

into a god, and there is at present on the political scene no figure anything like so impressive, or surrounded by anything like such a glamour, as that of the G. O. M. It is an hour of peril for a nation when its interests are placed absolutely in the hands of a man intoxicated with popularity—too imperious to respect or consider any opinion but his own, too old to put off the cravings of ambition, and too near his end to feel the full measure of personal responsibility for the consequences of his policy. In saying this I am only repeating the language of those who have loved Mr. Gladstone and long trusted him, but now see that he has degenerated into a splendid demagogue, and that, if he lived long enough, there is nothing which he would not destroy. It has always appeared to me, and I am now confirmed in the conviction, that, while his moral aspirations and tone are high, his sense of responsibility is comparatively low. He is wrecking the country with a light heart. Those graves which his fatal bungling has dug for the brave in the Soudan have never, I suspect, cost him a pang, nor has he ever uttered over them a generous or remorseful word. He wishes to do good to his kind, and especially to that portion of it which inhabits these islands; but patriotism, in the common sense of the word, is probably almost alien to his heart; it certainly never finds expression through his lips. When he angrily denounces a proposal to increase the grant to the volunteers, it is as much the national and patriotic character of the force as the financial irregularity which moves him, and the obvious tendency of his Separatist policy to lower his country in the scale of nations, probably detracts little from its excellence in his eyes.

The Queen might, as I conceive, very properly refuse Mr. Gladstone a dissolution, not only in the interest of the public tranquillity and of commerce, but on two constitutional grounds. In the first place, this Parliament, though not called by the present Prime Minister, was at once recognized by him as favourable, and at its hands he accepted power; he has therefore no moral right to appeal against its decision. In the second place, neither in his policy nor in a demand of dissolution has he the concurrence of the other leaders of the party. But the refusal would no doubt bring on a storm, which Mr. Gladstone and his friends would raise by appeals to the masses; and the Sovereign is a lady who cannot be advised to do anything which might lead her into danger, or even to expose herself to any personal annoyance. A dissolution, therefore, if the Bill is defeated there will in all probability be, and in my next letter I shall have to forecast as well as I can, amidst such political darkness and confusion, the result of an appeal to the country.

I have said that the Caucus is putting on the screw, in Mr. Gladstone's interest, with all its might. I am happy to be able to add that the screw shows signs of breaking. Whatever political faults Englishmen may have, they are generally not wanting in independence; and it is difficult to get them to bow their necks to the regulative tyranny of a machine. Liberal Committees for the maintenance of the Union are being formed at several points, in opposition to the Local Caucus: an invitation from one at Bradford, which is a great Liberal centre, lies before me. It would be some consolation even for the loss of Ireland if this political Devil-fish should receive a mortal wound. The indications of the Caucus in Mr. Gladstone's favour are somewhat fallacious. Caucuses are always composed of the thoroughgoing partisans; but it is among the quieter folk, and those who do not attend party councils that the Liberal secessions will take place. Bear this in mind as an important fact when you are estimating the manifestations of opinion. Still waters, I suspect, are running deep.

The conclusion to which my study of the Irish question has always led me is that the political movement is weak in itself, and derives whatever strength it has from its union with agrarian discontent. This opinion is confirmed by what I now hear from Ireland. A credible informant reports that Mr. Gladstone's Home Rule policy was received with no enthusiasm in Kerry, which is now about the most disaffected district, and that the same is the case in other districts which my informant has visited. A separate Parliament is the aim only of the political agitators and adventurers; the people want it, if at all, merely because they have been led to believe that it will give them the land, which is the real object of their desire. Knowing this, the politicians strenuously resist any proposal to settle the Land question without Home Rule; and the correspondent whom I have already quoted repeats the words of a leading Nationalist priest, who confessed that if the Land question were settled, Home Rule would have little interest for the people. Some of the well-to-do farmers begin to shrink from the prospect of Fenian domination, while the labourers on their part are afraid of finding themselves left under the absolute rule of the farmer class, whose interest is by no means identical with theirs. The Nationalist feeling, to which Mr. Gladstone tells us it is necessary to surrender the Legislative Union, is, I am persuaded, largely the offspring of his own inflammatory eloquence, operating in conjunction with

the machinations of Irish aspirants to places in a National Government, to American Fenians, and the incendiary Press.

The conduct of the Independent Liberals must, I should think, extort the respect even of opponents who have any generosity in their hearts. By these men alone has the country been preferred to party and personal interest. On the amount of force which they may be able to muster, and the degree of constancy with which they may withstand the tremendous pressure put upon them, the salvation of the country, in the eyes of Unionists, depends. This Lord Salisbury must know; yet the consciousness of it does not restrain him, any more than patriotism and honour restrained him from accepting office at the hands of the Parnellites, throwing over Lord Spencer, and abandoning the Crimes Act. His last speech is full of his usual party spirit, arrogance, and indiscretion. He shows once more that judicial blindness which Heaven sends upon those whom it has doomed to destruction. He is an English Polignac, utterly incapable of reading the perilous situation in which he is placed, and destined to lead his party, his class, and his order to ruin. His speech has been received by the Gladstonian Press with a peal, too well justified, of delight and triumph. It will shake, if anything can, the firmness of the Independent Liberals. Beyond doubt it will decide some waverers the wrong way. One of the most calamitous features of the situation is the absence of a wise and thoroughly patriotic leader on the Conservative side. Indeed, the state of the Conservative benches altogether at the present crisis is deplorable. In the Commons, since the departure of Mr. Gibson to the Lords, the Conservatives have not had a single man of power and weight. Lord Randolph Churchill is dull when he is not indiscreet, and indiscreet when he is not dull. In debate, the whole set are as children in the hands of the G.O.M.

It was refreshing and reassuring to a British Canadian to see that Mr. Blake's proposed resolution of sympathy with Mr. Gladstone's policy of Separation had been voted down by an overwhelming majority, and that in its place had been passed a resolution to which any Unionist might subscribe. This indicates, I trust, that the hearts of British Canadians have been stirred by the peril of our Mother Country, and that the Unionist sentiment awakened in Ontario has been felt at Ottawa. Mr. Blake, let us hope, will be taught by this experience, following upon his experience in the case of Riel, that it is wiser as well as nobler to frame a policy of his own, upon which he may appeal to the country, than to angle for sectional votes, which, even if they are hooked, are very apt to slip back into the water. If he does not take care he will find at the next election that there is a British as well as an Irish and a French vote. Votes of sympathy from American Legislatures and politicians are coming over to Mr. Gladstone in great abundance. The meaning of these every Canadian understands, and knows what sort of tributes they are to the patriotism of a British statesman. But to Vespasian the smell of revenue, whatever its source, was sweet; and sweet to Mr. Gladstone, whatever its source, is popularity.

The Irish question absorbs attention, and I have had little time as yet for sightseeing. I have merely glanced at the Indian and Colonial Exhibition, in which of course the gorgeous East eclipses everything else in the way of a show, while Colonial productions, our own among the rest, are more interesting to the economist and the politician as solid proofs of material progress. The Exhibition has awakened into renewed activity the promoters of Imperial Federation, and there is some reason to fear that this dream may have an unfortunate influence on the course of political events by reconciling people to the Dismemberment of the United Kingdom as a preliminary process by which raw materials will be prepared for the construction of an ampler and grander Union. I hope that, seeing this, the Canadian Press will render the British people the service of frankly telling them the plain truth. Falsehood may help to turn them to their ruin.

At the Exhibition of the Academy also I have briefly glanced. I am struck as usual by a want of interest in the subjects, which seems to indicate a temporary suspension of the life of art, however excellent the technical execution may be. The picture which attracts most notice is one which represents a Mermaid dragging down a man, the victim of her deadly wiles, into the depths of the sea, with a very Mermaidish expression in her eyes. It has furnished *Punch* with the subject of an excellent cartoon, in which Mr. Morley as a Mermaid is dragging Gladstone down into the depths of the Irish question. That Irish question meets you, whichever way you turn.

In Hyde Park, the reduced number and splendour of the equipages betrays the effect of agricultural depression on the incomes of the landed gentry. Colleges which derive their revenues from land are suffering in the same way. Yet I see at present no signs of falling off in the general wealth of the country, and though the china-mania has somewhat sub-