

of the Bill; but opposition the most skilful and determined must fail where the elements of success are wanting, and it is hard to perceive how the utmost pertinacity is to avail the Gladstonite-Irish party in the face of the Government majority, if the Government stand by its guns. But here there is some uncertainty; already has come the report that the change of venue clause—a most objectionable clause, it must be admitted—has been dropped; and it is quite probable that if, as is reported, there be really a tide rising in England against the Coercion Bill as proposed, some other of its more stringent features may also be obliterated before it becomes law. Still, we believe that law it will become, in some shape; its passage has, indeed, already been secured by the approval of Mr. Chamberlain and Lord Hartington; and if, owing to the obstruction which the Irish party may still practise, it should become necessary to appeal to the country, the tide of indignation that will swell up in the breasts of a stubborn yet just-minded people at this continuous paralysis of all government by a faction is not likely to carry the faction to victory.

MR. GLADSTONE'S indignation at the drastic character of the Coercion Bill is what might have been expected. Exactly a year ago he was elated with the prospect of settling the Irish question by a measure which he then introduced into the House, and which, conceived in a spirit totally opposed to that pervading the present measure, would, he had reasonable cause to believe, when supported by the authority of his great name appeal to such among the Liberal party as were disposed to adopt a conciliatory course towards the Irish people. But, unfortunately for his design, the impossible problem before him was to satisfy a very real Irish aspiration for national autonomy, and at the same time to preserve the Union intact. This he weakly hoped to do by an ambiguously worded Act of Parliament, that might be read in either sense; and the result—a result due in great part to the bad character of the men to whom he proposed to surrender the government of Ireland—was failure. The fall of his Government was accompanied by the secession from genuine Liberalism of nearly the whole Liberal party, who, lured by an unwise leader from the path they had trod with honour for the preceding fifty years, have now embraced a fanaticism for a creed, branding as unorthodox orthodox Liberalism, because it will not agree to the provincial, and essentially Tory, designs of the Parnellites, and ally itself with a League that has usurped the Queen's Government in Ireland.

MR. GLADSTONE'S present position does more honour to his heart than his head. Unquestionably he is ardently desirous to help Ireland; but this is a generous impulse that has led him—never remarkable for soundness of judgment—to adopt means which, in the opinion of a great many perhaps better able to judge than he, though certainly not capable of greater sympathy for the just cause and the right, to adopt means which would probably increase the evil he aims to cure. Having, however, adopted such a conciliatory policy towards Ireland, it had been matter not merely of surprise, but of disappointment, if Mr. Gladstone had not shown considerable indignation at the hard features of the Coercion Bill. Nothing evidently but the direst necessity can excuse some of its provisions, which are a perfect antithesis to the method he proposed and still believes to be the best. In this we believe him to be wrong; but it is a debateable subject, its premises depending very much on the view one takes of the character of the present agitation in Ireland. If we are convinced that the Parnellite movement is a wicked conspiracy, and that the Parnellite designs are treasonous, then we approve most heartily of the Bill, as a measure for the coercion of crime, and, as a consequence, for the restoration of order in Ireland. But if, on the other hand, we should take the view—as Mr. Gladstone does—that the Parnellites truly represent a legitimate and general national aspiration for local self-government, then we could not but condemn most strongly a measure that would impose penalties on patriotism, and stigmatise Irishmen in general as unfit to be entrusted with the ordinary privileges of civilisation. We do not believe they are so; nor do we believe that the mass of the Irish people, however strong their national feeling, aim to set up an Irish nationality independent of Great Britain. But the politicians who, as a National League, have seized the reins of power in Ireland unquestionably do so; they are using for their own purposes a wide-spread disaffection, springing not from political but from economic causes; and against them and their knowing tools is the Coercion Bill directed. If the Coercion Bill affected all Irishmen alike, as seems to be the rather extravagant contention of its opponents, we should condemn it as strongly as they do; but, in fact, it affects only a small body of offenders, and while, besides, all offences of a political character, such as treason, treason-felony, and seditious libel, are expressly excluded from its operation, all law-abiding people are perfectly secure

under it. The only classes that it affects are those guilty of certain offences—criminal conspiracy, boycotting, rioting, offences under the Whiteboy Acts, assault on officers of the law, forcible and unlawful possession. These are crimes not usually practised by a law-abiding people; therefore all such, while they remain such, are safe; the only new feature introduced by the Bill is that persons guilty of such offences will not have so many and great chances of escape as they have enjoyed of late; and the National League, or any others, if they incite to these crimes, will be suppressed or punished. But to complain, as the opponents of the Bill do, that it is an injury and insult to all Irishmen, is to protest too much. The suspension of the ordinary law in a country is a great evil, as being a sign that crime is unusually rife—too rife to be dealt with by the ordinary tribunals; and it should not be done without the very gravest cause—such, for instance, as the practical usurpation of the Government by a conspiracy of treason and plunder. But none but traitors and malefactors have anything to fear from the suspension; to all others—and let us hope the mass of Irishmen are among these—the institution of a law for the effectual coercion of crime is a protection.

THE meagre particulars of the Land Bill that have reached this side do not afford material for an intelligent judgment to be formed on the probable effects of this Bill. One good feature, however, seems to be clear—the abolition of the dual ownership of land created by the Act of 1881. This is most desirable; and if, besides, a cheap and easy method of transferring the landlord's interest to the tenant has been devised, the Irish problem is solved. But, we regret to say, we do not note in the cable reports a word on this subject of cheap land transfer, which yet is the one great vital need of Ireland, as an essentially agricultural country, whose prosperity depends so much on the well-being of the peasantry. Such a provision is as much in the interest of landlords as of tenants: the landlords' day is evidently done, and any ready means of effecting a transfer of the land on fair terms to the tenants, doing away with the exorbitant law charges, which are almost prohibitory, ought to be welcomed as a deliverance from an untenable position. Mortgages will, no doubt, in a great proportion of cases stand in the way; but no settlement of the Irish question can be had till the general body of tillers of the soil own the soil; and to assist in the transfer, the State must step in with authority and with assistance, while the landlords and mortgagees, remembering what the land has already yielded them, must be prepared also to bear a share of the sacrifice. This, or something leading to this, is, we hope, provided for by the Land Bill: it would go far to solve a problem whose pretended insolubility is a disgrace to the political sense of the English people; among all the plans for worthily celebrating the Queen's Jubilee none—not all put together—would yield so noble a result as such a satisfaction and contentment of a now disaffected portion of the Queen's subjects.

IN spite of the revived war rumours from Europe, we are still of opinion that no war will break out this spring. The key of the situation really lies with Russia in Bulgaria; and she is not likely to lift her hand while Germany is free to assist Austria. While also Russia is clear of the embarrassment that an invasion of the Balkans would probably involve her in, Germany will not attack France; for Russia will never permit France, if defeated, to be "*saignée à blanc*." On the other hand, France cannot attack Germany while Austria and Italy are standing by idle and fully armed. The chapter of accidents may, of course, at any time precipitate a war; but neither side will willingly rush into it, until some new combination or development affords a better protection in flank. The latest alliance reported is between Russia and France, as against Germany, Austria, and Italy; and this is probably the final arrangement of the opposing forces: still, the coming war is probably yet very distant.

THE Toronto cricketers who banqueted the other day in honour of their game would enjoy the second volume of Mr. Pycroft's "*Oxford Memories*" (Bentley and Son). It is full of the history of the game, with accounts and anecdotes of its heroes, and discusses all the questions which affect its present or future. Evidently a crisis in the fortunes of cricket has arrived. The time which a match takes, since training has made the defence of the wickets so superior to the attack, begins to be felt as a serious objection, especially in countries like ours, where there is not, as in England, a leisure class. Moreover, matches lose their interest when scores of three hundred become common; the thing, as Mr. Pycroft says, is too palpably easy; it is like fishing when the fish rush of themselves into the net. Mr. Pycroft, however, thinks that there is a remedy. He holds that the game admits of ready adaptation to the powers of the sides and to the time at their command. He would have the stumps placed closer