

BLAMES BOTH SIDES FOR IRISH PLIGHT

British Complacency Culpable and Sinn Fein Atrocities Inde- fensible, Observer Says.

FINDS SECURITY ESSENTIAL

Strategic Position of Ireland Makes It Necessary for Britain to Keep Her in Empire.

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TIMES.

LONDON, Aug. 7.—In this series of letters I have tried to present facts such as the average American visitor to Ireland would personally be interested in and would make a mental note of for his own information and to serve as a basis to explain the Irish situation to his friends when he got back home. I have often heard the comment in America that the news sent home consisted too much of Parliamentary speeches and partisan appeals, and that what was needed was a rough outline, by an impartial observer, of the fundamentals. Having given the details in so far as I could gather them in a brief visit, I shall try not to leave the reader in a wilderness of facts and shall finish by giving a summary of the whole position as I saw it.

On both sides there seemed to me to be a mixture of right and wrong. One partisan might say: "Britain has mis-governed Ireland and should not be allowed to continue her misrule. In these days of self-determination the majority of the Irish people are entitled to choose a Government for their country." Abstractly this would, perhaps, be the truth, but certainly not the whole truth. Another partisan might say: "A people who shoot in the back—a community which tolerates such methods—is not fit for self-government. For such people an outwardly tyrannical rule is necessary." That also would, perhaps, be the truth, but certainly not the whole truth.

Let us first apply the good American test of "results" to British rule in Ireland. Judged by results, her rule has been a failure. Britain cannot plead the peculiarities and shortcomings of the Irish race as an excuse for her failure. She has been mistress of the situation for centuries and has had the power to enforce her authority and to apply the necessary remedies. The simple fact is that she has refused to bring to her task the kind of study and effort which the Irish situation called for. Generally speaking, she has ruined all her other colonies and dependencies wisely and well. She has certain formulas that have worked admirably. But these did not suit the case of Ireland. Britain, like Procrustes, had a bed, and it was a good bed. All the rest slept in it very comfortably. When she found that the Irish legs were too long, Procrustes-like, she tried to cut them off to fit the bed. That may be putting the matter rather strongly, but it was something like that.

Irish Problem Neglected.

At all events Ireland was a special problem the solution of which involved the question of British efficiency. Britain declined to bend herself to the task. The opportunity existed, and still exists, to make Ireland one of the greatest of all the British dependencies. But it required a departure from the set principles and rules which were applied to Canada, Australia, India, Egypt and the rest. Britain simply would not take the trouble. She might have won Ireland by studying the people and by trying to understand the possibilities of the country. An intelligent and sustained effort at penetration on industrial lines might have succeeded. A government that was at once just and firm might have brought about ordered conditions. But Britain would never take these measures. Methods which were good enough for other countries were good enough for Ireland. Ulster got along under this Government; why not Leinster, Connaught and Munster?

The characteristic British spirit is one of liberality and generosity, even to the point of laxity, but Britain has no elasticity. If she has made pins two inches long for a century or two, that is the kind of pins people ought to use and no other kind will her manufacturers produce. That was why Germany took the pin-trade away from her. And so it has been with regard to British rule of Ireland. It has not been bad in the abstract, but it has not been suited to the Irish character and temperament. Britain has been wonderfully generous in many things. But she has treated Ireland like a child, giving her candy when she cried for it, and at other times ignoring her existence. The Irish have been shrewd in the calculation that the only way to get things out of John Bull was to pound him "good and hard." There was deep incompatibility between the British and Irish to begin with, and the practice of centuries has established contemptuous superiority on one side and bitter hatred on the other. Nothing has been done to break down this temperamental wall, and everything done to make it less surmountable, and hence the worst of all the outbreaks in the whole history of the unhappy relationship.

England is tired of and bored with the whole business. She does not get excited and does not take the situation seriously, not enough so. British phlegm has often proved a life-saver, but it has worked in the reverse way with regard to Ireland. If Britain would only wake up to the danger in Ireland and give to removing it the same planned and sustained effort that she gives to many other solutions, a way would be found to the right kind of Irish settlement. But fundamentally the typical Britisher neither understands nor likes the typical Irishman. There is no desire to persecute or tyrannize over him; the stumbling block is the temperamental antipathy of the two races.

Ireland's Strategic Importance.

If Ireland could be moved to the other side of the Atlantic and either govern herself or be governed by America, England would not greatly mind. But Ireland is a strategic necessity to Britain. As has been said, the British Empire is rather a state of mind than an empire. All but Ireland. The one country absolutely necessary for the integrity of the British Empire happens to be the country in which a large body of the people are bitterly hostile to that Empire. That in itself makes it necessary to keep Ireland in the union. The position of the island as the key of the Atlantic would make the surrender of it by Britain an unthinkable thing, from her standpoint. Without Ireland, and especially with that island in unfriendly hands, Britain would have been at the mercy of Germany in 1914, and would be for all time at the mercy of a future enemy under like circumstances. Rather than put herself in this position, Britain would take any chance—yes, the chance of a war with America.

That is the cherished hope and dream of the Irish who are now in rebellion. We, in America, know how utterly unfounded any such hope is, and in Britain, while there is more anxiety over the American phase of the Irish trouble than any other, there is no real fear of war. But the feeling is nevertheless that if there must be war on such an issue, let it come. Britain will never agree to Irish independence, happen what may. In the meantime it is not extravagant to say that American sympathy and help constitute 50 per cent. of the basis upon which Irish hopes of a republic rest.

As I have indicated, the main responsibility for a dissatisfied and disordered

Ireland must be laid at Britain's door. That is, Britain being what she is, a professional ruler of smaller nations, makes herself responsible for results. But when one comes to consider the Irish on their own merits, he must take into account considerations which, though offering no adequate excuse for British failure, must be set down to the discredit of the Irish in any impartial judgment between the two. There are no sufficient reasons for the present rebellion. Some of the methods are abominable. There is not even the excuse of expediency, for, while they may goad the British to new concessions, these methods offend the moral sense of the world and antagonize public opinion in every country.

The effort to overthrow British rule is badly timed, because it follows a record in the war by which all Ireland's friends in America were at least temporarily offended. It comes at a time when it weighs against an attempt in which England is active and potent to set the world on the path of order and prosperity and to make democratic institutions and civilization itself safe against autocracy. There are no fresh deep grievances to stir Ireland to action. On the contrary, that country is relatively rich, partly as the result of shirking her full share in the war against Germany. The ruling power did not resort to drastic action to enforce participation. Ireland during the whole time was enjoying the benefits of the law of 1903 under which the land was being divided up.

Both Sides at Fault.

The British have not measured up to the responsibility imposed upon them as the rulers of Ireland. Judged by the standard of efficiency and "results," British rule has been unsuccessful. The Irish would be entirely justified in proper efforts to gain a greater measure of freedom, and even an effort for an independent republic would command respect and general sympathy if it were lawful, intelligent and persistent. The methods that the Irish have been pursuing in this movement must antagonize fair-minded opinion in the world. There has been terrible bungling in recent years, but not real tyranny on the part of Britain. The Irish methods are not warranted by actual conditions. They may have a good effect in forcing Britain to new concessions, but they tend to compromise the Irish cause at the bar of world opinion and create doubts as to the fitness of Ireland for full self-government.

Indeed, one is often moved to reflect that the Irish, by their extremes, are vindicating the British position, and Britain is helping the movement for an Irish republic by her vacillation and blundering. Britain is neither one thing nor the other—a strict disciplinarian nor an "easy boss," but a mixture of the two.

The rule of violence in Ireland will probably tend to make the Irish people think. It will cause divisions on new lines, particularly the natural line between property owners and non-property owners. The conservatizing influence of distributed wealth will probably become a force in Ireland strong enough to prevent solidarity in any future movement like the present one. This influence is already at work to make a cleavage between the Bolshevik labor union and the general Sinn Fein movement for independence.

With these disintegrating influences at work and the certainty that Britain will never yield to the demand for independence, the outlook is for a compromise within the next few months.

If there were a man on the Irish side who could act for all interests—such a man as O'Connell, the great liberator—the settlement would come quickly, it would give Ireland full self-government in domestic affairs and would be satisfactory to 80 per cent. of Catholic Ireland. Such a settlement would hold for many years, perhaps even be permanent. Ulster could not be included. She would not now accept Dublin rule and cannot be forced to do so. But Ireland will be a unit sooner or later. The silent and irresistible forces of commercial and industrial self-interest will bring the North and South together. The coming together of these two races so different from and complementary to one another, each supplying the qualities that the other lacks, will eventually bring tranquility, happiness and prosperity to one of the greatest, richest and most attractive islands in the world.

This is the fourth and last of a series of articles by Mr. Grasty on Ireland. The first appeared last Saturday.