

# THE WEEK.

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## AMERICAN OPINION ON HOME RULE.

THE value of American opinion on Home Rule is very slight indeed. In the first place, it is hardly correct to speak of American opinion, as it has no unity; and American opinions on this subject are as diverse as they are on any other question. Mr. Matthew Arnold was perfectly justified, in spite of the protests of the New York newspapers, when he said that American opinion was on one side, if you counted votes, on another, if you weighed them. It may be worth while to note some aspects of that chaotic condition of ignorance, prejudice, and thoughtless, amiable sentimentality out of which Home Rule opinion, if it can be thought to deserve the name, is formed in the United States.

In the first place, as every one knows, the most pronounced and noisy form of public opinion on the subject of Home Rule in the States is the Fenian Irish. That their opinion is the mere expression of their hatred of England, no one will think of denying. To this we must add that it is not quite so certain as some persons seem to imagine that the whole blame of that hatred is to be laid at England's door. Ireland has suffered from bad government in the past; but so has England, and Scotland, and France, and Germany. For many years, Ireland has been governed as justly and as benevolently as any nation in the world; and, even in the worst times, it is quite likely that Ireland was fully as well governed by the various Imperial Administrations as she would have been by any Government of her own.

Next to Irish opinion comes that large extent of opinion—or of what passes for opinion—which is governed by Irish influence. It is, perhaps, needlessly complimentary to call this opinion at all. It is, in fact, no more than a mere professed agreement with the prejudices of a class which is united in the determination to support all who will countenance their enmity against England, and to oppose all who disapprove of the same. It is a miserable result of the party politics of the States that the Irish vote has to be bidden for by the opposing factions, and neither would have a chance of obtaining it—or any part of it, for it is generally solid,—if they ventured to think for themselves on the subject of Irish Home Rule. Every one knows this; but only those who are moving about in the States, coming into contact with various classes of men, and noting the indecision and timidity with which opinions are expressed, can have any just notion of the manner in which Irish feeling tyrannises over American thought.

Another and a very curious element in American opinion is the German. As a rule, the Germans take less interest in politics than any other portion of the population. Still they count for something, and this in various ways. A considerable proportion of the German population is Roman Catholic; and they, naturally enough, sympathize with members of their own Church, and therefore are in favour of Home Rule. But the greater part of the German population is Protestant or indifferent—perhaps as free from religion as any nationality that could be thought of. Not only so, but many of them are violently opposed to Monarchical Government. Some, as we know, are Socialists, and these are very numerous; a few are Anarchists or Nihilists, and these are chiefly from the borders of Poland and Russia. But a very large number, without being Nihilist or even Socialist, are strongly opposed to Monarchy in any form.

One of these the writer of this paper recently met in the State of New York. He was a well-educated man, and evidently represented the opinion of a large class. He had a great sympathy, he said, with this movement, which was intended to give freedom to Ireland. Freedom? In what way did he propose to secure this boon for the Irish? By an Irish Republic. This was interesting. It clearly represented the aspiration of the Irish leaders in the States.

“By an Irish Republic? In what way was such a change to benefit the poor people in Ireland?” “Manifestly,” he replied, “for there could be no freedom under a Queen. Only a republic could give liberty.” “But how was the national liberty of any Irishman interfered with by the Queen?” The answer was curious and instructive. “The Queen had taken the land from the people.” The answer was given quietly, soberly, with evident conviction, without a doubt of its truth. “But,” said his English hearer, “it is not so, the Queen has not taken away anybody's land. The Queen could not have a thought of the kind. If she had, she had no more power than one of us had to carry the thought into effect. In fact, the proprietors of the soil of Ireland were principally Irishmen.”

This was evidently very astonishing to the benevolent German gentleman, who began to ask whether he had been imposed upon in the past, or whether he was being imposed upon now. “But this was not all. The Irish tenant had greater consideration shown him than the tenant of almost any other country. In England, in Scotland, in America, if a man let a house or a farm he got what he could for it. The amount of rent was determined ultimately by competition, and no one blamed the proprietor if he let his house, or his land, to the highest bidder. But in Ireland it was different. There a farmer might carry his case before a Board, and complain that his rent was excessive, and have it reduced, if the Board thought it was higher than he ought to pay.”

The astonishment of the advocate of freedom for the Irish people here knew no bounds. “What!” he exclaimed, “will a Board interfere and lower the rent, without any reference to the will of the proprietor?” “Certainly; for they had done so in a great many cases.” “But it is not just. Surely a man ought not to be compelled to let his property at a rent determined by others, without being himself consulted.” And so this excellent gentleman, who began by proposing to have an Irish Republic, in order to give freedom to the down-trodden masses of Ireland, finished by pitying, not the tenants, but the landlords, and denouncing the injustice done to the proprietors of the land. It was only when he was told that it was quite easy to verify the information which had been given him that he seemed able to believe it.

Another class of Americans, with whom one cannot have much patience, is composed of Englishmen and Canadians, settled in America, and a large number of other persons, with very imperfect knowledge and very indefinite views of what Home Rule means, and what it might be expected to do, who like to be thought liberal, and talk in an imbecile, sentimental manner of the desirableness of satisfying the desires of Ireland (forgetting that it is only a part, and not the best part, of Ireland). These people will talk mournfully of the past history of this unhappy country, of the discontent so widely prevailing, of the necessity of doing something, and then will coolly assume that the thing to be done is what the Chicago Fenians and their tributaries in Ireland want to be done. If you hint that you are imperilling the destinies of a great empire, they compassionate your selfishness. If you say that the granting of these requests would be no benefit or blessing to Ireland, they will reply that surely the Irish are the best judges of that, and at any rate, the thing might be tried. It does not occur to them that, after the failure of the trial, you cannot go back where you were. But what is the use of arguing? Schiller says the gods themselves are powerless against stupidity; and there is no form of it so hopeless as the imbecile, amiable sentimentality which plays on the surface of great subjects without a suspicion of the depths which lie below.

But there is still another American opinion—the opinion of reading and thinking men, who have no party or political interests to serve, and who look at the subject, not as Englishmen, nor as Americans, but as students of political history, sincerely asking what light they may gain from acknowledged principles and from past experience in order to form a right judgment on this momentous question.

To many of these the case seems quite analogous to the Rebellion of the Southern States. At one time, they say, there were differences of opinion