

THE POPE AND IRISH PEACE

"In ancient Greece a slave who was ill-treated had the right to be sold to another master, but the subject nation has no world tribunal to appeal to, nothing but the Master of Life, that indefinable something we surmise in the government of the Cosmos. So here in Ireland people endure grimly, without hope of any other nation's intervention, waiting for world circumstance to enable them to escape from their conquerors, or for the mills of God to come at last in their grinding to the British Empire as they came to the Roman Empire, the Chaldean and other empires whose sins and magnificence have sunk far behind time.

"I am trying to interpret the mood of my countrymen rather than to express my own feelings. For myself I do not care whether I am governed from Moscow or Peking if my countrymen are happy. I am by profession an artist and man of letters, and I find the consolations of life in things with which Governments cannot interfere, in the light and beauty the Earth puts forth for her children. The words 'republic' or 'empire' are opaque words to me. I cannot see through them any beauty or majesty to which they inevitably lead. But I do believe in freedom. If the universe has any meaning at all, it exists for the purposes of soul, and men or nations denied essential freedom cannot fulfil their destiny, or illuminate earth with light or wisdom from that divinity without them, or mould external circumstance into the image of the Heaven they conceive in their hearts."—*The Inner and the Outer Ireland.* By A. E. (Talbot Press, Dublin, 2d.)

It is said by a new school of psychologists that men and women forget what they want to forget and learn what they want to learn (says the *Nation* and the *Athenaeum*). Month after month a few public men have been trying to make the British people realise the terrible truth about Ireland. Those who knew something of the truth imagined that they had only to communicate their knowledge to make the nation repudiate the policy and conduct which led to such disgrace and such disaster. Gradually they found out that the ignorance they were trying to dissipate was a semi-wilful ignorance, and that men and women closed their eyes and their ears, because they preferred to be accessories to injustice rather than to face a painful truth. They were incapable of the moral resolution that was needed to arrest this fatal and dishonoring policy or they despaired of changing it, and they chose rather to leave their reputation and their fate to the most inexorable of masters, the event.

A shock has come this week to this cowardly apathy in revelations from a quarter that cannot be disregarded. General Crozier was the man chosen by Ministers to command their special force of Auxiliary Police. They could hardly have been guilty of the unspeakable cynicism of appointing a man they considered untrustworthy for such a task, and therefore their accuser is a man who had earned their confidence. This officer brings against the administration charges that put into the shade those on which war criminals are being tried at this moment in Leipzig. He charges officers in high position with complicity in murder; with conspiracy to prevent just trials; with having screened men guilty of heinous offences; and he declares that the reports and complaints of responsible officers have been suppressed by Dublin Castle. The terrible rumors that began in whispers in Ireland but have lately been passing round the benches of the House of Commons, receive confirmation from this high authority. To substantiate such accusations will be no easy matter. But no Government in the world can refuse an inquiry into such charges unless it is prepared to take its place publicly and confessedly by the side of the system that Abdul Hamid controlled from Constantinople twenty years ago.

We have said that the horrors of our terrorist system in Ireland have made comparatively little impression on public opinion in this country. Roughly speaking, the nation had to choose between two courses, each involving a sacrifice. We had either to make some sacrifice of the kind of prestige that is vulgarly associated with power, or it might be some sacrifice of our interests as we regarded them, or to make some sacrifice of the honorable traditions

of our history. Few people faced the truth about the second sacrifice. They said to themselves, "We cannot make the first sacrifice, and we hope the second sacrifice will not be very serious in extent or character; that we shall not have to depart very far from our professedly Liberal principles." What has happened has been that having yielded to this temptation, Ministers have gone on from one sacrifice to another until they have thrown overboard not merely Liberal policy, but Christian principles. Our rule in Ireland depends at this moment on the repudiation of every Christian doctrine, for it asserts and maintains that the life of an Irishman is of less moment than the life of an Englishman; that justice is in the old phrase the right of the stronger; and that there is no cruelty or wrong that we may not justly inflict if we think that thereby we strengthen our hold on Ireland. Once you adopt this train of reasoning, there is no longer any question whether or not your rule will be marked by crime and injustice: the only question that arises is the question of the degree and kind of the injustice that you inflict.

The nature and extent of this abandonment of all civilised practice, if they have not moved politicians, have made a serious impression on the chief leaders of religious thought. The Church of England has been, as a rule, in the past a conservative institution in the narrowest sense of the word. Many of its leaders have shown themselves in this crisis a conservative institution in the best sense of the word. They have refused to accept the doctrine that frightfulness is a reputable method of government when it is in the right hands, and that the Christian spirit has no place in the life of a nation. This week there has been a still more powerful religious intervention in the Irish case. The Pope's letter, carrying a subscription to the White Cross of 200,000 lire, proceeds from a statement of the devastation of Ireland and its cause to a definite peace proposal. Statement, analysis of cause, and peace proposal are alike significant. Equally to be noted is the occasion of its publication. Never before was the Vatican so abundantly furnished with the facts of the Irish situation from the most divergent sources. One is aware of the attempts, prolonged over three Papacies by official, semi-official, and private personages and missions to induce the Vatican to look with new hostility on the Irish movement. We have, in this letter, its net result. The Holy See does not depart from the neutral attitude. But this is not the cold neutrality of a spectator. The Pope does not stigmatise this conflict of two nations as the work of a murder-gang or the outburst of a faction against authority. He sees an equality of strife between Irish and English, and, deploring and tracing its evils, attributes "the indignity of devastation and slaughter to which Ireland is subjected" in great part to the recent war, "for neither has sufficient consideration been given to the desires of nations, nor have the fruits of peace which people promised to themselves been reaped." Broken promises and the frustration of legitimate desires are the sources of this bitter struggle, wherein "property and homes are being ruthlessly and disgracefully laid waste, and villages and farmsteads being set aflame." In these words something like a world-judgement has been delivered.

It is followed by a peace proposal. The Pope recommends a recent suggestion "of distinguished men and skilled politicians" to refer the question at issue to "some body of men selected by the whole Irish nation" whose findings would be reviewed by "influential men of both parties." The suggestion is in harmony with the recent proposal of a Constituent Assembly to follow the results of the present elections. It is certain that Sinn Féin must give its most serious consideration to this proposal. It is therefore possible, if there is any real desire on the part of Mr. Lloyd George's Government to secure peace, that a favorable hour has struck. What is the machinery available? There are 128 members from Southern Ireland and 52 from the North to constitute the "body of men selected by the whole Irish nation." It may be said at once that this is not the exact body the country would select in ordinary circumstances to form a Constituent Assembly. It is too exclusively a body elected by a country in a state of war to carry through that war towards fixed ends. Minorities, not in their totality negligible, sub-