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**Eoin MacNeill to ? editor re Ernest Hambloch book review**

**15 January 1938, published 17 January**

Sir -

It was hardly necessary in your review of Mr. Hambloch's book, to tell us that, in the opinion of the General manager of a Brazilian railway or of a British consul in Brazil, Roger Casement was a “humbug”. Their main business, for which they were employed and paid, was to secure dividends and profits for investors and traders. We can well understand how the line that Casement took made him appear a humbug to them, and we may even think of that humbug, in the circumstances was a mild way of putting it. He must have been an infernal nuisance. We also get the view of “the community at Rio”, the exploitation community. they “voted him not normal and whispered that he was abnormal.” In view of what happened afterwards, “whispered” is good and 'abnormal” is skilful. They point to the beginnings of a campaign ending in an episode, which in its close association with judicial proceedings, would be hard to match in the history of foul play. Mr. Hambloch frees himself from one feature of the campaign when he says, no doubt with full deliberation and sense of significance, “there was nothing evil about Casement”. It is hard to say which of the two was more disgraceful, the charge of evil or the use made of it.

The faults of character that Mr. Hambloch found in Casement, and, apparently, not in the course of any close personal acquaintance, were want of a sense of humour, taking himself too seriously, incapacity of enjoying life with gusto. “He was the saddest of God's creatures.” “A gust of laughter might have been his salvation.” When I read that I can form some idea of the humour and enjoyment of life and material for gusts of laughter that were acceptable to “the community at Rio.” It has been suggested by the writer of another book that Casement was afflicted with some sort of mental depression after his experiences in South America and mid-Africa. I will follow the example of moderation given by the General Manager of the Leopoldina Railway when I say that this sort of talk about Casement is all humbug. I knew him intimately in his latter years after his retirement from the Consular Service. He was often in my house, joined in our meals, made merry with the children. We travelled together in the country, attended numerous meetings and conferences together. Neither I nor any of my family saw a shadow of sadness in him. He had a keen sense of humour and was always bright and cheerful. Far from taking himself too seriously, he had no vanity and seemed almost unconscious of himself. If he had appreciated his own mental gifts, he could have made a name for himself both as a poet and prose writer. Certainly he had a dignity, both physical and spiritual, that came to him naturally, but his complete freedom from pretentiousness or snobbery or contempt for others would have delighted G.K. Chesterton. There are hundreds of others who knew him in that time, who can confirm what I say from their own experience. One thing I have to add. The man who had the fullest opportunity of knowing Roger Casement's heart and mind in his last days said to me: “That man was a saint.”

What was wrong with him to make him a humbug to dividend seekers and sad and abnormal to trade exploiters? There are earnest missionaries, not doubt, who teach the children in Putumayo and the Congo to say “Our Father” as well they may, for those words are the one and only charter of human liberty, equality and fraternity. They imply “our brothers and sisters”, and Roger Casement believed in them in that sense, without limitation of race or colour or grade of civilization, and tried to live up to them. Of course, that was not business, it was not finance, and it was very far from being politics.

Your reviewer says that Casement was “anti-English”, and that “there was no humbug about his feelings towards the country whose uniform he wore.” It is untrue that he was anti-English. Even if it were true, the country which he served was not England but the “United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland”. Am I wrong in thinking that, in the same service, he might have been as anti-Irish as he liked without earning the reproach of disloyalty from that point of view? It would be worth while enquiring what exactly he was “anti”. I can supply a part of the answer from my own knowledge and experience. He was very strongly anti the infamous device of fostering sectarian hatred as an instrument of politics.

I am just reminded that one of Casement's ways of enjoying life was to buy a barrel of apples and bring it to a country school.

Yours, etc.

Eoin MacNeill

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