

THE IRISH ISSUE

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The Irish Issue by William J. M. A. Maloney

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WILLIAM J. M. A. MALONEY

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BY

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CAPTAIN IN THE BRITISH ARMY

August, 1914—August, 1916

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*The following articles appeared successively
in AMERICA
on October 16, 23, and 30, and on
November 6, and 13, 1918, respectively*

DEDICATION

*To the glorious and indomitable people
of Ireland, now the only subject people
in Europe.*

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The Irish Issue in Its American Aspect

ABOUT 150 years ago the American States, becoming increasingly self-conscious, felt it to be inconsistent with their rights longer to submit to colonial bondage. They readily perceived a community of interests with Ireland, the oldest of England's dependencies. Not that the American States, 3,000 miles from England, had ever experienced the weight of the yoke which Ireland, on the threshold of England, endured. But in principle the problem confronting the two dependencies was identical. "The question in both countries," wrote Froude ("English in Ireland," p. 189), "was substantially the same; whether the Mother Country had a right to utilize her dependencies for her own interests irrespective of their consent." And the all-wise Franklin, preparing for the contest which was to settle this question for his people, visited Ireland in 1771 to emphasize to the Irish Patriot party the essential unity of American aims with Irish interests. "I found them," he records ("Franklin's Works," VII., p. 557-558) "disposed to be friends of America in which I endeavored to confirm them with the expectation that our growing weight might in turn be thrown into one scale and by joining our interests with theirs a more equitable treatment from this nation (England) might be obtained for

themselves as well as for us." Franklin not only sought through Ireland to weaken England in the impending struggle against the American States, he also contemplated an affiliation of Ireland and of Canada with the people he represented. His diplomatic mission was followed up by action on the part of the first general Congress which met in Philadelphia on September 4, 1774.

For any subject of England to aid America was, of course, treason against England. And the American Fathers, conscious of the consequences of this crime, deemed it their duty to forbid the Island of Jamaica to incur the dangers of aiding the Revolution. "The peculiar situation of your Island," said the Congressional Letter to the Jamaican Assembly, read on July 25, 1775, "forbids your assistance." Remoteness from England endowed Jamaica with, at least, relative safety. If wise discretion was advisable in Jamaica, it might have been considered imperative in Ireland, isolated and well nigh defenseless at the very gates of England, and therefore in a "peculiar situation" to perform vicarious expiation for all traitorous colonists.

But no admonition to caution came from Congress to moderate Irish ardor for the American cause. Instead, Congress appointed a committee to draft an address "To the People of Ireland" which was read on July 28, 1775, and which ran as follows:

We are desirous of the good opinion of the virtuous and humane. We are peculiarly desirous of furnishing you with the true state of our motives and objects; the better to enable you to judge of our conduct with accuracy and determine the merits of the controversy with impartiality and precision. Your Parliament has done us no wrong. You had ever been friendly

to the rights of mankind; and we acknowledge with pleasure and gratitude that your nation has produced patriots who have nobly distinguished themselves in the cause of humanity and of America.

The judgment sought by Congress from Ireland was so unanimous in favor of America that the disastrous effect of the Revolution on Irish trade did not prevent "the mass of the people, both Catholic and Protestant, from wishing success to the patriotic colonists" (Mitchel). "Ireland was with America to a man," declared Pitt, the "Great Commoner" (Bancroft's "History of the United States," vol. VII., p. 194). The people of Dublin presented their thanks, and the "Merchants' Guild" gave an address of honor to the Earl of Effingham who "refused to draw the sword against the lives and liberties of his fellow-subjects" in America. In Belfast meetings were held and money was raised to support the American cause. And Grattan boldly referred to America as "the only hope of Ireland and the only refuge of the liberties of mankind" ("Select Speeches of Grattan," edited by Duffy, p. 104). The menace of that "hostility to the pretensions of England" which Franklin had sought to excite in Ireland, grew aggressively until it proved powerful to reinforce American valor in establishing the independence of the revolting States.

The Americans had incited in the Irish a fervor for freedom which Lord North and his contemporaries, in spite of conciliation, corruption and concession failed to calm. It did not evoke a crisis till 1782, and it did not make the country a shambles till 1798; but from the first it was an ever present danger at the very heart of the British Empire and it gravely handicapped the war