

Mr. Devlin's own constituency of West Belfast, in such a manner that the Nationalist Division of the Falls Road was swamped by the addition of two undiluted Orange Divisions. When he and his brother withdrawers came back to register a last impassioned demand for "an Undivided Ireland" on the Third Reading, it was to find that he had been effectually gerrymandered out of the Imperial Parliament for life, and the last nail driven in the coffin of the Board of Erin Ascendancy.

CHAPTER XXVI.—PEACEFUL SELF-DETERMINATION.

Apologists for the infamies perpetrated by the Black-and-Tans, under the instructions of British Ministers, have striven hard to represent these as "reprisals" for provocations more infamous still. The men they warred upon were a "murder gang" who began by the wholesale assassination of defenceless police men and soldiers, and the amiable guardians of the peace whom Sir Hamar Greenwood picked out from the off-scourings of a demobilised army only came to the rescue of society by "taking the assassins by the throat." It would not be easy for impudence to invent a grosser reversal of the true sequence of events. "The murder gang" was a nation engaged in putting bloodlessly in practice the right of "self-determination for the small nations," by the promulgation of which England had won the war, and it was the British statesmen who had just rewarded with their liberty the revolted subjects of Austria for throwing off their allegiance, who started a war of brute force against their Irish subjects for following the example.

There were two distinct phases in the warfare which ended in the surrender of Mr. Lloyd George and Sir Hamar Greenwood; and in both it was England which was the aggressor. In the first phase (1917-'18) they were dealing with a nation peacefully exercising the right of self-determination; in the second (1918-'21) with an Irish Republican Army whom they had deliberately goaded and forced into action. From the time when the General Election had invested Sinn Fein with unchallenged authority as the spokesmen of their nation, they proceeded, as was their indisputable right under the new law of nations, to supersede English rule by inducing the local governing bodies to renounce any connection with Dublin Castle and by organising a volunteer police force and Arbitration Courts to enforce a law and order and a system of public justice of their own, leaving the garrisons and Royal Irish Constabulary of England in isolated impotence within their barrack walls. It was a scheme of "peaceful penetration" of singular daring, and by reason of its very bloodlessness was succeeding with a celerity which drove the choleric soldiers and bureaucrats of Dublin Castle to distraction. The insufferable offence was that the Royal Irish Constabulary was mysteriously melting away under their eyes by voluntary resignation.

The shrewdest blow aimed at English rule by the Sinn Fein leaders was the disorganisation of that redoubtable force. The Constabulary were the nerve-track by which

Dublin Castle transmitted its orders to and received its information from the remotest parishes in the country; the network of espionage that penetrated every household; the army which had its detachment ready in every village to lay its heavy hand on the first stirrings of disaffection. It was assuredly the break-up of these village garrisons that eventually deprived the central government of its eyes and ears and hands, and the regular army forces which replaced them, irresistible though they were against armed opposition in the field, could but stagger about blindly in dealing with the hidden local forces respecting which the Constabulary could once have put them in possession of the most accurate particulars of place and persons. But it is a perversion of the truth to pretend that it was by violence and assassination the Royal Irish Constabulary was broken up. What dismayed the Castle authorities most was that, on the contrary, the process was throughout the years 1917 and 1918 a bloodless one, working within the body like some obscure epidemic; it sprang largely from the fact that the enthusiasm with which the rest of their countrymen were inflamed was infecting the younger and more generous-hearted of the Force, and no doubt, also, from the sharp pressure of local opinion upon their relatives in the country, and of those relatives themselves for whom it became an intolerable disgrace that men of their blood should stand in the way of the universal National uprising. It will be found that, long before the cruel individual assassinations that subsequently nearly decimated the Royal Irish Constabulary, some 2500 of its best men had voluntarily resigned their connection with a service that had become hateful, and it was the dread that thousands more were on the point of imitating their example that drove the advisers of Sir Hamar Greenwood to endeavour to stop the *défringolade* by flooding the Irish Force with the infamous Black-and-Tans, and thereby involved the Constabulary in the hell of barbarities and reprisals through which the rest of their countrymen were forced to pass. History will establish it as one of the fundamental truths of those awful times that it was not the assassinations which brought the Black-and-Tans, but the Black-and-Tans who gave the signal for the assassinations, and that, of course, even the Black-and-Tans were less culpable than their pay-masters.

There was another motive, baser still, for hastening to kill the process of peaceful self-determination before it was completed. In 1918 the General Election was pending. Sinn Fein was busy with its arrangements for a trial of strength on whose upshot it would depend whether or not Sinn Fein could speak as the authorised fiduciary of the nation. The old Hibernian Party was still no less busy, and was little less sanguine of its chances. The Hibernian successes in West Cork, Waterford, and Armagh—the last that visited their banners—had filled them with the most extravagant hopes. One need not assume that Mr. Dillon, who still retained some portion of the influence which had made him the principal adviser of the Castle before the Easter Week rebellion, had

anything to say to the measures now taken by the official wirepullers. But the Hibernians still held 74 seats, and anything might happen at the polls. Accordingly, the Sinn Fein Director of Electioneering was snapped up, some of his principal assistants in the provinces were arrested and their confidential documents confiscated, and the most dreaded of the Sinn Fein candidates and organisers were kidnapped and shut up in Internment Camps. The General Election might still be saved, if the Sinn Fein election arrangements could be sufficiently dislocated and the electors properly overawed. It all turned out, as anybody except the Tapers and Tadpoles of politics might have known. It did not alter the fate of the Hibernians at the General Election, but it did help to cripple the pacificators in their way of working out self-determination and it made the war spirits of the I.R.A. the masters of the situation.

The revolution by which the Royal Irish Constabulary was silently falling to pieces and their places taken by a Volunteer police, under whose protection new Courts of Justice were administering impartial fair play to Unionist and Nationalist alike, and the local government of the country carried on with astonishing efficiency and with absolute incorruptibility, was in reality only the legitimate application of those principles of self-determination which England and her Allies had consecrated in the Treaty of Versailles, and it was the knowledge that the Government of the country was slipping away from them, without armed rebellion, by the mere organised enforcement of the people's will, that impelled the bureaucrats of Dublin Castle, since the crimeless will of the people was proving too strong for them, to make the people's will itself the worst of crimes and let loose the dogs of war to put it down with bloody tooth and claw.

(To be continued.)

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