

The Volunteer Movement.

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It would be impossible to find a parallel in Irish movements for the rapid growth of the National Volunteers. Our contemporary, "The Sunday Independent," computes that the force already numbers 130,000 men, and probably the estimate is a moderate one. As far as County Kilkenny is concerned, the figure has been put at 3,000, but scarcely a day passes that we do not receive communications from some portion of this and neighbouring counties, chronicling the formation of new corps or making inquiries as to the initial steps to be taken with that object in view. There can be no doubt but that some such Irish movement as this, was necessary to rouse the younger generation of Irishmen, to whom the purely economic aspect of constitutional agitation did not appeal. Besides that, North-East Ulster had set a headline that could not be mis-read. The Volunteers there had succeeded almost in smashing constitutional government, and the lesson of the surrenders made to force was not lost on the rest of Ireland. Shortly after the formation of the National Volunteers, the Government issued a proclamation prohibiting the importation of arms to Ireland. In one way this might have been regarded as a compliment to the Nationalists. It might be read to mean that armed Nationalists were a real menace, while armed Orangemen were simply playing at war. But the unfairness of the proceeding admitted no question, and brought into prominence the fact that there are two laws in Ireland—one for the ascendancy party, and another for the common people, no matter what Government happens to be in power. Since this proclamation, the gun-running in the North of Ireland has taken place, thus proving that whatever vigilance might have been exercised elsewhere on the coast of Ireland, the Northern seaboard was exempt from supervision. We have our own ideas as to the extent of the gun-running in Ulster; every exploit of the Orangemen is divisible by a hundred, before the real facts are ascertained, and there is a shrewd idea abroad that the Ulster army was as well off for the munitions of war prior to the arrival of the "mystery ship," as it is to-day. However, Sir Edward Carson took full responsibility for what occurred, and gloried in his immunity from punishment, so that once

again the Government has committed itself, despite its proclamation, to the right of citizens in a free country to arm themselves for all eventualities. It is difficult to say to what extent the National Volunteers are an armed force. We may be quite certain that if they have succeeded in procuring effective weapons, they will be slow to advertise the fact. That they have come to stay is now recognised by even the most re-actionary of the old school of politics. That they are an absolute necessity to the political development of the country, is obvious to anyone who takes the trouble of looking ahead for a few years. There is now little doubt as to the passage into law of the Home Rule Bill. We are threatened with an amending Bill which will tamper with the vital principles of the original measure, and after that, and in all probability before the Act becomes operative, with a general election. We do not believe for a moment that the next general election will secure the return to power of the Unionists, but the English electorate is notoriously fickle, and believes in giving the political parties turn and turn about. The political necessities of the moment, therefore, require that the original Bill shall not be tampered with, and that repeal will be rendered impossible. Both objects can only be attained through the Volunteer movement, which, we hope, will have grown to five times its present dimensions by the time Parliament re-assembles. There are other considerations also, notably that if the invasion of England ever takes place, or that country engages in war with a foreign nation, Ireland would be of necessity abandoned to its fate. Surely patriotic Ulster men, no matter to what political party they belong, should be largely influenced by this consideration. Hitherto, it has been found impossible to bring North and South together on a peace platform. Perhaps, however, as brothers-in-arms, that end may be attained. Who can tell? A united Ireland would be simply invincible, whether in the arts of war or commerce.