

EDITORIAL

RELIGIOUS HATE IN IRELAND

MR. HILAIRE BELLOC in a letter to the *Daily News* (January 21st) puts forward an aspect of the Irish situation which is so important that it should not be ignored by Catholics in this country. He says that the view is prevalent on the Continent and in every quarter of the United States that the present turmoil in Ireland is nothing more than a religious war, that the "burnings, torturings, floggings, murders and the rest are regarded everywhere as essentially the persecution of a Catholic people because they are Catholic, and as the outcome of an almost insane religious hatred."

Apparently the foreign view is that the mass of Englishmen are violently and bitterly opposed to the Irish on account of their religion, and are therefore either encouraging or condoning the present "terror" in Ireland. Mr. Belloc rightly disavows this charge and is at pains to prove its falsehood. Anyone who knows England and Englishmen must see the absurdity of this view. One had thought that the large tolerance given in England to every form of religious belief had become a proverb in Europe. Whenever one meets French or German priests who have been driven by anti-Catholic legislation to seek a home in England, or again when one comes across French priests who have worked as missionaries in India, invariably any conversation on England (whether it be panegyric or the reverse) will end something like this: "At any rate, nowhere in the world does the Catholic Church enjoy such complete liberty as under British rule." That remark seems about the most obvious commonplace that can be put into words.

The average Englishman is usually inclined to indifference in religious matters. Perhaps he is not

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sufficiently convinced in his own beliefs to be a bigot. Rarely has he any bitterness in his heart against his neighbour's religion : he is vaguely perplexed by it, but seldom feels strongly enough about it to hate it.

To disprove this legend of English hatred for Ireland's religion, Mr. Belloc calls attention to the undeniable fact that those " sections of English opinion which are most attached to the national tradition in matters of religion, which might be called without any exaggeration the Protestant Press, are decidedly the most favourable to a just settlement of the Irish problem." And he might have added that the Catholic Press in this country is not always as enthusiastically outspoken on Irish claims as opinion in Ireland would seem to demand. Among Catholics in England there is not that unity of opinion which one would expect if the Irish affair could be summed up as a state of antagonism between Protestant England and Catholic Ireland. There is probably no more fruitful source of discord among Catholics in this country than the Irish question. This fact may explain the attitude of editors whose primary concern is to provide Catholic news and items of more specifically religious interest. Doubtless it is a laudable desire to avoid stirring up discords within the household that bids them avoid as much as possible the unpleasant debate.

We do not wish to throw blame on Catholic editors or to criticize the views of Catholics, whether English or Irish. We only wish to draw a simple conclusion from simple premises—namely : there is no religious war between the people of England and the people of Ireland.

If it is true that Cromwell's methods are being revived in Ireland, at least it is certain that the motives *now* are not those that inspired Cromwell. The various " risings " at different times during the last hundred and twenty years were not essentially religious

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in character. Wolfe Tone, Emmett, Parnell and Casement are not names that one would associate with a Catholic crusade. No. We must agree with Mr. Belloc that "the foundation of it all is not religious hatred at all, but the determination of the Irish to govern themselves as free men, and the conviction of this country as a whole that complete autonomy for Ireland would endanger the safety of the realm." That is as simple and complete an analysis of the situation as it is possible to give.

Mr. Belloc admits that there is religious hatred in Ireland, but he declares that it is not of English origin. It comes from that small section in the north-eastern corner of Ireland whom he calls the "Orange Group." This body is inspired by no higher or more statesman-like motive than "a blind hatred of the Catholic Church." These men are the agents of British policy in Ireland: "nothing else explains the repeated and wanton insults offered to the Catholic religion and to its ministers, not as the enemies of this country, but as the members of a hated religious body. Nothing else explains the condonation of the abominable acts in Belfast, whereby thousands have been rendered destitute and homeless. Nothing else explains the searching of men and women for religious emblems, and the questions continually put by the terrorists to their victims to declare their religion as a test whether it be safe to assault or kill them or burn down their houses."

Considering that such happenings are bringing discredit on the British name among friend and foe abroad, it is well that Catholics in this country should ask themselves how long such things should be allowed to continue.

THE EDITOR.