

Interview with Mrs. Sheehy-Skeffington.

Irish Republican Cause in America.

Mrs. Sheehy-Skeffington, whose husband was brutally murdered by the military in Portobello Barracks, Dublin, on April 26, 1916, arrived in Dublin on Thursday, 1st August, 1918, after an extensive American tour. The English Government had refused her a passport to go to America, but she succeeded in eluding the vigilance of the Government officials, and on her return to England she was again refused a passport to her native country. Again, however, she succeeded in accomplishing her journey despite the vigilance of the authorities. She was arrested on Thursday, 8th August, deported to England without trial or charge, and confined in Holloway Prison. From the moment of her arrest she went on hunger strike, and she was released on Sunday morning, 11th August, being, however, informed that she would not be allowed to return to Ireland, where her son is at present. The same Government which thus prosecutes this brave Irish lady has recently released from Broadmoor Asylum and given a pension to Captain Bowen-Colthurst, the man who ordered and superintended the murder of her husband. The following interview, given to the Dublin Press by Mrs. Sheehy-Skeffington previous to her arrest, was suppressed by the English Press Censor in Ireland:—

Mrs. Sheehy-Skeffington, who evaded the vigilance of the authorities in Liverpool, and succeeded in getting to Ireland without a permit, had many interesting things to say about her tour in America when interviewed. Asked as to how she succeeded in getting out of Liverpool, Mrs. Skeffington humorously replied—"All I will say is that I came by the shortest route, and took French leave. The Government was so long in coming to a decision as to whether I was a fit and proper person to be allowed back to my own country that I thought it was better to leave without asking permission. 'The 'Cork Constitution' suggested some time ago that as I got over to America without a permit I should get back to Ireland without one. I thought I might as well avail of this suggestion, so here I am."

IRELAND A POPULAR SMALL NATION.

"With regard to America," continued Mrs. Skeffington, "I spoke in twenty-one of the States, from New York to San Francisco, and from the Canadian border in Washington State down to Texas, and covered all the large cities. I found every-

VA 9
18x
232

where that Ireland was the most popular of the small nations. The Americans are beginning to learn about the Jugo-Slavs and the Czecho-Slovaks, and to find out where they are on the map. But they don't need any education with regard to Ireland, as there are twenty millions of Irish-Americans."

That was a very potent factor to be reckoned with, and would ensure that the claims of Ireland were not neglected.

INTERVIEW WITH THE PRESIDENT.

"In my interview with President Wilson I found him very sympathetic, and I have a strong personal feeling that, with the help of the Irish-Americans in the United States, he will see to it that Ireland's claims for independence and self-determination will be considered. Anything short of that, which would exclude Ireland as a small nation, would imply on America's part that President Wilson didn't mean what he said about the consent of the governed."

IRISH RESOLUTIONS IN CONGRESS.

"Dealing with the discussions on the Irish question in Congress, Mrs. Skeffington said that there had been seven resolutions in this connection brought before Congress, and Senator Gallinger, the Leader of the Republican Party, brought in on the Eve of St. Patrick's Day last a resolution in favour of self-determination for Ireland. It was very probable that the question of Ireland would be made a plank at the coming Congressional elections in November."

SUBJECT NATIONS CONGRESS.

"This sympathy for Ireland was well demonstrated by an Irish campaign in America at the present time, where they were holding the largest public meetings in the largest halls throughout the country, and these meetings had taken place since America entered the war, and, of course, were held under the full authority of the American Government.

"They also held a great Congress last October of all the small and subject nations, and to which she had the honour of being asked as one of the representatives of Ireland. The Boers, Indians, Egyptians, etc., were present."

"Sympathy with Ireland," she continued, "was not confined to the Irish in America. She found it with all Americans of whatever descent except, of course, English-Americans. She spoke in towns where there was a large Scandinavian population, and where the population was largely Teutonic, and in all strong sympathy was shown for Ireland. Also she found this feeling strong amongst Russians, Poles and Bohemians.

"I have also found that America cannot understand why England keeps such a large garrison just at present in Ireland.

"My largest meetings were held since America's entrance into the war. One of these, for instance, was in the Auditorium in San Francisco, which holds 20,000; and all the Irish meetings have been held in the largest halls in the country."

AMERICA PROUD OF IRELAND.

"In general my impression is," she said, "that the American is eminently fair-minded and just, and he cannot see, being a logical person, why Great Britain wants freedom for all the rest of the world and yet persists in keeping Ireland under her heel." That sympathetic feeling for Ireland was shown, she said, very strongly at the time that conscription for Ireland was introduced by England. Mrs. Skeffington believed that the American Government had intervened to prevent Ireland being conscripted. After a huge anti-conscription-of-Ireland meeting in Madison Square, New York, a great feeling of relief was felt everywhere in America, even in pro-Ally newspapers, when it became known that conscription was not being enforced in Ireland. There was a feeling of great pride in Ireland amongst Americans generally that the little nation stood up with its back to the wall and refused to be conscripted at the bidding of a foreign Government.

COLOURS OF THE IRISH REPUBLIC.

Mrs. Skeffington next dealt with a meeting at which she was present in Washington, D.C., which was attended by Congressmen and Senators. An Irish deputation laid a wreath on Washington's grave, together with the colours of the Irish Republic. Personally she found Americans most hospitable and warm-hearted, eager to understand, with a great sense of fair play, and a feeling that Ireland is entitled to a place in the sun.

IRELAND NO DOMESTIC QUESTION.

Asked as to the effects of British propaganda on the Irish question in America, she said that the Irish cause had many able speakers in the States, but the very best propagandists the Irish had were Sir F. E. Smith, Lord Northcliffe, and Mr. Balfour. England made the mistake of not sending to America a single democratic envoy. Those sent over as England's ambassadors and propagandists were thus responsible for many converts to Ireland's cause. "One prominent American said to me," Mrs. Skeffington remarked, "that he had met Sir F. E. Smith at the banquet, 'and I am now an Irish-Irelander,' he said. 'I met Sir F. E. Smith, and I now realise what you have to put up with in Ireland.'"

"If England would only send more of these men out," she went on, "and, in addition, such soldierly gentlemen as Captain Bowen-Colthurst, the people of all classes in America would not be long in discovering for themselves the real attitude of the champion of small nations towards democracy.

"At the present time America felt that the Irish question was not, as Great Britain would have it, one of mere domestic politics. Unless President Wilson was a hypocrite, everything that he had said about the consent of the governed should logically include Ireland.

"Wherever the Irish question had been raised at an election it had been extremely effective, and it was the Irish vote that defeated Mayor Mitchel in New York when he became more British than the British themselves."

Asked as to how the story of the German plot and arrests of the Sinn Fein leaders had been taken in America, Mrs. Skeffington said that the Americans absolutely refused to believe in Lord French's plot. Even the most British of the Press stated that they would like a little proof of what was known in American parlance as a "frame up."

MRS. SKEFFINGTON AND THE GOVERNMENT.

"With regard to myself," she said, "I don't know whether the Government will take further action in attempting to exile me from my own country and separate me from my son; but I desire the Government to know in the most public manner that I will not submit to forcible exile, and that if I am arrested I will immediately hunger-strike, and continue that protest until I am released either by the Government or by a Higher Authority."

In conclusion, she expressed her gratitude to the public boards throughout the country and to the Irish Women's Franchise League for their efforts on her behalf.

CAPTAIN BOWEN-COLTHURST.

Commenting on the release of Captain Bowen-Colthurst, she perfectly agreed with the Government that he was sane and normal. "But," she added, "the only point on which I differ from the authorities is that they would have us believe that he was ever otherwise. He was always sane and responsible for his actions, and the whole history of the case is another proof that, far from it being a misdemeanour to murder Irishmen, it is rather a subject for promotion. I think it was very significant that Captain Bowen-Colthurst's 'recovery' coincided with the new regime in Ireland and the attempt to enforce conscription."