

Current Topics

Conscientious Objectors

The other day a writer—anonymous, of course—in our morning paper had a sneer at Catholics, to give point to which he quoted the *Tablet* as saying that our people will always defend the laws of God and of the Church against man-made laws. It is to right-minded people very strange that such a reasonable and logical position should find even in the home of the wowser anyone so ignorant of the relations of man to God as to be capable of surprise at such a remark as the *Tablet* is supposed to have made, and very probably did make in some case that has escaped our memory just now. God is Truth and the Church is His mouthpiece; politicians, especially of the New Zealand type, are very far indeed from being oracles of Truth or in any way reliable at all; and the laws they make are not as far as we know remarkable for sanity or wisdom. But on the whole, judging from the anonymous writer's letters, sane laws would not be in keeping with the mentality of many amongst us. It is indeed rather a shocking state of things that we find many ready to question the proposition that the laws of God and of His Church are to be put before the laws of William Massey, and it is an eloquent commentary on the condition to which the legislation and the education of such persons has reduced this Dominion. Have they plunged us so deeply in that species of barbarism which they call efficiency that truths self-evident to a savage arouse wonder and a cackle of laughter reminiscent of Bedlam? The fact that principles have ceased to have any meaning for many legislators and for multitudes of the people is now too obvious to require labored explanation. And it is especially the principles of the Divine and Natural Laws that have been blotted out of the minds (as well as off the Statute Book) of the inhabitants of New Zealand. "God's Own Country," indeed! God help us. Among many priceless things unknown to New Zealand statesmen is conscience. They are to all appearances ignorant that man has a soul; they have passed Acts of Parliament against God; therefore why should they not trample on the rights of conscience. They tried to do it as far as Catholic priests were concerned during this war alleged falsely to be for the freedom of small nations. They did it in the case of many individuals who suffered, and some of whom are still suffering, because they had ideals and convictions above the low, material, utilitarian views of the place-hunters of this country. They did it, and in doing it they have made a name for New Zealand that will be long remembered: they gave a fine example of the Prussianism, which not for the first time has been found closely allied to John Bullism. Which of us cannot recall cases of incredible brutality which have come under our notice? And we know from the protests made in England that those who suffered there for conscience sake were not treated with the humanity that one should expect from those who went to war because they objected to German cruelty. A year ago or so a proposal to disfranchise conscientious objectors was voted down in the House of Commons after due discussion. Commenting on this, the *Month* said that the decision was sound, "because it acknowledges and proclaims that citizens have a higher duty than obedience to the State: a thoroughly Christian view which Catholics have been ready to uphold with their lives." The view was certainly Christian; and there were Christians enough in England to maintain it. Where are the Christians of New Zealand? Are they all converted by the anonymous scribe who could sneer at the "thoroughly Christian view" that people ought to put the laws of God and of His Church before laws made by men who are not fit to govern a colony of monkeys? Are there not enough strong men left in the country to uphold and to enforce the Christian view? Will nobody raise a voice for the conscientious objectors who have been ill-treated here because they would not submit to the hateful tyranny of Conscription?

A Terrible Indictment

The Glasgow *Observer*, referring to the arrest of the Sinn Fein leaders on a charge for which not a jot of evidence had been adduced, hinted that General Smuts, who has already been convicted of impertinent interference where Ireland is concerned, was the man who suggested the scheme. Like the *Daily News*, the *Chronicle*, the *Manchester Guardian*, the *Westminster Gazette*, and other English papers which have not sold their honor to Lloyd George, the *Observer* protested vehemently against the outrage of justice committed by the Government, and it made a terrible charge against British rulers, past and present, for the cowardly manner in which they have always, in defiance of the laws of chivalry and honor, calumniated and belied their enemies. The words of this honest British journal are worth producing, and it is to be hoped that certain editors amongst us in New Zealand will lay them to heart and consider how far they have deserved the same castigation:—

"As for the rest of the 'disclosures,' they bear all the traces of a trumped-up, evilly designed charge, intended to create prejudice and promote injustice, two weapons which this nation has never hesitated to wield against Ireland, or against any people with whom it has had a quarrel.

"The character of the American colonists was blackened most abominably when a German King on the British throne was endeavoring with the aid of Huns here and Hessians and Red Indians in America to subjugate or exterminate them.

"In our wars against France and Napoleon, waged on behalf of the most odious tyranny, and ending in the infamous 'Holy Alliance' of all the tyrants of Europe against Freedom, this country was a regular factory of anti-French, anti-Napoleonic lies and calumnies and obscenities. The press of the time is unmatched, even to-day, for the scurrility, cowardice, and scoundrelism of its attacks on the French people and on the Emperor.

"And were not the Boers subjected to the same infamies? They were cowards, immoral, brutal, treacherous, firing on the white flag, and generally, indeed, were made out to be unfit to live.

"We were then out to rob them and destroy their liberties, under the gentle influence of our Huns and Jingoese, many of whom are still with us, and now showing the same attitude towards Ireland."

No man who has read the papers during the present war or during the Boer war can say that the *Observer* exaggerated. This indictment of the Government of England recalls the scathing words of that honorable and chivalrous gentleman, Sir William Butler, on the same count. The "Prussianism" of the Tory clique is as active to-day as it was in the days of Pigott, and the most regrettable thing about it is that it casts such a slur on the good name of the British Democracy which in no uncertain voice more than once proclaimed its will about the treatment of Ireland. But it all helps Ireland. The outrageous tyranny of the Carson-Milner-George combination has already made all Ireland Sinn Fein, and is winning the world to the same banner as days go by. In this connection we again quote the *Observer*:—

"We are with the constitutional movement in Ireland, as we have ever been. We have opposed Sinn Fein on certain matters, such as the Easter Week rising and the appeal to force.

"We were surprised and pained by it all. We had fixed our eyes on other means to the end. We took a too narrow view. But we are forced to recognise even so soon as this that the men of Easter Week, 1916, those who stood as well as those who fell, will live in Irish annals along with those of '98 and '48 and '67. We are too close to the catastrophe to see its inwardness and provocation. It was a blunder, but a generous and a heroic blunder. It will have its reward. We leave it there.

"But on the Conscription issue we are wholly with the Sinn Feiners and the rest of Ireland. With the criticisms made on the Irish Party by Sinn Feiners and

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