

centration of Russian troops on the German frontier. The German Ambassador at St. Petersburg protested. "The late Czar—like all his race—was a choleric man, and wrote off a stinging letter to Emperor William, without giving his wary advisers a chance of toning it down. The Imperial mind at Berlin was instantly ablaze, and the two countries nearly came to blows. Friends persuaded their bellicose majesties to meet, and the 'incident' faded away. But meanwhile Prince Bismarck set to work and concluded the treaty." The incident, if true, affords a striking illustration of the fact that even in this nineteenth century the peace of nations and the lives and property of millions of people may be imperilled or sacrificed by the whim or the anger of one or two passionate men.

THE recent casting of a vote of 50,000 in half a dozen French districts for Boulanger, though he had emphatically refused to allow himself to be considered a candidate, is very significant. It shows that the General's enforced seclusion has not lost him his hold upon the popular imagination. He can hardly fail to recognize in the fact a prophecy and a promise of an early restoration to power. Nor is the effect of so remarkable a demonstration likely to be lost upon the Government, though it may be doubtful in what direction it will urge them. They may feel constrained to try to efface him more effectually, or they may obey the popular mandate and return him at an early day to his old place in a reconstructed Ministry—the War Office. Should the Russian alliance become an accomplished fact, and renewed preparations be made for the life and death struggle with Germany, there is no doubt that Boulanger is the man to whom the people, whether in their wisdom or their blindness, will look to lead their armies.

### THE IRISH QUESTION.

THE state of affairs in England with reference to the Home Rule controversy seems to be almost exactly what it was. One seat has been lost by the Unionists, and two have been gained. The solid body of Conservatives and Liberal-Unionists, by whom the Ministry is sustained, give no sign whatever of the disintegration which has been so confidently predicted by the Gladstonians. It would be quite safe to prophesy that, unless something unexpected, almost miraculous, should happen, or unless Lord Salisbury's Government should do something inconceivably foolish, they will come to the end of this Parliament with a majority that will carry everything before it.

On the other hand, it cannot be said that the coercive measures of the Government have proved a failure. Boycotting has been put down to a considerable extent, farmers have, in many cases, paid their rents, landlords and tenants have seen their way to a mutual understanding, terrorism has been repressed, crime has been punished, and cheap martyrdom has very nearly disappeared since it has been discovered that men cannot break the law with impunity whether they wear "hoddens gray," Irish frieze, or broad cloth. In spite of the protests and denials of the Irish "patriots" and their allies, Mr. Balfour's quiet, persistent, unimpassioned enforcement of the law is making itself felt widely and beneficially.

There are very few new features in this dismal fray. For one thing, it cannot be said that Mr. Gladstone and his followers have succeeded in convincing the more educated and thoughtful classes of any country in the world that their conduct is wise, patriotic, or in any way worthy of respect. Many of us may shrink (many do not) from saying that Mr. Gladstone is consciously dishonest; but even those who credit him with present sincerity cannot help remembering the remark of his former colleague, Mr. William Forster: "The honourable gentleman can convince other people of most things; but he can convince himself of anything." Certainly Mr. Gladstone is not regaining the place which he had lost in the respect of the better class of Englishmen. Their anger may have passed into sorrow; but there is no prospect of its becoming supplanted by confidence and hope.

Another thing which seems to be coming out with increasing clearness is the real character of the agricultural movement in Ireland, as being socialistic rather than nationalistic. It is certainly a mere pretence to represent the prevailing sentiment among the party of rebellion in Ireland as being, in any sense of the word, properly national. What is going on there is a rising against rent much more than against English government. This was recently pointed out by Mr. Balfour in the House of Commons; but it has been seen and stated many times before. It is not reduction of rents, or reasonable rents, that the Irish farmers are wanting, whatever they may seem to be asking for, it is abolition of rents. And this demand is made in a characteristically illogical manner. If it were made on social-

istic grounds, it would be intelligible, and it could be argued with as standing upon that platform. It is quite true that this is what it must mean if it has any intelligent meaning at all; and Mr. Balfour was quite right in saying that the movement, while professing to be nationalist, was really socialist.

But, at bottom, the Irish tenant farmers who are refusing to pay their rents are no more socialists than the landlords are. There are many socialists (we do not mean anarchists or nihilists) who are quite respectable and unselfish, and who are devoted to the highest interests of mankind. But the mass of those farmers who can pay their rents, and will not, are neither respectable nor unselfish. They have no more notion of the nationalization of the land than the fiercest opponents of Mr. Henry George. They believe in private property; but they believe in it only when it is their own: they have no notion of allowing their landlords to have any property in the estates which, in most cases, they have bought under the protection of the law; but they are quite disposed to retain them as their own property, and we have no reason to think that they would be in any way more willing to part with these possessions, should they become their own, than are the present proprietors.

Ireland may have a right, in some senses, to say that she has the finest peasantry in the world. At one time they were kindly, light-hearted, humorous, beyond all question. It is to be feared that they are losing some of these amiable qualities. But there is one quality which we cannot remember any one claiming for them, and they certainly have not acquired it of late. They are not logical. They are acting upon a theory which is pure Socialism, and yet their distinct aim is certainly individualistic.

Another thing comes out even more clearly in the course of this conflict—that, apart from the agricultural sentiment, the main strength of the movement is formed in hatred of England. We do not for a moment attribute any thing like this to Mr. Gladstone or to the majority of the Gladstonian Liberals. Mr. Gladstone, alas! seems more like a child which breaks its toy because it cannot do as it likes with it. But, apart from him and his party, the people who love and honour the English nation and their great history and their splendid contributions to literature, to legislation, to philanthropy, to all that makes men good or great; the people who love England are the people who detest this Home Rule movement and see its danger, and the people who hate England are the people who show the warmest sympathy with it.

The supporters of an Irish Parliament on this side of the Atlantic may be divided roughly into four classes, first (and but for these there would be no others), those Irishmen who would gladly weaken the power of Great Britain and lower her place among the nations of the earth. Such Irishmen there are, in Ireland, in Canada, in the United States. Whether they have any reason for such feelings, and whether they are wise, even in the interests of Ireland, to give way to them, are questions which we need not at present discuss. The existence of this class will not be denied. Next to them we may place a number of persons, principally politicians, who, because they are not in office, or because they imagine that the English people do not accept their theories, or for a variety of other reasons, dislike Great Britain, and never lose an opportunity of decrying and insulting her and all connected with her. Of the existence of this class we have continual and painful evidence. A third class consists of politicians who are opposed to Home Rule or care nothing about it, but who dare not say so for fear of alienating some of their supporters. Finally, there is a considerable class of persons who have taken no trouble to acquaint themselves with the history of the "Making of England" or of any of the great European States, and who derive all their notions of government from what they know of this country, thinking it as simple a thing to break up an ancient system of government and build a new one out of its fragments as it was to pass a "British North America Act." Undoubtedly we have here a formidable mass, if we can hardly call it a body, for it has little of the character of organization or even cohesion. But whether such a motley assembly should prevail with British subjects or with any who honour the great nation from which came the roots of all American life, history, progress, civilization, is a question which we imagine can be answered only in one way. These, at least, are considerations which may be submitted to those who have not, for themselves, seriously thought out this Home Rule question. Some other points we hope to deal with hereafter. For the present, we may say it is plain, that, but for hatred of England or the coveting of the goods of others, there would be no Home Rule Party at all; and that none of those who profess to support this movement care a straw about it except those who are influenced by the sentiments which we have indicated.