

THE WEEK.

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THE ELECTORAL CONTEST IN ENGLAND.

I HAVE just returned from the London centre of organization, but no more light as to the probable result of the election is to be had there than here. Election it can hardly be called, at least in the ordinary sense of the term: it is a plebiscite on the question of the Union. The addresses of candidates deal with that subject alone. The fate of the nation seems, as I said before, to depend on the decision of Hodge. And how Hodge will decide, it is simply impossible to divine. He knows, as I have said before, absolutely nothing about the Irish question. Probably he could not tell whether Ireland lay to the east or to the west of England, much less is he acquainted with its history. The Irishman comes over and competes with him as a labourer at harvest time; for this he hates the Irishman and would like to be rid of him; and if he takes it into his head that Home Rule would do it, he will be for Home Rule. That probably is the only consideration connected with Ireland which is present to the mind of the real arbiter of an issue respecting the future relations between Ireland and Great Britain, on which the integrity of this nation and the fate of the Empire depend. Suppose the question of an inconvertible currency were to be submitted by plebiscite to the Red Indian. He would vote perhaps for that which he thought pleasing to the Great Mother, or for that which he fancied would produce most buffalo. And this, I suspect, is about what Hodge will do. He knows one name—"Muster Gladstone, he a very good man." He has also a vague, but not unfounded, idea that with Mr. Gladstone's name and policy is connected an agrarian revolution by which he may in some way profit. He will, therefore, vote for the G. O. M. and the hope of more buffalo.

Among the masses in the cities and the people generally who are of a somewhat higher grade of intelligence than the worthy Hodge, there prevails a sentiment which is as creditable to them as the manner in which he plays upon it is discreditable to Mr. Gladstone. They fancy that they are doing justice to Ireland, and substituting a policy of conciliation for one of coercion. If the case were fairly put before them, they might see that to hand over Ireland to the government of the League would be doing her the greatest injustice, and that the policy proposed by Mr. Gladstone, instead of conciliating, would only lead to fresh quarrels, and, if the Union was not to be given up altogether, to increased measures of coercion. But to put a case of this kind fairly before people when they are in a state of violent excitement and following a leader who has fascinated their imaginations, is extremely difficult, and Mr. Gladstone in his appeals to sentiment has an enormous advantage, of which he makes an unscrupulous use. His organs, of course, follow his lead, and instead of attempts to show that Ireland would be better governed by a separate Parliament, or that Mr. Gladstone's plan is workable, we have nothing but appeals to sentiment in favour of Conciliation against Coercion. "The Almighty arm of kindness" is the last phrase coined in the Gladstonian mint. I should like to know whether the Americans have found the arm of kindness almighty in putting down anarchy and outrage.

Having appealed in his first manifesto to the class-feeling of the masses

against the educated, Mr. Gladstone is now trying to set the different nationalities of the United Kingdom against each other. His last appeal is to the prejudices of the Scotch. Since England at the last election gave a majority against him, he has been affecting to be not an Englishman but a Scotchman, and has inscribed the great historical fact of his Scotch origin on the monument which, in anticipation of the verdict of posterity, he has erected in his own honour at Edinburgh. Nothing would please him more than by the help of Scotland, Ireland, and Wales to coerce and humiliate the rebellious England which has failed to recognize his divine mission. Surely if Scotland was at first discontented with the Union, but by continuance in it became perfectly contented, that is a good reason for recommending Ireland to try continuance in the Union, and for hoping that she also will become contented. Ireland stands precisely on the same footing as Scotland, with a larger representation, and with the same opportunities for making her wishes felt on local questions in Parliament which the practical and sensible delegation of Scotland has used with the most satisfactory effect. The object of all the best men of this country has been to get rid, as far as possible, of divisions between class and class, between section and section, and to make the community a community indeed. Mr. Gladstone's reckless ambition is reviving every antagonism and re-opening every sore.

The enthusiasm which attended Mr. Gladstone's progress to Scotland was, of course, organized. It tells, nevertheless, upon the imagination of the people. The Unionist leaders, I venture to think, do not see so clearly as might be desired, the nature and conditions of this battle. Their addresses are directed to the educated and the intelligent. But the educated and the intelligent are on their side already. They can win only by detaching from the Arch-demagogue some portion of his immense following among the ill-informed masses, and to do this they must manage in some way to dispel the glamour which surrounds him. That it takes this line is the only redeeming point in Lord Randolph Churchill's flippant and indecent address, one phrase in which, however, "the old man in a hurry," will stick.

The patriotic alliance between Conservatives and Liberals is a ray of hope on the darkening horizon of British politics. Another is the self-devotion with which the Liberal Unionists, or Hartingtonians as they are called, have taken their political lives in their hands and confronted the ire of their Gladstonite constituents in defence of their conscientious convictions and of the threatened integrity of the nation. The laborious exertions which these men are making also deserve a large meed of praise, considering that some of those who are working hardest and incurring the greatest sacrifices of ease and health are very rich, and have the song of the Sirens of pleasure always in their ears. There is some good stuff in Old England yet. At the same time I must admit that a change has come over her, and that it is impossible for an onlooker at this crisis not to be sensible of a decline of national spirit and a general lack of the robust and masculine patriotism of former days. Political power at all events has passed into the hands of classes which, perhaps pardonably, care much more for their own wages than for anything national or imperial, and which would be ready, I suspect, to give up not only Ireland but half of England itself, if its cession would bring them another meal a day. The influences belonging to the old and patriotic England, which struggled against this apathy, are, I suspect, diminishing in force, and if they are, whatever may be the result of this battle, catastrophe in the end must come. Fifty years ago, what would have been the fate of a British politician if he had leagued himself, like Mr. Gladstone, with the avowed enemies of the realm, and gone about, as Mr. Gladstone does, traducing the honour of the country before the world? Fifty years ago, would not the heart of the nation have taken fire at seeing money sent over by American conspirators to carry British elections in the interest of a party of Dismemberment?

The bells which were rung to usher in the Queen's Year of Jubilee had to my ear anything but a jubilant sound. The Queen has been morally almost discrowned by great demagogues who during the long seclusion of Royalty have usurped the throne, while her dominions are in imminent danger of dismemberment. It is largely her own fault, in not showing herself more to the people. She is now making an effort to win back the heart of the nation, but it is almost too late.

GOLDWIN SMITH.

Oxford, June 23, 1886.