

OUR ROMAN LETTER

(By "SCOTTUS.")

The Sinn Fein victory at the recent elections in Ireland evoked what Italians would call a striking repercussion in this country. Hitherto, as readers of these pages will doubtless remember, not only had we to lament the effects of the ring of silence that was drawn round all things Irish since the outbreak of the war, but worse still the news items and observations that were allowed to appear now and then were anything at all but favorable or complimentary. All this underwent a surprising change; and since the beginning of the present year the press of this city, and indeed of all Italy, has devoted praiseworthy attention to the Irish problem, particularly in its bearing on international settlements. On the whole the attitude was friendly; and this was true not only of newspapers that were always more or less sympathetic, but also of such widely different sheets as the *Messaggero* and *Corriere d'Italia*, both of which, for one reason or another, have been uniformly hostile in the past. The outcome of this new interest was this that hardly a day passed without some newspaper reference to happenings in Ireland and to their bearing on public opinion in other lands, particularly in America. Nor did this interest stop short at mere items of news: several of the best-known papers printed long articles discussing the whole situation in its historical setting and in its actual effects and possibilities. One of the best articles of the kind, for instance, appeared in the hitherto hostile *Popolo d'Italia*, which and in a sympathetic vein discussed the question of Ireland's capacity for running her own house. It is worth mentioning that the facts cited in favor of this capacity were taken from a leaflet on the subject widely circulated during the elections in Ireland.

It is obvious, however that this friendly frame of mind could not be allowed to continue unchecked. True indeed, the censorship of the press had been taken away on the cessation of hostilities; but with one apparently harmless reservation, namely, that affecting news likely to disturb international relations. Remote as this exception appeared, some of us were inclined from the beginning to suspect the cloven foot and to fear that it was probably calculated to cover ground in which we were interested. It was not long till we had reason to know that our suspicions were not unfounded. A little more than a month of publicity had passed when our English cousins here began to take the offensive. Eventually matters came to a head when one of the most important newspapers of this city, discussing a map of national aspirations published by the *Morning Post*, pointed out that while that militant organ of English society could find a sympathetic corner for every people from the Irish Sea to the Pacific Ocean, it had not room for as much as the outlines of the Irish coast. That same evening the editor was informed by persons claiming to speak in the name of the British Embassy that while the British Government had no objection to the discussion of England's international policy it did not wish to see the domestic concerns of the United Kingdom thrown on the screen. That the admonition was effectual was at once apparent. Though practically all the newspaper editors in this city are in sympathy with the Irish claim at the present moment, hardly one of them ventures just now to publish any comment or any expository article dealing with the subject. The most they dare under present conditions is to print such news items as are wired out from London and Paris by the press agencies, which, however, may be relied on not to trouble the public with an overdose of words in our favor. Recently we have had samples enough of what this means. For instance, the declaration attributed to Mr. Wilson stating that the Irish question was a matter of domestic policy and did not come within

the scope of the Peace Congress was at once wired out here and duly published, whereas there was not a word sent about his repudiation of that declaration, about the recent vote of the American Congress in favor of Irish self-determination, or about the nature of the interview between the President and the delegation that waited on him in connection with the Philadelphia meeting.

Despite all these petty obstacles, which form so striking a commentary on the much vaunted English fair play, the truth has been making considerable headway, particularly in educated and influential quarters, so much so indeed that one is often surprised how it has come to pass that knowledge has been acquired where the means of information have been so artfully restricted. The Roman clergy in general know a good deal of the actual facts of the case and do not hesitate to express their sympathy; and the same is true of those occupying the higher ecclesiastical positions. Naturally there are exceptions. No one, for instance, expects the Allied Cardinals resident in this city to be favorably disposed: the pro-English tendencies of Cardinals de Lai and Pompili are pretty generally well known; while in a city where the cross-currents are so numerous and varied it is only to be expected that several individuals would be won over by the resounding arguments of astute Albion.

It is not a little curious that the one newspaper which is most careful in printing all sorts of things against us, and just as careful in excluding anything that could tell in our favor, is the *Osservatore Romano*, which is sometimes called the official organ of the Holy See. It can be called so, however, only in a very limited sense—first because it is subsidised by the Holy See; and secondly because it is the recognised medium through which official announcements are sometimes issued. But outside such announcements, it has no official authority whatever; and its editorial attitude is its own and no one else's. With regard to the point in question just now, readers may take for granted without any hesitation that the *Osservatore* does not reflect the mind of the Holy See, or indeed of any authority in this city. Those who want to form some sort of idea as to what is likely to be the attitude prevalent in high quarters will find the best index in the well-chosen words used by Mgr. Cerretti in his address at the jubilee of Cardinal Gibbons, when, speaking of Ireland, he told his hearers of "the many fond hopes and desires" We cherish for that country. Careful observers note that in using the pronoun We the Monsignor was not speaking merely in his own name; and they also are inclined to attribute to his influence the thorough conversion of the Cardinal of Baltimore from his previous attitude of aloofness or indifference into one of friendly and energetic sympathy. It would be easy to labor this point at greater length; but the intelligent reader will have little difficulty in drawing obvious conclusions.

Meanwhile it may not be uninteresting to review the objections that have obtained anything like currency here against the application of self-determination to Ireland.

First there comes the usual chestnut that it would be injurious to the Catholic Church. This line of argument, which is intended to affect ecclesiastical circles, but which meets with but limited success, is propounded by a certain number of English Catholics and by a little group of Irishmen here who lose no opportunity of painting the present Irish leaders as unchristian knaves and their followers as thoughtless dupes.

Side by side with this runs the venerable bogey of the danger of exposing the Protestant minority to the risk of persecution at the hands of the Catholic majority of their fellow-countrymen, who naturally are represented as the essence of bigotry while the others are painted as enlightened, successful, prosperous business men who have made their province into a paradise

Consulting Rooms :
Opp. Masonic Hotel,
Napier



Visits
Hastings Tuesdays
At Union Bank Chambers