

THE RELIGIOUS DIFFICULTY UNDER HOME RULE

(ii) THE NONCONFORMIST VIEW

BY REV. SAMUEL PRENTER, M.A., D.D. (DUBLIN),
*Moderator of General Assembly of Presbyterian Church in
Ireland in 1904-5.*

FOR obvious reasons, the Religious Difficulty under Home Rule does not receive much attention on the political platform in Great Britain. But in Ireland a religious problem flames at the heart of the whole controversy. This religious problem creates the cleavage in the Irish population, and is the real secret of the intense passion on both sides with which Home Rule is both prosecuted and resisted. Irishmen understand this very well; but as Home Rule, on its face value, is only a question of a mode of civil government, it is almost impossible to make the matter clear to British electors. They say, What has religion got to do with Home Rule? Home Rule is a pure question of politics, and it must be solved on exclusively political lines. Even if this were so, might not Englishmen remember that the Nationalist Members of Parliament have been controlled by the Church of Rome in their votes on the English education question? I mention this to show that under the disguise of pure politics ecclesiastical authority may stalk in perfect freedom through the lobbies of the House of Commons. Is it, then, an absolutely incredible thing that what has been done in the English Parliament in the name of politics may be done openly and undisguised in the name of politics in a Home Rule Parliament? That such will be the case I shall now attempt to show.

Let us begin with the most elementary facts. According

to the official census of 1911 the population of Ireland is grouped as follows:—

Roman Catholics	...	...	...	...	3,238,656
Irish Church	...	...	...	...	575,489
Presbyterians	...	...	...	...	439,876
Methodists	...	...	...	...	61,806
All other Christian denominations	...	...	...	...	57,718
Jews	...	...	...	...	5,101
Information refused	...	...	...	...	3,305

I beg the electors of Great Britain to look steadily into the above figures, and to ask themselves who are the Home Rulers and who are the Unionists in Ireland. Irish Home Rulers are almost all Roman Catholics, and the Protestants and others are almost all stout Unionists. Does this fact suggest nothing? How is it that the line of demarcation in Irish politics almost exactly coincides with the line of demarcation in religion? Quite true, there are a few Irish Roman Catholics who are Unionists, and a few Protestants who are Home Rulers. But they are so few and so unimportant on both sides that the exception only serves to prove the rule. These exceptions, no doubt, have been abundantly exploited, and the very most has been made of them. But the great elementary fact remains, that one-fourth of the Irish people, mostly Protestant, are resolutely, and even passionately, opposed to Home Rule; and the remarkable thing is that the most militant Irish Unionists for the past twenty years have not been the members of the Irish Church who might be suspected of Protestant Ascendency prejudices, but they are the Presbyterians and Methodists who never belonged to the old Protestant Ascendency party. It is of Irish Presbyterians that I can speak with the most intimate knowledge. Their record in Ireland requires to be made perfectly clear. In 1829 they were the champions of Catholic Emancipation. In 1868 they supported Mr. Gladstone in his great Irish reforms. They have been at all times the advocates of perfect equality in religion, and of unsectarianism in education. They stand firm and staunch on these two principles still. But they are the sternest and

strongest opponents of Home Rule, and their reason is because Home Rule spells for Ireland a new religious ascendancy and the destruction of the unsectarian principle in education.

I ask on these grounds that English and Scottish electors should pause for a moment, and open their minds to the fact that there is a great religious problem at the heart of Home Rule. Irish Presbyterians claim that they know what they are doing, and that they are not the blind dupes of religious prejudice and political passion. It is for a great something that they have embarked in this conflict; they are determined to risk everything in this resistance, and in proportion as the danger approaches, in like proportion does their hostility to the Home Rule claim increase.

What, then, is the secret of this determination? It lies in a nutshell. A Parliament in Dublin would be under the control and domination of the Church of Rome. Two facts in Irish life render this not only likely and probable, but inevitable and certain. The first fact is that three-fourths of the members would be Roman Catholic, and the second fact is that the Irish people are the most devoted Roman Catholics at present in Christendom. No one disputes the first fact, but the second requires to be made clear to the electors of Great Britain. Let no one suppose that I am finding fault with Irishmen for being devoted Roman Catholics. What I wish to show is that the Church of Rome would be supreme in the new Parliament, and that she is not a good guardian of Protestant liberties and interests. Ireland has been for the last two generations brought into absolute captivity to the principles of ultramontaniam. When Italy asserted her nationality, and fought for it in 1870, Ireland sent out a brigade to fight on the side of the Pope. When France, a few years ago, broke up in that land the bondage of Ecclesiasticism, the streets of Dublin were filled Sunday after Sunday for weeks with crowds of Irishmen, headed by priests, shouting for the Pope against France. The Church first, nationality afterwards, is the creed of the ultramontane; and it is the

avowed creed of the Irish people. But this would be changed in an Irish Parliament, British electors affirm. Let us hear what Mr. John Dillon, M.P., says on the point. Speaking about a year ago in the Free Trade Hall in Manchester, Mr. Dillon said—

“I assert, and it is the glory of our race, that we are to-day the right arm of the Catholic Church throughout the world . . . we stand to-day as we have stood throughout, without abating one jot or tittle of that faith, the most Catholic nation on the whole earth.”

What Mr. Dillon says is perfectly true. The Irish Parliament would be constituted on the Roman model. If there were none but Roman Catholics in Ireland, Ireland would rapidly become a “State of the Church.” But how would Protestants fare? Just as they fared in old Papal days in Italy under the temporal rule of the Vatican. But it may still be said that Irishmen themselves would curb the ecclesiastical power. This is one of the delusions by which British electors conceal from themselves the peril of Home Rule to Irish Protestants. They forget that Irishmen are, if possible, more Roman than Rome herself. I take the following picture of the Romanised condition of Ireland from a Roman Catholic writer—

“Mr. Frank Hugh O'Donnell, who ‘believes in the Papal Church in every point, who accepts her teaching from Nicaea to Trent, and from Trent to the Vatican,’ says, ‘While the general population of Ireland has been going down by leaps and bounds to the abyss, the clerical population has been mounting by cent. per cent. during the same period. . . .’ A short time ago, when an Austrian Cabinet was being heckled by some anti-clerical opponents upon its alleged encouragement of an excessive number of clerical persons in Austria, the Minister replied, ‘If you want to know what an excessive number of the clergy is like go to Ireland. In proportion to their population the Irish have got ten priests and nuns to the one who exists in Austria. I do not prejudge the question. They may be wanted in Ireland. But let not honourable members talk about over-clericalism in Austria until they have studied the clerical statistics of Ireland.’ A Jesuit visitor to Ireland, on returning to his English acquaintances, and being asked how did he find the priests

in Ireland, replied, 'The priests in Ireland! There is nobody but priests in Ireland. Over there they are treading on one another's heels.' While the population of Ireland has diminished one-half, the population of the Presbyteries and convents has multiplied three-fold or more. Comparisons are then instituted between the Sacerdotal census of Ireland, and that of the European Papal countries. I shall state results only. Belgium has only one Archbishop and five Bishops; but if it were staffed with prelates on the Irish scale it would have nine or ten Archbishops and some sixty Bishops. I suppose the main army of ecclesiastics in the two countries is in the same grossly incongruous proportions—ten or twelve priests in Ireland for every one in Belgium! The German Empire, with its 21,000,000 Roman Catholics, has actually fewer mitred prelates than Ireland with its 3,000,000 of Roman Catholics. The figures of Austria-Hungary with its Roman Catholic population of 36,000,000 are equally impressive. It has eleven Archbishops, but if it were staffed on the Irish scale it would have forty-eight. It has forty Bishops, but if it were like Ireland it would have 288. Mr. O'Donnell goes on: 'This enormous population of Churchmen, far beyond the necessities and even the luxuries of religious worship and service, would be a heavy tax upon the resources of great and wealthy lands. What must it be for Ireland to have to supply the Episcopal villas, the new Cathedrals, and handsome Presbyteries, and handsome incomes of this enormous and increasing host of reverend gentlemen, who, as regards five-sixths of their number, contribute neither to the spiritual nor temporal felicity of the Island? They are the despotic managers of all primary schools, and can exact what homage they please from the poor serf-teachers, whom they dominate and whom they keep eternally under their thumb. They absolutely own and control all the secondary schools, with all their private profits and all their Government grants. In the University what they do not dominate they mutilate. Every appointment, from dispensary doctors to members of Parliament, must acknowledge their ownership, and pay toll to their despotism. The County Councils must contribute patronage according to their indications; the parish committees of the congested districts supplement their pocket-money. They have annexed the revenues of the industrial schools. They are engaged in transforming the universal proprietary of Ireland in order to add materials for their exactions from the living and the moribund. I am told that not less than £5,000,000 are lifted from the Irish people every year by the innumerable agencies of clerical suction which are at work upon all parts of the Irish body, politic

and social. Nor can it be forgotten that the material loss is only a portion of the injury. The brow-beaten and intimidated condition of the popular action and intelligence which is necessary to this state of things necessarily communicates its want of will and energy to every function of the community."

Of course Mr. F. H. O'Donnell has been driven out of public life in Ireland for plain speaking like this; and so would every man be who ventured to cross swords with his Church. It aggravates the situation immensely when we take another fact in Irish life into account.

In quite recent months Mr. Devlin, M.P., has brought into prominence a society called the Ancient Order of Hibernians (sometimes called the Molly Maguires) which, according to the late Mr. Michael Davitt, is "the most wonderful pro-Celtic organisation in the world." This is a secret society which at one time was under the ban of the Church; but quite recently the ban has been removed, and priests are now allowed to join the order. The present Pope is said to be its most powerful friend. It has branches in many lands, and it is rapidly gathering into it all the great mass of the Irish Roman Catholic people. This is the most wonderful political machine in Ireland.

Mr. William O'Brien, M.P., has recently given an account of this society which has never been seriously questioned.

"The fundamental object of the Hibernian Society is to give preference to its own members first and Catholics afterwards as against Protestants on all occasions. Whether it is a question of custom, office, public contracts, or positions on Public Boards, Molly Maguires are pledged always to support a Catholic as against a Protestant. If Protestants are to be robbed of their business, if they are to be deprived of public contracts, if they are to be shut out of every office of honour or emolument, what is this but extermination? The domination of such a society would make this country a hell. It would light the flame of civil war in our midst, and blight every hope of its future prosperity."

And now we reach the core of the question. It is perfectly clear that Home Rule would create a Roman Catholic

ascendency in Ireland, but still it might be said that the Church of Rome would be tolerant. On that point we had best consult the Church of Rome herself. Has she ever said that she would practise toleration towards Protestants when she was in power? Never; on the contrary, she declares most clearly that toleration of error is a deadly sin. In this respect the Church of Rome claims to differ *toto coelo* from the churches of the Reformation. In Ireland she has passed through all the stages of ecclesiastical experience from the lowest form of disability to the present claim of supremacy. In the dark days of her suffering she cried for toleration, and as the claim was just in Protestant eyes she got it. Then as she grew in strength she stretched forth her hands for equality, and as this too was just, she gradually obtained it. At present she enjoys equality in every practical right and privilege with her Protestant neighbours. But in the demand for Home Rule there is involved the claim of exerting an ecclesiastical ascendency not only over her own members but over Irish Protestants, and this is the claim which is unjust and which ought not to be granted. Green, the historian, points out that William Pitt made the Union with England the ground of his plea for Roman Catholic emancipation, as it would effectually prevent a Romish ascendency in Ireland. Home Rule in practice will destroy the control of Great Britain, and, therefore, involves the removal of the bulwark against Roman Catholic ascendency.

The contention of the Irish Protestants is that neither their will nor their religious liberties would be safe in the custody of Rome. In an Irish Parliament civil allegiance to the Holy See would be the test of membership, and would make every Roman Catholic member a civil servant of the Vatican. That Parliament would be compelled to carry out the behests of the Church. The Church is hostile to the liberty of the Press, to liberty of public speech, to Modernism in science, in literature, in philosophy; is bound to exact obedience from her own members and to extirpate heresy and heretics; claims to be above Civil Law, and the right to enforce Canon Law whenever she is able. There are

simply no limits even of life or property to the range of her intolerance. This is not an indictment; it is the boast of Rome. She plumes herself upon being an intolerant because she is an infallible Church, and her Irish claim, symbolised by the Papal Tiara, is supremacy over the Church, supremacy over the State, and supremacy over the invisible world. Unquestioning obedience is her law towards her own subjects, and intolerance tempered with prudence is her law towards Protestants. It is a strange hallucination to find that there are politicians to-day who think that Rome will change her principles at the bidding of Mr. Redmond, or to please hard-driven politicians, or to make Rome attractive to a Protestant Empire. Rome claims supremacy, and she tells us quite candidly what she will do when she gets it.

Here is our difficulty under Home Rule. Irish Protestants see that they must either refuse to go into an Irish Parliament, or else go into it as a hopeless minority, and turn it into an arena for the maintenance of their most elementary rights; in which case the Irish Parliament would be simply a cockpit of religio-political strife. But it would be a great mistake to suppose that the religious difficulty is confined to Irish Protestants. It is a difficulty which would become in time a crushing burden to Roman Catholics themselves. The yoke of Rome was found too heavy for Italy, and in a generation or two it would be found too heavy for Ireland. But for the creation of the Papal ascendency in Ireland, the responsibility must rest, in the long run, on Great Britain herself. England and Scotland, the most favoured lands of the Reformation, by establishing Home Rule in Ireland, will do for Rome what no other country in the world would do for her. They would entrust her with a legislative machine which she could control without check, hand over to her tender mercies a million of the best Protestants of the Empire, and establish at the heart of the Empire a power altogether at variance with her own ideals of Government, fraught with danger, and a good base of operations for the conquest of England. Can this be done with impunity? Can Great Britain divest herself of a

religious responsibility in dealing with Home Rule? Is there not a God in Heaven who will take note of such national procedure? Are electors not responsible to Him for the use they make of their votes? If they sow to the wind, must they not reap the whirlwind?

In brief compass, I hope I have made it quite clear what the Religious Difficulty in Ireland under Home Rule is. It is not a mere accident of the situation; it does not spring from any question of temper, or of prejudice, or of bigotry. The Religious Difficulty is created by the essential and fundamental genius of Romanism. Her whole ideal of life differs from the Protestant ideal. It is impossible to reconcile these two ideals. It is impossible to unite them in any amalgam that would not mean the destruction of both. Under Imperial Rule these ideals have discovered a decently working *modus vivendi*. Mr. Pitt's contention that the union with Great Britain would be an effectual barrier against Romanism has held good. But if you remove Imperial Rule than you create at a stroke the ascendancy of Rome, and under that ascendancy the greatest injustice would be inflicted on the Protestant minority. Questions of public situations and of efficient patronage are of very subordinate importance indeed. Mr. Redmond demands that Irish Protestants must be included in his Home Rule scheme, and threatens that if they object they must be dealt with "by the strong hand," and his Home Rule Parliament would be subservient to the Church of Rome. Does any one suppose that a million of the most earnest Protestants in the world are going to submit to such an arrangement? Neither Englishmen nor Scotsmen would be willing themselves to enter under such a yoke, and why should they ask Irishmen to do so?

It is contended, indeed, that the power of the priest in Ireland is on the wane. This is partly true and partly not true. It is true that he is not quite the political and social autocrat that he once was. But it is not true that the Church of Rome is less powerful in Ireland than she was. On the contrary, as an ecclesiastical organisation Rome was

never so compact in organisation, never so ably manned by both regular and secular clergy, never so wealthy nor so full of resource, never so obedient to the rule of the Vatican, as at the present moment. Give her an Irish Parliament, and she will be complete; she will patiently subdue all Ireland to her will. Emigration has drained the country of the strong men of the laity, who might be able to resist her encroachments. Dr. Horton truly says: "The Roman Church dominates Ireland and the Irish as completely as Islam dominates Morocco." By Ireland and the Irish Dr. Horton, of course, means Roman Catholic Ireland. Are you now going to place a legislative weapon in her hand whereby she will be able to dominate Protestants also? It is bad statesmanship; bad politics; bad religion. For Ireland it can bring nothing but ruin; and for the Empire nothing but terrible retribution in the future.