

THE WEEK.

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CONTENTS OF CURRENT NUMBER.

CONTRIBUTED ARTICLES—	PAGE
The Unionist Victory	Goldwin Smith. 555
On Some Impressions	T. 556
Jottings along the C. P. R.	E. S. 557
Literary Notes from the Continent	558
The Spites of Rulers	Selected. 558
The Dead Sea	Selected. 559
CORRESPONDENCE	559
TOPICS OF THE WEEK—	
The New Extradition Treaty	560
The Fisheries Question	560
Imperial Defence	560
Imperial Federation	560
The Batoum Incident	561
The Futility of Inconvenient Treaties	561
NOTES	561
POETRY—	
To Miranda	Seranus. 563
A TRIP TO NEWFOUNDLAND.—I	Portia. 563
INCONSTANT.—Poem	Selected. 565
OUR LIBRARY TABLE	565
LITERARY GOSSIP	566

THE UNIONIST VICTORY.

THE political battle, of all the political battles which I have witnessed the fiercest and the most eventful, is now virtually over, as the ninety elections which remain are not likely to go differently from the rest. The result is not doubtful. Mr. Gladstone is at this moment determining whether he shall resign or wait to be ejected. His conduct during the campaign leads people to expect that he will take some violent course and try to set the house on fire before he leaves it. But he has colleagues who, though individually ciphers, collectively are able to restrain him, since the Queen would certainly not consent under the present circumstances to the reconstruction of his Cabinet, and the counsels of placemen are seldom desperate. Sir William Harcourt at all events is not likely to immolate himself on the funeral pile of his beloved chief's reputation. But speculation is futile when the event will soon be known.

As to Mr. Gladstone himself, he is capable of anything. He has shown throughout the campaign a force, energy, and pluck which at his age are most marvellous: he has been the strength, and almost the sole strength, of his own cause; for the lucubrations of Mr. Morley, who is known to be the author of the most discredited part of the Irish Bill, have had little effect, and though Sir William Harcourt is a first rate stump speaker, his character was neatly painted by the *Saturday Review* when it said that in one portion of his speech at Derby he seemed to have forgotten on which side he had been retained. But the spirit displayed by the Prime Minister has been such as no British statesman in his position has ever displayed before, and, it is to be hoped, no British statesman in his position will ever display again. He has assailed all who differed from him, even those who but yesterday were his colleagues, with a vindictive bitterness which has rendered reconciliation almost impossible, and precluded any hope of the reunion of the party under his leadership. He has seriously injured his reputation for integrity, even among those who had the highest opinion of him, by his evasions and equivocations. Worst of all, he has laboured with what can only be called deliberate malignity, to set the masses against what he calls the classes, and to poison the heart of society in the interest of his own ambition. Never did demagogism assume a more noxious form. He has even deliberately falsified political history to make it appear that the more highly educated classes have been the opponents of every measure of justice and humanity, and to hold them up to the hatred of the masses. He has not wanted the effrontery to pretend that Catholic Emancipation, among other reforms, was carried by the just instinct of the masses against the prejudice and self interest of "the classes," though nothing can be more certain than that toleration was the tendency of the enlightened few, and that Lord George Gordon had the masses on his side. To compliment the people on being guided by instinct and not by reason, is to designate them as brutes. A denunciation of intellect comes with singularly bad grace from a man who owes his rise in public life to his University distinction and connections, and who was glad to identify himself with intelligence till intelligence rejected his Irish Bill. Popularity came to Mr. Gladstone late in life. He is intoxicated with it, and in his intoxication he has forgotten not only propriety and good sense, but his duty to his

country. There seems to be no more charitable mode, consistent with the supposition of his sanity, of accounting for his demeanour in his recent struggle for power. It is gratifying to see that while his appeals for justice to Ireland have had very great effect with multitudes of kind-hearted though ill-informed people, his appeals to class hatred have fallen dead, or been received by his followers with tacit, sometimes even with avowed, reprobation. His maddened ambition in its fall has desperately laid hold of the pillars of society, but the pillars happily have not given way.

Mr. Gladstone has held Scotland. This I believe to be the true account of the result in the Northern Kingdom, which took us all by surprise, since the leading journals of Scotland had pronounced against the Bill, and the tendency of Scotch opinion a month or two ago seemed decidedly to be in the same direction. The Edinburgh speeches and demonstration told, no doubt, over the whole district. Mr. Gladstone has, moreover, of late, been ostentatiously proclaiming himself a Scotchman in blood and sentiment, as he would probably proclaim himself a Welshman if his political object were to fire the Welsh heart; and this appeal to the clanish nature of the Scotch has evidently produced a great effect. The Caledonians apparently feel that they are supporting the political Wallace of the day against the Southron. If this seems unlike Scotch hard-headedness, the explanation probably is that the most hard-headed have voted the other way. The Free Churchmen in Scotland hope for Disestablishment at Mr. Gladstone's hands. This is the account of the coldness with which they have received the appeal of the Presbyterians of Ulster. The Disestablishment question is likewise the main cause of the apparent Disunionism of Wales, where the bulk of the people are Nonconformists, while the gentry belong to the Established Church. It is, however, to be lamented that Scotland, Ireland, and Wales should be apparently arrayed against England, and trouble may come of an antagonism between the portions of the United Kingdom which Mr. Gladstone in his reckless combativeness is fomenting to the utmost of his power. He seems literally to have persuaded himself that he has a divine mission, and that England in rejecting his policy has committed an act of impiety, punishment for which she is to receive at the hands of her more right-minded coempers.

The national verdict against Mr. Gladstone's policy and in favour of the Union would have been infinitely more decisive if it had been possible effectually to eliminate Party, and get the whole nation to vote simply on the issue specially submitted to it on this occasion. But to eliminate Party all at once was not possible, and though Liberal Unionists enough to turn the balance detached themselves and joined the Conservatives, the masses on both sides remained within the party lines. My own special mission during the election was to induce Liberal Unionists to vote for Conservatives instead of merely abstaining; and I can testify to the difficulty of the task. Not a few of the Liberal Unionists have fallen victims to party vengeance. The defeat of Mr. Goschen and Sir George Trevelyan has been balm to the wounded heart of Mr. Gladstone, who on the occasion of Mr. Goschen's rejection telegraphed, with a somewhat ludicrous effusiveness, his thanks to "dear old Scotland," for breaking the "chains" which nobody was aware that she had worn. But it may be doubted whether any solid advantage will accrue to Mr. Gladstone's party, since the Moderate Liberals, being deprived of leaders of their own, will be the more ready to fall into line with the Conservatives and aid them in forming and sustaining a Government. The country has received a very valuable tribute and one full of good augury in the patriotism of Liberal Unionists, who have thus taken their political lives in their own hands; and the sacrifice made by the leaders, who will certainly find other seats and remain in public life, is in reality exceeded by that of less conspicuous men who are not likely to find other seats, but will forfeit the sole prize of their ambition and be relegated to obscurity, not without odium or perhaps even without loss. So England has still some who love her well.

In its net result this is a Conservative victory, and the Conservatives must be called upon to form a Government. Their majority, if they have one, will be very small; it will not be a working majority. But they may safely count upon the assistance of the Hartingtonians. The position of Mr. Chamberlain and his following is very different, and their adhesion is much more doubtful. Their adhesion in fact must be limited to the single question of the Legislative Union. An actual coalition of Conservatives and moderate Liberals is generally desired by those who care more for the country than for Party, and it would probably be brought about without