

# THE WEEK.

Third Year.  
Vol. III., No. 8.

Toronto, Thursday, January 21st, 1886.

\$3 00 per Annum.  
Single Copies, 10 Cents.

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## THE PROGRESS OF THE IRISH QUESTION.

"FOR some time past I have been coming to the belief that the final solution of the Irish question will be a bloody one, and one which will leave the Island without any representation at all in Parliament for a considerable time at least." So writes an American observer of the situation in England, a man of high intelligence, of perfectly calm judgment and large political experience, after informing his mind by intercourse with reflecting men of all parties. Such, indeed, is the goal towards which the Irish question has now for some time been too evidently tending. Such is the consummation which all who, either in England or in Canada, foster and flatter rebellion for the sake of catching the Irish vote are doing their best to bring about. Nor are there wanting, in England at least, those who in disgust and despair say: "Let the inevitable come; the sooner the business gets out of the hands of the political intriguer and into those of the soldier the better." But this, though natural, is not humanity; it is not statesmanship. Humanity and statesmanship alike call aloud upon the leaders of the nation to avert civil bloodshed, which they may yet with ease do, if, laying aside for a moment their selfish ambition and their factious rivalries, they will unite in delivering Ireland from a reign of lawless terrorism and restoring the reign of law. When this has been done, if Mr. Parnell complains of any political grievance, let the complaint be fairly heard, and the grievance, if it is proved to exist, be promptly redressed. Redress of any proved grievance has never been denied by the British Parliament to Ireland since the reform of 1832 made the House of Commons a real representation of the British people. In truth it is to the action of English and Scotch, rather than of Irish members, that practical improvements in Ireland have been due. The Irish members, instead of earnestly seeking the removal of grievances, have hugged them as the capital of sedition. At this moment Mr. Parnell and Mr. Davitt are doing their best to make the Purchase Act miscarry, lest it should content the people and the fuel of sedition should be withdrawn.

As yet no specific grievance of any kind has been alleged by Mr. Parnell or any of his associates. Disorderly demonstrations in the House of Commons, murder, outrage and terrorism throughout the Celtic and Catholic provinces of Ireland, attempts to massacre English men, women, and children wholesale with dynamite, torrents of hellish invective against the British race and name we have had; but not one definite charge of tyranny or abuse, not one intelligible demand for reform. In the *Contemporary Review*, Mr. Justin McCarthy, vice-leader of the Nationalist party, comes forward again with a general demand of justice for Ireland and with complaints of a want of the friendly sympathy on the part of the British which, he thinks, Irish dynamite ought to have produced; but what injustice is being done to Ireland he does not attempt to explain. About the Viceroyalty a great fuss is now being made, and in a former paper Mr. Justin McCarthy described it as a devilish engine of British tyranny, the counterpart of the Austrian satrapy in Venetia. The answer given at the time in these columns was that thirty years ago the House of Commons voted the abolition of the Viceroyalty by a majority of three to one, and the measure was dropped solely in deference to Irish opposition, particularly the opposition of the citizens of Dublin, who liked the pageant, the entertainments,

and the expenditure. Nobody in England, Wales, or Scotland cares a rush whether the Viceroyalty is retained or not, and the only reason for hesitating about its immediate abolition is that any change made at this moment is a betrayal of nervous weakness and will act as oil poured on the fire of rebellion. It will no more appease the enemies of the Union than did the Land Act, the Disturbance Act, the extension of the Franchise or any other concession that has been made. What they seek and have sought throughout is not reform, to which they have never, even in the case of the Land Act, lent anything like a cordial support, but separation.

Mr. Lecky, the historian, is an Irishman and an Irish patriot. He has warmly defended his compatriots with his pen. He says that the one thing which Ireland wants is British security for contracts, commerce, and industry. "A Liberal" last week said the same thing in these columns. When the Nationalist movement began, the savings banks were full of money, commerce was active in Belfast and its other seats, and the rate of pauperism had fallen ninety per cent. from what it had once been. The agrarian legislation of Mr. Gladstone, as some of those who voted for it in public acknowledged in private, gave a severe blow to the faith of contracts and to commercial confidence. But by the terrorism of the League the very springs of trade and industry are being broken: no lawful calling can be freely pursued, no binding contract can be made, capital can no longer be securely invested. Deliver Ireland into the hands of the revolutionists; by the fatal necessity of revolutions, the more violent will prevail; and there will follow an orgie of confiscation. Mr. Parnell calls for Grattan's Parliament, but what he means is Tyrconnell's Parliament, which passed a sweeping Act of Attainder against all Protestant and British proprietors. The reign of Jacobin robbery in France, by paralyzing all the motives to industry, brought on a national famine: a reign of Fenian robbery in Ireland would do the same.

By the time these pages reach their readers the veil which still covers the intrigues and plottings of the party leaders will probably have been raised. At this moment we can only see, in shadowy confusion, the workings of a passionate desire on the part of Mr. Gladstone to turn out the Government and get back to power, a refusal on the part of the Moderate Liberals to gratify his cravings at the expense of the unity of the nation, a disposition on the part of Mr. Chamberlain to set up at once for himself as leader of the Radicals, a struggle in the bosom of the Ministry between the duty of a Government to Ireland, and the shallow scoundrelism of Lord Randolph Churchill. Perhaps we also discern a certain trepidation on the part of Mr. Parnell, who, having been enabled by the pecuniary proceeds of his patriotism to pay off his mortgages, now feels that he has something to lose, and finds that the American and Dynamite wing is beginning to escape from his control. In the meantime it appears that the spirit of the nation is still rising, notwithstanding the selfish weakness of politicians, and that under anything like patriotic leadership it will defend its union against savagery and superstition as the Americans defended theirs against slavery. Why, it is asked by the partisans of dismemberment, is not separation to be conceded to Ireland when it is conceded to Bulgaria? In the first place, because it cannot be said in the case of Bulgaria, as it can be said in the case of Ireland, that a third of the people at least are attached to the Union, while of the rest the great majority care nothing for the political change in itself, but only as it is a license to agrarian plunder. In the second place, because it is possible to disentangle the Bulgarian from the Turkish element, while the British and Irish elements are inextricably blended in the two islands. In the third place, because, whereas for Bulgaria the only hope of freedom and civilization is separation from Turkey, for the Celt of Ireland, ridden by priests and demagogues, the only hope of real freedom or civilization is continuance in the Union. In the fourth place, because the dissolution of the Turkish Empire is not, while the dissolution of the British Empire would be, the destruction of the Power which has hitherto led the march of progress, and whose influence is still of inestimable value to humanity.

GOLDWIN SMITH.

"ALL my argument," says Mr. Gladstone, in his reply to Professor Huxley in the January number of the *Nineteenth Century*—"All my argument, the chief argument of my paper, leads up to the nebular or rotatory hypothesis." Precisely so. Where can Professor Huxley have been this last quarter of a century not to know that this is the chief characteristic of all Mr. Gladstone's arguments?—*St. James's Gazette*.