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**THE TRAGEDY OF ROGER CASEMENT**

Mr. McColl's Study

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WHAT a strange man he was," exclaims Mr. MacColl in describing Roger Casement in mid-career, and it is one of the merits of ,his book' that he never allows a clearsighted recognition of Casement's many weaknesses to destroy his genuine sympathy and evident desire to understand an alien point of view. Unfortunately, Ireland is not his spiritual home, and whenever he touches Irish affairs he goes badly off the beam. To proclaim that "I do not believe that patriotism was his (Casement's) primary motive in joining the Nationalist movement. I consider it was due to wounded vanity, to a sense of slight" inflicted by the stuffed-shirts of Whitehall, is fair neither to Casement's deepest convictions nor to the patience and tact shown by the Foreign Office to a most quarrelsome and exacting subordinate.

Controversial matters apart, it is good to have such a full and attractively written account of the Congo and Putumayo episodes, and to be reminded that this unknown young Irishman fought his way unaided into a position where he made a permanent contribution to the civilizing of Africa. If he failed to do as much for the still more tormented folk on the Upper Amazon, that was hardly his fault, or that of the Foreign Office. But after Putumayo "nothing seemed to go right." His own acknowledged diaries, the captured German documents, the correspondence of John Devoy (the old Clan-na-Gael leader), the evidence of Robert Monteith, who accompanied him on the chill Fenit landing, all unite in showing that his American visit was a failure and his German mission a series of humiliating disasters.

He had rashly taken with him to Germany a Norwegian sailor pervert, one Adler Christiansen, whom he had picked up in New York, and his persistent association with this unsavoury character had given the Germans a very unfavourable impression of his stability and judgment. His preoccupation with the mysterious episode in Christiana, when the British Minister apparently bribed Christiansen to kidnap him, further irritated his hosts, and the unexpected resistance of the Irish prisoners of war to his blandishments completed German disillusionment, and Casement's ruin. It gradually dawned on the distraught man that the Germans (as might have been guessed from their, history) cared nothing for Irish Nationalism as a cause, and the Dublin revolutionaries could rely only on a minimum of aid. His frantic efforts to prevent them walking, as he believed, into a trap, only brought him more unpopularity all round, and he was told practically nothing. A suggestion that the fragmentary "Irish Brigade" should be sent to Egypt to fight with the Turks against the British and their allies was a particularly unhappy effort, for, as Mr. MacColl points out, it destroyed Casement's later plea that he was a sincere if misguided patriot who had done nothing but try to persuade his fellow countrymen to enrol an army of liberation for Ireland. It was only because the German military authorities thought the men too ill-disciplined even to be trusted with weapons that the plan failed to materialize.

The story of Casement, like a Graham Greene novel, is rich in absorbing ethical problems which tend to be overlooked in favour of some comparatively uninteresting dilemma of sex. Is a man justified in entering voluntarily into the service of the Crown and then if war breaks out deciding to act on the maxim that "England's danger is Ireland's opportunity”? Is it a sound idea to attempt to seduce voluntarily enlisted prisoners of war from their allegiance? (The Korean campaign has shown us what this practice can lead to). In 1916, the British public, as my recollection goes, felt so vehemently on these points that one finds it difficult to accept today's verdict that it was Casement's abnormal sexual propensities which brought about his tragic end. This aspect of his character was known outside the relatively small circle of important people who had been shown the Black Diaries, but he was so generally execrated for his treachery 'that. I venture to doubt if even a War Cabinet would have dared reprieve him, except (as F. E. Smith clearly saw) on the ground of insanity.

On the painful subject of the diaries, Mr. MacColl manages to write dispassionately, although his examination of the evidence leaves him in no doubt as to their authenticity. It is hard to see what other conclusion he could reach when the only evidence to the contrary consists of vague statements by Mr. Bulmer Hobson and Mr. P. Hegarty, and the fact (which he does not mention) that Sir Basil Thomson gives somewhat inconsistent accounts of their contents and history in his various books. The positive evidence that they exist and could in fact have been written by none other than Casement is strong enough to sink a battleship. The handwriting was never queried by anyone who knew Casement's distinctive script. The only suggestion of alternative authorship names a certain Armando Normand, a Bolivian who had lived in London and was employed by the abominable Putumayo rubber company first as an interpreter and then as a manager. In examining the original reports on the Putumayo area, I found that Casement had a peculiar horror of this man, whom he charged with an assortment of revolting crimes, including lustful propensities towards women, but never with perversions. An incriminating diary would have been exactly the evidence needed to bring this scoundrel to account, but not only does Casement never refer to such a document in his reports or his own open diaries, but not one of his English colleagues could come forward to say that he had ever mentioned it. It is inconceivable that he should not have told Cadbury, Morel, or Harris about it, especially if he had been at pains to translate it and then copy the long translation in his own hand. Other witnesses, including Mr. MacColl himself, testify that the diaries include accounts of incidents in the Congo, Denham and other places where Casement had resided and Normand had certainly never been. No wonder that Dr. Maloney of Philadelphia, in his confused volume on The Forged Casement Diaries abandons the theory of a simple translation and is driven to the wild surmise that the papers circulated at the time of the trial were elaborate forgeries concocted by industrious Scotland Yard officials from their own files on homosexual offenders, and grafted on to Casement's translation of Normand's terrible document !

Today, we are much more likely to be shocked by the use made of the diaries by Admiral Sir Reginald Hall and Sir Basil Thomson than by the moral deviations of the writer. However, the revelations, once made public, cannot be unmade, and as they have been so fiercely disputed it seems grotesque for the Government to remain voluntarily under the slur of having committed a vile forgery, a charge much more widely believed than they seem to realize. Professor Denis Gwynn has now revealed that the ban of secrecy was originally imposed in deference to the wishes of Casement's relatives; the attitude of his admirers still recalls that of the old lady who didn't believe in ghosts, but was very frightened of them. No greater tribute could now be paid to the memory of a man who gave of his best to his country than a determination to face the truth about him with charity and courage.

The statement made in this as in other biographies of Casement, that he was "dropped into quicklime," may be misunderstood. He was in fact, like all executed persons, coffined and buried in earth. But, by very old custom, some quicklime would probably have been thrown into the grave, the purpose being to prevent the possible escape of putrefactive gases into a prison yard closely hemmed in by buildings. This practice (which. has, I believe, been discontinued of recent years) has in some instances the effect of preserving rather than of destroying the bodies.

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