

MAY 12th, 1893.]

THE POLITICAL OUTLOOK.

The decision of Mr. Laurier and his lieutenants to call a Dominion Convention of representatives of the Liberal party, for the discussion of the political situation and the construction or consolidation of a party platform, was a courageous one. It is, we believe, the first time in the history of confederated Canada that a convention representative of all the Provinces has been attempted. No one can doubt that if we must have government by party, the holding of national conventions to settle questions of principal and policy is a right and proper thing. Whether it is a wise thing for a party composed of such heterogeneous material, comprising so many varieties of opinion and of interest, and characterized by so strong a tendency to fly off in fragments under the operation of the centrifugal forces which are always at work within it, and which seem almost to be the natural offspring of Liberalism, remains to be proved. The greatness of the risk will be still more fully appreciated when we look back over the history of the party during the long years in which it has been in Opposition and note the number of dissimilar and devious, if not positively incompatible, policies which have from time to time been advocated in its name.

If the game which the Liberal leaders have resolved to play is full of risk, it cannot be denied that the stake played for is a heavy one. If Mr. Laurier can succeed in getting together a tolerably full and really representative body of delegates from all parts of the Dominion, and if those delegates can be brought to agree heartily and enthusiastically on a clearly defined policy, with tariff reform as its basis and ruling principle, the chances of the party at the approaching general election will be unquestionably much better than on any previous occasion since the adoption of the National Policy. The time is propitious. The spirit of political unrest is in the air. That the revolt against the high tariff is genuine and wide-spread can no longer be doubted. The reception which is being accorded to Mr. Dalton McCarthy in various sections of the country is proof sufficient of that fact, so far at least as Ontario is concerned. No doubt other powerful influences combine to bring about that result. The personal popularity of the man, the general conviction of his honesty and sincerity, and with a large number, strong sympathy with his attitude in regard to the dual language and separate school questions in Manitoba and the North-West, have much to do with making possible the warm and enthusiastic receptions which are given him, even by many who have hitherto been staunch supporters of the Government and the policy against which he is now directing his guns.

Other and perhaps still more potent forces are at work producing the tendency to political disintegration which is manifest-

and history as those which make Ireland a distinct unit. To the Canadian onlooker, for whom use and familiarity have deprived federalism of its bogeyish look, and who has often wondered at the courage with which the Imperial Parliament struggles on year after year under a constantly accumulating load of local legislative demands from which it can never hope to free itself under the ancient system, the wonder is that the common-sense plan of relegating local matters to local legislatures was not long since tried. Such a system is, indeed, as much a logical outcome of the county and parish council systems which are now being introduced, as of Irish Home Rule.

Were "Federalism" indeed the divisive force which the Spectator seems to suppose, there would be good reason for its deprecation. If it really meant that Great Britain is "to be disintegrated and dissolved into we know not how many arbitrary political atoms;" that "the Empire is to be a loose structure sprawling, as it were, on frail tenter-hooks all over the globe, without even a single strong core at the heart of the Empire," every British patriot must needs regard it with abhorrence and dread. But why should federation mean anything of the kind? Surely the strength of the kingdom does not depend upon the legislative bands which hold its component parts in mere mechanical union, so to speak. Surely the pride of history and the passion of patriotism are not dependent upon the ability of English members to postpone or defeat local measures desired by Scotchmen for the better management of purely Scotch affairs, or vice versa. If legislative union could produce homogeneity, there would be strong reason for continuing it in spite of all disadvantages, but the history of centuries shows that little is to be hoped for in that direction. The distinguishing features of English, Scotch, Irish and Welsh character stand out to view almost as distinctly to-day as at the first. So long as all parts of the kingdom are equally represented in the central Parliament or council which determines all relations with other nations and has supreme control in all matters affecting the Empire as such, it is not easy to see why a subdivision of the multifarious and ever-increasing details of internal legislation and management should have the slightest tendency to weaken the cohesive forces which are the source of all real national strength. Should any cynic be disposed to insinuate that the Canadian federal system has not been so successful in welding the provincial fragments into a compact whole as to make its history a powerful argument for federation, the reply is that, imperfect as may be the result from this point of view, federation has done that towards building up a Canadian nationality which could never have been accomplished under any other system.

There are about sixty-five thousand of them in the Union—it is asserted that the removals so far are less than one-half the number removed within the corresponding period under the preceding Administration. The fact is that Civil Service reform is making steady headway in the Republic, in spite of the desperate resistance of the admirers of the machine. From a seemingly authentic statement before us we learn that there are in the gift of the Government about 180,000 positions; that of these the number affected by the Civil Service law at the end of President Arthur's administration was about 15,000; at the close of President Cleveland's former term, about 27,300; at the close of President Harrison's, 43,400, besides some thousands in the navy yards, so that at present about one-fourth of the whole number of offices have been withdrawn from the arena of the scramblers for office. The Republic is making progress, but there is yet a large work to be done. Both Presidents and people seem to be becoming more and more sensitive in regard to the ridiculous figure the chief magistrate of a great nation is made to cut when he is obliged to give up the first weeks and months of his term to the work of dismissing political opponents from petty offices and putting his hungry followers in their places all over the Union.

The London Spectator deplors "the creeping on of the federal idea" in the House of Commons. While it protests that nobody really wants federation for its own sake, it admits that "you can see everywhere that the logic of the cry for Home Rule for Ireland is gradually affecting the minds of all classes of members and converting them to a half-and-half fancy that our 'manifest destiny' lies in that direction." Not only do Mr. Asquith and Sir George Trevelyan frankly advocate federalism as the solution of the difficulty, and Mr. Storey and Mr. Wallace admit themselves converts to the logic of the idea, but even an old Conservative like Colonel Bridgeman "speaks of it with a certain tolerance, not to say even a leaning towards it." It is not the habit of the British people to make political changes as so many steps in the direction of a clearly defined political ideal towards which they are consciously working; nevertheless it is difficult to see how any far-sighted advocate of Irish Home Rule could fail to perceive from the first that the whole trend of the movement is in that direction. The adoption of the federal system in the case of Ireland will be the entering of the wedge and nothing but the conspicuous failure of that experiment can prevent its being driven home by the "logic of the idea," or of the situation, in a kingdom composed of several constituent parts marked off from each other by lines of cleavage almost as distinctly drawn by race