

EDITORIAL

ENGLAND'S chronic difficulty—the perennial, insuperable problem of the politician, the persistent stumbling-block of the British statesman—is called Ireland. Since the “Union,” the difficulty has only grown more acute and more complex. After one hundred and twenty years the Irish Question still remains a question to which there is no answer. We are familiar with much that has been written to explain the endless quarrel between the two islands ; but an explanation that does not open some way to a healing of the cleavage is entirely beside the mark. A diagnosis that does not lead to a remedy only leads to despair. It is futile to allege that the situation is the result of the clash of economic forces, that it is the necessary conflict between industrial England and agricultural Ireland, unless we can somehow reconcile these opposite ideas. What use is it to declare the whole affair a mere religious quarrel, unless, forsooth, you be impelled to effect a reconciliation by working zealously for the conversion of England ? Of even less avail is it to say that it is all a matter of racial aversion, because, like the leopard's spots, a man's nationality is not within his own control.

Mere philosophizing and moralizing about the trouble should be avoided, especially when the findings of your philosophy only tend to prove to you that the chasm is either wider than you thought or is too wide to be bridged. The only hopeful way of looking

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at the situation is to look for a way out of the embroglio. A man who has tumbled into a well can afford to put off the consideration of the reason why he fell in and concentrate every faculty on the question of how he is going to get out. For the time being it is irrelevant whether he was deliberately pushed in on account of his political opinions, or whether he was intoxicated. For the moment the only consideration for him is : How to get out.

If this phrase " How to get out " were the master-thought of all those engaged in the Irish arena, perhaps a way out might be more easily discovered ; but most of the discussion turns on the question of how the trouble began, who is responsible. Meanwhile the whole horrible business continues because men will not agree to seek a remedy. If, instead of apportioning blame, both sides were to agree to snatch every opportunity of ending the struggle, peace would be in sight.

The history of English and Irish relations might be called the sad record of a long series of lost opportunities. It is usual to say that lost opportunities never return. True enough, a chance missed is missed for ever ; but it is extraordinary how, if we have the patience to wait for them, other opportunities will constantly recur. And in a land like Ireland, where history repeats itself with almost mathematical accuracy and regularity, the opportunities of a settlement are ever recurring, if British statesmen had only the eyes to see them and the courage to grasp them.

Editorial

When Gladstone's Home Rule Bill fell through, the despairing cry went up that a unique opportunity had been missed ; and saddened pessimists said that never again should we behold a British Premier championing Ireland's cause at Westminster. Yet they proved to be wrong.

The opportunity did come again and was missed in 1914. There are some who are optimistic enough to see in the present moment a chance of a settlement. The Bishop of Cork has openly expressed this view in a letter to *The Times*. Such optimism, coming from a city whose sufferings in the recent reprisals campaign might be expected to leave little room for optimism, is particularly valuable, and should be given every encouragement. Every nerve should be strained, every avenue explored that seems to lead to the hope of a reconciliation. But reconciliation is incompatible with retaliation. Common sense tells us that the only basis of negotiation must be an armistice. Both sides must agree to " cease fire " before a parley can be initiated. In other words the " reprisals " must cease. All are agreed that the Government can inspire confidence and show the sincerity of its will for peace by withdrawing the mercenaries, commonly called the Black-and-Tans, whose presence in Ireland is a perpetual irritant and an incentive to lawlessness.

If everyone, English and Irish alike, would direct their efforts, not to the discovery of who is to blame, not to mutual recrimination, but to the searching after the opportunities for healing their discords, the

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present appalling state of things would not last. If both sides could only be brought to trust one another (therein lies the whole crux of the matter) we might be nearer to the dawn of the day when Ireland will no longer be John Bull's family ghost, the Banquo always turning up to disturb his merry feast. But ghosts are only multiplied by bloodshed. They are effectively laid only by Christian means—by the Christian virtues of Faith, Hope, and Love : and the greatest of these is Love.

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Considerations of the value of our space prevent us from printing any of the lengthy letters we have received with regard to the article on *Dress* that appeared in our December issue. While the editor does not want in any way to discourage helpful comment, or to stifle legitimate criticism, he feels that it is unfair to the readers of BLACKFRIARS to fill precious space with merely contentious and sometimes abusive letters. Letters intended for the Correspondence Page should formulate some definite idea, and above all should be brief and to the point.

THE EDITOR.

