

England's Blind Spot

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Five years ago any Englishman who felt in need of indulging the more diabolical type of national pride had only to cross a strip of water, very choppy most of the time, but well worth crossing. He could then hear the most sincere of fulsome flattery about the Machiavellianism of "perfidious Albion." Any travelling Germans, Russians, or Italians who happened to overhear could be relied upon to swell the chorus of approval; growl as it was, it sounded like divinest music in British ears. For its refrain was that the Englishman was the most devilishly clever diplomat in the world. He was the Mephistopheles of politics. If the continent had had the Anglo-Saxon trick of following its opponents in fiction, the British spy would have been to it what the German spy, the Japanese spy, the Mexican spy are to our modern movie fans.

This estimate was a good one. England, with minuscule resources, has always managed to outmaneuver the cleverest enemies, against incredible odds. The policies of Elizabeth, of Cromwell, of Pitt stood as the David-Goliath victories of all time. There is no parallel in history. Greece resisted Persia by superior valour; Rome grew by conquest and assimilation; England's Empire, alone, is the creation of sheer statecraft.

But just as Herod in his pride was doomed to be slain by the smallest of all God's creatures, so England. Infernally clever as she is in all other respects, in one point she is more stupid than one could think possible. That nation is Ireland. It is not a story of one foolish minister; it is a tale of seven hundred years of consistent imbecility. King after king broke his shins by stumbling against the Irish bog-oak; Richard II. lost his crown,

and plunged England into a century of civil war, over his Irish wars. Statesman after statesman lost his reputation and his head, over Ireland; general after general buried his fame there. The Stuarts foundered there, even they; but for Strafford and the Irish tangle, Charles I. would have been "Beloved"; and Cromwell, astute and unscrupulous as he was, could do nothing in the Green Isle but massacre. Since his time the British policy has been one of frank extermination. 125 years ago the population of Ireland was greater than that of the United States; the ratio is now as 4 to 100.

The English deliberately laid Ireland waste by land laws which made agriculture economically impossible, so as to force an emigration; in the Black Year the relief ships were held upon technicalities that the people might starve. One can buy an estate of many thousand acres with a fine house in Ireland for five to ten thousand dollars. It was a commonplace of my boyhood to say that the Irish question could be settled easily by putting the island under water for 24 hours.

The official English apologist of these best years, Gilbert Keith Chesterton, has shown up an indictment of British rule in Ireland which makes the alleged German atrocities in Belgium read like harmless practical jokes, and he excuses England by saying that it was not "England, but only England's hired Prussian soldiers" that were responsible. The British are sometimes almost too ingenious!

Now all this trouble is only a trouble of temperament. It is a profound misunderstanding. I — moi qui vous parle — can trace back my Irish blood on the father's side to the Egyptians, my English blood on the mother's side to the Phoenicians; so I understand where the mischief lies. Vigorously pro-Ally as I am in the present juncture, I cannot place the whole blame of the recent revolution in Ireland upon the Irish.

On July 3, 1915, I proclaimed the Independence of Ireland at the foot of the Statue of Liberty. But I did not

intend to interpret that "independence" as "dependence on Germany!" The German temperament is surely the one thing more antagonistic to the Irish than the English temperament. There is no sense of what a German would call order in the Irish mind; all Irishmen have genius in its worst form! Hence it was utterly ridiculous of the English to try to prove that the martyrs of last Easter were "bribed by the Germans." For one thing, you can't bribe people whose action, if successful, gives them control of the wealth of a whole country, whose failure dooms them to the gallows. But British stupidity never hesitated. While all America, even violently pro-Ally America, was vomiting with horror and disgust at the murders of Pearse, Conolly, Skeffington and the rest, she calmly proceeded to vilify her victims. She did not even have the sense to see that the mere date of the Revolution — Holy Week — would inevitably link Pearse in the Catholic mind with the hero of the "World's Tragedy," and so make his name a rallying-cry of anti-English sentiment for the lifetime of Christianity.

Not content with hanging Casement in cold blood, though every one even in England knew him for a harmless idealist with a touch of the crank in him, she branded him by secret slander — not daring to publish the alleged evidence against him — as "immoral" in a particular sense which to all informed memories merely recalled the theft of the Crown Jewels of Dublin Castle by the servants of the crown.

To attribute what the French call "le vice anglais" to Casement was too funny. If they had laughed, it would not have been so bad; but they kept the veil of hypocrisy upon their faces, not knowing what word some rude little boy had written there.

For an Englishman not only "never knows when he is beaten"; he also never knows when he is found out. It is difficult to say how far this may be an advantage; but he has lied so long that he now lies in all sincerity; he has lost the sense of what truth is.

Therefore I do not say that the English were not sincere in their denunciation of those lofty souls who heard the clarion call of my Declaration of Independence, and sprang to arms. The tragedy of it is that they were. They had not imagination enough to put themselves in the place of any Home Rule Irishman. Let us give a sketch of the history of the movement.

1. It goes on rather hopelessly for 50 years or so after the treacherous destruction of Graham's Parliament.

2. Parnell takes hold, and forces the government to offer a measure. The government splits rather than pass it.

3. Parnell renews his efforts. This time, despite his own fill, the bill goes through the Commons. The Lords throw it out.

4. Another rally. The veto of the Lords is destroyed, principally in order to pass Home Rule.

5. The bill passes. Sir Edward Carson revolts, drills men, runs guns, with the Government and the army for his accomplices. England, even the anti-Home-Rule section, is aghast.

6. The King signs the bill. General relief; "Oh well, that's done with, thank God! It's law now; *but we needn't enforce it, need we?*"

But now? Yes: even now a frank acceptance of the Law of England might save England. Let Dublin Castle be abolished; perhaps no other act would be necessary. Ulster and Rebel Cork have learnt to understand each other in the last two years, to some extent. Home Rule is now possible as never before. At least a fair trial would be evidence of England's good intentions.

Or is her Blind Spot "a place that is always barred"?
Oh William Schwenck Gilbert!