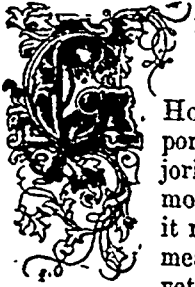


THE PRESBYTERIAN.

SEPTEMBER, 1868.



GLADSTONE'S Irish Church "Suspensory Bill" having failed to carry in the House of Lords, though supported by a considerable majority in the House of Commons, the question to which it relates may be said in the meantime to be disposed of; yet as it is the great ecclesiastical question of the day, and one on which, from the nature of the case, continued agitation is certain, it may not be out of place to offer a few remarks upon it in these columns, by way of keeping our readers informed as to the current of events.

The Bill which has been quashed in the Upper House by a vote of 192 to 97, provided that no new appointments should be made to vacancies occurring in the Established Church of Ireland, with the view of ultimately disestablishing that Church. Whilst it was before Parliament, all the great ecclesiastical assemblies of Britain, in annual conference gathered, had an opportunity of expressing their opinions upon it, of which all, except two, availed themselves, viz., the Wesleyans and the Free Church of Scotland. The alleged reason for the silence of the latter, was want of time, but we can conceive that a want of will—a fear of getting impaled on one or other horns of a dilemma at this stage of the Union question—had probably as much to do with it, as they generally contrive to *make* time for speaking on such important matters whenever there is anything to be gained by doing so.* The U. P. Church, as might be expected, considering its radical elements, gave an almost unanimous support to Gladstone's proposals. The Irish Presbyterian Church resolved by a majority of 210 to 180 to petition both Houses of Parliament against the withdrawal of the *Regium Donum*—or, in other words, against the disestablishment and disendowment of the Episcopal Church of Ireland, to which the *Regium Donum* is a sort of *appendix solatii*. The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, after a long and able discussion, by a vote of 211 to 81, resolved to petition the Legisla-

ture against the Bill, without expressing any opinion as to the modification needed in the construction of the Irish Church. The Church of England, of course, stands up stoutly for herself as she is represented in Ireland, although some of her clergy hesitated to do so.

The facts of the case are these: of the 5,700,000 of a population in Ireland in 1861, 4,500,000, in round numbers, were Roman Catholics; 700,000 belonged to the Established Church; and 500,000 were Presbyterians. The clergy of the Established Church number somewhere about 2200, including two archbishops and ten bishops. There are in all 1510 benefices. In about 40 of these there is not a single Protestant; in 45 more the average is less than 20 Protestants, and in 229 more there is an average of only 23 Episcopalians; whilst one-half the entire benefices can scarce count 180 Anglican adherents. The Church was planted in Ireland in 1560, and although both the English and the Scottish population was brought in to be a centre whence Protestant views might radiate, still there is not more than one-fourth of the population Protestant, and of these nearly a half are not Episcopalian. The annual revenue of the Church amounts to nearly half a million sterling, and is derived from a tithe-rent charge upon the soil. Whilst the Protestants have gained about 3 per cent. during the last 30 years, owing to the greater emigration of Roman Catholics, it is found that this relative gain is not in favour of the Established Church, for its adherents are now 160,000 fewer than they were in 1834. These are the facts, and on them we offer a thought or two.

It is evident from what has been stated, that whatever may be said in defence of the wisdom or expediency of maintaining an Established Protestant Church in Ireland, there is some change needed in its present organisation. This was very generally admitted by those who joined in the debate in the General Assembly. But granted that there are grave abuses in that Church calling loudly for a remedy, it is a very different thing reforming it to destroying it altogether. This latter can be accomplished only by a revolution. The Church is part and parcel of the constitution of the realm, and all the legislation

* The Commission of the Free Assembly subsequently resolved by a vote of 32 to 24 to support the Gladstone policy.