

people was that they trusted you too much, and allowed their representatives in this House to use their tremendous powers—the greatest powers that Irishmen ever had over your Parliament—only too feebly and with only too merciful a regard for your interests. Even when this war broke out Ireland could have destroyed you. One of your own statesmen then acknowledged that Ireland was the one bright spot on your horizon. What is Ireland's reward? Now, when in your wild ignorance you have taken it into your heads that the two latest Irish elections of South Armagh and Waterford show* that the spirit of Sinn Fein is dying away, you have the country disarmed and are holding it down under Martial Law. You have your gaols packed with political prisoners whom you are treating as common felons for the selfsame offence of drilling a Volunteer Army, for which two of the most distinguished leaders of the Ulster Volunteers have been promoted to be Cabinet Ministers. We have witnessed to-night another exhibition of the old trick of mixing up the promise of a milk-and-water Home Rule Bill which you know will come to nothing with a proposal of brutal military coercion by which you ask the Irish people to shed torrents of their blood—I suppose by way of gratitude to the Prime Minister for casting to the winds, as he did to-night, another solemn promise to the Irish nation. . . . If you expect co-operation or gratitude all I can tell you is you will receive nothing and deserve nothing but the destitution of a people who only a few months ago were all but on their knees proffering you their friendship and their allegiance. I say all this with bitter regret, because you have compelled me to renounce those dreams of a true and permanent reconciliation between these two countries with which I can truly say my thoughts have been occupied night and day for the past fifteen years. . . . I do not want on an occasion of this kind to accentuate differences amongst Irish Nationalists. You have perhaps by this proposal to-night done something to lessen those differences and to ensure that however serious our differences have been and are, on this question of resistance to Conscription you will find all Irish Nationalists the world over who are worth their salt standing shoulder to shoulder against you. I dare say you have machine guns enough to beat down armed resistance, although you may not find it as easy a job as the Prime Minister imagines, but even if you succeed your troubles with Ireland shall be only beginning. Your own experience ought to have taught you that, in the 800 years you have spent in trying, you have never yet completely conquered Ireland and you never shall. What you will do, I am afraid, will be to drive resistance into other channels with which, with all your military power, you will never be able to deal, and you will be digging a gulf of hatred between the two countries which no living man will see bridged over again. I hate to say it in your present hour of trouble, but in my solemn belief it is the truth. By this Bill, instead of winning soldiers for your army, you are calling down

upon your heads the execrations of the entire Irish race in America and Australia and Canada, as well as in every honest Irish home, if not among the five hundred thousand men of Irish blood in your own military camps, and you are driving millions of the best men of our race to turn away their eyes from this Parliament for ever."

Never was perfidy more swiftly punished. To the demand for her best blood, coming from the Government which had just broken its word twice over, by the fraudulent Convention, and by the violation of its pledge to exempt her from Conscription, Ireland made answer that her blood would be spent rather in resisting the decree of her oppressors, and to the world's amaze, it was the all but unarmed "small nationality" that succeeded, and it was the Power counting its soldiers by millions that went down in the encounter. The happy idea of turning that resistance into a heavensent bond of National Unity occurred to the Lord Mayor of Dublin (Ald. O'Neill), who can truly be described as the only Irishman of our time, who lived through long years of civil war, and belonged to no Party, but gave noble service to them all. He summoned a Mansion House Conference at which the leaders of all sections met around the same board to organise the resistance. The Conference was so happily constituted as to deserve the description of it given by the official organ of Sinn Fein—*The Irish Bulletin*—that "it formed a National Cabinet." Its members were—For the Sinn Fein Party, Mr. de Valera and Mr. Arthur Griffith; for the Hibernian Party—Mr. Dillon and Mr. Devlin; for the All-for-Ireland Party, Mr. T. M. Healy and myself; and for the Irish Labor Party, Messrs. Johnston, O'Brien, and Egan. The country was fused as it was never fused before by the common danger into a glowing National unity so complete that any order countersigned by "the National Cabinet" would have been obeyed without question by every Nationalist of the race.

Its sittings gave me my first opportunities of getting acquainted with Mr. de Valera. His transparent sincerity, his gentleness and equability captured the hearts of us all. His gaunt frame and sad eyes deeply buried in their sockets had much of the Dantesque suggestion of "the man who had been in hell." His was that subtle blend of virility and emotion which the Americans mean when they speak of "a magnetic man." Even the obstinacy (and it was sometimes trying) with which he would defend a thesis, as though it were a point in pure mathematics, with more than the French bigotry for logic, became tolerable enough when, with a boyish smile, he would say: "You will bear with me, won't you? You know I am an old schoolmaster." On the other hand the Memphis Sphinx could not well have been more mute than was Mr. Arthur Griffith during these consultations, but his silence had something of the placid strength and assuredness of that granitic Egyptian countenance. Nobody acquainted with his abundant and excellent work as a publicist will suspect that he said nothing because he had nothing to say. So long as all went well, he was content to listen. He

raised no difficulties. He gave no hint of personal preferences or fads. Throughout our sittings, Mr. Healy was considerate and conciliatory to a degree that took away the breath of Mr. Dillon himself, and he contributed to our proceedings in the form of an Address to President Wilson, a statement of Ireland's historic case which will deserve to live in our National archives as a State paper of classic value. On the day of our first meeting at the Mansion House, the Irish Bishops were meeting also at Maynooth, twelve miles away. It will always be counted among my most consolatory memories that it was my good fortune to frame for submission to the Bishops a resolution outlining the form of National Resistance to be adopted. It was Mr. de Valera who drew up the words of the Anti-Conscription Pledge which we suggested should be solemnly taken in every parish in the country on the following Sunday. It was, indeed, a drastic one, and led to a logomachy between its author and Mr. Dillon so prolonged that I had to appeal to the Lord Mayor to force a decision, or the Bishops would have dispersed and our deputation would arrive too late. The necessity for haste was justified. When the deputation reached Maynooth, the Bishops had concluded their meeting with a resolution energetic enough as a Platonic protest against conscription but as water unto wine compared with the specific declaration of war of which our deputation were the bearers. Fortunately their Lordships reassembled and adopted with but few changes even of words the substance of our recommendations "solemnly pledging the Nation to resist onscription by the most effectual means at their disposal," and inaugurating the National resistance by a Mass of Intercession in every church in the island to be followed by the public administration of the Pledge. The Bishops, who have not always been so fortunate in their dealings with Irish political affairs, deserve the lasting gratitude of the nation for the fortitude (and it was greater than persons without intimate secret knowledge could estimate) with which they faced all the perils of saving their race. It was the Bishops' solemn benediction to the resistance "by the most effectual means at the disposal of the Irish people" which killed onscription.

Next, of course, to the known determination of the youth of the country to be worthy of their lead and to resist unto blood. Even the appalling experiences of the war let loose later on by Sir Hamar Greenwood will scarcely enable posterity to realise in what a perfect ecstasy of self-sacrifice the young men were preparing to meet conscription foot to foot. The Government on its own side seemed not less resolute. Every regiment that could be spared was hurried over to Ireland, and Field Marshal French, fresh from the horrors of the Flanders battlefields, was sent over as Commander-in-Chief to superintend the operations which were to begin "in a week or two." Early on the morning of the day on which the Mansion House Conference was to hold its first meeting, I was awakened in my bedroom at the Shelbourne Hotel by the noise of a military band escorting Field-Marshal French on his arrival by

* Five Hibernians were returned.

J. E. Fitzgerald

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