

CONFEDERATION OF BRITISH NORTH AMERICA.

WE resume this important subject from the last number of the READER.

As we have formerly intimated, the question ought to be considered on its own merits, irrespective of the past or present opinions of those who are now either the advocates or the opponents of the measure. We have already spoken of Mr. Joseph Howe's antagonism to it; and Mr. George Brown is accused of a change of a contrary character, he having, at one time, strongly denounced the Union, of which, since 1864, he has been one of the most zealous promoters. Of Mr. Howe's duplicity in the matter, Dr. Tupper's pamphlet scarcely permits a doubt; but Mr. Brown stands in a different position. He asserts that, having arrived at the conviction that the Confederation of the British American Provinces has become a necessity, he is willing to sacrifice much to obtain it; and there are numerous converts to the cause of Confederation besides him, who have withdrawn their opposition to the scheme from the same reason. Many persons, for instance, regard the construction of the Intercolonial Railway as undesirable, viewing it from a merely commercial point of view; but they consider it as the price that must be paid for Union; and, as such, they are prepared to incur the expense, because, without the railway, we cannot have the Union. But, as we have said, individual opinions or motives should only be taken for what they are worth; and it is not difficult to come to a decision on the great question of the Confederation of British North America, by even a slight examination of facts and circumstances with which we are all sufficiently conversant, and which do not require any special wisdom to comprehend and appreciate.

In every legitimate argument, it is necessary to lay down some fact as an admitted truth. We shall therefore assume as a major proposition that the experience of other countries and all ages has proved that the union of two or more small neighbouring communities or states is based on sound policy. There may be, it is true, exceptions to the rule, but such exceptions are rare, and arise from conditions which do not often exist. Few persons in the present day will contend that a united Britain, a united Italy, or a United Germany, to say nothing of the United States, represent a series of political blunders. No one can well deny that a union of the three Scandinavian kingdoms—Sweden, Norway, and Denmark—or that of the present Austrian dominions, would add to their strength and prosperity. No one doubts this who is not swayed by passion, prejudice, or individual selfishness and interest. Its truth is patent to all the world besides. How is it, then, that the British North American Provinces would not be gainers by Union? Do they come within the rule or the exception? Let us review the facts of the case, regarding the subject, not from a party point of view, but as an incident of the history of the day; and as such, of far more consequence to us than that of the past, which is only of value from the lessons it teaches, or that of the future, which we can but see as in a glass darkly, and which is almost wholly beyond the sphere of our influence.

That the British colonies on the North American continent possess many of the elements calculated to constitute a great nation, will not admit of dispute. In fact, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, they exceed the whole of Europe; the climate, if severe for a large portion of the year, is highly favourable to human life; they are capable of producing in abundance all the cereals and almost all the other articles of food known to the temperate zone; they abound in mineral wealth; their forests of timber are unequalled on the globe; their seas swarm with fish; and their lakes and rivers are navigable for seagoing vessels for hundreds of miles, from the ocean into the very heart of the North American continent. It has been computed that, at the rate of increase from 1841 to 1851, Canada alone will contain a population of 20,000,000

by the end of this century; and if the other colonies should advance in anything like a similar ratio, the population of the whole would exceed that of most of the great European states. It were easy to enter more into details on this head; but it is sufficient for our present purpose to show that in the attributes of territory, products, and future population, British North America may justly aspire to the position of one of the great empires of the world.

What, then, are the obstacles in the way of such a consummation? For ourselves, we do not believe that there is much danger to be apprehended from the mere ambition, rivalry or hatred of the United States, whether directed against Great Britain or her colonies. In the first place, we do not imagine that the Americans will ever attempt to conquer these Provinces contrary to the wishes of the great body of the Provincial people, nine-tenths of whom are strongly averse to annexation, and would oppose it by every means in their power. Our neighbours have trouble enough on their hands with their disaffected brethren in the South, without allying themselves to four millions in the North, equally or more disaffected. That would certainly be "gaining a loss," as their Fenian friends might say. But we again declare that we have little fear on that head. In the second place, we think nothing more unlikely than a war between England and the United States. They are both bound over to keep the peace towards each other by the simple fact of their possessing the two greatest mercantile navies of the world, and a war would entail an enormous loss, if not utter ruin on the one as well as the other. Neither would have a merchant ship on the ocean in the first year after hostilities commenced; the best proof of which is the destruction caused to American commerce by only a couple of Confederate cruisers during the Southern rebellion. We repeat, then, that notwithstanding appearances, England and the United States are the two last countries likely to go to war with each other.

The real difficulty against which we would have to contend is of a different character. It is what may be called the geographical difficulty. It is useless to shut our eyes to the grave fact, that for nearly one-half the year our commerce and means of communication will, in a great measure, be at the mercy of the United States. From December to May we can communicate with the Red River Settlement but through American territory, and for the same period our neighbours can close the route to and from the Atlantic against our trade. It is true that the ports of the Maritime Provinces will be open to us, after we have constructed the Intercolonial Railway; but the distance from Montreal to Halifax is about 900 miles, to St. John, New Brunswick, about 700 miles, while that to Portland is under 300 miles. Supposing, therefore, that the freight of a barrel of flour to Portland would amount to 2s. 6d., it would be 7s. 6d. to Halifax, and, say, 5s. to St. John; consequently the Canadian merchant would lose one dollar per barrel, and half a dollar, as the case might be, by forwarding his flour to a foreign market through the ports of the Maritime Provinces, instead of the American port. Our whole imports and exports would be similarly burthened for five or six months of the year, enabling the Americans, who have shorter routes to the seaboard than we have, to monopolize the trade of the West, from the fall to the beginning of summer, as they could undersell for that period in Europe and elsewhere.

This is simply a question of facts and figures; but to disregard it in our scheme of a new nationality, would only lead to disappointment and disaster. It is "the lion in the path," which must be got rid of in some way, before we can assume the status of an independent power in America, whether in connection with England or otherwise. We do not, indeed, insist that the difficulty is insurmountable; but it is great and obvious, and calls for grave consideration from those engaged in effecting the Union of the Provinces. For ourselves, we can conceive no other impediment to Confederation that could not be met and overcome; and we suggested

more than twelve months ago that the sole remedy was a winter port in the Lower St. Lawrence, which so many persons, entitled by knowledge and experience to pronounce a judgment in the matter, believe to be a feasible project. At all events, the problem ought to be solved.

We are not ignorant that the views we have thus expressed will be unwelcome to many of our readers, who have been taught to regard the Union of British North America as being of easy accomplishment by the mere volition of the colonies and the mother country. But we should not deceive ourselves. Is it at all likely that the Imperial Parliament will include Nova Scotia in an Act of Union, in opposition to the wishes of its people, or that there can be a union of the Provinces without Nova Scotia? Is it not true that our only present communication with the ocean, in winter, is through foreign territory; and that the ports of the Lower Provinces will not be available to us for commercial purposes, even after the Intercolonial Railway shall be made? To conquer difficulties, we must first understand their nature and extent; and if we fail to do so in this instance, the gorgeous vision of a British North American Empire may vanish into air, and we may have to exclaim, like him of old: "I awoke; and, behold, it was a dream!"

MR. BRIGHT IN IRELAND.

THE visit of the member for Birmingham to the "sister isle" is likely to constitute an important era in the history of the United Kingdom; and we are only surprised that the course he has pursued was so long unattempted. Many years ago the famous French statesman Guizot told the people of Ireland that their true policy was to accept the Union with England, and make the best of it; and Mr. Bright is now labouring to give practical effect to that advice, by persuading the Irish to adopt it, and act up to it. He tells them that the people of England, as well as they, have grievances of which they complain, and wrongs for which they seek redress; and he argues that the true interests of the two countries would be best served by a combined effort to attain their common objects. This is so evident that we cannot conceive how even the most obtuse can fail to appreciate it. Ireland has long tried the opposite course, and failed. When Spain was the greatest power in Europe; when Louis the Fourteenth was in the zenith of his glory; when the French Republic was the terror of the continent; when the First Napoleon wielded the imperial sceptre of France: from each of these the Irish sought aid to sever their connection with Britain; and in the present day they place their hope in the United States with the same end in view. It were wiser in them to listen to the counsels of Mr. Guizot and Mr. Bright. Ireland must continue a portion of the British empire, at whatever cost; and she can only cease to be so, when England has lost her place among the nations, and has become as powerless as Spain, or Sweden, or Norway. Right or wrong, for weal or for woe, the two islands must be one and indivisible. But to return to Mr. Bright and his Irish policy.

The first item in his scheme contemplates the abolition of the Protestant Church Establishment. Few liberal Protestants will differ from him on that head, so that the reform be conceived and executed in a spirit of mercy and justice. There is much said, even by those favourable to Mr. Bright's views about the preservation of vested rights; but it should be remembered that these rights, whatever they are, reside less in the clergy than in the laity. While the interests of a temporary holder of an income derived from church property ought certainly to be respected, the more prominent interests of his flock ought not to be forgotten. But under any circumstances, there can be little doubt that the Irish State Church, as it now exists, must disappear, before long, as an institution incompatible with the spirit of the age, and the prevailing ideas of right and wrong. The next project for the removal of Irish