

THE WEEK.

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THE COMING STRUGGLE IN ENGLAND.

As the day of fate draws near, the prospects of the Union improve. The mind of the nation seems to be at length awakened to the danger of dismemberment which, till it became imminent, was hardly realized. Public men seem to be at length stung into a patriotic suspension of the factious rivalries which have prostrated them and the country at the feet of the most despicable conspiracy which ever threatened the life of a great nation. Lord Randolph Churchill may continue to protest, in his graceful and sensible way, against an alliance with Whigs as "eminently unwholesome and scrofulous," but the promptings of the Tory Democrat will probably be overruled by the wiser and better men of his party. Mr. Gladstone's colleagues having taken office on the faith of "a scheme, thereafter to be revealed," apparently recoil from the revelation. Much must depend upon the following which Mr. Chamberlain is able to carry with him. The Master of the Caucuses ought to be well informed, and we may be sure that he studies opinion. It may be true that he has been piqued by the relegation to a minor office which punished his temerity in treading too near the Throne; but he has too much sense to be betrayed by pique into the destruction of his prospects which a breach with the whole of his party would entail. If the report is correct that the Scotch members are renouncing allegiance to Mr. Gladstone, he is doomed, and the Caledonians are not likely to be reduced to obedience by Irish threats. He is said to be "riding for a fall." Such conduct would be criminal. How can a Prime Minister be justified in bringing in a Bill affecting the integrity and the very life of the Empire when he knows that he cannot carry it, and at the same time that its introduction with his authority must cause irreparable mischief by inflaming the minds of the disaffected, and may even sow the seeds of civil war? It is more likely that Mr. Gladstone looks forward, in the event of his immediate defeat, to a dissolution and an appeal to the Radicals and Irish which would give him a majority in a new Parliament, and enable him eventually to pass his Bill. A singular exit from the scene of public life for one who entered it as the nominee of the almost insanely reactionary Duke of Newcastle, and as the hope of the High Church Tories! Whether a dissolution shall be granted, however, rests in the Queen's personal discretion, to an exceptionally free exercise of which she is assuredly entitled when the question at issue is the integrity of the nation, of which she is at once the embodiment and the guardian, and when the Head of the Cabinet is himself breaking away from all ordinary rules and approaching her without the concurrence of his colleagues. Mr. Gladstone begins to think that he is the nation.

It is not unlikely that the fervent appeal of Ulster against her severance from the nationality of which she is no mean part, and the transfer of her allegiance from the British Queen and Parliament to a revolutionary assembly under Mr. Parnell, and controlled by his American confederates, may have deeply stirred men's hearts and awakened them to a sense of shame. Mr. John Morley, with obsequious eagerness, promises Mr.

Parnell vigorous measures against Irish Loyalism if it interferes with the propagation of treason; and after the establishment of an Irish Parliament he would no doubt exult in the employment of British troops, if necessary, to enforce the submission of the Loyalists to the decrees of his country's enemies at New York. He may style himself, as he styles his chief, a "human" not a national politician. But there are some for whom national ignominy has a sting. England under evil leadership deserted the Catalans, but she did not stoop to the baseness of lending her arms to reduce them under the yoke which as her allies and in reliance on her protection they had cast off. Louis XIV., when brought low by misfortune in war, was ready to submit to very hard and galling terms; but he refused, and his people, crushed and suffering as they were, supported him in the refusal to dishonour his crown and the nation by sending his armies to assist those of his enemies in coercing his own friends in Spain. It is impossible to imagine infamy fouler than that which Great Britain would incur by shooting down the Irish Loyalists for having clung too faithfully to her side, and for withholding their obedience from those who openly seek her ruin.

It is strange that Mr. Chamberlain, or any other man of sense, should persist in speaking of Canada as a precedent for Ireland. Not in a single point is there any resemblance between the two cases, nor can either of them throw the slightest light on the other, even assuming, what no one but a blind optimist would assume, that Canadian Confederation is an assured and unequivocal success. In her relation to Great Britain, Canada is not an integral part of the United Kingdom, but a distant colony, already enjoying legislative independence, and at the same time perfectly friendly, so that there is no fear of her making any hostile use of her powers or creating difficulty of any kind. Even if she became perfectly independent she would never become, as Ireland would, a thorn in the side of Great Britain. In her internal structure she is a group of Provinces all placed under a Federal Government elected by them in common; and she presents no analogy to a couple of nations in a dog-collar union, such as Great Britain and Ireland after their legislative divorce would be. To settle questions between the Federal Government and the Provinces, moreover, Canada has the Privy Council, an external and impartial tribunal to which entire deference is paid; whereas, in the case of Great Britain and Ireland, all differences would have to be fought out between the parties. There is no precedent for British dismemberment any more than there is a precedent in British history for the weakness which has brought the nation to the verge of such humiliation.

It was a fatal mistake ever to be drawn into treating the case of Ireland, in regard to the extension of Self-government, separately from those of the other two Kingdoms. Self-government to any extent may be safely granted so long as the measure is general, and the supreme authority of the Imperial Parliament in all things is preserved. At the very time when Mr. Parnell took to Obstruction at Westminster, and to Terrorism in Ireland, the Government and Parliament were well known to be on the point of framing a much-needed measure of decentralization for all three Kingdoms alike. Why did they not sweep away Obstruction, put Terrorism down, and persevere in the wise and liberal policy which they had embraced? The answer to that question is the record of their shame. They will now, if Mr. Gladstone's scheme is rejected, have to struggle back to the sound position from which they have allowed themselves to be drawn. The return, after what has happened, and when Irish disaffection has been brought to so angry a head, will no doubt be difficult enough. The moral rebellion which patriotic union would at once have repressed has now assumed very formidable proportions. But return to a firm and rational policy on any subject is no longer easy since Mr. Gladstone's blind extension of the suffrage, without safeguards of any kind or any general revision of the Constitution, to masses of ignorance, passion, and disaffection. The House of Commons shows almost daily by legislative escapades, as well as by its growing lack of organization, its unfitness for the exercise of the supreme power which at the same time it is more than ever disposed to engross. It is too probable that the country will have to undergo a convulsion of some kind in order to evolve a force capable of giving birth to a strong and stable Government.

Meanwhile Famine, mocking the devices and rivalries of politicians, stalks along the Western Coast of Ireland, and not a cent is subscribed for the relief of the famishing by the patriots who have subscribed a million