

of dealing with which distinguishes a nation from a province or a dependency. The problem of union or separation would present itself in the question, Shall Ireland have this sovereign power in association with England and Scotland, through its representatives in an Imperial Parliament or as a separate nation, accidentally ruled by the same monarch as England, just as England and Hanover were until, on the death of William IV., their differing laws of succession separated the two countries? The problem which is before the Round Table in the first instance, and which, if they solve it to their satisfaction, will come before Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Parnell in the second instance, is to make home rule compatible with and subject to the Parliamentary Union. The condition of business in the House of Commons, not now only but during many Parliaments, shows the need of an arrangement by which purely insular concerns, British and Irish, shall be referred to purely British and Irish assemblies, whether called legislative bodies, or national councils, or parliaments, while the common affairs of the United Kingdom, and these alone, shall be dealt with in a united Parliament, in which Great Britain and Ireland shall be equally represented. In the imperfectness of political nomenclature, the word Federal is that by which an arrangement of this kind can be least misleadingly described, though text writers, guiding themselves by precedents and definitions, may prove that federation, as in the United States, in Switzerland, in Germany, and in Austria-Hungary, is impossible in the United Kingdom. Very likely, but in the art of politics, as in the art of poetry, definitions must follow practice, instead of tying down practice to themselves. In the meantime, it must be observed that the Round Table Conference is conducted entirely by members of Mr. Gladstone's late Cabinet, Lord Herschell, Sir William Harcourt, and Mr. John Morley remained in it to the last. Mr. Chamberlain and Sir George Trevelyan seceded from it, objecting to the plan and not to the principle and the policy. Lord Hartington and the larger and more important section of Liberal Unionists who declined to admit the principle or entertain the policy, and who therefore refused to join Mr. Gladstone's Ministry, hold aloof from the conference. Lord Hartington and his followers still give their support to the Government, in which they are represented by Mr. Goschen; and the concessions which would satisfy Mr. Chamberlain and Sir George Trevelyan might leave the Hartingtonian Unionists unreconciled.

The social gatherings which accompany the Parliamentary session have commenced. Mrs. Peel's receptions follow the Speaker's Parliamentary dinners, which are ruled by an order as rigid as that which governs the debate, and one which is much better observed. These dinners are given on Wednesday, the only Parliamentary day on which an afternoon sitting is held. At the first dinner the Speaker entertains such of her Majesty's Ministers as have seats in the House of Commons; on the second, the members of the preceding Government. On the third, Privy Councillors and other members of former administrations who have not been included in the recent political arrangements of either party, are the Speaker's guests, and no doubt much candid conversation is heard with respect to men and measures. Then the rank and file of Parliament follow by batches until the whole is exhausted. Many members have been in the habit of refusing the Speaker's invitations. Old Cobbett did so more than half a century ago on the ground, stated by him in his letter of apology to the Speaker who then was, that he was not accustomed to the society of gentlemen. Mr. Cobden and Mr. Bright used to do so—the former until the day of

his death, the latter until he took office—from an insurmountable reluctance to put on court dress. For Mr. Bright, when he became a Minister, a new uniform was invented of black velvet, to spare him the necessity of investing himself in the blue Windsor uniform with its epaulettes and sword. Very well he looks in his court suit. When M. Blowitz intruded himself into the prison of a celebrated French political offender, uninvited and for interviewing purposes, the victim described himself as struck by the approach of something which resembled *une boule surmontée par une orifice*. Mr. Bright, in his velvet attire, looks like a stately pin-cushion, surmounted by a singularly handsome and venerable countenance, and endowed with locomotive properties. The number of persons who entertain Mr. Cobden's objection to court dress is considerable in the present House of Commons, and for them the Speaker has arranged a supplementary banquet, not exclusively Parliamentary, for which evening dress suffices. There are still grumblers, for among working-class members the modern dress-coat and white tie are viewed as *bourgeois* symbols. The deference shown to the Speaker is probably unique in the attitude of popular representatives to their President. He is addressed in conversation as "Sir," a title otherwise given only to the King, when there is one, and to royal princes. There have, indeed, been two exceptions to this monopoly. The late Sir Robert Peel told Lord Stanhope, the historian, that when Mr. Grattan became a member of the British House of Commons, those Irish members of the United Parliament who had sat at Dublin with him, always addressed him as "Sir." Lord Castlereagh was among those who did so. A similar sign of deference is studiously observed by many of his younger colleagues and other members of his party to Mr. Gladstone. The unceremonious habits of English society, in which the use of the words "Sir," or "My Lord," or "Your Grace" are becoming obsolete, and are scarcely heard except from tradesmen, servants, and dependents, is rather an insular peculiarity, involving departure from the stately formality of a previous generation, as well as from existing European and, I presume, American usage.

Mrs. Peel's receptions are naturally of wider scope than the Speaker's dinners, not only as regards numbers, but as regards quality, and include all that is most notable in political society. In the suite of stately rooms of "the Speaker's house," from the walls of which the present Speaker's predecessors gaze down upon the assembled groups, no more dignified and urbane host, and no more graceful hostess, could discharge the duties which fall to Mr. and Mrs. Peel. The other principal places of political receptions are, for the Conservatives, Lady Salisbury's in Arlington Street, and Mrs. W. H. Smith's in Grosvenor Place; for the Liberals, Lady Granville's in Carlton House Terrace, Lady Spencer's at Spencer House, near St. James's Palace, and Lady Rosebery's in Lansdowne House, which has been let to the late Foreign Secretary during the absence of the present Governor-General of Canada. More places of reception are, for the Conservatives, Lady Stanhope's in Grosvenor Place and Lady Hayter's, the wife of Sir Arthur Hayter, a subordinate member of Mr. Gladstone's last Government, once an assistant whip of the party, and the son of a more celebrated whip. The palmy days of great houses and great hostesses are, however, over—the days when youthful Macaulays were introduced by brilliant Lady Hollands in historic palaces to ambassadors and earls. In their place is to be seen a staring crowd, looking about them, like a party of

personally conducted tourists deserted by their conductor, obviously ill at ease as to their behavior, and uncertain as to what is expected from them.

The periodically renewed rumors of the conversion of the *Times* into a penny paper are again afloat. No doubt the intention will be denied until it is executed, and probably with truth, for when the purpose is definitely framed it will be promptly put into effect. The public will be innocent of the knowledge until it applauds or condemns the deed. Meantime the newspaper offices are perplexed with fears of a change which, if it takes place, must have momentous consequences. It will be fatal either to some of them or to the *Times* itself. Whether the *Times* at a penny would remain the *Times* is the question, and it must be either the *Times* or nothing. Under Mr. Buckle's editorship it has certainly recovered something of its old authority, and the decline in its circulation has been stopped and has even been turned the other way. Notwithstanding, there have been signs of weakness in Printing-house Square. It has condescended to recognize the man in the streets, and at the railway stations, and on the knife-board of the omnibus, by the issue of bills of contents after the manner of its penny rivals. These bills are scantily supplied, it is true, and they are hidden shamefacedly in obscure corners. Still they are there, if you look for them. The *Times* is apparently dabbling its foot timidly in the water until it can make up its mind for a plunge. The hesitation is excusable. The step it is supposed to be meditating means either suicide or a magic renewal of youth and strength. The quality and not the quantity of its circulation has of late years been its stronghold; and that has made it the medium through which public men of all parties express themselves when they have had anything to say by the press. Its law and Parliamentary reports make it essential to lawyers and politicians. To "write to the *Times*," and to "see a thing in the *Times*" are not mere survivals of speech: they express a belief in its unique character. Can it retain the features which have given it this pre-eminence for a penny? L. L.

THE REPORT OF LORD COWPER'S COMMISSION.

DUBLIN, February 28, 1887.

THE Royal Commission on the Irish Land Laws, presided over by Lord Cowper, has presented its report to Parliament. The only representative of the tenants on the Commission (a Conservative farmer from the County Armagh) dissents from the general report, and promises to present his own within a short time. The published report may therefore be looked upon as representing the landlords' view of the question; and, as such, it completely justifies the Plan of Campaign and the proposals made to Parliament last autumn by the National party.

The fall in prices during the last two, as compared with the preceding four, years is stated to be 18½ per cent. This, in conjunction with unfavorable seasons, has so impaired the farmers' ability to pay rent that an immediate revision of judicial rents is recommended. The Commission proposes the following changes in the law as regards rents: (1) The revision of rents every five years, instead of fifteen; the revision to be effected according to the general average of prices which have ruled during the five years preceding the revision, as compared with the average of prices for the five years before them. (2) The admission of leaseholders to the land courts to have fair rents fixed. (3) The admission of town-park occupiers, exclusive of those who hold less than five acres, of pasture farms up to £100 value,

As to the first suggestion, nothing is said on the most important point of how the percentage of fall or rise in prices is to be applied to the increase or diminution of rent. The admission of the classes of tenants referred to in the second and third suggestions has been claimed by the Irish members as a matter of justice on every opportunity since the introduction of the Land Bill in 1881, and was refused peremptorily by both Liberal and Tory Governments. The proposal to regulate rents according to the average of prices for periods of five years would be impracticable. The principle is undesirable, and no clear suggestion is made as to how it is to be applied. The amount of produce of any farm depends on the capital employed as well as on the skill of the farmer and the seasons. The cost of labor is quite as important an element in determining the net profit as the prices realized. So is the amount of capital employed and the rate of interest to be allowed upon it. Cereal produce, meat of all kinds, and butter are imported from all parts of the world into Ireland, as well as exported from it. Prices are not, therefore, dependent on local conditions alone; the good prices in any quinquennial period would not be a guide to the rent that could be paid in a succeeding period of lean years. Where a payment is small in proportion to the value of the annual produce, as in the case of tithes, the money value may be made dependent on prices without much inconvenience; but where rent presses on the means of subsistence, as in many districts in Ireland, it cannot be so regulated. Instead of facilitating the collection of rent, such a method would encourage its being withheld, and would give rise to perpetual disputes and claims for the introduction of other elements into the calculation.

Rents in Ireland are now in theory perpetual in duration, though uncertain as to their amount. In France and Switzerland the creation and imposition of perpetual rents are forbidden by the Constitution or by fundamental laws; they are looked on as inconsistent with the true conditions of liberty and democracy. Rents in Ireland should be made redeemable, instead of trying to perpetuate them. The existence of a small rent-receiving class, retaining, attached to their rents, undefined powers of interference with the conditions of tenure, is not consistent with the economical and social health of an agricultural community.

As remedies for the evils of congested districts, which are defined as being those where the soil is poor and the population too dense to live upon its produce, the Commissioners recommend (1) technical education for children, (2) emigration, (3) migration of families to other parts of Ireland, (4) colonization. As to the details, how and at whose expense these things are to be done, nothing is said. It may be remarked incidentally that it is a mistake to suppose that the Irish Nationalists are opposed to emigration. What they have protested against is the schemes offered and enforced by the Imperial Parliament, which provided little more than the bare passage of the emigrants and often of very unfit classes, who, flung in shiploads on the shores of strange countries, with no further provision, were likely to be as badly off as if they had stayed at home. Irishmen have also claimed that a Government's first duty is to make the conditions of life at home—so far as laws can do so—such as to enable the population to live and thrive, instead of seeking to get rid of them by any and every means, which has been the English policy in Ireland from time immemorial. When the population of Ireland was under three millions, it was said to be overpopulated; the same is said now when the population has decreased by more than three millions in thirty years, and when four or

five million pounds are paid away annually to absentee land-owners.

The other recommendations of the Royal Commission deal with the policy of enabling the tenants to purchase up the landlords' interests by State loans. They do not advise compulsion or expropriation, or any change in the terms on which loans are made, but make a multitude of small proposals, with the object of enabling landlords to get rid of legal and technical difficulties and obstacles in the way of selling their estates. They omit, however, to make suggestions as to establishing any system of cheap and speedy transfer for the proprietary interests to be conferred on the tenant. This is an all-important matter; the law and practice of land transfer and with respect to the devolution of real estate in the United Kingdom are such that no system of small proprietorships of land could endure or be successful under it. Within the last thirteen years I have known it to take nine years from the institution of the proceedings to get the sale of an estate completed. The average time taken to sell an estate in the Land Judges' Court is officially stated to be two years. The costs of selling or buying real estate are enormous, and increase in inverse proportion to the size of the estate. The preparation of the deeds of transfer is only a small portion of the cost incurred in a sale; but I have known the purchaser of a small parcel of land to pay for his transfer deed five times as much as he paid for the land. It is a crime for any Government to confer the ownership of land upon peasants without at the same time making provision for its certain, cheap, and speedy transfer and devolution in future. In most of the British colonies land is transferred on the record-of-title system with certainty and cheapness. In many colonies professional assistance is unnecessary. In Switzerland land can be bought and sold by the yard at a trifling and known cost. It is the same in nearly all other civilized European countries; the only heavy expense being the duty charged by the State on transfers.

The omission of any mention of this matter from the report of Lord Cowper's Commission evidences its incompetence and the incompleteness of its inquiry. The Nationalist party gave no evidence; the witnesses were almost altogether landlords, agents, and officials. Nothing was, however, expected to come of the Commission's inquiry; the enlargement of the rent provisions of the Land Law to include the classes excepted at present will probably be the only useful result, for such a change introduced by the Conservatives would meet opposition from no other party. The neglect, however, of establishing a system of cheap and easy transfer may possibly prove fatal to the plan of lending public money on the security of the tenants' holdings. When it takes years to sell a parcel of land, and when the cost of doing so is uncertain, but always great, it is evident that small parcels of land are a bad security from the fact of their not being marketable. Land reformers have often pointed out that the reluctance of banks (the natural traders in loans) to lend upon land is one of the greatest condemnations of the English land-transfer system. When the owner of a small lot of land subject to a mortgage to the State gets into difficulties, he cannot dispose of his interest until he may have become hopelessly involved, and incurred a bill of law costs which may leave him without anything from the realization of his estate. He cannot, moreover, sell to the best advantage when he meets a buyer with an appetite, for nothing can be done without lawyers' aid, and nothing can be done off-hand. Many small freeholds have from such causes been eaten up by costs attendant upon family arrangements and partitions.

The opportunity offered by a sale through a

Government Commission is the most favorable for arranging for the future free transfer of land so sold. The title is cleared; the land is identified and defined by a map. If the record-of-title system were adopted for all such land, it would be a marketable and good security. The possession of a small parcel of land would not then be, as Lord Brougham thirty years ago said it was, and as it still remains, "a ruinous extravagance for a man of small means."

The general meaning of the report of the Cowper Commission, then, is in the sense of making amendments in the existing laws, of grafting new statutes on to the already complex laws relating to the relations of landlord and tenant and the purchase of land. It recommends no new departure, not even simplification and consolidation of the existing laws. If its proposals are embodied in legislation, they cannot be expected to contribute much towards a settlement on a permanent basis of this troublesome and vital question.

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THE ELECTIVE SYSTEM.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NATION:

SIR: On page 163 of the current volume of the *Nation*, "A. H.," in commenting on the statement that Harvard has been the leader in the "elective system," claims the leadership for the University of Virginia, and quotes a paragraph by Prof. Noah K. Davis in support of the claim. During the last few years this claim has again and again been made, but, in the opinion of some, upon a misunderstanding of the term "elective," which is applied to the system of the University of Virginia, but is there used in an entirely different sense from the more commonly accepted meaning. That it may be understood in what way the system of the University of Virginia is elective, the following is a brief sketch of the "elective system" and the University of Virginia "elective system."

The main facts are these. At Harvard, in 1823 and 1824, sixty-four years ago, the Faculty (Reports of the President of Harvard College for 1833-34 and 1834-35) "began to elaborate a system of instruction and discipline for students in the liberal arts which has come to be known as the elective system, because it permits each student, under limitations and guidance which are partly artificial but chiefly natural, to choose his subjects of study." Previous to the time mentioned, a uniform "curriculum" prevailed in most, if not in all, colleges in the United States, to which the student was required to conform. It extended over four years, and prescribed not only the kind of studies, but the order in which they were to be taken. Further, all persons admitted were presumably candidates for a degree (no provision being made for persons not candidates for a degree), and only in connection with such persons is the term "elective system" applied generally at present.

In 1825 laws were adopted at Harvard which provided for the admission "of persons who are not candidates for a degree" and "for the consideration, to a limited extent, of the desires of students in the arrangement of their studies." Beginning with some "electives" at this time (1825), it was not until 1841 that the electives became numerous, when they were allowed in all years except the Freshman year. In 1846 the electives were restricted to Junior and Senior years, where they remained for twenty years. In 1867, electives were allowed in Sophomore year again, and were gradually extended to Freshman year, so that at present there are only a few required studies in Freshman year.