

## Our Roman Letter

(By "STANNOUS.")

Within the past few weeks an Irish delegation has been quietly but definitely opened here in Rome. The delegate is Mr. George Gavan-Duffy, the Dail Eireann member for South Dublin. He came to us six months ago, but, owing to the general house-shortage in Rome, he has been compelled to live in hotel apartments until quite recently. Now he has acquired a very beautiful house in one of the principal boulevards of the city, where he and his charming wife preside over a truly Irish salon. Irishmen visiting the Eternal City are certain of a welcome at their home. With their two little children, who by the way, recently received their First Holy Communion from the hands of the Holy Father himself, they are the centre of interest to Irishmen in Rome. Mr. Duffy came here from Paris, where he had been in charge of the Irish delegation to the French people. Perhaps it would be more correct to say that Mr. Duffy came here from Brussels, where he had lived for some three months after leaving the French capital. During his stay in Belgium he was personally responsible for bringing the question of Ireland's claims under the notice of His Eminence Cardinal Mercier. The result of that activity of the Irish envoy was seen in the joint Pastoral on Ireland issued by the Belgian Episcopate last Christmas. His work here has been characterised by a quiet efficiency that, in the opinion of those competent to judge, augurs well for the ultimate success of his mission in Rome. Irishmen resident here cannot help noticing that public interest in the Irish problem has increased by leaps and bounds since his arrival. Whether the explanation of that indubitable fact is to be found in Mr. Duffy's diplomatic activities or in causes outside the sphere of his work is known, of course, only to the initiated.

My attention has been directed to a Roman paragraph which has recently appeared in an Irish contemporary. The paragraph, which may be read in the *Irish Catholic* in its issue of June 25 last, was not included in the ordinary Rome Letter. Indeed I find that the Rome correspondent of that paper disclaims all responsibility for it. It purports to contain the following information:—

"A message from Rome states that on the 17th inst., the Pope received in private audience the Rev. Finbar Ryan, Provincial of the Irish Dominicans, who was accompanied by Rev. Louis Nolan, of the Dominican Church of St. Clement's in Rome. The Pope took the opportunity to learn at first-hand, particulars of the present state of affairs in Ireland."

It is to be noted that the paragraph does not tell us, unless perhaps by implication, from which of the rev. gentlemen the Holy Father sought the first-hand information on the state of affairs in Ireland. It would appear that first-hand information on the state of Ireland has been hitherto little known at the Vatican. More than one Irishman in the Eternal City would look very glum indeed if it were to be suggested that His Holiness had to depend for such information on Rev. Louis Nolan.

Few items of Irish news have caused such a thrill in Italy as the report of the Maynooth statement of the Irish Episcopate on the crisis in Ireland. One sentence in the historic pronouncement has been seized on by the logical Latin mind—the sentence wherein the Bishops formally state the position of the Irish people in this latest phase of the long struggle for national independence:—"Until repression ceases, and the right of Ireland to choose her own form of government is recognised, there is no prospect that peace will reign amongst us, or that the reconciliation which His Holiness so ardently desires will be accomplished."

This sentence, which is certainly not lacking in clearness, has been the subject of much discussion here. It is regarded on all sides as giving definite episcopal approval to the Sinn Fein position. The fact that it follows the recent paternal letter of His Holiness to His Eminence Cardinal Logue and that it is in some degree an official reply to that Papal letter renders it of special interest to the Catholics of Italy and indeed to all Catholics throughout the world. Sitting here in Rome and reading that Maynooth pronouncement, at least one Irishman cannot help recalling another such episcopal meeting and

another such episcopal appeal—the meeting and statement of the Irish Bishops at Kilkenny on May 10, 1642, in circumstances of national stress and strain almost the same as obtain in Ireland to-day.

We sometimes hear complaints among Irishmen that some of their fellow-countrymen enlist in the ranks of the enemy, even when the issue is clear between English and Irish. The very same thing was happening in the Irish war in the seventeenth century. Dr. Thomas Dease, Bishop of Meath, made every effort in the sixteen-forties to extinguish the spirit of patriotism in his people, and on one memorable occasion did grave harm to the Irish forces at Drogheda by preventing supplies from reaching them. The Catholic lords of the Pale, men like Dunsany, Gormanstown, and Netterville burned for an opportunity of proving their loyalty to England by waging war on the men who had arisen to challenge the Puritan despotism. One Catholic nobleman, a Talbot, by the way, wanted to dash off to Wicklow to harass the O'Byrnes and the O'Tooles, septs already plundered by the Lord Justice Parsons and goaded to madness by the cruelties of Coote. But those who were so very anxious to help the English soon learnt the bitter lesson that willy-nilly they were to be driven into the ranks of the Sinn Feiners of the day. Their crime was that they were Papists, and their feverish protestations of loyalty were held of little account. As the historian tells us:—

"No matter how reluctant they may have been, the nobility and gentry of the Pale had no other course open to them save that of joining those who, in the hypocritical slang of the times, were denounced as rebels. Naturally enough they dreaded to encounter the pains and penalties to which their religion consigned them, and they determined to abandon their vacillation and to seek protection in the patriot ranks."

As a result of their overtures to the Irish chiefs a meeting was arranged on the hill of Crofty in the County Meath. There Roger O'Moore and Lord Gormanstown, the respective representatives of the old Irish and of the Irish of the Pale, solemnly pledged their fealty to the common cause of their country and swore to forget the feuds and quarrels that had so long divided them.

Meanwhile things were moving rapidly in ecclesiastical circles in Ireland. Through the winter months of 1641 the Bishops had been working in their dioceses to cheer and to encourage their flocks in pursuing the only means that seemed left to the Irish people for the removal of their grievances, namely, home-legislation and an appeal to arms. But it was not till March 22, 1642, that any concerted action by the Hierarchy was taken in the national movement. On that day there was opened at Kells a provincial synod of the ecclesiastical province of Armagh. It had been convened by Dr. Hugh O'Reilly, Archbishop of Armagh, and it was attended by all the suffragan bishops with the notable exception of the Bishop of Meath. The meeting was brief, but its decisions were very much to the point. The synod pronounced the Irish war to be lawful and pious, and a spirited appeal was issued to the people to take up arms. Before the proceedings were formally closed, the prelates who were present drew up a manifesto to be sent to their venerable brethern in the Irish episcopate, notifying them that a general meeting of the bishops of Ireland was to be held in the approaching month of May. This was the famous National Synod of Kilkenny on May 10, 1642. In that memorable year of Irish history there is only one other assembly to surpass it in interest and only one other day to equal it in glory. The assembly I refer to was the Confederation of Kilkenny, at which 25 peers—11 spiritual and 14 temporal—and 226 commoners met to keep watch and ward over the renaissance spirit of Irish freedom. And the date I have in mind is the date of the opening meeting of the last real Parliament of Ireland; it was October 24, 1642.

But to return to the bishops. The National Synod was duly held on the date and in the city arranged. There were present the Archbishops of Armagh, Cashel, and Tuam. Most Rev. Dr. Thomas Fleming, O.S.F., Archbishop of Dublin, was unable to be present on the occasion but sent his proctor, Father Joseph Everard. Six other bishops answered the roll-call, with the proctors of five more, thus making a total of 14 in all. Besides these