

establishment of protective minefields and play havoc with the auxiliary surface craft which are indispensable to submarine bases. But protection by sea and air would itself be wholly wasted without protection by land, because the command of the sea would enable England to throw into Ireland at selected points armies capable of enveloping and destroying the submarine bases, or at any rate of rendering them strategically untenable by cutting their communications with the Irish military centres. A submarine base cannot exist in the air.

The strategic conditions in the North Sea during the world-war supply a vivid illustration of these facts. Germany with her vast resources and the second navy in the world was just able, by immense outlay in men and money upon protective air squadrons, ferro-concreted dockyard protection (including a colossal bomb-proof shelter for submarines at Bruges, which is one of the wonders of the world), numerous squadrons of destroyers, minelayers and minor surface-craft to maintain against naval and aerial attack on her advanced submarine base, Bruges, with its seaport, Zeebrugge, until near the close of the war. Ostend became useless owing to naval bombardment. In April 1918, an assault on Zeebrugge closed access to Bruges, which lies nine miles inland, for several weeks' and might if repeated, have closed it permanently. But, whether this happened or not, the existence of the Bruges base depended on uninterrupted communication with the military and industrial centres of Germany. When the Allied armies began to break the battle-front in Belgium in October, Bruges, Zeebrugge, and Ostend, threatened with envelopment, were instantly evacuated. This was the final result of England's command of the sea, enabling her, in spite of fleets of German submarines, to maintain the transport of her growing army across the Channel for more than four years.

An Irish Minister of War, therefore, asked to prepare estimates for a naval establishment, with or without submarines, capable of threatening England, or even of providing an adequate defence against English aggression, would refuse or resign at the first survey of the facts. He would say that he was asked, literally, to throw money into the sea. The utmost he, like the Naval Minister of any other small country would sanction, would be a small outlay purely for defensive purposes, on small vessels of war, including perhaps a few small submarines, strictly for fishery, coast, and harbor protection, together with a modest air defence mainly for reconnaissance.

#### Ireland's Defensive Power against England

From the purely defensive standpoint these provisions would be useless in the last resort against an attack by a strong naval and air power, though they could cause delay, and necessitate some additional output of strength in the enemy's offensive. This, in the last resort, though with a marked difference of degree, is all that Ireland's main line of defence—her army—could do to prevent a resolute invasion by a Power as great as England. We cannot now by sheer military force expel the British armies, and we could not prevent them from re-entering if they were inflexibly determined to do so. In the final reckoning we must face the fact that our resistance depends on moral right.

But from England's standpoint that moral right and the resistance founded upon it is an insurmountable obstacle now. Unsatisfied with the far-reaching results flowing for its refusal, it is her strategical danger. Satisfied, it would be her strategical safeguard.

For it is not to England's interest that Ireland, her best, and, indeed, her indispensable food supplier and market, should be under the control of a hostile Power. A free Ireland would be her strongest guarantee against any such eventuality. For a free Ireland would fight to the death against any kind of foreign control.

This plain inference from ordinary human motives, taken with the roset of strategical facts, should be a sufficient answer to the fears expressed about the other contingencies we have to consider—the alliance of Ireland with some other Power or Powers, or the forced violation of her neutrality.

#### The Violation of a Neutral Ireland

We have already disposed by implication of the latter case. Leaving aside for the moment the naval possibility of a forced landing in a neutral Ireland by a foreign Power, the military defence of the island, supposing the landing were effected, could not be in better hands than that of an Irish army fighting with vehemence to defend its own soil. An English army of occupation, with an Irish rebel army upon its back, perhaps in actual sympathy with the invader, would be paralysed from the first.

The contingency of a hostile Ireland, allied with another Power, must in justice be considered, though it is

one that hardly comes within the scope of reasonable discussion; and, without some little tincture of reason, all discussion is futile. What could be the motive for such an alliance? Ireland has, and would have, no continental entanglements or colonial ambitions, no land frontiers, no irreconcilable, nothing to covet or intrigue for. To win her freedom from England has been the single object of her policy for 700 years. To retain it when won would be her supreme object in the future. The instinct of self-preservation, if nothing else, would dictate friendly relations of a small neutral nation with a powerful neighbor. There would also be powerful motives of economic and commercial interests. Ireland would not profit from the destruction of England—she would be at a heavy loss.

So much for motives. But for the sake of argument credit Ireland with the lunacy of deserting her safest role—the safest role for all small nations—that of strict neutrality, and of entering into some joint design against England, based, one must suppose, upon a senseless spirit of revenge for wrongs already requited. The strategic facts demand that her alliance must be with a naval Power or Powers. The combined navies of Europe are negligible beside the British Navy, and are likely to remain so for further than we can see. Japan? A war between England and Japan, waged in European waters, is not a possible contingency, and an alliance between Ireland and Japan raises a smile. America? The independence of Ireland would itself remove the main obstacle to friendly co-operation between England and America, and would render war between them an unnatural and unlikely event in any case, practically unthinkable. If it did take place, it would not be fought in waters where Ireland could be a strategic factor. America is too distant, her communications too long. It would be an economic struggle.

#### The First Consequences of an Alliance

Nevertheless, to omit nothing, let us suppose this alliance, or any other, however unlikely, to be entertained by Ireland, what would be the result? At the first glimpse of preparation for it—and the preparations could not be concealed—perhaps at the first wind of it an ultimatum from England, with all the fearful perils involved. Suppose, even so, that the war actually came to pass. Ireland would certainly be the first to suffer, and heavily, from England. But could she be of any practical assistance to her ally?

Nene, if the governing principles of naval strategy be remembered. Her only contribution to the war would be to offer her shores as a foothold to the armies of her ally and her ports as a shelter for his ships. But neither of these offers could take effect until the English Navy had been destroyed or driven finally from the seas. Until that happened no hostile Power could land a man in Ireland, or derive any appreciable advantage from the use of Irish ports. The idea that submarines can be based surreptitiously on the ports of a little country without a navy, and in direct defiance of an enemy Power holding the local command of the sea is a delusion born of the tittle-tattle of scaremongers.

But let us make the final supposition: that England did in fact lose the command of the sea. In that case there would be no need for her enemy to land a man in Ireland or to use Irish ports. England's economic position is such that her loss of the command of the sea means starvation and defeat.

Such is the position. Where does England's true strategic interest lie? In antagonising Ireland or conciliating her? There can be but one reasonable answer. It is her interest to recognise our independence. To contest it in a war of extermination is not only shameful, but ruinous to her.

As the soul is the life of the body, but does not keep it alive without bodily food, so God is the Life of the Soul, but does not keep it alive without spiritual food, that is, without the Word of God.—St. Augustine.

#### AN APPEAL FROM THE BACKBLOCKS

At Tuatapere—a bush township in Southland—Mass is celebrated in the most westerly part of New Zealand. The few scattered Catholics are making a bold endeavor to raise funds for a much-needed church but realise their difficulties without assistance from outside. They therefore appeal to the generously disposed readers of the *Tablet* to help them in their enterprise.

Subscriptions may be sent to the undersigned—Presbytery, Riverton—and will be acknowledged in the *Tablet*.

(Rev.) D. P. BUCKLEY.

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