

THE WEEK.

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THE CRISIS IN ENGLAND.

MR. GLADSTONE'S scheme was proposed expressly as one which was to deliver Westminster from the presence of the Irish members, and set the British Parliament free to legislate without obstruction. To reduce a disorderly squad to order being pronounced a task of insurmountable difficulty for a great assembly, exclusion was the only remedy, and for this the dismemberment of the United Kingdom was not too great a price to be paid. That was the consideration on which Mr. Gladstone emphatically dwelt in the opening of his speech. It is the keynote of his Irish policy as expounded by himself after being heralded by the Irish Secretary, who is supposed now to be his most trusted colleague. But universal disapprobation greeted a project which excluded Ireland from the Imperial legislature, yet left her subject to Imperial burdens; which lowered her from the position of a member of the United Kingdom to that of a tributary colony; which in place of equality gave her vassalage; which in plucking out one thorn from her breast would have planted ten; and which, as was at once seen, must, instead of quenching the flame of Irish agitation, feed it with fuel far more dangerous than it had before. Hereupon Mr. Gladstone intimates that he is ready, if the concession will help his Bill to pass, to give up his cardinal principle, embrace the opposite principle, and admit representatives of Ireland to the Parliament at Westminster. Would it be too harsh, when the question is one touching the very life of the nation, to designate such a mode of dealing with it as unlike deliberate wisdom? Mr. Parnell must be paid the price of his support. A great revolutionary measure must be passed for the honour of the statesmanship whose monuments are the graves of the Soudan. The exact nature of the measure and its consequences to the country seem to be of comparatively little moment. Mr. Gladstone's conscientiousness is, of course, supreme; yet the nation might be safer in the hands of one of those British statesmen of the old school who had nothing ecclesiastical about them, whose exterior was that of the man of the world, or almost of the cynic, but who felt responsibility nevertheless, and in whose hearts deeply and immovably seated were patriotism and honour. Melbourne and Palmerston were in some respects loose; yet neither of them would have abandoned the Loyals of Ireland.

Obstruction then, if the amendment is adopted, will remain; probably it will assume an aggravated form, inasmuch as the Representatives of Ireland in the Parliament of Westminster will now be emissaries of an alien nationality, and of a nationality struggling to become entirely free. To carry Dismemberment, its main object and sole compensation is renounced. But this is not all. The reversal of the main action throws the whole piece of constitutional machinery, as projected by Mr. Gladstone, out of gear. The Parliament at Westminster will still have jurisdiction over British as well as Imperial affairs. Are the Irish, who have a Parliament of their own at Dublin for Irish affairs, to have a voice also in questions relating to the national affairs of Great Britain? Or are the Irish Representatives

at Westminster to be allowed to speak and vote on Imperial questions only? If this is the plan, how is the line to be drawn, and preserved in the conduct of business, between the two classes of questions? Are the Irish Representatives to pass their time between the House and the Lobby, popping in and out according as business of one kind or the other happens to come up and as the discussion takes a domestic or an Imperial turn? Suppose want of confidence is moved in a Minister on account at once of his Foreign and his Home policy, are they to seize their hats as often as the Home policy is mentioned? Are they to be allowed to vote on any question, say of finance or trade, which, though in itself domestic, has a manifestly Imperial bearing, or upon any Imperial question which has a manifest bearing on domestic finance or trade? To delegate subjects to a subordinate legislature is practicable; this it was that, when the Irish rebellion broke out, Parliament was preparing to do: it is practicable also, as in the case of the United States or Canada, to divide the list of subjects between the Federal Legislature and those of the States: it is not practicable to draw a line across the action of a single legislature, any more than to draw a line across the action of an individual man. All the parts of the action play into each other: they are not segments of a mechanical combination, but functions of an organic and indivisible whole. The complication is rendered still more hopeless by Party, the combinations and divisions of which run through the entire dealings of the Legislature with affairs, whether domestic or foreign? What is the relation of these amphibious members to the parties of the British House to be? Is it possible that they should give to a party an exclusively Imperial support, and help it into power with regard to one class of questions without helping it into power with regard to all? In the upshot, probably, the position and attitude of the Representatives of Ireland would be those of intruders into a foreign Parliament, trucking their support to one or other of its parties for objects of their own, alien or even adverse to the interests of Great Britain. Even to a voice in Imperial affairs their title would be equivocal. They would represent, not, like the British members, a general liability to taxation for imperial purposes, but a fixed annual payment, so that in any case involving a possible increase of Imperial expenditure their responsibility would not be the same as that of the rest.

The more these proposals, so tremendous in their scope and probable consequences, are examined in detail, the clearer it becomes that they are not the offspring of mature thought, but of impulse, and of the necessity of fulfilling a bargain which requires the goods to be delivered without delay. Mr. Gladstone himself, if the report is correct, pleads that he has worked under pressure. He has worked under pressure indeed. Yet it is strange that the performance of this renowned statesman even when hastily turned out, should betray, as it unquestionably does, palpable oversights. In the last of these papers it was pointed out that Mr. Gladstone had inadvertently extinguished the Supreme Legislature. It might even have been stated more broadly that he had extinguished the sovereign power. At present the sovereign power resides in the Parliament of the United Kingdom. Mr. Gladstone does not repeal the Act of Union so as to restore to each Parliament the sovereignty which it had before, nor does he give sovereign power to either of the two new and independent though disparate Parliaments which he in fact creates. The result is that there will be no means of amending the Constitution, of dealing, at need, with any of the relations which the Bill calls into existence, or of modifying the conditions which it imposes. So long as the Legislative Union and the supremacy of the United Parliament are retained, powers of local self-government may be safely conceded to any extent; but between the retention of the Legislative Union and Separation there is no middle course, and attempts to find one result only in confusion. If, apart from the dictates of faction or of fear, the nation has deliberately made up its mind, on grounds of justice or of policy, that the three Celtic and Catholic Provinces ought to be abandoned, let them go.

Mr. Goschen, on the last night of the debate, referred with just indignation to the attempts made by Sir William Harcourt and others to frighten Parliament into passing the Bill by allusions to the strength of Fenianism in the United States. British legislators and statesmen may rest assured that if they will only act with firmness and courage, keeping their minds fixed on their duty to their own country, they will have nothing to fear from American intervention. Irish Nationalists, politicians in quest of the Irish vote, journals which have Irish subscribers, and Protec-