

A TENTATIVE HOME RULE BILL.

Were it not for his complacency to which sympathy is utterly ungenial, we could commiserate Mr. Birrell on the reception which has greeted his latest invention for remedying the ills of Ireland. Damned with faint praise by his own supporters, regarded with hardly disguised contempt by the Irish members and with scorn and detestation by the Unionists the new Bill is, of course, bound to be wrecked on the shoals of the House of Lords, but before it reaches those dangerous waters it will be discussed ad nauseam in Parliament and in the Press. Mr. Birrell is refreshingly frank about the measure; if it should succeed he admits it is intended to pave the way to Home Rule; if, on the other hand it be a failure, Mr. Birrell is equally ready to allow that it will be impossible to persuade the electorate of the "predominant partner" England, that the Irish are capable of self-government. It may be well to epitomise the main points of the act as drafted by the Chief Secretary. A Central Representative Council is to be created, consisting of 82 elected and 24 nominated members. This Council is to have complete control over the powers vested in the eight following Boards: the Local Government Board, the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction, the Congested Districts Board, the Commissioners of Public Works, the Commissioners of National Education, the Intermediate Education Board, the Reformatory and Industrial Schools Department and the Registrar General's office. Powers are to be conferred on this Council to constitute a new Education Board, to which will be transferred the powers and funds of the existing Commissioners. The elected members are to be chosen on the municipal franchise, which includes women as well as men: the first nominated members are to be selected by the Crown, meaning, of course, the Ministry of the day, their successors by the Lord Lieutenant for the time being. The Council is to elect its own President, and the Irish Secretary is to have the right of attending and speaking at the Council, but not of voting. It is to work through committees and exercise control over the various bodies it regulates by means of resolutions. These resolutions are to be submitted to the Lord Lieutenant before they can possess operative power, and, like a Colonial Governor, he may confirm, annul, or remit them again to the Council. The exercise of this right of veto may be challenged in the Imperial Parliament, and the Council is to be re-elected and re-nominated every three years, like the County Councils throughout the kingdom. The Irish Treasury, abolished in 1817, is to be reconstituted, and an "Irish Fund" is to be established for the purpose of working the eight departments. At the present moment all the money they can command is £2,000,000, and as this will be inadequate to the extended sphere of usefulness ordained for them in the Bill, the Imperial Exchequer is to supplant it by an annual grant of £650,000. The Bill also contains a proviso that the religious opinions of the Lord Lieutenant should not in future be taken into account. This latter clause will be hotly opposed by Protestant Ulster, but hardly by any one else, for it does seem ridiculous in these days that a Viceroy should be deemed incapable of acting with impartiality should he belong to the same faith as the vast majority of the people whose fortunes he is called upon in a measure to direct. The main objection, however, to the Bill is that it is purposeless and obviously inspired by a Minister halting between two opinions. It will do no good from the Nationalist point of view and will do much harm to the Ulster Protestants, for with the control of Education placed in the hands of the Nationalists—and there can be no manner of doubt that they will form an overwhelming majority of the new Council,—the Ulster Protestants may well fear for the future maintenance of their schools. Mr. Birrell admits that there are 45 separate Boards in Ireland and as the new Council is only to touch eight of these, it looks very much as if he were merely adding a 46th Board to meddle with some of the remaining 45. By the Bill the Irish are to be taught self-respect, and the necessary instruction is to be imparted at a cost to the British taxpayer of £650,000 a year. England is to have no voice in Irish affairs but the Irish members retain full liberty of interference in affairs essentially English. The Bill is,—like most of the measures of the present Government—insidious, inasmuch as it has other objects than those professed by its author. It is a sop to the extravagant demands of the Nationalists, and how little it is likely to satisfy those demands may be understood when we reflect that the control of the Land Commission and the Irish Constabulary are to be left in the hands of the Imperial Parliament. The Bill will irritate many people, will satisfy none, the flood of Unionist opinion in England will rise higher than ever, and Mr. Birrell is certain to be in the unenviable position of one who falls between two stools.

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RANDOM NOTES.

So the Lord Chancellor has decided that the most popular of the comic operas known to the English stage shall no longer be performed. Mrs. D'Oyly Carte finds that she has spent at least £5,000 in vain, for the "Mikado" was to follow the present revival of "Patience"; the Middlesborough Amateurs are also up in arms, for they were contemplating a weeks' performance of the fascinating opera, and have been put to considerable expense in the matter. The decision of the Lord Chancellor is coincident with the arrival in England of the Japanese envoy, Prince Fushimi, and it is naturally supposed that the prohibition of future performances of the "Mikado" is a step taken to avoid wounding the feelings of this distinguished representative of England's friend and ally. It would, however, be interesting to know what cause for offence Prince Fushimi could

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find in the "Mikado". Now, if it were the "Geisha", it would be different, for the Prince might well consider it outrageous that English ladies should be found hob-nobbing with the inmates of a tea house who are certainly not on the same social scale, and who are probably related, however distantly, to Lilith. Or perhaps that egregious play produced a few years back by Mr. Tree, might have offended the Prince, whose sense of fitness would be wounded by seeing Japanese girls dance with their feet like Europeans instead of only shuffling and posturing with their arms. But the "Mikado"; surely he could not but be pleased with that charming farrago of genial nonsense, in which "Poohbah" is probably the only character the least true to life. It is true that the august *Mikado* himself is brought on the stage and that too, at an epoch when the Sovereign of the Land of the rising sun lived a hermit-like life within the yellow walls of the Kyoto palace, the virtual prisoner of the Shogues; but surely no great exception could be taken to Gilbert's humane *Mikado*, and as for Koko he is too amusing and too frankly un-Japanese, to cause anything but laughter.

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Is it possible, we are inclined to wonder, that the Japanese in assimilating the habits and customs of the West have adopted their lack of humour. The lower classes of Japan laugh from the cradle to the grave, but the higher you go in the social scale, the sterner become the faces, the more rare the genial smile. There can be no doubt that the precious salt of humour is evaporating, slowly but surely evaporating. This has been for some time apparent in England, where people have allowed themselves to view without a smile Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, sitting in the seat formerly occupied by a Pitt, a Wellington, a Disraeli. We have clung desperately to the idea that in America humour still remained, but what shall we say when we find it gravely stated in a Pittsburg journal that the municipal authorities are taking steps to remove from the community the terrible scandal caused by the nudity of the statuary in the Carnegie Institution?

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Seriously, it may well be asked where the Lord Chancellor is going to draw the line. If once we begin prohibiting of plays that may offend the susceptibilities of foreigners we may go on to consider the feelings of our own countrymen. To start with, one of the favourite characters of the stage is doomed. The Russian secret police agent must vanish from our plays, and though not quite such a hardy annual as a few years ago he is

still to be encountered fairly often on the English stage. The *entente cordiale* is sacred, so away, too, with the comic French waiter, especially at the moment when the Paris *garçon* is attracting a good deal of attention. Never again shall we behold that farce of farces. "Ici on parle Français," for *Victor Dubois* could only exist on the boards, and he must perish rather than that we should run the risk of damaging the *entente*. The stage American, too, the stage Irishman, both of whom talk with accents that would be accounted utterly foreign in the States or in Erin must be wiped out without hesitation and truth to tell we shall bear their loss with equanimity; they are usually ridiculous enough in all conscience. Our stage Germans have not been so bad as a rule, though it was lucky for George Alexander that another Chancellor amply occupied the Woolsack when he produced "Old Heidelberg" for anything more supremely ludicrous than his portrayal of the young hereditary Prince of Heiligenschwarzenheimer (name not guaranteed) can hardly be imagined.

In the domain of opera we need have fewer qualms. So many of the characters in opera are inherently ridiculous if regarded, so to speak, *per se*, that we have become accustomed to regard them as moving and having their being in a world apart, and are loath to judge them by ordinary standards. To our untutored mind this is where the characters in the Wagnerian Trilogy score so. We are none of us, or few of us, giants or dwarfs and certainly none of us gods or goddesses, so criticism is dumb or ought to be before the long windedness of *Wotan*, and the shrewishness of *Fricka*, though, ribald as the idea may be, we have always had a sneaking idea that the rest of his family must have welcomed the "twilight of the Gods" if *Wotan's* conversation in the family circle resembled in length or matter the methods employed by him in keeping *Erda* awake. There is, indeed, one character in a popular opera which, were Englishmen as sensitive as the Lord Chancellor evidently supposes the Japanese to be, would certainly have to be eliminated from any international stage, and that is the supposedly comic *milord* in "Fra Diavolo". This individual is supposed to be a typical Englishman, and by way of demonstrating this fact, he has a solo with a refrain consisting of the words "No, no, no, G—d—". It is not the fatuity of his remarks that depresses the spirits of his English audience so much as his costume. Was there ever an epoch when an Englishman travelled in Italy clad in knickerbockers, sun-hat and blue veil? We, naturally enough, doubt it, but he is always received with much hearty laughter and yet at a certain race meeting not a thousand miles from Dresden, we once saw an individual in a straw hat, a black frock coat, a blue waistcoat, white flannel trousers and bright yellow boots! Margate sands! what a costume! but he evidently rejoiced greatly in the conviction that he looked "très chic", and we saw precious few smiles to undecieve him.

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Monday, May 13th. 10.0 a.m. Matins.
Tuesday, May 14th. 10.0 a.m. Matins.
Wednesday, May 15th. 11.0 a.m. Matins and Litany.
Thursday, May 16th. *Octave of the Ascension.* 8.0 a.m. Holy Communion. 10.0 a.m. Matins.
Friday, May 17th. 11.0 a.m. Matins and Litany. 5.0 p.m. Choir Practice.
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