

THE ANGLO-IRISH ACT OF UNION

(By ALFRED W. McCANN, in America.)

Americans of Irish extraction as a rule are unfamiliar with the Act of Union passed in 1800, which destroyed the Parliament of Ireland by fusing it with the Parliament of England. We are hearing much of the "Union" nowadays, and there is nothing remarkable in the phenomenon that reveals scores of well-meaning, rightly-disposed, patriotic American citizens, profoundly impressed by the British argument that the Irish question is merely a domestic one, being to England what the negro question was to the United States.

Irishmen in Ireland, however, know how the Union was effected, following the defeat of the measure when first proposed in the House of Commons in 1799. They know how the Government dismissed from office everyone who voted against the Union in 1799; how it devoted its efforts to bribing members during the recess; how peerages, bishoprics, seats on the bench and commands in the army were freely given in exchange for votes for the Union. There are many aspects of the Union with which even the Irish in Ireland are unfamiliar, and a still larger number with which Americans of Irish extraction are unfamiliar. It is not surprising, therefore, that Americans who have no trace of Irish in them should be wholly unfamiliar with the Union sophistry.

Few are the Americans who know that in the destruction of the Irish Parliament, 1800, and in the Act of Union that followed it, 22 Irish peerages were created; that five peers received English peerages and 20 peers received higher titles; that 84 boroughs were disfranchised, treated as private property, compensation (bribes) being given for that "property" to their patrons. They do not know that each seat was valued at £7500, and the whole sum awarded as compensation amounted to £1,260,000. They never heard that Lord Downshire received £52,000 as the owner of seven borough seats, or that £45,000 apiece went to Lords Shannon and Ely. They do not know that 63 members, who refused to vote for the destruction of their native Parliament as the bribed patrons of their seats demanded, vacated their seats, which were filled at once by Englishmen and Scotchmen, who immediately voted away a Parliament, in the continuation of which they had no interest and for the destruction of which they had accepted bribes.

The British are telling Americans now, and ex-President Taft is echoing the British argument, that the United States fought to preserve the Union of North and South, wherefore the United States cannot now advocate any separation of the Union of Ireland with England.

Americans know that the Union between the North and the South was a real Union, entered into by a sacred covenant of voluntary origin. The people of the South and the North were of the same blood. They shared equally with each other in the laws and institutions of their own making. The bonds that united them had been wrought by generations of mutual endeavor. In that Union between North and South there was no consciousness of a separate nationality. All were on a parity with each other before the law; nowhere was there discrimination, special privilege, or oppression. This was indeed a Union, and when the South attempted separation civil war resulted that the very foundation of our common liberty might not be undermined. Such a Union which the United States fought to maintain is in no sense similar to the Union now referred to by ex-President Taft and the British in America.

Besides the £1,260,000 given as "compensation" to the patrons of the boroughs disfranchised by the Act of Union, £3,000,000 extra were expended in actual payment to the persons who voted for the Union. Of the 300 members of the Irish House of Commons, 115 could not be reached by promises of promotion or reward. All of them voted against the Union, which

was carried by a majority of whom only seven were unbribed.

Lord Byron, speaking in the House of Lords, April 21, 1812, said of this unholy marriage, which ex-President Taft now compares with the Union between North and South: "If it must be called a union, it is a union of the shark with his prey; the spoiler swallows up his victim and they become one and inseparable. Thus has Great Britain swallowed up the Parliament of Ireland, the Constitution of Ireland, the independence of Ireland." Seventy-four years later, April 16, 1886, Gladstone declared:—

"I have avoided that subject because I did not want to enter into the details of it. It is dreadful to read the language of Lord Cornwallis and the disgust of an honorable mind at the transactions in which he found himself under the painful necessity of engaging. I will only say that we obtained that Union between England and Ireland against the sense of every class of the community, by wholesale bribery and unblushing intimidation."

Americans can understand that where a real union exists a separation is impossible, but they can also understand that there can be no separation where there is no Union. The aspects of the Irish issue which even the Irish in Ireland do not fully appreciate are legion. Many of them, if not all of them, assume that the acts of bribery by which the Union was accomplished were specially devised instrumentalities, the operations of which were peculiarly anti-Irish. The facts are that bribery, corruption, and blackmail were characteristic of the period, and that England herself suffered losses through their operations, from which, to this day, she has never recovered. It would be remarkable indeed if self-respecting Englishmen persisted, as they do persist, in holding fast to the fruits of corruption, were their sentiments, convictions, and conduct not traceable to a past that even Gladstone hesitated to explore.

At the time of the seduction of the Irish Parliament, a Parliament in which Catholics were not allowed to sit, not only were royal persons dealing in army commissions, but they were also selling bishoprics and deaneries. The regulation price for securing army commissions by which young officers were promoted over the heads of veterans was fixed by the degree of superiority involved. An ensigncy was sold for £200, a lieutenantcy for £400, a captaincy for £700. The rank of major commanded £900. Places were openly bought and sold, so vicious had become the corruptions of the times. Such public advertisements as the following, from the *Morning Post*, June 14, 1800, were common:

"Public Offices.—A young man of good connections, well educated in writing and accounts, and can find security, wishes for a Clerkship in any of the public offices. Any lady or gentleman having interest to procure such a situation will be presented with the full value of the place. The greatest secrecy and honor will be observed."

So frequent were these advertisements that it became necessary to take official notice of them, as note the following from *The Dawn of the XIXth Century in England*, by John Ashton (T. Fisher Unwin, London, 1906):—

"Custom House, London, December 7, 1902.—Whereas advertisements have at different times appeared in the Newspapers offering Sums of Money for the procuring of places, the Commissioners of his Majesty's Customs think it necessary to have it generally known that, in addition to the punishment which the Common Law would inflict upon the offence of bribing or attempting to bribe any person entrusted with the disposal of any Office, the Statute passed in the fifth and sixth year of the Reign of King Edward the Sixth inflicts the penalty of incapacity to hold such office in the person purchasing it and the forfeiture of office in the person selling it."

The Government of England finally became so corrupt that on January 27, 1809, G. Lloyd Wardell, M.P. for Oakhampton, began an indictment of the Duke of York before the House of Commons. He pro-