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SOME THOUGHTS ON THE IRISH QUESTION.

By LIAM DE RÓISTE

I HAVE been reading some recent speeches of Mr. Bonar Law and of the Duke of Bedford. Unlike the effect of most political pronouncements, two of these speeches have stimulated thought.

Mr. Law's contentions, so far as one can gather, may be summarised thus :

1. "Ulster" is right in resisting Irish Home Rule.
2. If the present Government in power in England carry the Home Rule Bill without reference once more to the people of Great Britain, either by general election or referendum, the Government becomes a tyranny, and justifies *armed* resistance on the part of "Ulster," which will be supported by the Tory Party of England.
3. If, by means of a general election or a referendum a majority of the English people favour the passing of the Home Rule Bill, "Ulster" may still resist, and will be right in so doing, but the English Tory Party will not back it.

Mr. Law was, however, careful, in a speech delivered at Bristol, to remind his hearers that the Ulster Covenant was a declaration to resist the passage of the Home Rule Bill through the English Parliament, *not to resist an Irish Parliament*, if once set up! Which reminder throws a flood of light on the antics of the English Tory Party and the use they wish to make of the "Ulster question."

A lesson that some Irishmen might learn from some of Mr. Law's remarks is this—that *armed resistance to a tyranny is justifiable and a duty on every citizen*. And on the lines of his remarks a tyranny may be defined as a government that does not consult the wishes of the people it governs. These are general principles, of course, with which most people must agree. Let us carry them to their logical conclusion with regard to English government in Ireland. It cannot be denied that English government in Ireland is, and always has been, maintained without reference to the wishes

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of the people of Ireland. Not only is this not denied, but has it not been boasted of by English Tories that they can force their ideas of law and order and government on the people, and that Englishmen know better than the people of Ireland themselves what is good for Ireland. Is not "twenty years of resolute government" the ideal government for Ireland held by many would-be statesmen in England yet? Resolute government and a fig for the wishes of the Irish people! Carrying Mr. Law's arguments to their just conclusion in application to this country, are the Irish people not justified, and have they not always been justified, in resisting English government, even by force, when they consider such government a tyranny, a tyranny being a government that does not consult the wishes of the people it governs? Not alone justified, but, following Mr. Bonar Law's just reasoning, it is a duty incumbent upon every citizen of the Irish nation to resist such government, even to the extent of armed resistance.

Mr. Law and his party cannot have things both ways. If his party are willing to bow to the will of the majority in their own country, if they think it just and right to do so, what is their justification for the resistance of "Ulster" to the wishes of the Irish people? If the will of the majority, however unpalatable to the minority, must be accepted in England, why must not the will of the majority in Ireland be accepted by the minority here? The Tory Party in England believe in majority rule—in England. But when it comes to Ireland—then right becomes wrong and wrong right!

Mr. Law clearly shows the need and the justification for the Irish National Volunteers. His party declare that if they get back to power in England—a not unlikely thing some time in the future—they will not govern Ireland according to the wishes of the Irish people; they will, in fact, establish a tyranny in Ireland. And, on Mr. Law's showing, the Irish people will be justified in resisting that tyranny by force of arms, as "Ulster" is now justified, according to him, in resisting what it considers a tyranny by force of arms. The obvious thing, then, for Irish Nationalists at the present time is to make the Irish National Volunteer force so strong that tyranny

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will be impossible in the future. Now is the time to prepare, not when the tyranny is established in its strongholds. Now is the time for the Irish people to show their determination not to submit to a future probable tyranny. The strengthening of the National Volunteers will demonstrate to all that the Irish people are in deadly earnest in the desire for a home government. Earnestness must be met with earnestness and force by force.. Such action will lead to mutual respect, and it will be far better for our nation, as it is for any nation, that its different sections respect each other rather than that they affect to despise each other.

The Duke of Bedford's concern was principally with the military aspect of "Ulster's" resistance. He showed how weak the English army is; how unlikely it is that that army could beat 90,000 Irishmen from Ulster; how a conflagration in Ulster would lead to the break-up of the British Empire by showing a way to India and South Africa to become free. I have always heard as the supposed clinching argument against physical force in Ireland that physical force by Irishmen in resistance to English tyranny had no chance of success because of the strength of the British army and navy. But the Duke of Bedford demonstrated, and his hearers cheered his demonstration, that the British army could not conquer an army of Irishmen from one province in Ireland. If that be the case—and the Duke of Bedford, as an army man himself, should know something about the matter—how little chance, on his showing, would the British army have against an Irish army drawn from three provinces—to say nothing of four provinces—of Ireland. That is a logical deduction to be drawn from the Duke's statements—that the English army could not withstand a large force of Irishmen. Assuming the statement to be true, there is something for Irish Nationalists generally and the leaders of the Irish Volunteers particularly to think over. If "Ulster" will gain concessions, or if by any chance it defeats the passage of the Home Rule Bill, what a lesson will be taught to Irishmen generally of the effectiveness of force, a lesson that they should and must take to heart. But, in any case, owing to the present threats of one of the great English

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political parties to interfere with the rights and liberties of the Irish Nation, the Irish people will be wise in preparing to resist what is threatened, by strengthening the ranks of the Irish National Volunteers. To anyone who calmly and seriously thinks upon the subject, with a knowledge of Irish history and unprejudiced by party views, the strengthening of the National Volunteer force is the real work for the Irish Nation to-day.