

THE WEEK.

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DISSOLUTION OF PARLIAMENT.

By the state of suspense and excitement in which the country has been kept for the last fortnight, and which is likely soon to begin to have a bad effect on trade, fresh emphasis is given to our protest against allowing the prerogative of dissolution to be wielded by a party leader for the purpose of bringing on an election at a time favourable to himself. A Parliament is by law elected for a certain term of years, and for that term it ought to sit, unless the occurrence of a constitutional crisis such as is brought on by a defeat of the Government, a collision between the two Houses, or some fundamental change of policy, renders necessary an appeal to the country. Whether a crisis has occurred, and whether a dissolution ought to be granted, are questions of which, we submit, the Crown or its representative is the judge, and which ought to be decided in the interest, not of a party, but of the whole community and of the Constitution. In England, though as we admitted before, the practice has of late become too lax, it has not become so lax as it is here, and as the leaders of both parties seem to desire; for the leader of the Opposition has been challenging an appeal to the country. There has not yet been a dissolution in England of which it could be said that, like the last dissolution in this country, it was wholly unjustified by any constitutional crisis, and had for its sole motive the electioneering convenience of the party in power. The nearest approach to such an abuse of the prerogative was Mr. Gladstone's unfortunate dissolution in 1874. Mr. Gladstone determined on that step in his bed, to which he was confined by sickness, and without consulting his colleagues, all of whom are said to have disapproved. But the Government had not long before been defeated, and had resigned on the Irish Universities Bill; and though it had resumed office, the resumption was understood to be provisional, and subject to an appeal to the country, which would determine whether the Ministry retained the confidence of the people. It is evident that if Members of Parliament are to hold their places, not for a legal term or until a necessity for an appeal to the country has arisen, but during the Prime Minister's pleasure, their independence will be impaired. "What seems more important," says Hallam, "than the usual term of duration is, that this should be permitted to take its course except in cases where some great change of national policy may perhaps justify its abridgement. The Crown would obtain a very serious advantage over the House of Commons if it should become an ordinary thing to dissolve Parliament for some petty ministerial interest or to avert some unpalatable resolution. Custom appears to have established, and with some convenience, the substitution of six for seven years as the natural life of a House of Commons; but an habitual irregularity in this respect might lead in time to consequences that most men would deprecate." Hallam here regards the prerogative as still really exercised by the Crown: he does not contemplate its usurpation by the Prime Minister, or his language would probably have been more stringent. In the Crown the prerogative of dissolution

still of right is; in the hands of the Crown it ought to remain, and by the Crown or the representative of the Crown it ought to be exercised on broad principles of general policy, and in the national interest, without reference to the exigencies of a party. Sir Edmund Head exercised it in refusing Mr. Brown a dissolution; and in England the other day it was quite understood that the Queen might have used her discretion in granting a dissolution to Mr. Gladstone had the majority against him been more decisive. The manifest doubt and hesitancy of the Ministers on the present occasion show plainly that no constitutional cause has arisen for abridging the legal life of the Parliament. The pretence that the Parliament has condemned itself by the extension of the franchise, and that on that account it is imperative at once to hold a fresh election with the enlarged constituency, is seen at once to be hollow; if it were not, the dissolution and fresh election would have been at once announced as a matter of course without all this suspense and agitation. If His Excellency the Governor-General has no functions it would be better at once to get rid of the expense of the office, and, of what is more injurious than its expense, its operation as a conventional mask for the malpractices of Party. But, as we venture to maintain, he is still the guardian of the Constitution. In that capacity he is now called upon to defend his trust against a dangerous usurpation. In doing this he will have to face some personal responsibility; but so, on certain occasions, has the sentinel at his door. Public opinion would be with him and there would be nothing to fear. The rumour that the Prime Minister has privately received from the Governor-General leave to dissolve if he finds it convenient, and is canvassing the country to ascertain his chances with the death-warrant of the Parliament in his pocket to be executed or cancelled as he may find convenient, is totally incredible; that it should obtain credence is a proof that our hold upon constitutional principles has been lost. With regard to the dissolution of the Ontario Legislature, which is first announced, we have only to repeat the remarks made with regard to the dissolution of the Dominion Parliament. In this case, again, the alleged condemnation of the Legislature by the extension of the suffrage is a subterfuge: the real reason is evidently some exigency of party tactics. Both the parties having done the same thing, neither can impeach the conduct of the other.

JUSTIFICATION for the dissolution of the Dominion Parliament there is none. The inducement to it is not very clear, and it is evident that there have been many searchings of heart and some division of councils on the Ministerial side. There is an object, no doubt, for holding the election in Quebec, while the Local Government and patronage are still in Tory hands, though it may be thought that a Ministry which has been unable to save itself is not likely to afford very effective aid to an ally. Sir John Macdonald may think, and with good reason, that by the Riel agitation he has gained in Ontario what he has lost in Quebec, and if he has his choice he will probably prefer that his Government shall rest on the support of the British rather than on that of the French Province. Trade is prosperous, and the country is in pretty good humour. The downward tendency of the national finances may be a motive for hastening the verdict. To imagine that the members of the Government are scared by the prospect of the damaging disclosures which next session has in store would be absurd; the only consequence of a damaging disclosure to any Canadian politician is knighthood. One motive Sir John Macdonald's colleagues may have for precipitating an election, which we may be sure is not shared by Sir John himself. They may feel that the talisman of his name is indispensable, and recollect that he is seventy-two. The Provincial Premier's motive may have reference to the supposed designs of the other party with regard to the Dominion Election; or he may be alarmed at the growing strength of the feeling against his Roman Catholic alliance.

STAMMERING is sometimes the cause of a pun. Some one was mentioning in Lamb's presence the cold-heartedness of the Duke of Cumberland in preventing the Duchess from rushing up to the embrace of her son, whom she had not seen for a considerable time, and insisting on her receiving him in state. "How horribly cold it was," said the narrator. "Yes," said Lamb, in his stuttering way, "but you know he is the Duke of Cumberland."