

ENGLAND—THE CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS

At last the restrictions which prevented a democracy from knowing the facts on matters of vital interest to the life of the nation have been removed, and the details of the terrible story of the conscientious objectors in England is now available (says *Australia*). Theoretically the Military Service Acts dealing with the problem of the conscientious objectors seemed liberal enough. They endeavored to meet the case of the objector by arranging for three kinds of objection. The objector might be granted exemption from combatant service only, and was placed in the non-combatant corps. A certain section of conscientious objectors were satisfied so long as they themselves were not obliged to take human life. The second form of exemption was conditional on the conscientious objector undertaking some work of national importance. To meet the case of a numerous form of objector who refused to work under any Military Service Act, a third form of objection was provided for by Parliament—viz., total exemption by the genuine objector. This exemption was granted in about 400 cases, but was refused in about 1000 cases whose claims were just as strong. Men who in the course of their ordinary occupation were doing useful work for the community objected, in obedience to the Act, to displace an agricultural labourer when the object was to send the labourer into the trenches. Many, who did not understand their point of view, denounced these men as cowards and shirkers. The fact was overlooked that they could have had easy conditions in the Home Office work centres. This meant comparatively light work, human society, and liberty, whereas the extreme conscientious objector for his opinions was subjected to solitary confinement—no exercise, no companionship, no bed very often, and little food. The severity of the treatment can be gauged by the fact that under it 32 became insane and 30 died. When the armistice was signed, 1507 were in prison, and are, presumably, there at the present time, as almost all of them were sentenced to two years' imprisonment at their latest court martial. In keeping these men in prison, the Government violated the terms of their own Act, which provided complete exemption to genuine objectors. Speaking on behalf of the Government on July 4, 1916, Lord Sandhurst said: "If the conscientious objector will not undertake national work, he will complete his term of civil imprisonment and then be discharged from the army." Lord Kitchener and Mr. Walter Long supported this with similar declarations. But, instead of discharging these conscientious objectors from the army when they had completed their sentence, the authorities kept them in the forces, and again and again incarcerated them for long terms. The spirit in which the Act was carried out may be illustrated by the case of Mr. Corder Catchwell, a member of a well-known Quaker family. He went to Flanders a few weeks after the war broke out with the Friends' Ambulance Unit. After laboring incessantly for eighteen months at the front, he returned to England to take his stand with other conscientious objectors. He was arrested and sentenced to 112 days in gaol. On his release, he was again sentenced to two years' hard labor. In prison for the first 28 days a prisoner is kept in solitude in separate confinement in his cell, seeing no one except the warder and occasionally the chaplain. For the first fourteen days of the sentence he must sleep without a mattress. After this time, if his conduct is good, he is employed on work in association with others during part of the day, if practicable. In practice, the whole time spent with others, including exercise and chapel, as well as work, does not exceed two hours daily. All conversation with other prisoners is forbidden throughout the whole time of sentence. Prisoners undergoing the hard-labor sentence are not allowed to write or receive a letter or visit until two months of the sentence have elapsed. The position of the conscientious objector in England, bad as it was, was mild compared to those sent to France and forced into the trenches, then court-martialled for refusing to obey orders and sentenced

to be shot. After being marched to the place of execution and after facing the firing party, these men were reprieved, and their sentence commuted to ten years' imprisonment. The number of cases of this kind is not known at present; the facts will come out in time, but in the light of those available, one does not wonder that there are Bolsheviks.

IRELAND: THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

The Irish papers containing accounts of the sittings of the *Dail Eireann*, or National Assembly, have just reached America (says *America* of recent date). The twenty-nine members present rose in a body and subscribed to a declaration of complete independence for Ireland. Then besides adopting a constitution the Assembly sent a message to the free nations of the world, a document that was scrupulously excluded from American papers. The message is as follows:—

"To the Nations of the World, Greeting:

"The nation of Ireland having proclaimed her national independence, calls, through her elected representatives in Parliament assembled in the Irish Capital on January 21, 1919, upon every free nation to support the Irish Republic by recognising Ireland's national status and her right to its vindication by the Peace Congress.

"Nationally, the race, the language, the customs and traditions of Ireland are radically distinct from the English. Ireland is one of the most ancient nations of Europe, and she has preserved her national integrity, vigorous and intact through seven centuries of foreign oppression; she has never relinquished her national rights, and throughout the long era of English usurpation she has in every generation defiantly proclaimed her inalienable right of nationhood down to her last glorious resort to arms in 1916.

"Internationally, Ireland is the gateway to the Atlantic. Ireland is the last outpost of Europe towards the West; Ireland is the point upon which great trade routes between East and West converge; her independence is demanded by the freedom of the seas; her great harbors must be open to all nations, instead of being the monopoly of England. To-day these harbors are empty and idle solely because English policy is determined to retain Ireland as a barren bulwark for English aggrandisement, and the unique geographical position of this island, far from being a benefit and safeguard to Europe and America, is subjected to the purposes of England's policy of world dominion.

"Ireland to-day reasserts her historic nationhood the more confidently before the new world emerging from the war, because she believes in freedom and justice as the fundamental principles of international law, because she believes in a frank co-operation between the peoples for equal rights against the vested privileges of ancient tyrannies, because the permanent peace of Europe can never be secured by perpetuating military dominion for the profit of empire, but only by establishing the control of government in every land upon the basis of the free will of a free people, and the existing state of war, between Ireland and England, can never be ended until Ireland is definitely evacuated by the armed forces of England.

"For these, among other reasons, Ireland resolutely and irrevocably determined at the dawn of the promised era of self-determination and liberty, that she will suffer foreign dominion no longer calls upon every free nation to uphold her national claim to complete independence as an Irish Republic against the arrogant pretensions of England founded in fraud and sustained only by an overwhelming military occupation, and demands to be confronted publicly with England at the Congress of Nations, that the civilised world having judged between English wrong and Irish right may guarantee to Ireland its permanent support for the maintenance of her national independence."

Let us obey each one in his place with the faith of a little child and the loyal heart of a true knight of God.

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CEDERHOLM & SON

6-8 MANNERS STREET - WELLINGTON
FOR EVERYTHING ELECTRICAL