

A GREAT struggle is now going on in the United States Senate over the Anti-Option Bill, which has, we believe, already passed the other House. So far as appears to those who are not interested in Wall Street methods and operations, the principle of the Bill is thoroughly sound, and its passage and enforcement would strike a most effective blow for the deliverance of the country from the worst form of the gambling mania of which Wall Street is the generating centre. It is a measure designed to prevent gambling in food products which have no existence save in the imaginations of the speculators. Its opponents have urged that the Bill would prevent farmers from selling their crops for future delivery, but it expressly provides that he may do so. It simply prevents the farmer or any other speculator from selling products which he neither owns at the time of sale nor has "acquired the right to the future possession of." And yet the *New York Tribune* says that the Wall Street men have kept the wires between New York and Washington hot with messages urging Senators to vote against the measure, and stock-brokers are declaring that if passed it will upset the business machinery of the whole country, and create a disastrous panic in all the great money centres. The outcome of the struggle remains to be seen, but it will be somewhat strange if the public anti-gambling sentiment which has crushed so effectually the Louisiana Lottery, after one of the most desperate struggles for existence ever made by any corporation, shall fail to strike down the twin institution in New York, which is no less vicious in principle, and which, if its ramifications are less extensive and minute, does its deadly work from time to time on a far more magnificent scale.

VARIOUS indications point to the existence of a degree of tension in the political situation in England such as has not been felt for many years. Rumours of the most improbable character are set in motion and straightway cabled across the Atlantic and to the ends of the earth. At one time we are told that Lord Salisbury proposes, or that it is proposed for him, to ignore the vote of the Parliamentary majority and retain the reins of Government from purely patriotic motives—a course of action which, it is needless to say, would shake the British Islands from centre to circumference, and put the stability of the constitution itself to the test. Another canard, far less wild in its improbability, but yet verging on the absurd, credits the moribund Ministry with an intention to take the wind out of the sails of their great adversary by putting into the Queen's speech a promise to repeal the Coercion Act and introduce a Home Rule Bill. Tory Governments have, it is true, in several famous instances borrowed the thunder of their Liberal antagonists and anticipated their reform Bills, but they have not waited until they had been defeated at the polls before doing so. There are limits to the extent to which such tactics can be successfully used, and one of these is that the change of policy must not be too sudden, or too long delayed. A death-bed repentance in politics would naturally be received not merely with suspicion but with incredulity and derision. But what strikes one as the most absurd of all the stories which have been sent by cable is that of the alleged interview of the Queen with the Duke of Devonshire, in which Her Majesty is represented as having appealed to the Duke to point out to her some way in which she could escape from the obligation of having to send for Mr. Gladstone to form a Ministry, and the sturdy constitutionalist is said to have replied that the only possible alternative was abdication. It is highly probable that Mr. Gladstone is not a favourite with Her Majesty, and that she still less likes his Home Rule policy. But Queen Victoria has not worn the British crown for more than half a century without having learned what is required of her as a constitutional monarch, and to her credit it must be said that she has never suffered her personal predilections to interfere with her discharge of her duties as a sovereign by the will of the people. It is in the highest degree unlikely that she would think of commencing now. Besides, had such an interview taken place it would have been in its nature confidential. Who then would have let the correspondent into the secret, Her Majesty or the Duke?

AN open letter addressed by Mrs. Humphry Ward to her publisher, as a preface to the sixth and popular edition of "The History of David Grieve," will be read with some interest by both the admirers and the more hostile critics of that production. The letter divides itself into two parts. In the first, Mrs. Ward amuses herself

and her readers by adroitly bringing into view the somewhat striking differences in opinion and judgment which reveal themselves in the articles in the three great quarterlies to which she mainly directs her attention. For instance, while the writer in the *Quarterly* pronounces "David Grieve" "tiresome as a novel and ineffectual as a sermon," the writer in the *Edinburgh*, though even more disparaging in the tone and substance of his general criticisms, admits that he has found it "a powerful story, at times of absorbing interest." Thus "the two statements cancel out," says the author, "like those mysterious sums of one's childhood, which I still remember as though they were some pleasant conjuring trick—amusing and impenetrable." Again, "the book shows a total absence of humour," says the *Edinburgh*, but the *Church Quarterly*, the third of the trio of hostiles, talks of "a refined and delicate sense of humour," of "mingled humour and pathos," etc. These contradictory verdicts are not very surprising when we remember that the capacity for being interested, and for recognizing and appreciating humour, is as varied in kind and extent as the facial expressions of the individual readers of the book. And in regard to such points we look in vain for any surer criterion than those supplied by individual tastes and idiosyncracies. We venture to say that the opinions of any dozen readers, taken at random, would be found to be quite as widely diverse in regard to the qualities under consideration. Or, to take for illustration a third point on which the critics disagree, the relative merits of the book as compared with its noted predecessor, the *Edinburgh* concedes that "the later novel has greater interest, more passion, more power and more pathos," the *Church Quarterly* "pronounces it a great improvement;" but the *Quarterly* is clear that "David" is "distinctly and surprisingly inferior." The results would be curious, we dare say, could we collate the opinions of any dozen readers on this question. For our own part, we are free to confess though we read "Robert Elsmere" to the end with intense interest, modified, it is true, by that feeling of the weakness and insufficiency of the cause assigned for the "eclipse of faith" which constituted the turning point in his career, we, notwithstanding our high-wrought expectations, or it may be to some extent in consequence of them, found "David Grieve" so "tiresome as a novel" that we cast it aside when scarcely more than half through with it, and to this day have not had a return of interest or curiosity sufficient to carry us back to it.

ALL the foregoing is, however, but introductory to the real questions which Mrs. Ward discusses briefly with her critics. These questions are two, though the first objection which she sweeps away seems so flimsy that we could easily conceive of it as a mere tissue-paper bogey, set up for the fun of seeing with what facility it could be sent into space with one vigorous puff. It is the assumption which underlies what is called the "personal" method of reviewing, "that a writer must deal with nothing but his or her personal experience." "All that one has to say is," says Mrs. Ward, suggesting proof of the statement by reference to Sir Walter Scott and his "Heart of Midlothian," etc., "that literature and the public have upset it times without number." But the second question, shall a novel have a purpose, is really worth discussion. It is still an open question—at any rate it has not been settled in the negative. All the three great quarterlies "dislike and resent what they call the intrusion of 'theology' into a novel, and the two older are especially intolerant of 'the novel with a purpose.'" To the discussion of this question Mrs. Ward addresses herself with a good deal of earnestness and vigour. We have not space to follow her either in her historical references, or in her attempted justification of the definition of a novel which she herself proposes, "A criticism of life under the conditions of imaginative truth and imaginative beauty"—a definition which she constructs by first exchanging the idea of "purpose" for the idea of "criticism of life," in the theory she is discussing, and then altering two words in Matthew Arnold's definition of poetry. The definition is certainly an attractive one, though we confess ourselves puzzled to discover the "imaginative beauty" in the characters of the hero or heroines in "David Grieve." But with the main argument of Mrs. Ward on this point we find ourselves in hearty sympathy, and so, we venture to think, will most of our readers. What can be truer than that "there are no hard and fast limits in reality; the great speculative motives everywhere play and melt into the great practical motives; each different life implies a different and a various thought-stuff; and there is nothing in art to for-

bid your dealing—if you can—with the thought-stuff of the philosopher as freely as with the thought-stuff of the peasant or the maiden"? May we not safely go much farther? Is there not an absolute similarity in kind, in the higher thought-stuff of peasant and of philosopher? Is it not that part of the thought-stuff of each which stands most closely related to "theology," or if we must modify our expressions to take in also the agnostic, which is most closely connected with our efforts to peer into the "surrounding darkness of the Unknown," which is, in philosopher and peasant, the most potent force in developing those shades of character and those phases of life which are best worth portraying, even for the amusement of the classes of mind which are best worth amusing? But we are getting beyond our depth. We must just be content with confessing ourselves unable to conceive of the thoughtful mind which is not in hearty accord with the author of "David" when she says: "I am so made that I cannot picture a human being's development without wanting to know the whole, his religion as well as his business, his thoughts as well as his actions. I cannot try to reflect my time without taking account of forces which are at least as real and living as any other forces, and have at least as much to do with the drama of human existence about me."

SHELLEY.

THE present year is remarkable as the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of Percy Bysshe Shelley.

Very few indeed of its poets is humanity willing to remember for so long a period as a hundred years. It is said that the final test of literary ability is the test of time, that merciless judge which seems to be possessed of some mysterious alchemy that enables it to select the permanent from the transitory, and out of the myriad aspirants for immortality choose a favoured few. To this stern ordeal the poetic darlings of every age have been forced to submit, nor can we, in surveying the ranks of the great ones who have been chosen, doubt that there is a rugged justice in the verdict of the ages. The verdict of time shows little respect for the judgments of ten years. It treats with a lofty contempt the opinions of contemporary critics, very often condemning to obscurity those whom their age has honoured, and selecting for immortality those whom it has condemned.

Perhaps there is no better illustration of this ephemeral character of contemporary literary verdicts than is afforded in the instance of that which the public of his time passed upon the works of Shelley. A generation ago he was fiercely denounced as blatant atheist, a violator of every rule and rubric of society, a blasphemer against all that was sacred and holy, a literary iconoclast, writing for the sole purpose of undermining the fabric of society, a poet whose verses were hardly worthy of a sneer, a monster in private life, and a traitor to public sentiment. Such was the opinion of his countrymen and contemporaries regarding Shelley. To-day, when another and a happier generation is on the scene, how different is the verdict. The wisest critics of the time have consigned him a foremost place in the brotherhood of "immortals," and he has thousands of passionate admirers who claim for him the very first. His character is admitted to be one of the sweetest and purest which the annals of literature have recorded. His life has been shown to be as stainless as his mind's ideal, and his crusade against the political and religious institutions of his day is now seen to have been inspired not by any malignant and unreasoning desire to destroy, but by a deep and a passionate desire to render yeoman service to the truth he saw and loved.

While we are inclined to think that the harshness of the judgment which his countrymen passed upon Shelley was largely due to their ignorance of his works, yet there can be little doubt that even those few who condescended to read them, and who held the orthodox political and religious opinions of the day, found much that was novel and shocking to their minds in the works of the poet. Shelley was a man at war with his age, and he rebelled against the received opinions at a time when his countrymen were least inclined to tolerate rebellion. The great revolution in France had made men suspicious of the very name of reform, and had implanted in the breasts of a great majority of Englishmen, from Edmund Burke down to the humblest ploughman, a hatred of anything breathing of political innovations which might tend from their nature or application to weaken or subvert those political and religious institutions which they deemed their only security against anarchy. It is not surprising, therefore, that the bold and radical opinions of Shelley should have been met with the fierce denunciation of his countrymen. They were not in the humour to examine, much less to reason, with his arguments. They treated him with the same unreasoning severity which they had already displayed towards Byron, and they drove him, like that illustrious exile, to leave his native land in anger and contempt.

Byron in his more impassioned moods had much in common with Shelley, but Byron was essentially an egoist, while Shelley was of all things an altruist. The pas-