

THE BLIND PELTING THE BLIND.

By D. P. Moran.

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Of course the Gaelic League has nothing to say to such a question as the reception that ought to be accorded to the Queen; though, no doubt, each member has his own strong opinion one way or the other upon the subject. There is much, however, in the agitation to which the matter has given rise that is very interesting from the point of view of the League, and which it may be worth while to note while the question is fresh.

The vote of the Dublin Corporation and the hostile demonstration in the street on St. Patrick's Day must have been suggestive of many thoughts to the Gaelic Leaguer perched, we will say, on one of the lamp-posts on O'Connell Bridge. Beneath him he saw an "Irish National" Lord Mayor being pelted and booed by an "Irish National" mob. To the latter the Lord Mayor was a coward, a traitor, a man undeserving of the name of Irishman; and, no doubt, his lordship and his party looked upon the mob as a howling set of clowns. He is not concerned with either of these views, for hugging the lamp-post on O'Connell Bridge he looks impartially with a kind of melancholy amusement upon all. The Lord Mayor may be a traitor as the mob calls him, and the mob may be clowns as probably the Lord Mayor thinks; all that concerns us to note is that neither the Mayor's party nor the mob are Irish Nationalists at all. And if – voluble as they all are – one were to put the simple and elementary question to any of them – "What is Irish Nationality?", his eloquence would be tripped up with a startling suddenness.

We know well the havoc that this confounding of "Irish Nationality" with certain mere opinions has already wrought. One of the main roots of half the bickerings, disunity, nonsense, and all entanglements that for so long have characterised Ireland is the fact that the people don't know, never ask themselves, are never asked to

ask themselves – What is Nationality? I would lay a wager that if you were to button-hole any member of that loud shouting crowd – anyone of whom is bursting with a desire to give ten thousand lives for his country – and demand of him – “What is Nationality?”, and if you don’t know why the dickens do you come out into the streets to howl about it for – he would blacken your eye for you, and call you a strongly qualified traitor by way of an answer.

Whether the Queen, driving through the streets of Dublin, is merely the head of the Constitution which all reasonable Irishmen – except those who are buying guns, laying in stores, and organising armies for the overthrow of her sway – are content to admit that she is, or whether she symbolises the British power in Ireland, against which most Irishmen are in revolt, is an important question, upon the answer to which the reception to be accorded to the Queen largely hinges. What I particularly want to point out is this, that modern “Irish Nationality” is such a curious thing that if on a concrete question of this kind a man holds up his hand for one side he is an “Irish Nationalist,” but if he holds it up on the other he is not a Nationalist at all; and indeed it is in England or some other benighted place that he ought to have been born. He might be a “Nationalist” in the morning, and not a “Nationalist” at mid-day, and he might possibly come back to the true fold again in the evening, for there is none of us who has not often had occasion to change his opinion in the space of twenty-four hours.

The fact is, as we in the Gaelic League well know, “Irish Nationality” has long since drifted away from its true meaning. It now stands for a few opinions which the elect are required to utter like a parrot. When Lord Mayors and others of that kind want to sail anywhere on the strength of the mob’s wind, they utter the parrot cries with much warmth and gesticulation, and the mob commences to blow its dead best. Having sailed to the end of the journey, Lord Mayors and others sometimes start thinking in a dull kind of way, and sometimes, from the high ground of their superior positions, they see a cosy nook wherein they would like to rest their little heads. It strikes them suddenly that parrot cries are only parrot cries, and ought to constitute no obstacle in the way of personal ambition. The mob then

finding that all its wind has been blown in vain gets enraged and cries “traitor.” The Lord Mayors and others smirk in their cosy nooks and retort “fools.” The mob, feeling in its heart that the caps fits it, throw stones. But, bless you, Lord Mayors and other don’t mind that if only the stones strike someone else. And that is “Irish Nationality” as seen from a lamp-post on O’Connell Bridge on St. Patrick’s Day.

It is none of our business as Gaelic Leaguers to take part in the shoutings or counter-shoutings of various different schools of “Nationalists.” But we are within our right and proper sphere in insisting that neither side, or any conceivable variation of either side, has any right whatever to arrogate to itself the title of “Irish Nationalists.” The fact that they have successfully annexed that title has led the country astray for a century. Were Gaelic Leaguers to put the plain question, “What, sir, do you mean by Irish Nationality?” to every gentleman seeking office or position of any kind in the gift of the people it would lead to much enlightenment on the muddled state of thinking prevalent in the country at the present time. It might also clear the air and lead to a more rational conception of what Nationality is.

The briefest definition of Nationality that I could attempt is, that a Nation is composed of a body and soul, and that all efforts to nourish and develop one or the other along natural and traditional lines make up the sum total of National endeavour. It seems absurd to me to select a few aims and opinions and label them “Nationality” to the exclusion of the rest; it seems ridiculous to me to call the re-instatement of the evicted tenants a “National” work, and refuse that qualifying adjective to, say, the main drainage of Dublin; for surely it is as necessary for the good of the nation that Dublin should be healthy as that the evicted tenants should be given the wherewithal to live. Mr. Plunkett’s movement, the Temperance movement, and every other movement making for the material and moral health of the people, and which is in harmony with the country’s traditions, are essentially National, on whichever side they may be. But a number of people shouting about “Nationality” in English, and doing nothing else, are not only ridiculous, but are West Britons to boot.

We have got to learn that as an army marches on its stomach so must a nation; and that a hungry nation without resources, like a hungry man in like circumstances, must either starve or beg. It is nonsense to talk of independence with nothing in your stomach. If Queen's visits will bring a few million pounds into the country may people will, whether they think it spirited or not, shout and hooroo for it whatever "National" nostrums they may have swallowed when they wanted favours from the populace. If the tourist traffic is calculated to vulgarise and Anglicise the people, as I think most of us are agreed that it is, that consideration will not diminish to any appreciable degree the welcome that tourists will receive from all who have a pecuniary interest in their flittings to and fro. We can't stop the tourist traffic by preaching or fine reasoning, and under these circumstances there are only two courses to pursue; one is to look to our defences, and pile up the Gaelic barricade as quickly as possible, and the other to turn the mind of the people on to the immediate necessity of developing their own economic resources if they want to carry themselves with an independent spirit. All the eloquence that Ireland ever produced will not restrain an unfortunate hungry beggar from bending the knee for a copper, and no sensible man will pour much wrath on the poor beggar for his lack of spirit. If the beggar swaggers about talking finely of independence and ideals, and airs his contempt for those for whose money he is willing to bow low, he is indeed, pitiful and ridiculous, as well as poor. Perhaps no section of the people in the country are as conscious of the necessity of showing for material prosperity and independence if their ideals are to be realised as the members of the Gaelic League. The League, unlike other organisations, has never claimed for itself that it is the sole depository of "Nationality;" its position is, that it is a big and necessary cogwheel in the great machine. No people are more conscious than we that when all of us speak Irish bread will still remain the staff of life, and that the Irish-speaking children of the future will be born in original sin.

The only conceivable "Irish Nationalist," it appears to me, is he who is a lineal descendant of distinct Irish tradition; and he may be a knave or a saint, a fool or a genius, but whatever he may be, whether he accepts or rejects any opinion or set of opinions, he is and will

remain an Irishman. But anyone who is the product of English – or, worse still, imitation English – tradition and civilisation, whatever opinions he may hold, or however ready he may be to die on battlefields or throw stones at carriages, is a West Briton and nothing else. This, I take it, is in the main the philosophy of the Gaelic League; and from that lamp-post on O’Connell Bridge on St. Patrick’s Day the sight of the blind pelting the blind with chunks of “Irish Nationality” is, therefore, calculated to make us both laugh and grieve.

D. P. MORAN.