

ULSTER AND HOME RULE

TWO WELL-KNOWN WRITERS ON THE SUBJECT

Frank Morton, the gifted and brilliant writer whose name is a household word throughout Australasia, has been discoursing on Home Rule in a North Island paper; and this is what he has to say: 'Now that the Ulster madness is definitely commencing, sane people will wait with some anxiety to see what the Asquith Government will do. For some time to come Ulster will need to be dealt with firmly. If Mr. Asquith and his colleagues bungle this time, as they have bungled consistently in their treatment of the Suffragettes, the consequences may be more serious than any that we can now foresee. To the people of Greater Britain it becomes amazing that anybody should take the claims and noises of mad Ulster seriously. The case against Home Rule is based on sectarian prejudice, and is unworthy of a moment's consideration by honest modern men. We who enjoy Home Rule, and daily live in amity and good fellowship with our Catholic fellow-citizens, know that there is no justification for Ulster's behaviour, no foundation for Ulster's fears. The only grounds on which any man can fairly attack Home Rule are political and humanitarian grounds. We can no longer pretend that religion can be allowed to stand in the way of reform; and bigotry, which alone stands opposed to Home Rule, is the vilest parasite of religion.'

'Let me cite for you a few statements made by Mr. Harold Begbie, who went to Ireland a Unionist and an anti-Catholic, and who returned in a few weeks a Home Ruler and a strong admirer of the Catholic people. First of all as to English treatment of Ireland in the past. It has been one long criminal blunder. Having failed signally to subdue the Irish, England set doggedly to work to exterminate them. Edmund Spenser gives us a glimpse of what happened. "Out of every corner of the woods and glens, they came creeping forth upon their hands, for their legs could not bear them; they looked like anatomies of death; they spoke like ghosts crying out of their graves; they did eat of the dead carriages, happy were they if they could find them, yea, and one another soon after, inasmuch as the very carcasses they spared not to scrape out of their graves. . . . In short space there were none almost left, and a most populous and plentiful country suddenly made void to man and beast."

Let me quote Mr. Begbie before I say too much. "Sir Arthur Chichester saw some children gnawing at the flesh of their starved mother. Lecky tells how old women lighted fires to attract children, whom they slew and devoured. The English soldiery put to the sword 'blind and feeble men, women, boys and girls, rich persons, idiots and old people.' M. Paul Dubois narrates: 'In the Desmond country, when all resistance was at an end, the soldiers forced the people into old barns, which they then set on fire, putting to the sword any who sought to escape. . . . Soldiers were seen to catch up children on the points of their swords, making them squirm in the air in their death agony. . . . Women were found hanged from trees, with the children at their bosoms strangled in the hair of their mothers.'

'Will you keep on remembering that all this is a tale of the treatment of Irish Catholics by English Protestants and Puritans. I cite it because the people who are setting themselves against this tardy attempt to give the Irish people a measure of justice is opposed by Protestants. Let us go on. "Not only did the English destroy crops and drive cattle into their own camps that the Irish might be starved, not only this, but they deliberately and with cunning purpose made a great slaughter of infants. The terrible phrase, almost the most terrible phrase in human records, 'Nits will be lice,' was the laughing, murderous and devilish justification for the slaughter of babes. The steel of England's might ran red with the blood of Irish infancy. Lips that had not learned to speak a human word, lips that knew nothing more than to hang

contented at the circle of the mother's breast, were twitched with agony, uttered screams of desperate pain, and grew purple in the wrench of violent death. Little feet that had but lately got the trick of balance ran, stumbled, and fell before the smoking swords of most inhuman murderers. Little hands that had but lately learned to fold themselves in prayer were raised in clamorous appeal for mercy to men who smote them down, and set their heels upon those stricken faces. 'Nits will be lice,' cried these slaughtering devils, and the beautiful flower of Irish childhood was crushed into the bloody ooze of a land that was like hell."

'To-day Belfast is at once the richest and poorest of Irish cities. There you may find huge fortunes, there the black depths of poverty and despair, squalid prostitution, the other rank flowers of evil that do not flourish in any one of the Catholic towns. And it is Belfast—Protestant Belfast—that revolts and cries out against the late dawn of Irish freedom! Let me give you an idea of how poor women are paid in Protestant Belfast. They provide their own sewing-machines, and their own thread. Children's pinafores (flounced and braided), 4½d per dozen. Women's chemises, 7½d per dozen. Women's aprons, 2½d per dozen. Men's shirts, 10d per dozen. Other things are in proportion. In the last week of December, for instance, a woman was observed embroidering small dots on cushion-covers; there were three hundred dots on each cushion, and for sewing these by hand she received the sum of one penny. She said that for a day's work of this kind she would have difficulty in making sixpence. The beautifully embroidered Irish linen that you see—the stuff that the smug Belfast traders put out to the world as made in Irish convents, represents the work of unhappy women who are worse housed and worse treated than any slaves the world has ever known. The ordinary rate of women's pay in Belfast is one penny per hour, and sometimes it falls below that. Do you wonder that Belfast alone among the Irish cities has its big class of prostitutes? Can you wonder? For my part, when I see the slaves so many, and the prostitutes proportionately so few, I can only cry out my admiration of the magnificent chastity of women. "Ireland desires neither to live upon our bounty," says Mr. Begbie, "nor to share the perils of our legislative experiments. She claims her freedom to make her own destiny. I am sure that Ireland will always be a small nation, and I hope that England may continue to be a great nation. I am as anxious to watch the experiment of England's attempt to live without relation to nature as Ireland's attempt to live without relation to materialism. But, on the whole, my sympathies are with Ireland. I think that Ireland is likely to be happier than England. I think her experiment is more beautiful than England's, and I think she will find it less difficult and troublesome to live outside materialism than England will find it easy to live outside natural conditions. And my book, I hope, may persuade all men in England to look at the Irish question without the distorting frenzy of faction, to honor Ireland for her sense of nationality, to reverence her for the beauty and simplicity, and to help with all the power they possess to win that relative and restricted freedom, proposed by the present measure of Irish self-government, without which it is impossible for her to continue her experiment with safety and with self-respect."

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