

## THE GREAT IRISH CRISIS

(By SHANE LESLIE, in America.)

In the midst of an Irish symposium ably conducted in the columns of *America* comes word of an Irish Convention in Dublin's fair city. The Irish in this country do not seem to have realised what a remarkable step towards "what Ireland wants" has been taken. The principles of autonomy, of Ireland for the Irish, of non-interference by English statesmen in Ireland, and of Dublin as a capital are all conceded.

Once a body of representative Irishmen meets in Dublin no power in the world can weaken the moral effect or the practical result. Irish nationality has come out of the catacombs and taken lodgings in Dublin preparatory to reoccupying the noble mansion which was built as the country's symbol.

In my humble opinion a constitutional issue will be evolved and, if ratified by anything approaching a clear majority in session, ought to be endorsed by Irish-Americans whose influence will have helped to bring it about. It would be a pity to condemn the Convention before it begins or ends, because it does not fit into an extreme democratisation, which is not even granted in America. America was not allowed a referendum on peace or war. I do not believe it would be any wiser to give Ireland a referendum as to whether she wishes to be a republic or not. The reason in each case must be the same, it would produce political confusion. From a comparative coercion Ireland's best friends do not wish to see her leap into anything approaching the Russian chaos. If every sect and party in Ireland is given due representation a popular vote is not necessary to endorse the findings. At least such is the principle of modern democracy, provided each sect or party is agreed that it is represented.

Such a convention is a great step, greater than the meeting of the Volunteers at Dungannon or the Confederation of Kilkenny, for it is not Protestant like the former or Catholic like the latter. Religious specialisation at least has been cleared away.

Neither the Irish Party nor the Sinn Feiners can claim the credit of the Convention or its promise of result. In 1914 John Redmond was within an ace of taking the trick which, in 1916, had a settlement ensued, would have been duly accredited to the Sinn Fein. The present Convention is directly and indirectly due to both, and both must aspire and conspire to its ultimate success. I may add that John Redmond would be the last to attempt to machinate it for the sake of a party whose leadership he has gallantly offered to resign rather than allow any past words of his to be an obstacle to a united Ireland.

Should the Convention decide on a form of republican Government, it would be nothing against the Divine law. It would be binding on both Constitutionalists and on England. I believe it would be a master stroke on England's part to accept an Irish republic, for the first business of an Irish republic would be to effect a defensive alliance with England against the occupation of Ireland by any foreign foe. A German coaling-station, for instance, would be excluded from Ireland out of friendship for the United States, as well as from the practical consideration that it is not to Ireland's advantage for England to be conquered by Germany. To be frank, it is undeniable that England's losses and difficulties during the war have led her to take a more serious view of Irish claims. But her total defeat would prevent any view being taken at all favorable or unfavorable, for Ireland would be engulfed in her collapse. The reduction of England from the position of "Premier Power" to an equality with France and America in the world's democracy is good for both Ireland and England herself. But a conquest of England or the payment of indemnity to Germany would fall as unpleasantly on Ireland as on the United States. Miserable as it is to think of an English army of occupation in Ireland to-day, a German army of invasion would be far worse. Nobody has been shot in Ireland for a year, "to give the devil his due."

In his remarkable article replying to mine, Judge Cohalan, whose extreme devotion to Ireland Dublin Castle has certainly tried to justify, gives the impression that his mind tends toward the Apocalyptic view, common to all the Messianic nations, in regard to all Power Imperial. Just as the broken Jews and the persecuted Christians ever harped on the coming overthrow of Babylon and Rome, much of Irish mystico-political writing foreshadows the destruction of England. However, this has been postponed by the action of the United States, and it is well to consider the more practical necessities of the situation.

Judge Cohalan recalls the interesting fact that the submarine which has all but imperilled England to-day, was reduced to a practical form by Holland, an Irishman. Possibly its original aim was that which it has only just, and I think happily, failed to accomplish. It is equally curious that Lord Acton, when occupying as a Catholic the history chair of Cambridge, was once asked to name the moment of England's greatest peril and answered with one of those brilliant impromptus of which his learning was capable: The day that Fulton offered his steamboat to the French Government. It was refused by the latter, but the moral lies in the fact that Fulton's father was born in Kilkenny.

The moral of to-day is that the submarine jeopardises Ireland just as much as England. The rightful solution of the Irish problem is as vital to England to-day as to Ireland. Both are anxious to see Ireland, in the words of the Judge, "freed from the misgovernment of England," while his corollary of "peace for the neighbors of Ireland in Europe" shows a breadth of foresight that we infer would include a peace with a just England.

Neither of these ideas would be excluded from the results of a colonial system! In fact they would both be essential to it. Mrs. Sheehy-Skeffington has answered that "colonial Home Rule" is not what Ireland wants. However, she mentions the name of Gavan Duffy, who though an unsuccessful revolutionist at home, became a wonderfully successful colonial premier in Australia. I have not the slightest doubt he would at any moment have accepted the colonial solution at home.

Irishmen must feel a chivalrous difficulty in cross-pens with Mrs. Skeffington at this moment. It is, therefore, with a profound sense of her tragedy that I offer any comment on her remarks. I distinguish the Balfour regime in the past from the present militaristic condition. My criticism of the Balfourian policy of "killing Home Rule by kindness" is that it recognised the material needs and not the idealistic yearnings of the Irish people, whose national ambitions required other carriage than his famous "light railways." The Irish do prefer freedom and sentiment to bread or butter, as the interest in this idealistic Convention shows.

All that Mrs. Skeffington says is logical and, except in the matter of separation, practical. But I postulate that if Ireland cannot be a nation within the Empire, then the Empire cannot go on being an empire. In fact, it would split into Wilsonian republics. From my present information I believe the British Empire will continue nominally, but practically as a confederation of which Ireland will be one unit. The only excuse for the empires of the future will be that they foster and protect small nationalities. No compulsory system will be tolerated. Therefore, when Mrs. Skeffington writes of Ireland continuing as a pawn, exploited for imperial ambitions, the victim of secret diplomacy, etc., she does not realise that since her trip west the action of Russia and the United States has completely changed the face and future of the world. There will be one ideal of democracy, and President Wilson is already its prophet. Peace and war are now in the hands of Russia and of America, as their gigantic resources are alone capable of exerting war power or peace conditions among exhausted combatants.

In the near era there will be no pawns on the chessboard, no Dublin castles, very few kings. No more than Mrs. Skeffington, do we expect the lion to

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