

JEWISH NATIONALISM—A COMPARISON.

By Aodh de Blácam.

From *Sinn Féin*, March 16, 1912.

Jewish Nationalism is naturally of interest to an Ulster Protestant, who in youth is taught to think of the Irish Unionists as the Chosen People, and of the 'Papishes' as the persecuting Philistine. For my part, I suppose my young mind was dull, for I could see no analogy between Ascendancy and Nationalism. It was not Catholic Ireland, but—strange to say—the Friend of Freedom over the water, who rose to my mind when my elders read the fervent words: 'Remember, O Lord, the Children of Edom, in the day of Jerusalem, who said: Raze it! Raze it! even unto the foundation thereof.' And I even added the names of Tone and Emmet and Mitchel and the rest to St. Paul's catalogue of patriots and martyrs 'of whom the world was not worthy.'

It is not merely true that the Jews have given us the finest Nationalist literature in the world: they have also set the finest Nationalist example. If anyone cares or dares to dispute this, I would advise him to read the little book just published by Fisher Unwin called 'Zionist Work in Palestine.' It is a collection of authoritative papers on the movement which has for its motto 'Israel a Nation.' Not a few things in it are worth the attention of Sinn Féiners.

There is one paper on the Hebrew Language Renaissance. The Jewish national tongue until late years was falling into utter disuse; but when the Jewish revival began in 1896, the nation recognised its peril, and a movement like our own was started. 'With the weakening of national feeling,' says the writer, 'there comes an almost intentional neglect of the native language.' Conversely, with the Zionist movement, came the enthusiastic determination to speak only the national tongue.

'What a power has this language to bind hearts together when we converse in it! What tender feelings of kinship it awakens in us! We speak a

language which is common to us from days of old, a language altogether our own, and not the language of those who once persecuted us with brutal hatred.'

Again, if we substitute Irish and Galdacht for Hebrew and Golus, is not this also true:

'When the Hebrew language lives on our tongues, it reminds us of and brings us nearer to the ages of our nation's glory in the past, it stimulates and inspires us, and makes us forget the Golus with all its hideousness. Just as in traversing the land we see the early history of our people rise up again before our imagination, every monument and every heap of stones reminding us of some event in those distant days, so the proverbs... and idioms of our ancestral language and the quotations from our prophets and poets, bring these to life again before our mind's eye.'

'The last few years have brought the idea of a national renaissance, the yearning for a full and complete national life. Throughout all Israel has resounded the cry: 'Enough of this long Golus existence in strange lands. Let us return to the land of our fathers, in order to lead there the life of a healthy and vigorous people!' In these words is proclaimed also the destiny of the national language to become again a living tongue. When the people begin again to live in its own land, it must also have its own language on its lips.'

And so it is that wherever the Jews are scattered, they are reviving their ancient language, preserved from far pre-Aryan times; and the interesting event is seen of Hebrew-speaking colonists settling in Palestine from all corners of the globe, united by the surest token of a common inheritance. This revival has not been easy. As with us, the drama, the debating club, and the seanchus have been employed to popularise it. Patriotic Jews have forbidden their families to speak the Gentile languages in the domestic circle, and to teach children whose parents had no Hebrew, the kindergarten was established. Children were sent before they knew any language to learn Hebrew from teachers who would speak to them in no other: and a phenomenon occurred (familiar also to some of us Gaelic Leaguers) of the parents learning the mother-tongue from their children.

The Jews in Palestine, moreover, are troubled by the seoinín. Authority there also is divorced from the popular ideal, and would have the children learn French instead of their own tongue, though, as our writer says, 'Education which purposely trains for emigration is altogether detrimental.' *Dar ndoigh, is fíor sin go deimhin.*

Jewish Nationalism goes into details, too. There is an institution called the Olive Tree Fund, devoted to the afforestation of Palestine. For a modest six shillings any patriotic person can have a tree planted and registered in his name, and rejoice in having done something for 'the Cause.'

But the Jew has not forgotten the chief necessity for the achievement of his aim. He realises that for the present all these movements must be subordinate to the re-colonisation of the land. Some years ago a body of young Jews left their native Russia and emigrated to Palestine, ignorant of the country, almost destitute of resources, but fired by determination to put their theories into practice. In this little work, the most spirited item is an appendix summarising the prospects of employment in the Holy Land, the would-be immigrant can here read what professions offer a prospect of success for the amount of capital or ability at his disposal. I believe that the Gaelic League and the I.L.S. run a mutual admiration paper called 'An tÉireannach' in London, which at one time was called 'The Paper for the Exile.' I would respectfully offer this example for their emulation.

Finally, one lays down the book with a new respect for that much-maligned race, and recalls with satisfaction the words of the Chief Rabbi, who, when in Dublin, expressed his pleasure at visiting Ireland; 'the only land in which his race had not been persecuted.' One is grateful to Israel because, when superior persons call our Irish ideals visionary, we can point to a nation proverbial for its business instinct, which has preserved its language and its ideal from almost pre-historic times, and which now, after incredible difficulty, is regaining its ancestral heritage and freedom. No doubt a few years will see the Jew back in his own land—indeed, there is reason to believe that the late Dr. Herzl, the Jewish Davis, only failed in his negotiations with the Sultan for the matter of two million pounds. But let us Irish take note of the words with which the book concludes:—

'It is enough to show that our fate to a large extent lies in our own hands. Why wait? Here is the work: here are we. Let us make a start.'

Israel represents the triumph of Sinn Féin.

