

James Connolly

The Fighting Race

1898

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We gather from the American newspapers that our countrymen in the United States army and navy have been highly distinguishing themselves in the cause of the war with Spain.

This is as it should be and in consonance with all our Irish traditions. We are a fighting race, we are told, and every Irishman is always proud to hear our politicians and journalists tell of our exploits in the fighting line – in other countries, in other climes and in other times.

Yes, we are a fighting race. Whether it is under the Stars and Stripes or under the Union Jack; planting the flag of America over the walls of Santiago or helping our own oppressors to extend their hated rule over other unfortunate nations our brave Irish boys are ever to the front.

When the Boer has to be robbed of his freedom, the Egyptian has to be hurled back under the heel of his taskmaster, the Zulu to be dynamited in his caves, the Matabele slaughtered beside the ruins of his smoking village or Afridi to be hunted from his desolated homestead, wheresoever, in short, the bloody standard of the oppressors of Ireland is to be found over some unusually atrocious piece of scoundrelism, look then for the sons of our Emerald Isle, and under the red coats of the hired assassin army you will find them.

Yes, we are a fighting race. In Africa, India or America, wherever blood is to be spilt, there you will find Irishmen, eager and anxious for a fight, under any flag, in anybody's quarrel, in any cause – except their own.

In that cause, for our own freedom and own land, we have for the last century consistently refused to fight. On any other part of the earth's surface we can shed our blood with the blessing of Mother Church and the prayers of the faithful to strengthen our arms, but in Ireland and for the freedom of the Irish people.

Anathema.

It is an impious thought and we must avoid it. Whatever we do let us keep on the safe side of the road and not quarrel with the Church – which denounced the United Irishmen and excommunicated the Fenians.

Faith and Fatherland. Oh, yes. But don't forget that when the Englishman was a Catholic and worshipped at the same altar as the Irishman, he plundered, robbed and murdered the Irishman as relentlessly as he did when, with sword in one hand and Bible in the other, he came snuffily chanting his psalms in the train of Oliver Cromwell.



The question of religious faith has precious little bearing upon the question of freedom. Witness Catholic Spain devastating Catholic Cuba, the Catholic capitalists of Italy running down with cannon the unarmed Catholic workmen, the Irish Catholic landlord rackrenting and evicting the Catholic tenant, the wealthy Catholic feasting inside the mansion while the Catholic beggar dies of hunger on the doorstep.

And as a companion picture witness the Protestant workmen of Belfast so often out on strike against their Protestant employers and their Protestant ancestors of 100 years ago in active rebellion against the English Protestant Government.

'Our institutions in Church and State' is the catchword with which the wealthy Irish Unionist endeavours to arouse religious bigotry among the Protestant working-class of Ulster and so prevent them coalescing with the working-class Catholic in a united effort for their common emancipation.

And 'Faith and Fatherland' by linking the national demands with a specific religious belief serves the same purpose in the mouth of the Home Rule trickster.

For what other purpose than that herein specified are either rallying cries used?

To keep the people of Ireland, and especially the workers, divided is the great object of all our politicians, Home Ruler or Unionist.

And our great object in this journal will be to unite the workers and to bury, in one common grave,

the religious hatreds, the provincial jealousies and mutual distrusts upon which oppression has so long depended for security.

The man whose forefathers manned the walls of Derry is as dear to us as he who traces his descent from the women who stood in the breaches of Limerick. Neither fought for Ireland, but only to decide which English king should rule Ireland.

What have we to do with their quarrels? In the words of the United Irishmen – "Let us bury our animosities with the bones of our ancestors."

In the near future when kings and the classes who are makers of kings no longer encumber the earth with their foul presence, how our Irish youth will smile when they read that 200 years ago Irishmen slaughtered each other to decide which English king should have the right to rob the Irish people.

And that for 200 years after the descendants of the respective parties conclusively proved to their own satisfaction that the leader of the other side had been a scoundrel.

And the impartial world looking on examined the evidence and came to the conclusion that on that point, at least, both parties were right. Both kings were scoundrels, ergo the followers of both were

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Well, never mind.