

Current Topics

Home Rule Odds—7 to 1

Nash's Magazine for February—two months before the introduction of the Home Rule Bill—contained an exceedingly interesting symposium on the question, 'Is Home Rule for Ireland a Foregone Conclusion?' The symposium included opinions both for and against Irish self-government; and amongst those who answered the question in a more or less emphatic affirmative were Mr. Asquith, Mr. John Redmond, Mr. Lloyd George, Sir Edward Grey, Alfred Russell Wallace (the distinguished scientist), A. C. Benson (son of the late Archbishop of Canterbury), Mr. Joseph McCabe, Hilaire Belloc, Sir J. H. Yoxall, M.P., and Admiral Sir Cyprian Bridge, G.C.B., who saw upwards of fifty years' service in the Royal Navy prior to his retirement in 1904. The Admiral must have something of a sporting strain in his composition, for, in his pithy statement on the subject, he seemed to think the simplest way of answering the query was to reduce the situation to a question of odds. 'My opinions,' he said, 'regarding the probability of Irish Home Rule being established, and established soon, are not worth much, because I am not a very keen politician, but looking at the matter from my position of detachment, I am led to believe that the odds in favor of Home Rule being established are about seven to one; and in favor of its being established soon, about seven to two. I wish that the establishment would come soon. This wish is not due to any political reason. It is due to a liking for being amused. Much amusement is to be anticipated when Home Rule is established, from watching the way in which many of those who now oppose it will tumble over each other in their eagerness to make it appear that they were really in favor of it all the time.' The sporting Admiral is, we believe, a true prophet; and in this last sentence has sized up the situation to a nicety.

The First Reading

The first reading of the Home Rule Bill was carried by 360 votes to 266; and though this is usually a more or less formal matter, the speeches made on the occasion may be taken as giving a general indication of the lines of attack and of defence that are likely to be adopted on the more detailed second reading discussion. If the Bill has to encounter no more formidable criticism than that offered by the Opposition members on the first reading it should have a very easy passage through the House. The speeches of the anti-Home Rule leaders, almost without exception, consisted of declamation and mere assertion, unsupported by any real argument or fact. To take one typical illustration: One of the most outstanding features of the Bill is the number and extent of the safeguards which are provided for Imperial supremacy and for the rights of minorities in Ireland. On this point—with a view, doubtless, to conciliating Unionist feeling—caution has been carried to a degree that appears certainly unnecessary, if not, indeed, ridiculous. The only 'criticism' vouchsafed by the Opposition is the bare, bald, assertion—repeated, parrot-like, by each succeeding speaker—that the guarantees are worthless. 'There was not one guarantee worth the paper on which it was written,' said Sir Edward Carson, speaking in that spirit of unreasoning passion and prejudice the display of which has already converted Sir Frederick Pollock to Home Rule. 'The guarantees for Ulster were intended for British consumption—they deceived no one in Ireland,' said Mr. Balfour. 'The Government had done nothing to placate Ulster,' said Mr. W. H. Long. 'The guarantees were worthless,' said Mr. Bonar Law. Not one of the speakers attempted to show how or why these elaborate and carefully-framed safe-guards were worthless, or to indicate how, in any material way, they could be evaded.

Where the Opposition speeches approached anything like genuine criticism, they touched only matters of detail, and not of principle. Mr. Balfour quite reasonably asked how the Irish Executive could be held responsible for law and order while the control of the Constabulary was to remain in British hands. The retention of the Constabulary under Imperial control is open to objection, not only on the ground indicated by Mr. Balfour, but also because it will retard the inauguration of much-needed economies in this ridiculously extravagant and over-manned department. Mr. Bonar Law was also, we consider, on solid ground when he took exception to the number of Imperial restrictions in the Bill, and declared that 'he would give Ireland, if possible, the same powers as Canada, because then there would be a chance of a friendly Ireland.' No Home Ruler will object to the most ample safe-guards in respect to religion; but when we find, in addition to the religious guarantees and the Lord Lieutenant's right of veto, a further proviso conferring a right of appeal to the Privy Council, not as to the interpretation but as to the validity of any law passed by the Irish Parliament, one cannot help scenting a danger that these multiplied checks—and particularly the last-named—may be used for the purpose of needlessly delaying and nullifying Irish legislation. How far the criticism of the Opposition is *bona fide*, and how far it is mere party opposition we do not profess to determine; but it is significant of the extreme moderateness of the Government proposals that even the Opposition are constrained to complain that they do not go far enough. In regard to the fiscal question, late cables mention that the Bill provides, when the time is opportune, for a revision of the financial provisions: and this confirms the view we expressed last week that the Irish Party have accepted the existing compromise with a view to securing better terms later on.

Those Italian Missions

A little over a year ago, thanks to the *faux pas* of Roosevelt, and to the blazing indiscretions of the egregious Dr. Tipple, a good deal of public attention—and of public criticism—was directed towards the American Methodist Missions for the 'conversion' of the Catholics of Italy; and the Missions came out of the ordeal in a distinctly damaged condition. The operations of the Methodist missionary propaganda were dealt with at some length in our columns; and it was shown on the testimony of one of the missionaries themselves—the Rev. Dr. Stackpole—and on other evidence, that the missionary methods in Italy were dishonest and offensive, that the agents and preachers employed were for the most part of very doubtful character, and that the results, in spite of the most unblushing 'souperism,' were practically *nil*. On this last point we are now enabled to bring the record up to date, and to show—still on Protestant testimony—that right up to the present day the efforts to make good Methodists of the Italians are a dismal failure. The Rev. Charles W. Wendt, D.D., who contributes the correspondence from Papal lands for *The Christian Register* (Unitarian), of Boston, February 1, tells the same old tale made familiar long ago by Dr. Stackpole. Dr. Wendt states that in 1872 the census showed 58,561 Protestants in Italy, and the present census counts 65,595—an increase of 15 per cent. in forty years. (In the meanwhile the general population of Italy has increased over 30 per cent.) *

Dr. Wendt is forced to confess: 'The Roman Catholic See has long since lost all fear of Protestant growth in this country, and treats the propaganda with profound indifference. How is this failure of Protestantism in Italy to be accounted for? Certainly it cannot be attributed to any lack of zeal on the part of the evangelical sects at work in this field. Hundreds of pastors, evangelists, and teachers are enrolled, among them not a few men of ability and character. Their budget of expenses is estimated at between one and a-half and two million dollars annually. By far the larger part of this great sum is contributed from foreign sources. Take away this American and British mis-