

NATIONALITY AND HOME RULE

IS there an Irish problem? If there be an Irish problem, what is its character and what is its origin? Can the Home Rule Bill now before Parliament do anything substantial towards its solution? These are the questions which every citizen of the United Kingdom, and, in a less degree, every citizen of the Empire, is bound to ask, for on the answers given must depend the immediate future of the country. The subject is so complex that it cannot be embraced within the limits of a brief article like the present. It is so controversial that an impartial treatment of it is almost beyond the reach of human endeavour. Yet there are one or two broad issues on which even now it may be worth while to say something, for in the heat of debate and the clash of disputes aroused by minor issues they are apt to be forgotten or ignored.

The first question of those which I began by asking must without doubt be answered in the affirmative. There *is* an Irish problem. Its gravity may be a matter of dispute, but its reality is beyond question. But what exactly is its character, and how has it arisen? Evidently we have not here to do with the ordinary case—familiar enough in history—of a down-trodden nationality. Ireland is neither robbed nor oppressed. It is not exploited in the interests of British financiers or of British taxpayers. If there is exploiting, it is the other way. Far from Ireland not having its fair share in the councils of the United Kingdom, it has far more than its fair share. It sends more than its proportionate share of representation to the British Parliament, as is admitted by everybody, including the authors of the Home Rule Bill. But, in addition to this, it has in every English and Scottish city an important section of the population who vote avowedly and openly as Irishmen, in favour of the candidate indicated by Nationalist Whips and supporting the policy of Nationalist