

IRELAND OR WEST BRITAIN.

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When in Norway a few years ago the question of political separation from Sweden was submitted to a plebiscite, nineteen voted against independence: they were ignorant of history or insensible of its teachings. We have in Ireland to-day many, perhaps a majority, who are not familiar with even the bare outlines of Irish history. They know little or nothing of the origin of their fathers or of their spirit and achievements. They are unacquainted with the relations of England with this country, and with the unchangeable purpose of those relations since first an English parliament enacted laws for the destruction of our language until two generations ago when a succeeding parliament connived at and utilised a famine for the destruction of our race. Others there are who have read Irish history, and even some who have attempted to write it, but they have learned little from it. Hence it is that so few have any conception of what nationality is. When men talk and write as if Ireland were but a shire of England, were not girt about by the sea, and had not a nationality and a mission of her own, we feel inclined to cry out with Mitchel:

‘Heaven! where is the great heart of chief and tanist? How has the rich blood of O’Connor and O’Donnell Roe grown pale! Is this, the stateliest family of the Caucasian race, indeed, starved, and kicked into incurable Helotism?’

This ignorance of history is responsible for the many anomalies against which Irish Irelanders have to fight to-day. It is responsible for the devout Catholic who desires a University to train Irishmen for life in an Empire whose god is Mammon, and for his fellow whose idea of a University is that it should be a ‘job-shop degree-factory.’ The prevalence of this ignorance it was that led British statesmen into hoping they had come to the final step in the ‘perfecting of Ireland’ when they placed on the Senate of the University a body of men whom National Ireland has found it so necessary to chastise. But all have not been stricken by the plague. There are in the Ireland of to-day men

whom honours cannot buy or flattery deceive or any prospect of worldly success lure from the path of national duty. A new generation has arisen 'out of the ashes,' and old ideals have been re-born. The foundations of a new nation have been laid, and no act of England's parliament, even should it be administered after the Britisher's own heart, can prevent the edifice being raised.

The fight for Irish in the University has not yet resulted in victory, but it has made it certain that the safety of the language is assured; it has brought many new friends into the open; it has sent a few compromisers into the enemy's camp, and it has raised once again above party and class interests, the ideal of Irish Nationality. The governors of the National University may ignore Irish opinion or attempt to meet by a shifty settlement the demands of the people, but they will do so at the cost of that success which they so dearly prize. Ireland if ignored or deceived will suffer for a few years, but she has grown too strong to be strangled by an indigent Government Department. We have outlived Trinity College and the National Board, and it needs no prophetic mind to foretell the end of a West British University should it be attempted to foist such an institution upon us.

Someone has said within the past few weeks that unless Irish be essential in the University the life of the language will be a matter of only a few generations. That is a mistake. Such words of despair serve no good end. They have no foundation in truth, but they encourage the enemies of the language and weaken its friends. The most urgent necessity of the present is a closer acquaintance with the language itself, a deeper knowledge of Irish history, an endeavour to form a clear conception of what nationality is, and, finally, determined action. We require light on many matters, and cool heads to consider them. Noisy threats will not convince the men on the Senate, but if they be honest men they should be amenable to reason. The public want full and accurate information on the University Act as it was finally passed into law. Every worker should know what are the powers of the Senate, and other governing bodies in the University, and what those of the people. We know what we require of the Senate, and we should neglect no legitimate means of voicing and enforcing our demands.

Public opinion is our first weapon. When the people are informed and confident of the justice of our cause, and when they realise the far-reaching effects a successful issue might have, they will not be slow to come to our assistance. The University Act empowers County and Borough Councils to raise a rate in aid of scholarships in the University Colleges. It is for the public to consider whether they will endow a University which threatens to exclude Irish from its essential subjects. Limerick Borough Council and three County Councils have already declared that they will not touch a seoinín institution. Many others will inevitably follow their courageous example. We do not want to rush the Senate into a state of excitement or to hasten the Councils into action, but we ask that all parties consider the question calmly, and with reason, and act with firmness. Our regret in the years that are past was the threatened extinction of our language. We have now a means of hastening its revival; are we to be prevented utilising that means by a Senate that draws its funds from the public purse? Let there be no scruples about interfering with the independence of the Senate. Ireland pays for the Universities, and she has the right to see that they are used for her best interests.

The fight has ranged Ireland into two distinct and opposing divisions. On one side are those whose concern is the 'Empire,' and who are content to have their country a province within it; on the other are the men and women whose concern is Ireland, and whose aim is to restore her to her birthright. Can anyone with a drop of Irish blood in his veins, or who has a thought of his fathers, whether of the Gael or Gall, doubt the right road? The issue can result only in one of two ways: If the University be frankly and generously Irish it will prosper, and the country will benefit by it; should it become an institution for the Catholic section of the garrison, it will be a failure, and Ireland will survive its influence as she has survived that of all the foreign institutions that have preyed upon her for over a century.