

HOME RULE AND RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE

THE OPINIONS OF LEADING PROTESTANTS

An instructive pamphlet has just been published by the Irish Press Agency. It is entitled 'Religious Intolerance under Home Rule,' and consists mainly of replies by Protestants, representative of every phase of Irish official, professional, and commercial life, to a query by Mr. McVeagh, M.P., as to their treatment in overwhelmingly Catholic districts in all parts of Ireland.

At every bye-election in Great Britain (says Mr. McVeagh), an army of speakers and canvassers, paid by the day on a generous scale, is imported from Ulster, and is employed on the ignoble work of slandering their own countrymen, and of painting lurid pictures of the intolerance which Protestants are likely to experience under Home Rule at the hands of a Catholic majority. It seemed to me, however, that the most effective method of reply would be to invite leading and representative non-Catholics in all parts of Ireland to state their views; and the replies to a circular letter are embodied in the following pages. The list might be indefinitely extended, but sufficient statements are herein set forth to demonstrate the absurdity of the suggestion. A large number of Protestant clergymen hold similar views, but are unwilling to publish them, as the members of their congregations are divided in opinion on the subject. Many heads of commercial houses have also written me that the publication of their opinions might injure their business amongst Unionist clients, and that they therefore prefer to remain silent. Neither have I embodied the opinions of members of the Government or of permanent officials: but it may not be amiss to set forth the fact that the Earl of Aberdeen, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland and ex-High Commissioner of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, sent the following telegram to Mr. J. M. Henderson, M.P., during the general election in December, 1910:—

The Lord Lieutenant and Some of His Predecessors.

'You are entirely at liberty to quote me as declaring to you that, after years of continuous residence in Ireland, watching affairs and meeting people of every class and creed, I am profoundly impressed as to the baselessness of alarm about the consequences of Home Rule. On Home Rule for Ireland I repeat and emphasise the opinion of my former telegrams, especially regarding apprehension of religious intolerance. Numerous Protestant ministers in Roman Catholic parts of Ireland support me in this view.'

Lord Aberdeen, in those and similar pronouncements, was in accord with one of the most single-minded, devoted, and capable men who ever held the position of Irish Viceroy, the late Earl Spencer, who, speaking at Chester in 1886, declared:—

'I have had some experience of Ireland, and yet I do not know any specific instance where there has been the exercise of religious intolerance on the part of the Roman Catholics against their Protestant countrymen. There has been, I deeply regret to say, constant signs of bitter religious animosity. But where has it been shown? Not in those provinces where the Roman Catholics greatly preponderate, but in Ulster, where more than one-half of the population belong to the Protestant faith.'

I may add that another distinguished nobleman who has filled the office of Lord Lieutenant of Ireland as well as other not less important offices of State, the Marquis of Crewe, writes me under date of June 12, 1911:—

'It is evident that a renewed attempt is to be made to alarm public opinion in England, Scotland, and Wales, by excited forecasts of the dangers and disabilities which Protestants may expect to undergo under a system of Home Rule in Ireland. In 1886 and 1893 the animosity between classes, largely agrarian in its origin, was far stronger than it is at present, and the line of cleavage roughly followed that of religious difference. But even in those years, as I well remember, it was evident that the possibilities of intolerance in a

self-governed Ireland were deliberately and grossly exaggerated, with a party motive. Now, when the various classes know each other better, and there is less occasion for friction, the attempt to excite religious discord will utterly fail, as I firmly believe. Even in the old days I often heard these melodramatic terrors ridiculed by sensible Unionists; and I cannot doubt that the number is now far greater of those who are willing to examine Home Rule on its merits, as a piece of political machinery, without endeavoring to raise a cloud of mistrust and prejudice.'

From North-West Ulster.

Here are excerpts from three letters written by prominent Protestants who reside in North-west Ulster. Mr. Edward Archdale, J.P., D.L., belongs to a family long connected with public affairs in Fermanagh and Tyrone. He says:—

'I have every reason to repudiate the idea that the grant of Self-Government to Ireland would result in the religious persecution of Protestants. There does not appear to be a grain of evidence in support of such a charge. I consider the publicly expressed fears and forebodings of many North of Ireland Protestants in this respect are quite unfounded. My experience of my Roman Catholic countrymen, after more than thirty years' continued residence in Ireland, the latter twelve of them as a landowner and large employer of labor, and observation of their action on public bodies, convinces me that the charge of favoring persecution of Protestants in any shape or form is a most unjust one. Some of the worthiest and most trustworthy men in my employment are Roman Catholics. They have always lived on the friendliest terms with my Protestant employees. No such thing as a religious quarrel has ever been heard of. A few years ago they subscribed, of their own wish, to a wedding present for the Rector of this parish. Neither from a political nor a religious standpoint have I any apprehension that Home Rule would result in the persecution of Protestants.'

Mr. Joseph Alexander, LL.D., Derry City, adds his testimony:—

'I see no reason to suppose that there will be any danger of intolerance under Home Rule, assuming that Home Rule was granted. Speaking for myself, as a Protestant, I may say that I have always lived on the very best terms with all my Catholic neighbors in this district, and I think all my friends could say the same. Some of my truest friends, and I might also say clients, have always been Catholics. So far as this part of the country is concerned, there is absolutely nothing in this cry of intolerance.'

And Mr. John Anderson, J.P., Clonelly, Co. Fermanagh, writes in the course of a long letter:—

'I am a Methodist, living in the Northern portion of County Fermanagh, almost on the border of County Donegal, and have an intimate knowledge of the conditions of life, religious and political, prevailing in both counties. It is with complete confidence I give expression to the opinion that the establishment of an Irish Parliament will not have, as one of its consequences, the religious persecution of Protestants. . . . As showing the spirit of fair play that prevails amongst the Roman Catholic population, I might mention that at the recent triennial election under the Local Government in a division of the County Donegal, where the Roman Catholics in proportion to Protestants are about three to one, they returned the son of a Protestant Rector as their representative in preference to a Roman Catholic, who contested the seat. There are many such instances. . . . I believe the establishment of an Irish Parliament to deal with Irish domestic affairs would tend to allay any religious animosity that may still exist, and would unite Irishmen of all religious creeds in the desire to promote the welfare of their native land, and repair the ruins of the Irish Nation, for the love of which Protestants and Catholics have alike in the past shed their blood.'

Views of Residents in Leinster and Munster.

Professor W. F. Barrett, an eminent Dublin Protestant, says:—

'Nowhere have I met with a more cordial welcome and greater hospitality than in Cork and in the South-