

THE GREAT DIFFICULTY.

(From the Morning Chronicle.)

What is to be done with Ireland? It is a very old question, but there probably never was a time at which a Government was less prepared to give it a satisfactory answer. Such is the position of affairs which the Whig Administration have entailed on themselves and on the country:—a doubtful war—a colony utterly disaffected, and all but dissolved—a vague promise touching the foundations of popular institutions, which is destined, we fear, to be prolific of rash hopes and unguarded fears—and lastly, a quarrel between England and Ireland on a religious question.

We do not profess to penetrate the mysteries of the Cabinet deliberations, but it is no secret that the Irish question has been, and is, the source of serious discussion. Lord John Russell has placed himself in that position which is so common to rash men, and so fatal to statesmen—a position in which to advance is impossible, and to retire unsafe, dishonorable, and self-destructive. He has not even the excuse which might be alleged by the feeble head of a disorganised party, that he had been forced into a path which his judgment condemned. He was not driven into the difficulty for any popular clamor—for he himself, by his Durham letter, evoked the clamor which has created the difficulty. It was in vain that Sir James Graham and Lord Aberdeen pointed out to him precisely the dilemma on the horns of which he is at this moment writhing. It is not often that political predictions are so literally and speedily fulfilled as in this instance.

Over and over again, through the weary course of the debates on the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill, we urged upon the consideration of the Government that, when the question arose of applying it to Ireland, they would be reduced to the alternative of either throwing that country into violent civil commotion, or degrading the law itself by permitting, with impunity, its ostentatious violation. The time is come when this bitter alternative is forced on the attention of the Ministers, and they cannot long postpone their determination. If ever any man was pledged to a definite course of political action, Lord John Russell is pledged to prosecute the Irish bishops under his own act. He called forth popular excitement against the Roman Catholics, and stimulated it by hopes of a strong repressive measure: he ultimately brought in a bill which fell far short of the expectations he had aroused; and the question now arises, is he prepared to give effect to the modicum of coercion which he induced Parliament to sanction? Incredible as it may appear to any man of common sense, we believe that the Premier flattered himself with the fond anticipation that the Irish bishops would submit to be stripped of their titles without resistance. Such an expectation was, on the face of it, absurd. Even if we gave those prelates no credit for religious zeal, it is impossible not to see how great an accession of influence is open to such of them as may be willing to make themselves martyrs for £100. The Romish ecclesiastics would have forfeited for ever their reputation for astuteness if they had missed so fair an opportunity of aggrandising their power. When James II. was thwarted by the seven bishops, he exclaimed, 'These men are determined to be martyrs, and so they shall be.' William III., on a similar occasion, said, 'I see that these persons are bent on being persecuted, and I am bent on disappointing them.' Mr. Macaulay justly observes that these dissimilar answers account for the different fates of the two monarchs. The Whig Lord John Russell has chosen the policy of the Stuart Prince.

We return to the question, Will Lord John Russell enforce his bill against the Irish bishops? Can it be that the early assembling of the Cabinet has anything to do with a determination of Lord Clarendon not to be the instrument of such a policy? We could readily believe this. Lord Clarendon has had to deal with one Irish rebellion, in which the vast power of the priesthood was ranged on the side of Government and law. It would be no matter of wonder were he to shrink from a contest in which such a body would be not only not with him, but would be at the head of the resistance. If the priests had sided with Smith O'Brien, the matter would not have ended in a cabbage-garden. Whatever may be the theoretical view of the question, the religion of a country is, for all practical purposes, the religion of the majority of its people.—Romanism is the religion of the majority of the Irish—a people peculiarly susceptible of ecclesiastical influence; and the grievance which the priests have to allege is so simple as to be intelligible to the most uneducated mind. 'Whereas your bishops and pastors have been for many years in the enjoyment of certain titles of respect and honor, conferred by their ecclesiastical superior the Pope, and assumed without question up to this time, they are now made subject to fine and imprisonment.' O'Connell himself could not have prayed for a more hopeful cry. Twenty years back the taunt of the Whigs against the Tories was, 'What will you do with Ireland?' We now retort the question on Lord John Russell. We tell him publicly—what Lord Clarendon has probably told him in Council—that his legislation of last session has made the government of Ireland impossible.

It is a grave evil, no doubt, that a law passed after long discussion, and affirmed by large majorities, should be openly and ostentatiously defied. But the dilemma is the work of the ministers. Reason and toleration contended against the bill which they forced upon the Legislature; it was protested against in every stage; and the perplexity which it has produced was abundantly foretold. The country is beginning to recover from the infatuation of last winter, and to understand

'How nations sink by darling schemes oppress,
When vengeance listens to the fool's request.'

Lord John Russell has thought to play the part of both the impersonations in this drama. We leave him to settle with the country for the false position into which he has led it, by making the maintenance and dignity of the law incompatible with the peace of the empire.

DR. NEVIN.

(From the United States Catholic Miscellany.)

Dr. Nevin is recognised as one of the ablest Protestant Divines of the United States. He is Professor in the German Reformed College at Mercersburg; and in his lectures, in his published works, and in the Mercersburg Review has for several years past advanced views of Theology based on a study of the History of the Early Church. The necessary result was a tendency to admit much that the Catholics hold as truth delivered from the beginning of Christianity, and which Protestants protest against, as the inventions of the middle ages.

So much dissatisfaction was gradually excited by

the unfolding of these views, that the Professor was induced to tender his resignation at the last meeting of the German Reformed Church. A paragraph in a preceding column states that the Professor was sustained. Since putting it in type we have met a letter in the Christian Observer signed Jacob Helffenstein, who grieves much over the decision. We extract the following sentences from the communication:—

'The question, as it was brought before Synod, was regarded on all sides as a test question. The case is now decided. By an almost unanimous vote, the Synod adopted a resolution, earnestly requesting the Professor to withdraw his resignation, assuring him of its unabated confidence, and pledging itself to his support. By this act, the sentiments of the Professor have been fully endorsed, and the German Reformed Church, so far as it was represented at the late Synod, declares that the system of Theology as taught by him, meets its entire approbation.'

'As one of the oldest sons of the church, we cannot but regard this decision with heartfelt sorrow. We had hoped, that whatever sympathy may have been manifested for certain peculiarities of the Mercersburg theology, the rapid advance which Dr. N. has recently made towards Romanism, would at once awaken universal apprehension, and call forth a most decided remonstrance. After a renewed and careful perusal of his article on "Early Christianity," the action of Synod appears to us like a dream.'

1. The article plainly maintains, "that Christianity as it stood in the fourth century, and in the first part of the fifth—was something very different from modern Protestantism, and that it bore in truth, a very near resemblance, in all material points, to the later religion of the Roman church."—in other words, that the Christianity of that period was substantially the same as Roman Catholic Christianity. Accordingly, the Dr. supposes that were the Fathers who then lived, again to appear on earth, they would find their home, not in the bosom of the Protestant, but of the Papal Church. "They knew nothing of the view which makes the Bible and private judgment the principle of Christianity, or the only rule of faith." They held to the supremacy of the Bishop of Rome—baptism for the remission of sins—the real presence of the Redeemer's glorified body—the necessity of confession—the grace of ministerial absolution—to purgatory—prayers for the dead—intercessions addressed to the angels and departed saints—the veneration of relics—the continuance of miracles—the merit of celibacy and voluntary poverty, and the "monastic life, as at once honorable to religion, and eminently suited to promote the spiritual welfare of man."

Let it here be distinctly remembered, that the Christianity of that period was not, according to Dr. Nevin's statements, Puseyism, or Anglicanism, but "in all material points," Romanism itself. "The Fathers of the fourth and fifth centuries were not Protestants of either the Anglican or the Puritan school. They would have felt themselves lost, and away from home altogether in the arms of English Episcopalianism, as well as in the more bony and stern embrace of Scotch Presbyterianism."

2. Another position of the Professor is that what the Church was in the fourth and fifth centuries, it was substantially in all the preceding centuries of the Christian era up to the apostolic age. The "great apostasy"—the falling away, of which Protestants speak, he does not allow. They may regard the several points which have been specified, such as purgatory, prayers for the dead, &c., as so many corruptions which at an early period began to develop themselves in the Christian church, but this, in his view, would be "turning the whole truth of Christianity into a strange lie." He admits of no such "golden age," as Protestants dream of, "representing, for a time at least, however short, the true original simplicity of the gospel, as the same has been happily resuscitated once again in these last days."—"the existence of a strictly evangelical church, founded on Protestant principles; the Bible, the only rule of doctrine, justification by faith, the clergy of one order, the people the fountain of all church power; breathing a Protestant spirit, and carrying men to heaven without sacramental mummery or mysticism, in the common sense Puritan way of the present time." All this is mere "fancy"—"a mere hypothesis which involves in the end a purely arbitrary construction of history, just as wild and bold, to our view, as any that has been offered us, from a different stand point, by Strauss, or Dr. Bauer."

"Our object now is simply to present the true 'stand point' of Dr. Nevin. The plain inference from all he has said on this subject is that 'in all material points,' what the Religion of Rome is, that was also the religion of the early Christians—in other words, the religion of the fourth and fifth centuries—the religion of all the preceding centuries was essentially the Roman Catholic Religion." If language can mean anything such is evidently the point which the Doctor's historical argument aims to establish. More than this no Romanist could ask; and how any honest man who maintains such a position, can still remain within the pale of the Protestant Church, we are utterly at a loss to conjecture."

INSANITY IN CALIFORNIA.

The San Francisco Courier is pressing upon the attention of the authorities of that State the duty of providing a public asylum for the insane. The necessity of some provision for the reception and treatment of patients suffering under this dreadful affliction, is urged and increasing prevalence of insanity amongst the emigrants. There is scarcely a physician in the State who has not had more patients than one. Hardly a vessel leaves the port for the Atlantic States, which does not take away some sufferer for medical aid. A judge of one of the lower courts in San Francisco has stated that more than one hundred and fifty cases had come under his observation, in that city in less than six months, and the editor of the Courier thinks there have been at least four hundred victims since the settlement of the place by the Americans. At the mines, the disease is also prevalent. In fact the accounts make it plain, that in no other known community has there ever been so large a portion of persons deprived of their reason, and needing the tenderest cares of sympathising kindred; and the guardianship of some public institution.

The causes which produce these remarkable results need not be searched for far or long. They lie upon the surface, and are open to the understanding of the most careless observer. California has been a land of the most extravagant hopes and the most bitter disappointments. Never were the most powerful passions more wildly excited; and though some have been successful, many have been suddenly awakened from

dreams of boundless wealth by shocks which scattered these visions, and overwhelmed them with the blackest prospects, crushed them with the pleasure of impending want, and filled them with regrets and anxieties and forebodings, before which the reason of many a stouthearted man has given way.

Some, unused to labor, trained in habits of self-indulgence or ease, allured by the prospect of sudden fortune, and never counting upon toil or reverses, rushed into the wilds, where, instead of gathering gold dust plentifully in peace, they had to meet with the rough frontier settler, the old and hardy hunter and miner, the daring and desperate criminal, and without the protection of law, to struggle for life and bread, with a horde of jostling, fighting, remorseless adventurers. Deserving, perhaps, the gentle but sure streams of industrious occupation which might have filled the measure of their rational desires, they hunted in the wilderness for rivers of gold, and too often perished in the dusty and empty channel. They had left at home, perhaps, a loving family, dependent children, wanting the means of subsistence, which had been exhausted in carrying the deluded gold hunter to regions whence he was to transmit back immediately some of that golden treasure which awaited his eager haste. When worn down with fruitless toil, enfeebled by disease, with no kind hand to nurse or gentle word to cheer, racked with apprehension of his own fate, anxiety for the absent, and despairing of the means of returning, even destitute and helpless, to try a new career in the old deserted place, what wonder is it that madness came in to substitute insensibility for the intolerable burdens of such thoughts. Sickness and penury, want, disappointment, and despair, following upon extravagant exaltations of hope and passions stimulated to unhealthy excess, these are the obvious causes of the insanity which is recognized as existing in California, in a degree beyond that of any other country: because in no other country has human nature been so severely tried by fluctuations so vast, so rapid and distracting. It is indeed a melancholy but instructive reflection, that so many of the golden dreams which have heated the public mind and drawn off throngs of hopeful and aspiring spirits to a fountain of inexhaustible wealth, should have proved to be only lures to the destruction of body or mind.

It is an illustration upon a grand scale and under circumstances of unusual development of the same moral law which rules in all the pursuits of life, that excessive and ill-regulated desires are injurious to the powers of the intellect, as well as the quiet of the heart, and that he who strives to be suddenly rich or reach eminence of any kind by unusual means, without patient toil and steady preparation, rarely achieves anything but disappointment and misery, the wreck of his faculties and the destruction of his peace.—N. O. Picayune.

UNITED STATES.

HORRIBLE CATASTROPHE.—A terrible accident occurred at about two o'clock, on the 26th inst., at the new public school in Greenwich Avenue, New York. An alarm of fire was raised, and the children becoming frightened, attempted to make their escape from the building. A large number were crowded against the bannisters on the second and third floors, when they gave way and precipitated them to the first floor, a distance of forty feet. Some twenty dead bodies have been taken out of the building, and forty-five boys and girls are killed. The scene was a most heart-rending one; mothers, in a frantic state, sought their children, and the cries of the mangled and dying attracted thousands to the spot. The details are as follows:—About 2 o'clock, Miss Harrison, the teacher of the primary school situated in the third story of the Ward School No. 26, was observed to faint, which started a number of the children to her side, while others raised the cry of fire. This caused the greatest alarm, and a general rush was made for the windows and stairs. The latter being spiral, and running from the first to the fourth stories of the building, the press against the balustrade was so great that it gave way, precipitating to the flag floor of the playground nearly 100 little ones, and presenting one of the most awful spectacles ever witnessed. Child after child rushed down the horrible pit, crushing beneath their weight those who had preceded them, while others leaped voluntarily down the chasm, mingling their life's blood with that of their comrades. More than seventy children thus rushed into the jaws of death. The calamity would have been still greater, but for the presence of mind of Mr. McNully, the principal, who was in the fourth story, and who, on hearing the cry of fire, immediately placed himself against the door, declaring that none of the children should go out. In this manner his classes escaped destruction. The scene of parents clasping their dead and dying children, beggars all description, and was horrible to behold. Since the above, it has been ascertained that besides those killed, some seventy or eighty are maimed, some of them for life. Many of the little ones were so dreadfully disfigured and mangled, as to be scarcely recognized by their parents. Since the above was written, three more children have died.

The Protechnic establishment of Lafayette Avenue, Brooklyn, New York, exploded, burning to death Michael McCue and John Duffy, and horribly mangleling three others, who have been taken to the hospital. The explosion was accidental.—Boston Pilot.

Now that the smoke of the last conflict has cleared away, we see that the democracy have swept the entire State of New York.—Ibid.

HORRIBLE SHOOTING AFFAIR.—At Morgantown, N. C., Col. Avery shot Mr. Samuel Fleming in the Court House, killing him instantly. They were both members of the Legislature.

Instructions have been sent to Judge Sharkey to proceed immediately to Havana, and take action in the case of Mr. Thrasher, whose immediate release or trial as an American citizen he has to demand. The Spanish Minister has been furnished with a copy of the despatch.—Ibid.

A. C. A. R. D.

Mrs. COFFEY, in returning her grateful thanks to her numerous kind friends, respectfully intimates to them, and the Ladies of Montreal in general, that she has just received a new and varied assortment of every article in the DRY GOODS and FANCY LINE, which she is able to offer for sale on the most reasonable terms. She begs leave, also, to announce that, having engaged the services of competent persons, she now carries on the MILLINERY and DRESS-MAKING business, in addition, and hopes, by strict attention and punctuality, to give entire satisfaction to those Ladies who may favor her with their patronage.

23 St. Laurence Street, Nov. 26, 1861.