

THE WEEK.

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CONTENTS OF CURRENT NUMBER.

CONTRIBUTED ARTICLES—	PAGE
British Affairs..... <i>Goldwin Smith.</i>	683
Our Paris Letter.....	<i>L. L.</i> 684
Misdirected State Aid.....	<i>Arnold Haultain.</i> 685
TALKING TO THE DEAD—(Poem).....	<i>Baroness von Oppen.</i> 686
THE MORAL OF THE LATE CRISIS—I.....	<i>Goldwin Smith.</i> 686
TOPICS OF THE WEEK—	
Anticosti.....	688
Sir John A. Macdonald.....	688
The Alaska Seizures.....	688
The Maine Elections.....	688
Prohibition in Maine.....	688
The League and the Irish People.....	689
NOTES.....	689
THE FIRST CHILL—(Poem).....	<i>Seranus</i> 690
SAUNTERINGS.....	<i>Sara Jeannette Duncan.</i> 690
SEA BREEZE—(Poem).....	<i>W. P. M.</i> 691
SUMMER IS OVER.....	<i>A. Stevenson.</i> 691
OUR LIBRARY TABLE.....	692

BRITISH AFFAIRS.

WHEN will Parliament give up the absurd practice of debating addresses in answer to the Speech from the Throne, in which a fortnight here has now been wasted? The Speech from the Throne, as everybody knows, is a spurious document. When it was proposed to George II. to proceed against a man who had counterfeited the King's Speech he replied: "Let the poor fellow alone; I have read both speeches, and I like the counterfeit much the best." The Parliament of Ontario once, if I remember rightly, spent a fortnight at the opening of the Session in reproducing, in a diluted form, the editorials of the party journals, instead of proceeding to the business of the province. It would be a good thing, however, if the waste of time in this farce were the most serious of the effects produced by the surviving phantom of Monarchical Government. Far more serious is its tendency to blind England, and all countries which have borrowed her institutions, to the momentous fact that she has no real government at all. Had there been a real government, this Irish difficulty would never have arisen; were there now a real government, the Irish difficulty would soon be at an end.

THE organs of the Gladstonian Party boast of its compact unity, but unless I am mistaken, a division will soon appear. The party swarms, as I said before, with hypocritical conformists, who followed Mr. Gladstone in his Irish policy only because they were afraid of their constituencies and the Caucus, some of them, in private, speaking openly and bitterly against the Bill. These men are now relieved from the fear of a dissolution. They have pledged themselves, it is true, but in their hearts they are still opposed to Home Rule, and they abhor the Parnellite alliance. Many of them also have property and are averse to agrarian confiscation, which, they must see, will lead before long to confiscation of other kinds. Without voting straight against Home Rule, they will find ways of putting a spoke in the wheel; and especially they will refuse to support the Parnellites in obstruction.

One symptom of this is a sudden change of tone on the part of Sir William Harcourt, who has taken the Radical leadership in Mr. Gladstone's absence. Sir William began by going all lengths with the Parnellites: suddenly he turned round and told them, to their bitter disappointment, that they would have his sympathy in their obstructive motions, but not his vote. I strongly suspect that his coat-tail had been pulled, and that he had been made to understand that if he did vote with the Parnellites he would go with a scanty train into the Lobby. Sir William is now bidding hard for the succession to Mr. Gladstone, to which he may naturally think that he has claims. He is, I should say, one of the best stump speakers I ever heard, though with the House, which is more critical, his hollow pomposity mars the effect. But, like General B. F. Butler, whom in cast of character he resembles, he suffers, and has always suffered, in his pursuit of the objects of his ambition from an inability to conceive the existence in ordinary men of moral perceptions of which he has himself had no experience. The General, when he hoisted the flag of

Repudiation, evidently did not imagine it possible that the mass of citizens should feel bound to pay their debts, or that a proposal to plunder the bondholder could fail to bring a harvest of popularity to its author. After Mr. Gladstone's defeat in the election of 1874, when he seemed to have fallen not to rise again, Sir William Harcourt, who had been his Solicitor-General, hastened openly to trample on him, and to cultivate by public compliments and private assiduity the regard of his successful rival. At the opening of a church at Hughenden Sir William had the privilege of performing, in company with Mr. Disraeli, certain ecclesiastical functions of a Ritualistic character, which were destined to propitiate heaven and the clerical vote; and the effect upon an amused public was much what it would have been had the same functions been performed by Wilkes and Sandwich. Nothing came, however, of this beautiful friendship, and Sir William found it expedient to obtain from Mr. Disraeli a certificate, which was published, to the effect that the friendship had been purely Arcadian, and ought to form no obstacle to the advancement of Sir William Harcourt in the other party. In the other party, and from the hands of Mr. Gladstone, accordingly, Sir William Harcourt accepted promotion in magnanimous oblivion of the past. As Mr. Gladstone's Home Secretary he assailed the Parnellites, who were then weak and universally odious, night after night, with the most contemptuous sarcasm and the bitterest invective, while he denounced as political sacrilege all attempts to tamper with the Union. On the platform he told the Parnellites that they might "stew in their own juice." But when Mr. Gladstone's coat was turned, that of his lieutenant was turned with obsequious promptness; and it is due to Sir William Harcourt to say that he had the courage of his morality, and did not manufacture a "history" of his "idea." He now hugs the Parnellites to his heart, and goes, or, but for the warning voice behind him, would go all lengths with them in obstruction, as well as in confiscation and in the dismemberment of the nation. But as I have said already, he antedates the demise of public morality, his opportunism is a little too undisguised, and I do not believe that the coveted leadership will be his. He has a rival in Mr. Labouchere, a curious amalgam, as his journal shows, of love of aristocratic connection, which most people believe to be genuine, and ultra-Radicalism, which most people believe to be feigned. Politics with him are probably an exciting game. Being asked what would become of his own wealth if the principles which he was preaching should prevail, he is said to have answered that all his securities were convertible, and that he should only have to change his country. It is natural that Mr. Labouchere, bidding for leadership, should be bitterly opposed to the re-admission of the Liberal Unionist leaders to the party, and that his fire should be specially directed against Mr. Chamberlain. Mr. Chamberlain, however, if I mistake not, will survive the fusillade, and ultimately grasp the leadership in virtue of the same force of character and resolution which enabled him in the last election to hold Birmingham for the Union. Perhaps, after his recent experience, he may make the party Liberal instead of Radical.

MR. GLADSTONE'S Land Act has broken down, as I ventured from the first to predict that it would, though I heartily wished success to any attempt of the Legislature to solve the desperate problem of Irish land. It is impossible for a Government to fix the price of land or any other commodity for a long period of years; it might almost as well attempt to fix the weather. The only mode of determining the price of land or any other commodity is to allow the vendor and purchaser, or the lessor and lessee, to contract with each other freely in an open market. This is the law—not the law of political economy, if by political economy is meant anything scholastic or artificial—but of Nature; and once more an attempt to legislate in defiance of it has failed. It is very likely that from the continuance of agricultural depreciation some of the judicial rents have become too high. There are districts in Ireland, such as wretched Kerry and still more wretched Leitrim, which can hardly bear any rent at all. But the renewed crusade of the Parnellites against rent, which the author of the Land Act does not scruple to countenance, is obviously a political move destined to fan the fire of agitation, evidently damped by the late defeat. I profess no special sympathy for the Irish landlords, whose absenteeism is undoubtedly one source of these troubles; but the case of the Irish landlords and their rents is now the least part of the matter. The main question is whether the principle of property or that of public robbery shall