

The "New Witness" on Ireland

Some among the many, of all parties, who sincerely desire a decent Irish settlement ought to remonstrate with those who, maintaining the profession of moderation, are clearly casting about to find excuses for refusal. In one case, at least, they were unfortunate in the excuse they find. One paper argues that Sir James Craig cannot be expected to accept the reversal of an Act of Parliament, and that "Ulster" naturally declines to trust de Valera as fully as an Act of Parliament. The writer seems to forget, in the queerest fashion, that an Act of Parliament was defied and destroyed entirely by the action of "Ulster." It was not amended or reconsidered, it was torn to pieces and tossed into the waste-paper basket, solely under the threat of armed rebellion by Ulster against the King. That threat was the signal and the example of all other armed rebellions that have since occurred in Ireland. To suggest now that Sir James Craig is shocked with the very thought of tampering with the text of a statute is enough to make an Orangeman laugh. If one statute was destroyed entirely out of defence to Belfast, surely another might be modified out of consideration for Ireland—and England. For it is England for which we are concerned in this matter; and it will be utterly intolerable if she is prevented from cutting her way out of her tragic tangle by such a ridiculous wisp of red tape as this.

Peace or Ruin

The truth is that the statements of Mr. de Valera so far do not, most fortunately, challenge the real English interests and stipulations at all. The real English interest to be defended is that of military and naval defence, and the real question to be discussed is whether any Parliament or Republic imperils it. But certainly Mr. de Valera says nothing at present that can imperil it. He demands Irish self-determination, which is the only possible object of creating any kind of Irish self-government. He expresses the idea of Irish unity by suggesting that the same self-government should be given to the Northern district of Ireland as is now given to it by England. We can see nothing in this mere matter of order and form that endangers the power of England, or that ought to endanger the peace of Ireland. We are concerned to protect the soil and status of England, not to protect the sensibilities of Sir James Craig. There may have been a cynical expediency in pretending to adore the Orange lodges of Belfast when they were regarded as a bulwark of our policy. It is simply suicidal sentimentalism to keep up the pretence if they have become a barrier to our policy. And our policy must be peace with Ireland; the alternative is not only crime and shame, but it is a ruinous wastage of our power and prestige, which will mean our sinking lower and lower in reputation and resources, till we become the sort of thing which the rest of humanity tramples out without regret.

The Cleanness of Sinn Fein

Many epithets have been thrown at Sinn Fein but it is important to note that never once has it been suggested that its leaders have been guilty of secret diplomacy, place-hunting, or the sacrifice of principle to party or finance. The *Dail Eireann* and its officials have been elected and are governing in a democratic way which is an education to the rest of the world. The best brains have been chosen for the most important tasks, nor have the Ministers dared go beyond the limits imposed on them by the will of the people who elected them. Thus we always know where to find them. Our own Government, on the other hand, has appointed its officials by a system of shameless co-option and corruption, has given office to incompetent but wealthy fools, and has never asked the country what measures it desired to have passed into law. This Irish Conference, then, certainly represents the will of the people on the Irish side, but not on ours. The Irish speakers are men of deep learning, extremely well versed in the art of open statesmanship, and imbued with a love of principle they have risked their lives to defend. Our self-appointed spokesmen are politicians of the lowest type, anxious for intrigue, ignorant beyond words. It is said that the real trouble will be that of finance, higher principles of national morality being lightly considered by our British cavaliers. In that event Ireland's case is being put forward by de Valera, a skilled mathematician, and Griffith, one of the

best statisticians of Europe; ours by Lloyd George, a lawyer, and—mark him well—Sir Philip Sassoon, a Jewish millionaire.

The Ulster Excuse

Mr. George is represented as having "fought" his Cabinet on behalf of Mr. de Valera. We are asked to admire the passionate sincerity of the Premier in testing the value of the Coalition support by an appeal for justice to Ireland. We may take it that there has been trouble with some of the Orange irreconcilables, of whom Major Archer Shee is one of the most honest. The crux of the matter, as Mr. Hugh Martin has already pointed out, lies not in the attitude of Ulster towards Sinn Fein but in the attitude of the Cabinet towards Sinn Fein outrages in Belfast have done very much to enlighten the general public as to the real cause of Irish dissension. Mr. George and his Press have persistently portrayed Sinn Fein as refusing to make peace with the Orange Loyalists who in their turn have been described as patient and long-enduring victims. In the ultimate, if Belfast is still recalcitrant, Mr. George will have to choose between concussing the Orange Lodges and losing his position, for if peace, so clearly in sight, should again disappear, the Premier will have to bear the full brunt of Tory disaffection backed up by popular feeling. Mr. de Valera's refusal to treat Sir James Craig out of Ireland is a wise piece of statesmanship. To meet him in London would be to recognise the right of England to settle Irish affairs, and the strength of Sinn Fein's position has always been that difference between the Southern Irish and the Belfast Unionists must be settled at home. It is of course quite possible that, emulating the example of the late Lord Chief Justice, Sir Edward Carson may vacate the Bench for the platform and pay a flying visit to Belfast to stiffen the Orangemen in the demand for a continuance of the war. We doubt, however, if even Sir Edward's enmity can shatter the hopes of an Irish peace. For in the ultimate Mr. George must stand or fall with the result of the negotiations, and if it comes to a choice between the suppression of Belfast and the loss of his salary, Belfast will kick the beam.

George and Northcliffe

The boycott of the *Times* by the Foreign Office as punishment for its criticism of Mr. George and Lord Curzon has demonstrated the scope of the Prime Minister's vanity in the most effective manner possible. That he has not been able to muzzle the *Times* by manipulation of shares held by his supporters is a thorn in Mr. George's side. He is pre-eminently provincial and has all the desire for publicity characteristic of the type. Adulation untinged by the faintest criticism is what Mr. George desires, and in his efforts to secure a servile and boot-licking Press he has acquired through his supporters a number of newspapers which, previous to their purchase, were successful both from a journalistic and a literary point of view. Since they passed into the service of the Prime Minister, however, their circulation has dropped and their standard deteriorated. Both the *Times* and the *Daily News*, however, have resisted Mr. George's aspirations, and the soul of the little Welsh attorney has become embittered at their independence. Unwittingly, he revealed the depth of his annoyance when he stated that the *Times* "is still supposed in many circles abroad to represent both educated and official opinion in this country." And in his rage that the truth should be read as to his unfitness to represent Great Britain at Washington, he has behaved with the spitefulness of an old maid at a suburban tea-party. We do not for a moment accept his suggestion that he is not responsible for the boycott of the *Times*. Lord Curzon does not suffer from any misapprehension as to his personal dignity, and, remembering the solemnity with which he regards both himself and his position, it seems unlikely he would emulate the antics of a gutter urchin. It is an open secret in Fleet Street that the Premier has brought every possible pressure to bear upon the *Times* in relation to its Irish policy. It is a proof of his failure and of his pettiness that, unable to muzzle our contemporary, he has shaken a puny fist in its face. "You shan't come and play in my yard if you are not good to me," says Mr. George, his fingers to his nose. Meanwhile, we fail to discover any alteration in the *Times* owing to the deprivation of the privileges hitherto accorded.