

## EDITORIAL

LADY SYKES, writing in *BLACKFRIARS* (Jan., 1921) on the sad state of affairs existing in Ireland just a year ago, said: "I believe that even now a cessation of hostilities on both sides could be arranged, and that if negotiations were entered upon in a generous and Christian spirit between the Government and the elected representatives of the people of Ireland, they would succeed in evolving for themselves a solution that would satisfy their national aspirations."

The belief contained in these words has been justified, and we behold in Ireland to-day almost as astounding a miracle as a prophecy fulfilled—that is, a granted wish or a dream come true. Our wishes, sometimes too sanguine, we feared, ever to be realized, have been granted; our dreams, too wildly ideal except for dreamland, have come true. The eternal Irish Question has been given a satisfactory answer. Are we speaking too hastily or too optimistically when we say that the stumbling-block that has tripped so many British statesmen has been removed? Is it too soon to say that a, so-called, "insuperable" difficulty has been overcome and that Britain's family ghost has at last been laid? There are some who fear the caprice of politics, others have an almost superstitious belief in the dread fate that dogs the steps of Ireland wresting the prize when within her grasp; but we have sufficient faith in English and Irish common sense and in ordinary Christian charity among men to believe that the insane quarrel of centuries has at last been settled. It is something to be grateful for to have lived to see this consummation for which men have laboured, struggled, and died.

The historian of the future, unhampered by passion and prejudice and able to view events from a distance

*BLACKFRIARS*, Vol. II, No. 22.

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in their true perspective and proportions, will doubtless explain them otherwise than do those men of our own time who were too much immersed in the struggle to be able to stand back from it and see it clearly in its true outlines. History will not hold with Lord Carson's verdict that the settlement was won at the cost of England's abject humiliation. Nor will it agree with him that rebellion triumphed over law and order ; still less, with the extremists in Ireland, will it regard the Treaty as the shameful defeat of Sinn Fein.

The historian who sets out, not merely to chronicle events, but to assign their causes, will show how the Great War (which was fought for small nations) let loose a new idea into the world. This idea was called self-determination, or the right of nations to govern themselves freely and manage their own affairs. He will show how Ireland took up the idea, calling it Sinn Fein ; how Britain was convinced that the granting of complete autonomy to Ireland would endanger the Empire, and he will relate the cruel conflict that raged during 1920-21. Our historian will, of course, say something of American influence, not necessarily the articulate expression of public sentiment so much as the silent, relentless pressure of economic forces. He will, of course, mention the Washington Conference. If he is an evolutionary historian, he will show how every event grew out of something else and how it all developed, flowered and ripened till the happy issue was reached. But we hope he will not be too "evolutionary." We hope he will not be so engaged with the mechanism of his theory that he will imagine that political and economic forces work themselves out automatically, and stumble into results by a series of amazing flukes. We hope that he will not forget that *men* rather than events form the raw material of history, and that it is that incalculable thing, the free-will of man, that makes or mars

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the events. He must not forget that the actors are not the least important part of the drama. Let him give honour, then, to the representatives of both peoples who had the vision to see and the courage to grasp a unique opportunity. Supreme credit will be due to His Majesty King George V, who by his Belfast speech first set the minds of men in the direction of peace and gave the initiative to the establishing of the truce which made the agreement a possibility. By Catholics of this and succeeding generations his name will be remembered as the first king who did not take the blasphemous coronation oath and as the king who helped to bring a new era of peace and happiness to Ireland.

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It is a consoling thought to be able to reflect that most of the articles on Ireland that have appeared in *BLACKFRIARS* during the last twenty months have been justified by recent events. As long ago as August, 1920, these words appeared in *BLACKFRIARS*: "The formula of an Irish settlement is as simple as it always has been. . . . Give Ireland real self-government, with full power to manage her own affairs. . . . Give Ireland a fair offer which will be really carried out, and a settlement could be had for the asking."

Those words were not a mere political statement, but the expression of principles that are enshrined in the British Constitution and are implied in the notion of the cardinal virtue of justice. We hope that current events will prove them to have been prophetic.

THE EDITOR.