

# THE WEEK.

Third Year  
Vol. III., No. 16.

Toronto, Thursday, March 18th, 1886.

\$3.00 per Annum.  
Single Copies, 10 Cents.

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## THE ACT OF UNION.

NATIONALISTS have promised us a magnificent attack on the Act of Union by Mr. Gladstone. Nothing is more likely. About the Irish Establishment Mr. Gladstone never said a word, though others were pleading hard for its abolition, till the question presented itself to him, or, as he probably thought, was presented to him by Providence, as the means of recovering power. He has been equally mute all his life about the Act of Union, but if he were suddenly to become sensible of its enormity and pour forth against it a burning torrent of moral eloquence, nobody would be in the least surprised. He would have only too easy a theme. In the passing of the Act of Union, culminated the unspeakable corruption of Grattan's Parliament, that assembly the revival of which is at once to make Ireland happy. Pitt ought never to have gone through that foul and scandalous farce. Irish government had perished, together with social order, in a hideous war of creeds and races; no authority or protection against anarchy was left except the military power of the Empire. Pitt should have done what, in similar circumstances, Cromwell did; he should simply have incorporated Ireland with Great Britain, giving her a fair share of representation in the United Parliament. But Cromwell was strong; Pitt was only stiff. Moreover, Pitt was in the hands of an aristocracy which would have protected the plunder of its Irish wing; and, perhaps, it may also be pleaded in his excuse that corruption was an established instrument of government in those days. The transaction was further tainted by Pitt's involuntary breach of the promise of emancipation which he had held out through Cornwallis to the Catholics. That promise, however, since the recovery of self-government by England herself, Parliament has fulfilled in the amplest measure.

But what are the parchment title-deeds of nations? What composite nationality would escape dismemberment if it were compelled to show a title to all its provinces in conformity with the modern principles of international law? What title had the Anglo-Norman to Ireland? What title had Normans or the Saxons before them to Great Britain? What title had the Milesians to the land of the Firbolg or of the Tuatha da Danann? What title had the Danes on the eastern coast of Ireland to the territory of those whom they expelled? Any one of these questions might as well be raised as another. The only case of annexation by plebiscite that we remember is that of Savoy, which, before the plebiscite was taken, had been virtually annexed to France by a treaty to which the Savoyards had nothing to say. Antiquarianism is not policy. Is the Union of Ireland with Great Britain natural and good for both countries? No other question will practical statesmanship ask. The answer is given by the map, which shows the smaller island under the lee of the larger, and cut off by it from the continent, so that nature has linked their destinies together. The larger island has the coal which sustains a great manufacturing population, the smaller island has the pastures, so that each is the other's market.

The races are inextricably blended together; they speak the same language; there is a large detachment of each in the island chiefly occupied by the other; the same laws and institutions have long governed both. They are also partners in the possession of a vast empire. The Act of Union is not the Union. The Union has lasted for seven hundred years. Before 1800 it was a Union of subordination, for even during the existence of the Grattan Parliament the Irish Legislature was kept in practical subordination by corruption. Since 1800, and especially since 1832, it has been a Union of equality. Seven centuries cannot be cancelled, and the independence of amity or indifference, which was possible, though neither likely nor desirable, before the Anglo-Norman conquest of Ireland is possible no more. If separation comes now, it will be a separation of hatred, with all the consequences to England of a hostile nation at her side, to Ireland of an enemy, overwhelmingly superior in power, pointing its guns against her coast. But if the two halves of the Island Empire which nature has joined together are torn asunder, they will some day be reunited in blood.

What statesman would allow his policy at the present day to be influenced by buried feuds? How much do French statesmen think about the extermination of the Huguenots, which was contemporary with the Irish Penal Code? In the age of universal conquest the Normans invaded Ireland as well as England, with the express sanction of the Head of Christendom in that day, and there ensued an era of struggle between them and the wild clans very like that between the frontier settler and the Indian here. Afterwards both races were drawn into the great vortex of the religious war which for two centuries raged over Europe, and the vanquished Catholics of Ireland suffered at the hands of the victorious Protestants a part, and a part only, of what the victorious Catholics inflicted on the vanquished Protestants in other countries. All this may be deplored, but it cannot be undone; it has left bitter and mischievous memories behind it; but otherwise it has no more practical bearing on the policy of the present day than if it had been enacted in a different planet. Since the last penal law was framed for Ireland by Protestant intolerance, since the last heretic was burned by Catholic intolerance in Spain, five or six generations have sunk into their graves, and hardly an Englishman lives whose great-grandfather had anything to do with the wrongs of Ireland. England herself, let it never be forgotten, was ruled by an oligarchy of borough-mongers down to 1832. It is only since that date that she has been really responsible for her actions; and if the wisdom and promptness of her actions have not been equal to the goodness of her intentions, the blame rests mainly on the representatives of Ireland in Parliament, who have given themselves to filibustering, obstruction, or jobbing, and have never, with anything like unanimity or perseverance, pressed any practical measure of reform.

Conjecture has veered again respecting Mr. Gladstone's plan, and it is now said that he means to grant, not merely Provincial Councils subject to the supremacy of the Imperial Legislature, but "Grattan's Parliament." Let him take note, however, that Grattan's Parliament cannot be restored. In those days the Crown had still real power; it disposed of a great mass of patronage, and of a number of nomination seats in the Irish House of Commons, as well as of the Bishoprics, the holders of which had great influence in the Irish House of Lords. By these means it was able to command or purchase sufficient support to keep the two Legislatures from running foul of each other. Nor, in case the Irish Parliament had legislated in opposition to that of Great Britain on any vital question, would it have been morally impossible in those days to exercise the Royal veto. In these days the power of the Crown is a name; there is but little patronage, there are no pensions, sinecures, or Government boroughs; so that the two Legislatures would be really independent. Their career would open with the impulses engendered by a violent rupture, which would set up a centrifugal action from the outset. The Irish Parliament would also be under the influence of American Fenianism, the object of which is civil war. Mr. Gladstone seems to have some notion of preserving union by entrusting to a British Minister, especially appointed for that function, a veto on all Irish legislation. But does he think that his Irish Parliament, on the morrow of successful revolt, would suffer that restraint? On what principle would the veto be exercised, and how could uniformity be preserved through the changes of party government? Some American suggested a Supreme Court like that of the United States, to keep Irish legislation within constitutional limits and to settle any question