

# THE WEEK.

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## MR. GLADSTONE'S SCHEME.

THROUGH the exulting shouts of the Irish Nationalists of London, drawn out under their priests, and amidst the joyous expectation of the American Fenians, and all who desire the downfall of the British power, Mr. Gladstone moved in triumph to propose what he had himself, a very short time before, branded as the Dismemberment of the Empire. By flouting the expression now he shows how rapidly he drifts, how easily and completely he breaks with his own past, how treacherous are the moorings of the ship of state if it anchors by his convictions. To be applauded by the enemies of his country would cause him less of a qualm than it would cause to ordinary men. His worshippers are fond of giving him the distinctive title of the great "human" statesman. It is a higher thing, perhaps, to be human than to be national. We may look forward, in spirit, to the day when, as the tribe has been lost in the nation, the nation will be lost in humanity. But, at present, in the merciless vortex of international competition it must fare ill with the nation which has not a patriotic chief; and England may have bitter reason to wish that Mr. Gladstone instead of being her Prime Minister were Prime Minister of Mankind. Perhaps a not very narrow patriotism may add that even Mankind would lose something which it can ill afford to lose by the immediate destruction of the British power.

That the union of two independent Parliaments under one Constitutional Crown is utterly impracticable, and that the attempt would lead only to confusion, all who are worth hearing on political subjects have with one voice pronounced. "The thing," says Macaulay, "is as plain as a proposition in Euclid. A Constitutional Sovereign must conform to the sense of Parliament, and, if the two Parliaments differ, how can he conform to the sense of both?" Where the real power is in the Crown a plurality of Parliaments is practicable, where the real power is in the Parliament it is not. The Irish Parliament during the period of its ostensible independence was really held in dependence by Crown patronage and corruption. Better, far better, than a Union with two Parliaments is Separation outright, which would rid Great Britain at once of all responsibility for Ireland and leave her at liberty to deal with it as a foreign country. That between Legislative Union and Separation there is no middle way has hitherto been the verdict of all statesmen. Mr. Gladstone thinks that he has found a middle way. He sets up two Parliaments, each national, and puts an end to Irish representation at Westminster. But of the two Parliaments one is to be Imperial, the other local. To the Parliament of Ireland local subjects only are assigned. Authority on Imperial subjects, including the Army and Navy, Peace and War, Foreign and Colonial policy, Customs, Coinage, Trade, Navigation, and for the present the Constabulary, is vested in the Parliament of Great Britain alone. In these questions the Irish Parliament is to have no voice; yet Ireland is to be dragged in the train of British policy, involved in British wars, and made to pay for the support of British armaments and the maintenance of a British

Empire. She is to be invested with nationality, but divested of its highest attributes, taxed without representation, and compelled to pay an annual tribute to the detested Saxon. By the cable reports Mr. Gladstone is made to say that the right of addressing the Crown would remain, and would be a full equivalent for the constitutional rights which are taken away; but it is incredible that he can have given utterance to such drivel. Would it have been possible to devise a scheme more certain to generate on the largest scale and inflame to the highest pitch the enmity which it is the professed object of all this revolutionary legislation to allay? Can it be believed that Ireland, with her Nationalist feeling stimulated as it has been, would long acquiesce in such an arrangement? Can it be doubted that as soon as the Irish Parliament met, a patriotic struggle into which every ambitious man would throw himself would commence for the abolition of the hateful tribute, for the removal of all restrictions, and for the assertion of a complete nationality? Can Mr. Gladstone imagine, after the experience which he has had in the case of the Land Act, that the object of the Irish agitators is peace, and that they will rest content with partial concessions? Does he think that ambition will at once die away in their breasts, that they will instantly bid farewell to the trade by which they make their bread, or that, if they did, others more violent and insatiable would not at once step into their place? Does he think that American Fenianism will be content to see Ireland with her "statutory" Parliament settle down in loyal allegiance to Queen Victoria? His own argument will at once be turned by thoroughgoing Nationalists with fatal force against himself. If a British legislature is, as he contends, incompetent to legislate for Ireland, how can it be competent to give her a constitution?

Suppose, in regard to the tribute or any other matter, Ireland refuses to fulfil the conditions, how are the conditions to be enforced? Suppose a question of jurisdiction arises, how is it to be settled? Suppose there is an ambiguity in the compact, who is to interpret? The American Federation has for the settlement of questions between its members the Supreme Court backed by the force of the Union. Canada has the Privy Council backed by the force of the Empire. Between Great Britain and Ireland there would be no arbitrating tribunal or power. The only guardian of the compact and the sole umpire would be the cannon. Thus to escape from what is described as the desperate task of coercing a few lawless terrorists, Great Britain undertakes, in an event which, considering the temper of the Irish and their American confederates, may be deemed morally inevitable, to coerce the whole Irish nation. The harbinger of peace is big with civil war. It is big with foreign war also; for an Irish Parliament refusing to pay tribute to Great Britain and declaring itself independent would almost certainly obtain recognition from the demagogism of the United States. If, by the cowardly love of ease and dread of trouble, Great Britain is led to surrender her unity and greatness, retribution will not long halt behind the crime.

As there is no legal power of enforcing the provisions of the new constitution or of interpreting its ambiguities, so there is no legal power of amending it, or indeed of legislating at all on organic questions for the future. No such authority is assigned to either the British or Irish Parliament, nor to any combination of the two. The Supreme Legislature is in fact extinguished, and extinguished without possibility of revival. This, no doubt, is an inadvertence, which with other inadvertences and crudities may be regarded as due to haste. Mr. Trevelyan states positively that in June last the Cabinet was unanimous against Home Rule. Nine months would be rather a short time in which to mature a revolution. But it is certain that Mr. Gladstone's conversion to the plan of a Parliament for Ireland dates from the moment when the result of the election showed him that he could not have a majority without the Parnellite vote. This scheme for the dissolution of the United Kingdom has been struck off at a heat by Mr. Gladstone's constructive genius, like those vast theories of Homeric mythology, primeval history, and cosmogony which are received with polite derision by the learned and scientific world. He has not even consulted his colleagues, being determined to keep the whole credit of settling the Irish question to himself. The want of a power of amendment is the more obviously disastrous, inasmuch as the plan of the Irish Constitution is evidently adopted not on its merits as a permanent polity, but for the temporary purpose of giving the landlords the means of protecting themselves against democratic confiscation.

In its internal structure the Irish Parliament appears to be a singular