

Party. It has become a very risky support to rely on. Three times within seven years English Conservatives have publicly shown themselves to be within measurable distance of throwing their Irish followers over. I refer, of course (1) to the incidents that occurred in 1905, when Sir Antony MacDonnell was appointed by Mr. Balfour, with the evident intention of devising some sweeping changes in the system of Irish government; (2) to the reception accorded by the English Unionist papers to the 'Pacifcus' letters just before the last General Election in 1910; and (3) to the recent manoeuvring about the 'referendum' and the 'Food Taxes.' The House of Lords' veto is gone, there has been no Liberal split, and the anti-Irish agitation has totally failed to effect its purpose among the English voters.

The Government at this present time of writing appears to be stronger than it has been for a long time past, and the Unionist Party seems to be in an almost more hopeless condition than they were in 1906.

And, suppose Mr. Asquith passes the Bill, and then goes to the country during the interval between that event and the first Irish elections? Does anyone really hope now that England is capable of being influenced by the anti-Home Rule arguments? Why, even in 1895, it was a fluke of the rarest kind that saved the Unionist party, for the majority of the electors (1,823,809) were in favor of Mr. Gladstone's policy, although the minority (1,785,372) secured 282 seats out of 484 contested! It is not likely that this fluke will occur again in a similar connection.

Most Irish Unionists seems to be, like Mr. Micawber, waiting for something to turn up. Even if something should eventually turn up to defeat the Bill, it is high time that moderate people in this country should be thinking over their line of action in case their hopes should be in vain. There are not many alternatives. One is the 'Provisional Government' plan for Ulster. Those who believe in the possibility of setting up this opera bouffe arrangement will naturally not trouble about any other alternative. It is, in any case, not much.

Consolation to Unionists in the Rest of Ireland to imagine an Irish Parliament without Ulstermen in it. The second is to lie low, and allow the present Bill, unamended, to be passed without any attempt to improve it. The third is, as soon as it becomes evident that the choice lies between the Bill as it stands and the Bill amended, for an organised expression of moderate opinion to be made by as large a body of Irish Unionists as possible. As everybody knows, there are plenty of Irishmen, even among those who signed the 'Covenant,' who are Unionist in their opinions, but who, if Home Rule comes, are willing to do their best to make the new arrangements work. It is the plain duty of all such men, once they realise that the Bill is going to pass, to help in making it a better Bill than it is.

But under the Parliament Act a Bill once stereotyped in the Commons cannot be altered, except by consent of all parties, if it is to be sent up over the heads of the Lords after its third passage through the Commons.

It is not reasonable to expect the men I have referred to to amend the Bill constructively now. It must go forward substantially in its present form during its next stages. It has been rejected by the Lords: it will pass the Commons again during the next session. If by that time nothing has turned up to remove the anxieties of Irish Unionists, a petition should be sent to the House of Lords saying that those who signed it had steadily opposed the Bill, but, recognising that their opposition had failed to defeat it, they preferred it to pass amended rather than, under the provisions of the Parliament Act, unamended. In short, the House of Lords should be asked, on behalf of moderate Irish Unionists who will have to live in the country under the new arrangements, to how to the inevitable, amend the Bill, and pass it. There is no sort of doubt that any reasonable amendment submitted in this spirit would be accepted by the Government and by the Nationalists.

The above suggestion, if it be possible to carry it out, would have the merit at lowest of affording an honorable escape from what threatens to become an impossible position for Irish Unionists. Also, it would get the question settled at an earlier date, and would thus remove the uncertainty and unsettlement which is holding so many things back just now in this country.

There is only one remaining alternative, and it is one which we would owe to the 'goodwill' of the Government if it ever became practicable, and not to

Good Generalship on the Part of Irish Unionists.

It is this: The Government may very likely, as already suggested, go to the country during the interval between the passing of the present Bill and the first Irish elections. As one of your correspondents acutely prophesied the other day, this interval would be utilised by the Irish Party for an outburst of loyalist speeches and demonstrations. In this atmosphere, what sort of chance do Irish Unionists think they would have of reviving the British elector's fear of Home Rule on the grounds of Nationalist disloyalty? Six months ago, no doubt, the Government might have been defeated at a General Election by reason of the Insurance Act. Now that benefits have begun to accrue, this no longer applies, and I find very few people who really believe that an election in the near future would dismiss the Government. Suppose, then, they returned to office in the circumstances outlined? They might choose to present Irish Unionists with one last opportunity for constructive statesmanship by offering to consider the result of a conference of all parties before enforcing the Act in case the conference disagreed. In the last resort, I hope and believe that some such means might be found for getting Home Rule through by consent. But is it good tactics, to put it no higher, for Irish Unionists, once they realise that Home Rule is certain to come, to say nothing, and to hope the Government will, of their charity, give them this or that chance of showing that they really have

The Welfare of the Country at Heart?

I append, as a mere suggestion for criticism, three points which seem to me to require immediate consideration:—

(1) Finance.—It is next door to impossible that the financial scheme of the Bill should prove workable in practice. Attention might very well be directed to a simple and ingenious plan proposed some months before the Bill was introduced—namely, that the Imperial contribution to Irish finance, which has been made necessary by recent British legislation, should be a fixed sum, not to be increased or reduced, and that this sum should be made payable by instalments, beginning with a sum little in excess of the present deficit, say, £2,000,000 the first year, and automatically decreasing by, say, £100,000 every subsequent year until the whole had been paid. In this or some similar way we might make the task of the Irish Treasury a more possible one.

(2) Land Purchase.—The amount of this fixed sum would, of course, depend upon the retention or delegation of the Land Purchase Acts. It would help to make things easier for many Irish Unionists if they felt sure the Land Purchase Acts were going to be completed by the Imperial Parliament, and without delay in the general sense of the 1903 Act. This is the one 'Government subsidy' that ought, for every reason, financial, political, and moral, to be paid off and completed with the very minimum of delay. We have Mr. Birrell's promise, but we would like to see his Bill.

(3) Method of Election to Lower House.—Proportional representation for the Irish Lower House should be insisted upon. It is precisely during the first three or four years that opportunities for minorities to secure representation will be most required, and the scheme now embodied in the Bill is one which effectually kills minorities, except in the nine member constituencies where proportional representation has been adopted.

Conclusion.

You will have noticed that I have made no mention of Irish Unionist objections to Home Rule. I

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