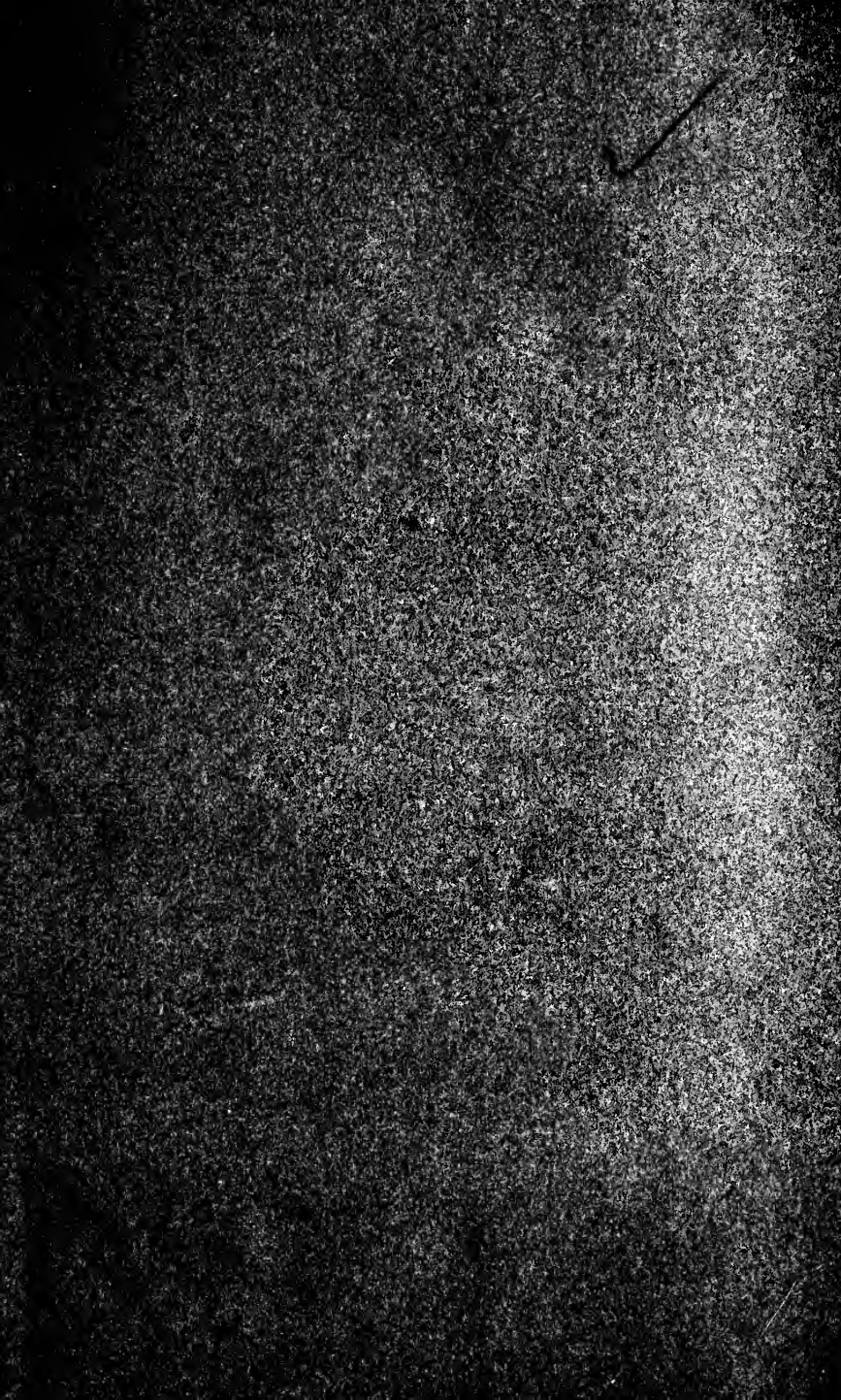




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10.

THE IRISH CHURCH,

A

POLITICAL VIEW OF THE QUESTION.

TONBRIDGE:

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THE IRISH CHURCH.

It is a trite observation that our partial judgments undergo material modification when ALL the circumstances of the case are considered, and this is especially true with reference to the Irish Church. Waving for a time the tests of *Justice* and *Expediency* to which the question of its Disestablishment must be submitted, we shall first consider the political law of higher moment to which it is allied.

A specious appeal is made to our sentiment of *Justice*, which at first sight appears unanswerable. Grievances real or supposed are harped upon, then the Establishment is reviewed until by an adroit use of what Whately terms the '*Thaumatrope fallacy*' an impression is created in the minds of many that the National Church in Ireland may be fairly credited with all the evils of that unhappy country.

We seem at the present time to take very subordinate views of the political matters which engage our attention. Our Statesmen 'live from hand to mouth' and deal with questions not by relating them to some general and permanent law, but by viewing them as local or particular or temporary. Recently this spirit was manifested in the case of Reform. Instead of ascertaining some *definite principle* which should accommodate itself to future times

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and similar contingencies, no idea seemed possible to either political party for many years save that of lowering the qualification a £ or two, thus inviting future agitation, and a recurrence of similar difficulties. The spirit of isolation, and lack of organizing power peculiar to Englishmen lead, I believe, to this local and narrow view; it is well therefore in the first place to consider the general bearing of the question, and to ascertain what is the greater problem of the day with which it is associated.

Any one who carefully considers the past will have observed that most occurrences at any given epoch, no matter how apparently disconnected, are referable to some revolution of thought—some predominant idea—some wave of opinion which seems in succession to pass over the globe, at one time political, at another social, at another religious.

The great political question which I conceive has been in restless agitation since the commencement of the present century has been relative to the nature of the 'Government compact'—a conflict between Federalism and the 'Indivisibility of the state.'

The question of the Republic 'one and indivisible' versus Federalism took its rise in the sanguinary period of the French convention between the Jacobins and their adversaries from the Gironde. The means were desperate, and intestine feud added to external conflict rendered France 'indivisible' enough. The anomalous partition of Europe by the Congress of Vienna in 1815 kept the problem alive, and the war of the Sonderbund in 1846 between the Catholic and Protestant Cantons of Switzerland

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is regarded by Guizot as an endeavour to crush the Federal compact, and mould their country into a 'Republic one and indivisible too. In America the recent struggle, nominally cast upon the issue of slavery, was really a solution of the same problem. The South aided by Democratic sympathies struggled for 'States Rights'—*i.e.* a Federal union, and the Republicans of the North like their prototypes, have by no gentle means rendered their Republic 'one and indivisible' also.

Italy next appears on the scene, working at the same question. To secure French ascendancy a confederation was proposed, but the instinct of the Italian Statesman guided him to that 'unity' which is the source of strength. A year ago the problem was solved in Germany. Prussia at Sadowa cemented into a unity 40 millions of Germans whose Federalism had been *her* constant weakness. It is a mere question of time when the few outlying states will gravitate to her by natural law.

Russia has stamped out Poland her name, religion, and nationality, for she too will have an empire "one and indivisible."

Hence whether in despotic Russia or in republican America, we see one instinctive principle manifested and the most violent means, (if all others fail,) resorted to for its accomplishment.

There are two states however which seem to entertain a policy in the opposite direction, England and Austria. Austria long endeavoured to weld her heterogeneous empire into a whole. Possibly the reason why she failed was, not so much the wonderful diversity of races under

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her sway, but because she tenaciously clung to the smaller element and maintained her capital at Vienna instead of at Pesth. It yet remains to be seen whether the separate autonomies she has granted, will be for her strength or weakness; probably the latter, if the instincts of other nations be true.

We now come to England. Her policy hitherto has been in the same general direction, but this question of the Irish Church is pregnant with serious consequences. It is a first indication that the bonds of union are to be relaxed, and that the policy of her rulers is to be antagonistic to the principle I have shewn to be universally predominant. Instead of regarding our country as "One and Indivisible"—as the *Great Britain* for which we have one *national Government and one National Protestant Church* in two branches, differing indeed in the *accident* of Church Government but *agreeing in Protestant Faith and Principle*, and *headed by the same Queen*, we have now the fatal admission that Ireland is a separate country,—its people—a peculiar people—requiring special treatment, different laws, and fresh ecclesiastical arrangements. This is the true meaning of the dis-establishment of the Irish Church. It is a 'bolt sped into the joints of the harness.'

Let us now test the question by the light of Justice and Expediency.

If Ireland be regarded as a separate country and Englishmen there as aliens, and the Protestant Church as the Church of the minority, *abstract* justice would require, I admit, its disestablishment. In demanding this on the

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score of Justice you are bound to a logical conclusion which is rather perplexing to say the least.

In the first place we deny the premisses. We do not regard Ireland as a strange or foreign land—as a separate nation, *but as part of a nation*, nor Englishmen there resident as aliens but fellow-Britons. We consider the Church as the Church of the majority, as we consider it the Church of the majority in Wales or even in Tonbridge though possibly out numbered by Dissenters in both places, and therefore we fight against disestablishment and disendowment on the score of justice and we are perfectly logical in doing so. We adopt the French, American, Russian, Italian, German principle of being one “indivisible nation” with one National Church.

Now let us grant the opposite, and trace the consequences. Let us be resolved to do justice upon the grounds proposed for dis-establishment “*Fiat justitia—ruat cœlum.*” Disestablish the Church! you *gratify* the Roman Catholics for the present, you do not *satisfy* them. They have been taught by time serving politicians the value of agitation, and the great boon to be obtained by winking at a few transatlantic desperadoes. They come forward and say “You have disendowed the Protestant Church—the church ‘of the minority’—‘good’! you have *removed an injustice*—“we wish you now to *do us justice*. In England the Church “of the majority is the Church of England and the National “Church so also in Scotland. We want equal justice too. “We Roman Catholics are the majority and our church is “and ought to be the National Church. *Do us justice.* “Bestow on us the 15 millions withdrawn from the minority.

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“It is Church property and belongs to the National Church.” I maintain, if you break up our Republic ‘one and indivisible’—if you entertain these national peculiarities, if you deal with provincial and not imperial considerations you cannot stop, until you arrive at this point. The claims of Justice will not allow you. Then too Wales will present a like bill of fare.

I can easily understand that the nonconformists, now blindly obeying political impulse rather than religious feeling, do not meditate such consequences as the endowment of the Romish Church, and the only alternative to escape this demand is *to pull down the National Church altogether*. Thus, this plea of abstract right places us in this dilemma (i.) either to endow the Romish Church in Ireland, or (ii.) to disestablish the Churches of England and Scotland.

I need hardly say we accept neither alternative. I have shewn why we deny the *justice* of the case in toto.

Next, we consider the *Expediency* of this proposition.

It is inexpedient—

- (i.) because it savours entirely of personal ambition and greed of office on Mr. Gladstone’s part. Why did the Liberals do nothing, attempt nothing, move nothing until in opposition?
- (ii.) because Fenianism has been probed, and this measure is totally uncalled for by the circumstances which are the pretext for it.
- (iii.) because it dissatisfies one million Protestants without assuring us of loyalty elsewhere.

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- (iv.) because it deals with Imperial questions in a way dangerous to our national stability.
- (v.) because it is a premium to agitation of the most *mischievous* kind.
- (vi.) because it admits that Ireland is a nation instead of *part of a nation*, that she has *distinctive national rights* which will culminate in a demand for *autonomy*.
- (vii.) because it violates the sacred rights of property.

It is all very well to assure us, as Mr. Bright does, that 'he is a far seeing prophet who can forecast the period of our Church's down fall.' Looking at Mr. Gladstone's conduct since last Oxford election he is a wise prophet who can certify to a fixed principle in him for one year. If the past be an earnest for the future we may have mightier changes proposed and sooner than we imagine. The Liberation Society, and nonconformists in general may gladly hail the day when they may dance in a ring round Mr. Lowe, singing in chorus "Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground," and sensible Churchmen may be excused if they therefore view the question as one sooner or later involving the existence of the National Church.

Are we prepared for the consequences of such a revolution? All the states of the old world sanction this principle of a State Church, and to a national religion *Monarchy* seems to be *essentially* allied.* In the Great Republic of the west a National Church is not, nor yet in our own Great Colonies

* After the anarchy of the French Revolution when Society was reconstituted, one of the first steps of Napoleon, was to restore a national Church to France.

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and Dependencies. The former presents us with nothing exactly worthy of imitation, not even *an example how to govern disaffected communities!* The latter are yet in their infancy, and it is difficult to speculate what they *may become* in their maturity. At all events if monarchy and state religion go together, and republics refuse this national admission of God's Government, what may we infer from the downfall of our own Church but a mighty change in our own political status?

It is thus we are compelled to take a comprehensive view of this matter, and not to treat a question of such vast import as a mere local affair. Before inaugurating such a revolution in the rights of property, in the bonds of national union and in our public religious life it is wise to weigh well the consequences. We hold in one hand a mighty charter of liberty, and in the other a grander still—the Englishman's Bible—*his book of final appeal*. There the humblest amongst us may read the Divine foundation of the first Church and its union with the state, and the simplest may gather from their interwoven history, how *national grandeur* and *national decay* were the invariable attestations of their fidelity to each other and to God.



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