

# Impressions of Ireland's Civil War

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**W**OULD you say that five-sixths of the people of Ireland are for the Free State?" "More, Sir, more." This was the question that I asked, and this was the answer that I received from a resident of Cobh (Queenstown) the day I landed in that port. During the two weeks that have since intervened I have put the same question to many sorts of persons from many parts of the country. The answer has almost invariably been the same. Sometimes the proportion of Free State supporters is placed as high as 98 per cent; never below 85 per cent. Ever since the elections in June, unprejudiced Americans have been aware that those who want the Free State comprise a great majority of the inhabitants of this Island; probably not many realize the overwhelming character of that majority.

Two questions are suggested by this situation: how comes it that the insurgent forces are at all numerous and powerful? In passing, it may be worth while to observe that the men in rebellion against the Free State Government are variously designated in this country. They are called "Republicans" by themselves and their friends; "irregulars," with a small initial letter, by the Government and probably the majority of the people, and I heard Michael Collins refer to them as "irregs." The second question is, by what process are the irregulars enabled to dominate a population that is at least nine-tenths opposition? That proportion favors the Free State even in the six or seven counties that have been under the control of the rebellious forces.

The answer to the first question is that the irregulars are not great in numbers, and that they are powerful only because they have arms in their hands. So far as I can make out, they are composed of three main elements: those who believe that they are fighting for a sacred principle; those who are without intense convictions on the political issue, but who are deterred either by a mistaken sense of loyalty or by fear of abandoning their old leaders and comrades in arms; and, finally, a varied group of young men and boys who are willingly or unwillingly out of work, some of whom are criminally inclined. In all probability the two latter sections constitute the vast majority of the irregular forces. One indication of this condition is the frequency with which they abandon their positions without serious fighting at the approach of the National troops. The irresponsible and semi-criminal element in the irregular army is exhibited in the wanton destruction of buildings and other property, and in their disregard for the rules of warfare and the laws of humanity. In most cases these outrageous performances are entirely without military value, as they do not appreciably hinder the operations of the Free State forces. Their most

important results are immense hardship and suffering for the civilian population, and enormous losses to the various political jurisdictions, through the destruction of public buildings, records, etc.; for example, the Sligo Custom House was burned by some of the irregulars after their organized forces had been driven from the city. It has been estimated that the cost of restoring the property already destroyed by the irregulars "would provide a decent house for every workingman who has to rear his family in a filthy tenement room, and a decent house and farm for every hovel-holder in the congested areas."

The answer to the second question is simple: The communities in which the irregulars hold sway are terrorized. Ten armed men can hold in subjection a hundred who are unarmed. While in Cork, I was assured that the townspeople are coming to detest the irregulars more than they detested the Black and Tans. This was the judgment of a prominent priest. On my way to the station, the sidecar in which I was riding barely escaped collision with a Ford which, filled with irregulars, dashed madly out of a side-street. It should be observed that the rebels have taken possession of all the automobiles in Cork except those used by physicians. As he turned his horse sharply to the left, the driver of my car exclaimed: "These are worse than the Black and Tans, for they do not know how to drive the cars that they have commandeered."

In the procedure of the irregulars "commandeer" has become a more blessed word than ever was "Mesopotamia." They subsist by "commandeering" buildings, and supplies of all sorts from the shopkeepers and from the farmers. Sometimes they go through the form of giving a receipt in the name of the "Irish Republican Army." Sometimes they neglect this bit of pleasantries. In practically every case the goods are taken without the consent of the owners, a circumstance which is not without significance as regards the attitude of the civilian population toward this rebellion on behalf of the "Republic." Of course, the process is plain looting.

The merchants who are thus robbed naturally refuse to replenish their stocks. Even if they were willing to do so, they would in a large proportion of cases be unable to obtain new quantities of goods, inasmuch as the railways have been cut and the roads obstructed between the subjected cities and the main sources of supply. As a consequence, the people are suffering extreme hardship. In Limerick a large section of the population was for a few days on the verge of starvation. When I was in Cork, July 10, more than 10,000 persons were out of employment, and the number must have been considerably augmented since that date.

The suffering and helplessness of the people in the

areas held by the irregulars are a striking illustration of the truth that, for a time at least, a small armed minority can defeat the will of the majority. The man who drove me to the station in Cork declared in tones of sadness: "You Americans must think we are an awful people, fighting among ourselves." I objected that this was not a fair way of describing the situation. When the vast majority of a nation are heartily supporting the civil authority in the task of overcoming a small insurgent minority, the people are not "fighting among themselves." They are repressing disorder, which is something that every government is called upon to do occasionally. While the disorderly forces operating in Ireland today are, indeed, stronger than is usually the case in countries where governments have been long established, nevertheless they do not represent a sufficient section of the population to invest their movement with the dignity of a revolt, much less a revolution. The proper words to describe the conflict are "rioting," "disorder," "pillage," "resistance to lawful authority."

These propositions are hotly contested by the "idealists" who are in favor of the insurgency. To them it is a great and heroic struggle on behalf of a "principle." In their minds the principle at stake is the right of the nation to complete political independence. Many times since my arrival in this country have I heard the exclamation, "There is too much idealism in Ireland!" There is much talk about "the soul of the nation," "selling the nation for ignoble peace and comfort," "continuing the nation in the bonds of political slavery," and similar rhetoric and buncombe which convey no realistic idea, but which unfortunately have a real power to delude and mislead persons who do not take the trouble to analyze either the content of these bombastic phrases or the realities of the present political situation. To a political realist this sort of idealism is a gross perversion. The "idealists" are engaged in the attempt to clothe political principles with the sanctity of ethical principles or religious principles. To give up, even temporarily, the armed struggle for a republic is to their minds morally wrong. It is as immoral as to compromise with murder, or theft, or adultery. To accept the Free State is as bad as to accept a corrupted form of religious faith. Obviously this is pure fanaticism.

The person who is able to distinguish between political forms and principles on the one hand and the forms and principles of religion and morality on the other hand, will not permit himself to forget that the former are merely means to human welfare. Keeping in mind this fundamental truth, he will realize that in some situations human welfare can be better promoted by partial independence than by complete independence. The latter is not an end in itself. Whether it is the best means to the real and valuable end, namely, human welfare, depends upon the facts of the existing situation. In Ireland today the pertinent facts are that through the Free State the Irish people can safeguard and promote their welfare, physically,

intellectually, morally and spiritually, quite as thoroughly and as extensively as they could if they had an independent republic.

One of the undying glories of the Irish people is their heroic and centuries-old devotion to the principles of right in place of mere expediency, to the things of the soul rather than the things of matter. In this age of materialism and ignoble ease, no true man will say one word in disparagement of this trait in the Irish character, this element in Irish history. On the other hand, every clear-seeing man will admit that willingness to suffer on behalf of a cause is not in itself a reasonable attitude. All depends upon the nature of the end, and upon the proportion between it and the suffering which is called for.

The sincere Republicans are idolizing abstractions. There is something Hegelian in their worship of "the Republic." It was the doctrine of Hegel that all reality is identical with the "Absolute Idea," or the "World Spirit," and that the highest outward manifestation of the World Spirit is to be found in the State. Therefore, he concluded, the individual is a mere means to the aggrandizement of the State. Similarly the extreme Republicans have deified "the Republic," and they demand that the Irish people shall sacrifice themselves to this fiction. The gospel of Republicanism has become almost a new form of Pantheism.

Not less extraordinary than this perversion of an ideal is the attempt made by the Republicans to justify their position by political arguments. Admitting that the majority of the people desire the Free State, they contend that this choice is morally invalid because it was made under duress, under threat of a resumption of war by the British Government. Do the Republicans, then, offer the people the opportunity of a perfectly free choice? Not at all. The British Government said in effect: "Accept the Free State, or we shall renew the war of the Black and Tans." The Republicans say in effect: "Reject the Free State, or we shall subject you to the ravages of civil war." Probably very few Irishmen have been deceived by this sophistry. The fact of the matter, and the reason of the matter, is that the people have a right to choose between the alternatives that are before them; they have a right to make a choice of evils. That right they exercised in deciding for the Free State. To deny them the right of choosing what they regard as the less of two evils, is to deny the essential principle of self-determination and of democracy. To assert that they had not a sufficient degree of moral and psychological freedom to perform a morally valid human act, is to utter a rather obvious falsehood.

More amazing still is the Republican rejoinder: "The majority is sometimes wrong; it was wrong during the revolt of 1916; it was wrong during a considerable part of the war against the Black and Tans, and it will be proved wrong in the present struggle." To be sure, the majority is sometimes wrong, and the minority is some-

times right, with regard to a political principle or a political policy. Nevertheless, there is no practical alternative which can be defended on the principles of democracy. No one would accept the proposition of minority-rule, regardless of the character of the minority. The political aristocrat contends for rule by the minority, but he has in mind a minority composed of "the best," of superior persons like unto himself. He believes that the superior few know what is good for the people better than do the people themselves, and therefore that the superior few have a moral right to impose their will upon the majority. On the principles of aristocracy this position is entirely logical.

But Mr. De Valera and his friends profess to be Democrats. How they can reconcile democracy with their present denial of majority-rule, they have never vouchsafed to explain. They appeal, as it were, from Philip drunk to Philip sober, from the people in a wearied and ignoble mood to the people in a mood of idealism and self-sacrifice. Who constituted Mr. De Valera, Miss MacSwiney and their associates the custodians and defenders of the nobler instincts and the purer will of the majority? They have no such mandate or mission. They have assumed it with as little authority as any other group or faction of self-constituted superior persons have ever undertaken to set aside the will of the majority. From the viewpoint of fundamental political theory, there is no essential difference between De Valera and Carson. The latter believes that the majority of the Irish people should be content, or be forced, to abide with the Northeastern minority under the rule of the British Parliament. He thinks that he knows that this is the best political arrangement for the majority. Mr. De Valera believes that the majority should be coerced by an armed minority into rejecting the Free State, and continuing the war for the Republic. He thinks that he

knows that that is the best political arrangement for the majority. He is essentially an aristocrat, not a democrat. No amount of pseudo-idealism and no amount of any other kind of sophistry, can erase the dominating fact of the situation, namely, that Mr. De Valera and his associates deny the right of the majority to make the political choice which, in the circumstances, they desire to make.

Happily the masses of the Irish people, of all classes and sections, have too much common-sense, have too keen a perception of fundamental realities, to be deceived by such subtleties and such "arguments." They are supporting their Government so generally and so whole-heartedly that it is to be hoped that before the middle of August the armed bands of irregulars will have been dislodged from every city and town on the island. No doubt there will be sporadic fighting and pillage by small gangs in the more remote and thinly populated areas for a considerably longer time, but it will not be sufficient in volume or in destructiveness to interfere greatly with the normal life and activities of the people. While the task of reconstruction will tax heavily the ingenuity of the Government and the moral and material resources of the country and the people, it is much lighter than that which faces any other nation of Europe which has gone through a war in recent years.

I am well aware that this forecast seems too optimistic to the majority of persons with whom I have talked in Ireland, but skepticism, if not pessimism, is a natural mood in a people that has gone through a Black and Tan war for more than two years, and then unexpectedly seen an armed minority of its own flesh and blood engage upon an orgy of senseless killing and devastation. But the thing that the pessimists fear is psychologically impossible.

*Dublin, July 22.*

## The New Hungary's Confident Tomorrow

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LET me now introduce the great European champions of American Democracy, the much-bedeveled and war-torn remnant of the once mighty nation of the Magyars who have their abode, or all that is left to them, just west of Austria, south of the free, sovereign and independent Czecho-Slovaks, east of the half-civilized Rumanians and north of the mighty Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. It will be recalled that for a long number of years those races in Southeastern Europe who were not under the domination of the Austrians paid their tribute to the Magyars at Budapest. Before the late war, the Slovaks, Rumanians, Germans and Croats used to write books and circulate propaganda literature charging all sorts and kinds of cruelty and barbarism to their Hungarian masters. Now, however, despite the fact that

most of these people are free and independent, there is a tremendous sentiment among them for a return, if not to their exact pre-war status, at least to a sort of autonomy under the guidance of the Magyars. The Slovaks are enraged with their Czech partners, the Germans, Seckelys and even the Rumanians of Transylvania are bitter in their denunciation of the Government at Bucharest, while the Croats in the South freely discuss revolution against the Serbs. The general situation is one of a number of strange results of the war fought for democracy and the self-determination of small nations. It will be recalled that, in that war, we, the nation of "advertisers," became the "champions of the rights of mankind" to the tune of billions of American dollars and thousands of American lives.

