

NOTES

Ancient Ireland

In the ages when the Saxon Gurth roamed the woods, wearing a brass collar like a dog to show that he was merely the property of some lord, our Irish ancestors had arrived at a high degree of learning. The Saxon lived as a beast, and his intelligence was not far higher than that of his dog; and it is curious to think that in after years, when Irish and Roman teachers had with great trouble managed to civilise in some way the English, the latter repaid their masters by trying to make them as they themselves were when they ate their food raw and gnawed bones like hungry mastiffs. England never numbered gratitude among her supposed virtues; and her only recompense to Ireland for civilisation was the sword of the robber and the strong hand of the tyrant. It may have been jealousy, it may have been heredity which transmitted to the present and earlier generations the ignoble qualities which Gurth shared with the animals under his care; but whatever it was the fact remains that English history is a long record of English efforts to bite the hand that fed England's soul—and we should be sorry to belong to a country or an Empire that could show no better lineage than that. The amusing thing about it is that, with wonderful stupidity, our day-lies seem to assume, when they tell us that we should become aliens if Ireland became a republic, that we must be very much affected by the prospect, as if we had not a country and a history that no man with a spark of nobility or honor would barter for the Empire and all its possessions—including even those bagged as a result of the recent lamented war for the freedom of small nations and the enrichment of the Anglo-Yiddish persons who *are* the British Empire at present.

Old Irish Books

If there were no other proof of the culture and learning of our ancestors the ancient Irish books were proof enough. Greatest of these is the *Book of Kells*, preserved in Trinity College. It is a copy of the Four Gospels in Latin, written on vellum as far back as the seventh or eighth century. Miss Stokes, herself an artist, says of it:

"No effort hitherto made to transcribe any one page of this book has the perfection of execution and rich harmony of color which belongs to this wonderful book. It is no exaggeration to say that, as with the microscopic works of nature, the stronger the magnifying power brought to bear upon it the more is this perfection seen. No single false interlacement or uneven curve in the spirals, no faint trace of a trembling hand or wandering thought can be detected. This is the very passion of labor and devotion, and thus did the Irish scribe work to glorify his book."

Professor Westwood of Oxford says of it:

"The *Book of Kells* is the most astonishing book of the Four Gospels which exists in the world. How men could have had eyes and tools to work out the designs, I am sure I, with all the skill and knowledge of such work which I have been exercising for the last fifty years, cannot conceive. I know pretty well all the libraries of Europe where such books as this occur, but there is no such book in any of them. There is nothing like it in all the books which were written for Charlemagne and his successors."

Remember that the men who made such books were the ancestors of the men who have defied the "Scum-and-Tans" of England for two years now, and you may be able to understand why the Irish of our day do not want to barter for the traditions of Gurth the swineherd, with his dog's collar, the ideals of Catholic Ireland. God forbid that they should ever be willing to do so! How little those people who say why don't the Irish accept the terms of Lloyd George understand us!

Characteristic Logic

The Britisher takes as kindly to logic as an elephant does to the violin. If we wanted a good sample of John Bullishness we need not go beyond the Dunedin *Star's* editorial columns on Monday, October 3. It says:

"The Holy See, we have just been told by an Italian Cardinal, is not 'averse to the establishment of a national home for persecuted Hebrews, but it is adverse to the establishment of a monopoly, which offends deeply the rooted sentiment of the Christian masses.' Cardinal Gasparri, at least, is evidently convinced in his own mind that a monopoly is intended, since he speaks of the possibility of retaliation being made by the Holy See by the recognition of an Irish Republic, which till now it has absolutely refused to recognise. The extreme claims of the Sinn Feiners, it is plain from this statement, are viewed naturally in Rome as a political not a moral question."

Now there is as neat a piece of wrong-headed, addle-brained, ignorant, and loose-minded sophistry as any professor of logic could desire for a warning and an example to his classes. First of all we have a cablegram telling us that a *Cardinal* said the things reported in the foregoing quotation. Then it was *guessed*, without any apparent justification, that the Cardinal who was said to have said something or other was the Secretary of State. Next the Editor of the *Star* proceeds to take a fablegrammer's guess as a dead certainty and to reason on the guess as if it were as true as a geometric axiom. We have no sort of certainty that any Cardinal ever said anything of the sort; it is still more uncertain that Cardinal Gasparri ever said it. But the trained and scholarly mind of the *Star* man dogmatically concludes, as if there could be no shadow of doubt at all, that "Cardinal Gasparri, at least, is evidently convinced." Now, we have very little hesitation in saying that no Cardinal ever did say what a *Cardinal* is reported to have said; and we have ten times less in saying that the Secretary of State is the last man in Italy likely to have said as much. However, the real point is not whether he said it or not. What we wish to point out is the transition in the mind of the Editor of the *Star* from absolutely doubtful premises to a dogmatically certain conclusion. It is indeed a choice specimen of the sort of reasoning for which a tyro at logic would be well and deservedly birched by a conscientious master. It is also a sample of the sort of mind that writes leading articles about Ireland on evidence that is at all times one-sided and as a rule precarious. It is no wonder that it has been suggested that persons who quoted editorials from New Zealand day-lies ought be committed without further inquiry to a mental home, or that the man-in-the-street occasionally asks if the editorials are done by Dr. Truby King's patients. From the "history" served up by Mr. Wells, to the editorials composed in the service of British propaganda, and the No-Popery tirades of an Elliott or a Dickie, the same sort of illiterate, unintelligent argument flourishes exceedingly, and is swallowed and even quoted by a public that has never been taught the elementary principles of clear thinking. In the press of Germany, France, Italy, Ireland, one does not find this sort of wrong-headedness: it is peculiarly John Bullish, and through it "dud" politicians, "dud" Cabinet Ministers, and "dud" preachers are enabled to live at the expense of a credulous and easily fooled people. To go back a little time, recall how an ignoramus of a British journalist thought the German word for carcase meant corpse, and then told a hungry press the lie about the corpse-factories. On the lie as a premise dogmatic accounts were forthwith based and the Empire rang with a story that ought ever be a testimonial to British ignorance. The reasoning in the case of the corpse-factories was of the same kidney as the sample now given us by the *Star* man.

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