

The Home Rule Situation

By SCRUTATOR

WARS are, happily, far rarer things than are rumours of wars. Civil war, or something all too like it, is a distinct possibility of the present situation in the United Kingdom. But there are other possibilities, too. Among these latter, however, I should hesitate to class anything in the nature of a Home Rule compromise on the basis suggested by Mr. Asquith, namely, the exclusion, for six years only, from the operation of the Home Rule measure, of such Irish counties as choose to vote themselves out of it. The Ulster Unionists will not have this at any price, and the British Unionist party is pledged to the support of their view unless, and until, a general election is held, or the whole matter has been submitted to the people by means of a referendum.

The Ulster Unionists' main objections to Mr. Asquith's compromise suggestion are two in number. First, they object to what has been termed the "vivisection of Ulster." The minimum of their demands is the exclusion of that Province. But, though they desire a specific provision to that effect to be incorporated in the Home Rule Bill, it is likely that they would, nevertheless, agree to Mr. Asquith's "contracting-out" suggestion, if exclusion were to be permanent, and not only for six years, and if the Provinces, and not the counties, of Ireland were to be made the units for voting aye or nay for exclusion. For it is practically certain that, although (mainly owing to the inequalities, as regards numbers, in the different electoral divisions of the Province) Home Rulers from Ulster have a majority of one over Ulster Unionists in Parliament, the latter can claim a decided numerical majority of the electorate. Under the scheme suggested by Mr. Asquith, the four counties of Armagh, Antrim, Down and Londonderry could vote themselves out of the measure. But, in so doing, they would be freeing themselves at the expense of their fellow-covenanters in the other five counties of Ulster, and particularly in Tyrone and Fermanagh, where the Protestant Unionist population forms very nearly half of the whole. Secondly, the Ulster Unionists object (and not less determinedly) to the time limit of six years suggested by Mr. Asquith. One prominent among them writes to me as follows: "The strain of the last two or three years has been fearful. We will not have another six years of it, with the knowledge that, at the end of them, we shall have to face the question again."

A possibility—certainly not a probability—of the situation is that the Government may, even yet, adopt Mr. Bonar Law's suggestion of a referendum. I believe the Home Rule cause would be more likely to win on that than at a general election. For one thing, the plural voter would not be able to use his plural votes on a referendum. For another, there would be no splitting of the Home Rule vote, as there would be, by reason of triangular contests, at an election. Moreover, a referendum offers this advantage to a government, that it can remain in office even after the particular measure referred to has been rejected. I can appreciate the argument that the Unionist demand for a general election is designed to secure the downfall of the Government, and, with it, of the Parliament Act. But the demand for a referendum is not open to the same criticism. If the Irish Nationalist party in Parliament have voted for Welsh disestablishment and the other items of the Liberal programme from genuine belief therein, then there is nothing in the world to prevent those measures being carried, under the protection of the Parliament Act, even though the Home Rule Bill should be rejected on a referendum—and I think there is just a shade of odds that it would not be. However, there seems little likelihood of the Government's acquiescing in the referendum idea. Indeed, of the two, I believe they would prefer appealing to the electorate at a general election, with all its disadvantages of plural votes and triangular contests, on their whole policy, not forgetting their land proposals and the democratic budget which is now in course of preparation by Mr. Lloyd George.

And a general election there will probably be immediately the Home Rule Bill has become law. Before then Ulster will have proclaimed her provisional government. But even this unparalleled step need not necessarily result in civil war. Much would depend on how all parties carried themselves in a situation which, in the round of daily life, would be partly tragic, and partly comic, but certainly replete with incident. However, a good deal that is big with import must happen before the Home Rule Bill is placed on the statute book. Action by the King, in the nature of insistence on the measure being referred to the electorate before he gives his assent to it, I merely mention as one of the possibilities of the situation, remote from probability as I think it. But action, of some kind, by the House of Lords there must be. The Peers may throw the bill out, as they have done twice before. In that case, the Government, unless they decided (which is most unlikely) to take the sense of the people on it before

obtaining the Royal assent would pass it, "over the heads" of the House of Lords, line by line, and word for word, exactly as it stands, without any of Mr. Asquith's suggestions being incorporated in it. For the Parliament Act gives no power for amendment, except as the result of agreement between the two Houses. Or the Peers may decide to read it a second time, and, in committee, exclude from its operation the whole Province of Ulster. Then there would be bargaining between the two Houses, and a settlement might, after all, be arrived at pretty much along the lines of such exclusion. That would depend on how far Mr. Asquith could carry Mr. Redmond, and on how far the latter, in turn, could carry his followers in Ireland. But, unless some such settlement is definitely in sight when the Bill comes before them, the Peers are unlikely to read the Bill a second time with the object of amending it. To do so would, more or less, weaken the Unionist position—at least, to say the most active members of the party—when the election comes. At the moment, it looks to me as though the House of Lords will reject the Bill, and the Government pass it, as it stands, and then go to the country. In that case, the Unionists will probably fight the election on the total repeal of the Bill, coupled with a promise of a federal scheme, involving separate Parliaments for England, Scotland, Wales, Ulster, and the rest of Ireland. And it would not surprise me altogether if such an election were to result in something like a gigantic deadlock, although, having regard to all the circumstances, and to them as a whole, I incline to the opinion that the Unionists would win it under present electoral conditions.

A Railway Knight in Action

Ottawa, March 23rd.

DURING the past two weeks the people on Parliament Hill have had a new view of Sir William Mackenzie. Members of the Press Gallery and members of the House are accustomed to see distinguished gentlemen at the Chateau Laurier, at the Rideau Club, and in certain corridors of the House of Commons. Usually these visits from prominent railway men, bank managers, and other influential citizens are decidedly brief and have a large portion of the social element in them. During the past fortnight Sir William Mackenzie has made a prolonged visit which sets a new record in the history of legislative circles in Ottawa.

Sir William came, and Sir William has stayed. When he first arrived, everyone expected that he would spend two or three days and depart, as has been the custom during the memory of the present generation of residents on Parliament Hill. But Sir William found work to do and he remained. There have been some foolish dispatches sent out from Ottawa describing the private cars, the number of secretaries, and the plethora of flying limousines. These dispatches are largely the product of the enemy. Sir William came on a private train over his own line from Toronto because that line is not yet opened for passenger traffic. He and Sir Donald

Mann each has his own car and with them are five or six prominent officials of the Canadian Northern. The flying limousines are usually Charlie Kelly's taxicabs. The secretaries consist of one or two hard-working stenographers.

Sir William has had a great task on his hands. He wanted the Dominion Government to guarantee a further issue of bonds to help complete the Transcontinental Railway, which Mackenzie and Mann hope to finish this year. He found a sheaf of questions to be answered. The Government wanted to know what security they would have that a further guarantee of bonds could be justified in the House and on the hustings. They asked for information. They wanted to know how much of the \$303,000,000, which the Canadian Northern has cost to date, has gone into the pocket of Mackenzie and Mann. Sir William is said to have answered that they have received nothing but common stock. The Government asked how the C. N. R. compares in grades with the other transcontinentals. Sir William is reported to have answered that the C. N. R. has the lowest grades on the North American Continent. The Government asked if the rails on the main line from Quebec to Vancouver would be up to the standard of the other roads. Sir William is said to have answered that all but a few hundred miles of the main line of the C. N. R. has eighty-pound rails.

These and other questions have been asked and answered. But the answering of them was not so simple as it looked. Sir William not only answered, but he produced the proofs. All the documents were brought down and laid before the members of the Cabinet who are dealing with the subject and before the experts whom they have called in to assist them. Everything is being investigated fully, and apparently satisfactorily.

Sir William smiles and looks the picture of optimism. He seems to be confident that there is not a weak spot in his armour. At seven-thirty in the morning he can be seen heading for breakfast in the Chateau Laurier or going for a walk in the early morning air. From then until midnight he is closeted with officials at his hotel, in his car, or at the Parliament Buildings. Almost any hour of the day he may be seen walking to and fro with the brisk step and cheerful countenance of men thirty years his junior. Day after day from early morning until midnight he has kept at it untiringly, and there are rumours that he can keep pegging away until two or three o'clock in the morning without personal discomfort.

The people of Parliament Hill have learned the secret of Sir William Mackenzie's success. He is the most aggressive and untiring worker that Ottawa has ever seen. He has justified the estimate which many people have of him, that he is the most remarkable Canadian of the age. There is no matter and no member too small to escape his attention. There is no question and no cabinet minister too great to be treated with the calmest and most deliberate consideration. His masterliness has been impressive, and all Ottawa is slowly but surely yielding to his dominant persuasiveness. His own personality, backed by the personality of Sir Donald Mann and the other officials, is too great to be resisted. Every one of them seems to have a clear grasp of the situation and a calm belief in his ability to do his share in the work that lies before them all. The staff reflects the ability, the power, and the resourcefulness of the general.

ECON.

WINNING THE MONTREAL TRAP-SHOOTING TROPHY



Three times within the past two weeks has the Montreal Challenge Trophy, until recently the property of the Ottawa Gun Club, changed hands. On March 7th, it was captured by the Lachine Gun Club and brought back to Montreal after a long absence. On Saturday last the Riverside Gun Club met and defeated the Lachine men and for the time being the trophy will rest in the Grand Trunk Boating Club house, the quarters of the Riverside Club. Our photograph shows the winning squad. Right to left: Thos. Westlake, C. Aubin, G. Jones, D. J. Kearney, and Robt. Lewis.