

THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN ENGLAND.

Ireland continues to monopolize the time of the Imperial Parliament. But Parliament can do little in the way of curing Irish troubles. These are the product of many complex forces that have been at work for centuries. It is absurd to think, therefore, that their action can be arrested and undone at once by any legislative measures. Causes social, economic, educational, have all been powerful factors in the production of the present state of things in Ireland. They can only be effectually checked by other forces of a like nature working in opposite directions. A nation, no more than an individual, can be reformed in a day; and it is worse than useless to expect that Ireland can be cured of its chronic maladies by any Bill that may be passed.

Legislation, even of a healing kind, is, however, made almost impossible by the condition of the country, which, as Mr. Gladstone said, is in the throes of a social revolution that threatens to overturn the foundations of society itself. The most atrocious murders are committed; helpless victims are despatched with a tiger-like ferocity, characteristic of the lowest types of savage barbarism. There seems to be a widespread, well-organized conspiracy against order and good government, which has cast a malignant spell upon the people. So far the Government have been comparatively powerless, the absence of anything like a public moral sentiment to which they could appeal for support, having weakened their hands and paralyzed much of their energy.

Meanwhile, the prevention of Crimes Bill is being pressed in spite of the most violent obstruction by the Land League section of the Irish party, whose existence is imperilled by the settlement of the country. The first duty of a Government is to maintain order, sternly to put an end to intimidation by a set of ruffians, and to teach the people, by force if necessary, obedience to the laws. The stringency of the Prevention Bill was, therefore, a necessity. Trial by jury becomes a farce, and defeats the end of its existence, when no jury will discharge its duty by convicting. If crime had not to go unpunished altogether, therefore, a commission of judges was imperative. So, also, with the large discretionary powers entrusted to the Lord Lieutenant. Desperate cases require desperate remedies. And only the guilty and their associates need stand in awe of the Prevention Bill. To peaceful, law-abiding citizens, it will cause little permanent inconvenience or hardship.

Along with the Prevention Bill, the Arrears of Rent Bill is being steadily advanced, the fundamental principle of the policy of the Government being redress of grievances, as far as possible, along with any system of coercion. The Arrears Bill is the necessary complement of the Land Bill of last year, many tenants, on account of arrears of rent, being unable to take advantage of its provisions. The clauses providing for partial payment by the Government, out of the surplus funds of the Irish church and the public treasury, of arrears of rent in certain cases, are assailed by the opponents of the Bill for their communistic tendency. In this respect, however, they are trifling when compared with Lord Salisbury's celebrated plan for making the State the sole proprietor of the island. Theoretically, the Arrears Bill may have something of a socialistic character, but the good, practical, common-sense of the English

people, the most successful and the most illogical people in the world, may be relied on to prevent its ever being used as a precedent for the realisation of communistic dreams.

Amidst the many voices crying in the streets, the demand for Home Rule grows louder. Ignoring altogether the fact that the causes of the Irish troubles are not even mainly legislative, it is arbitrarily assumed that they have arisen from the want of Home Rule, and that possession of it will prove their cure. On this unwarrantable assumption the late Canadian Parliament based its singularly ill-timed attempt to interfere in a matter entirely beyond its jurisdiction. Canada itself was pointed to as an example of the successful working of the system, and the example has been quoted since. But Ireland can never be allowed to stand to England in the same relation as that of the Dominion at the present. And it is premature to point to the successful operation of the system among the Provinces themselves. Apart altogether from the fact that Canada possesses undeveloped resources that are practically limitless, and that Home Rule, so-called, in Canada, is only a temporary cutting of the knot, not a final solution of the problem of how to fuse the scattered parts of the Dominion into one organic whole, it is a hasty inference that Home Rule in Canada is a success. In the very province where the difficulties it was meant to obviate were most felt, a large and influential number of the population are looking forward to a legislative union as the only safe-guard for their liberties, and the only means of escape from the baneful influence of the Government of Quebec.

Hitherto its advocates have refused to face the question: What is Home Rule? Home Rule for Ireland means either national independence, or practically nothing. The possibility of the former does not admit even of discussion; and the latter becomes evident the moment an intelligible definition of Home Rule is attempted. In the *Nineteenth Century* for June, Mr. Justin McCarthy, M.P., writes: "The interest of Ireland is not necessarily divided from that of England in the matter of 'Imperial taxation, or of postal arrangements, or of colonial and foreign policy, or even of tariffs and commercial treaties.'" And, in his Home Rule scheme, the Imperial Parliament is charged with "the monarchical establishment, the maintenance of the army, the navy, and the post office, and the conduct of foreign and colonial policy, and the imposition and collection of such taxation as would be needed for these objects." What is left, then, after adding education and a reform of the land laws to the list, both of which, in the peculiar circumstances of the country, could not with safety be left to the control of any local legislature? Nothing that a good system of county boards could not accomplish equally well, and at far less cost.

It is hopeless to expect that Ireland can be cured of its evils within one or even several generations; least of all that so desirable a result can ever be achieved by Home Rule, or any other merely legislative measures. Justice will be done to Ireland, as well as to England and Scotland, by the British Parliament; real grievances will be redressed as far as possible. But beyond this, and as more powerful agents in the regeneration of society, the Irish people must look to the spread of a better education, the recognition of economic laws, and the counteracting influences of higher social forces, whose operation, though less obvious, is none the less real.