

farmers are not favourable to the enfranchisement of the labourers, with whose unions they were the other day waging war, and thus the rural constituencies will probably remain Conservative in an election held under the present conditions. Nor is it easy to say how far the city constituencies may be influenced by the general fear of revolution or by the fear of increasing the forces of disunion through extension of the franchise in Ireland. Moreover, the special question of the Franchise Bill will not be submitted apart from other questions as a constitutional amendment issued to the people under the American system. It will be indistinguishably confounded with the Egyptian question, with the Irish question, and with all other questions, general, local, and personal which may happen to be agitating the minds of the people throughout the country or in any particular constituency at the time. Nobody will be able positively to say whether the nation has decided in favour of the Franchise Bill or not; so little rational in some cases of the most vital kind is the working of this renowned constitution. Sooner or later, however, the Peers must succumb. They will, as usual, increase their unpopularity by their resistance, the contempt felt for them by their surrender, and they will have brought their House a step, and a wide step, nearer to its doom.

In the encounter, for which the trumpets have now sounded, and which, unless the warder of compromise should again be unexpectedly thrown down between the combatants, must ensue, there will be more of violence than of reason, even on the right side, and passions will be unchained only a few degrees less rabid and injurious to political character than those of civil war. And what will be the practical result when the Franchise Bill shall have been carried not one of the statesmen who have framed that Bill and are pressing it on the acceptance of the nation has, so far as appears from his speeches on the subject, even seriously attempted to forecast. England will be left without any government or authority but that of party, the historical basis of which is fast crumbling away and giving place to the domination of wire-pullers, who, with their caucuses, are likely henceforth to have the country in their hands. It may be a bold thing to say, but it is the fact, that there is not one among the leaders, at this critical juncture, who sees the real character of the situation. The vision of all of them is clouded by the penumbra of monarchical institutions. They all allow themselves to fancy that the Crown is still the government, that the House of Lords is an independent branch of the legislature, and that the House of Commons, instead of being, as it now is, the supreme power, is merely, as it was in monarchical days, the representation of the people. Hence, they imagine that they may safely pour any amount of ignorance, passion, and political incompetency into the constituencies by which the House of Commons is elected. But their "ancient throne" is an ancient throne, and nothing more; and when the House of Lords attempts, on any organic question, to exercise the power of a co-ordinate branch of the legislature, it is at once denounced and coerced. Almost the only conservative institution in England, which retains any practical force, is the non-payment of members of Parliament, which, together with the expensiveness of elections and public life, keeps the representation mainly in the hands of the rich; and this is neither a satisfactory sort of safeguard in itself, nor one which is likely long to survive the last restrictions on the suffrage. The hereditary principle is dead at the root, though, in some of the branches and leaves of the vast and immemorial tree, there still lingers, as there was sure to linger, an autumnal and waning life. Political and social order, which is not less necessary to progress than to security, must henceforth be sustained by other means. The elective system, now the only system possible, must be so organized that it shall, in the interest not only of the rich but of all, give the ascendancy to public reason over passion, and support a stable government. Democracy has come. By the framers of the American constitution it was recognized, and they accordingly provided it with real, though, it has turned out, not sufficient, safeguards, such as an executive government assured of its legal term of existence irrespectively of the fluctuations of party, the President's veto and those of the governors of States, a Senate elected on a conservative principle, and a written constitution in the keeping of a supreme court, besides the Federal system, which is highly conservative in itself. British statesmen are now called upon, in truth they were called upon long ago, in the same way to recognize democracy and to organize it, furnishing it with safeguards as real as those with which it is furnished in the United States, but more effectual. It is an unorganized and chaotic democracy that they are introducing under the forms and names of an old feudal monarchy; and on the perilous path which they are blindly treading amidst the vociferous applause of partisans, no step can be taken backwards, at least without a violent convulsion.

IN Ireland there is a lull, but they, it is to be feared, are much mistaken who fancy that the storm is over. The success of the Land Act must be still regarded as very doubtful. The Duke of Argyll speaks as a landlord, yet his criticisms on the Act are strong. Of course, if by agrarian legislation you take an annual sum of two or three millions from its legal owners and hand it over to another set of people, the set of people to whom it is handed over will, for the moment, be enriched and pleased; so will the trades and interests which are dependent on them, while the trades and interests dependent on the political class, as well as the despoiled class itself, will suffer, and complain in proportion. But obvious consequences wait on such a method of suppressing discontent. Security of property and faith in contracts, with all that depend upon them, disappear. We are now told, and it is easy to believe, that land in Ireland is unsalable. Investors will not buy it, because they know that they will never be able to collect their rents. The tenants will not buy it, as it was hoped they would, because they look to political agitation as the sure means of enabling them to repudiate the remainder of the rent and make the land their own without further payment. That which is unsalable is, of course, unmortgageable; indeed, a mortgagee would be pretty sure to be paid off, like a landlord, with a bullet: money, therefore, cannot be borrowed for the purpose of stocking or improving a farm; and the landlord, now reduced to the ownership of a very precarious rent-charge, will certainly not spend money in improvements, the benefit of which he knows that he will never reap. A temporary sop given to disaffection is not a solution of the problem. A population multiplying in thriftlessness and wretchedness, on a soil incapable of maintaining it, is, as cannot be too often repeated, the main source of evil in Ireland. We should have the same pressure on the means of subsistence and the same troubles in Quebec, if Quebec were an island, instead of having a ready outlet for the surplus population into the United States. Nothing can be an effectual remedy which does not equalize subsistence with population, and this confiscation will never do. Whatever binds the surplus population to the soil will, of course, aggravate the evil. Instead of increasing under the Land Law, production is said rather to have declined. As to "migration," or the plan of shifting the people from one part of Ireland to another, it is a device of the political agitators for keeping the elements of discontent at home: nobody would embrace such a scheme on purely economical grounds. The renewal of the agitation against the remainder of the rent seems to be merely a question of time; it will hardly be delayed beyond the first bad season; and when it comes, how much will remain of the fruits of all this benevolent legislation?

ONE thing is painfully clear. All these agrarian concessions, all these violations, in the supposed interest of the Irish tenantry, of economical principle and private right, though tendered in the sweetest accents of conciliation, have failed to allay the political disaffection or to conjure away the political danger. The language of Mr. Parnell and his associates both in Ireland and in America is just as rancorous as ever, and their aim plainly is not Home Rule in the sense of an improvement of local institutions, or the assertion of a nationality within the Union like that of Scotland, but the disruption of the United Kingdom. They avow themselves in this to be actuated not merely by love of Ireland but by hatred of England, and make no secret of their intention to carve a hostile, as well as an independent, republic out of the side of Great Britain. If the Parnellites have been rather less obstreperous and offensive of late in the House of Commons, it is because they are afraid of injuring the prospects of the Franchise Bill, from which they hope to receive a large increase of power. It would have been folly to expect that political adventurers, the breath of whose life is disaffection, and who have not scrupled to resort to such means as the terrorism of the Land League, or to embrace such alliances as that with the American Invincibles, would allow themselves to be conciliated, and their fangs to be drawn by land reforms or by reforms of any kind. It is true that the strength of Irish disturbance is now, as it has always been, not political but agrarian. Purely political movements for the establishment of an Irish Republic have always failed, as it was natural that they should when, apart from the Union itself, there was no serious political grievance to sustain rebellion. But the cause of disunion has become blended in the minds of the peasantry with that of farms free of rent, and popular passion has been worked up against England to such a pitch that, whatever may be said about the impulsiveness and fickleness of Irish character, it can hardly be expected to subside, especially as it is constantly fed by the anti-British literature which the system of public schools, introduced by the native priesthood, has enabled the people to read. The danger may yet pass away. Dissension, which has already broken out