allow this great war, as to which their opinions and ours are the same, and our action will also be the same, to swallow up all the small issues in the domestic government of Ireland which now divide us; that, as our soldiers are going to fight, to shed their blood, and to die at each other's side, in the same army, against the same enemy, and for the same high purpose, their union in the field may lead to a union in their home, and that their blood may be the seal that will bring all Ireland together in one nation, and in liberties equally common to all.' That is the utterance of a statesman; and if the War