

CHAPTER IX.

THE HOME RULE QUESTION AND IMPERIALISM.

1886-1899.

SINCE the days immediately preceding the Reform Bill of 1832, the United Kingdom had never been in such a state of political excitement as prevailed from November, 1885, to July, 1886. It was in the former month that rumours began to get abroad that the "liberal measure of local self-government," which Gladstone had spoken of in his Midlothian speeches as desirable for Ireland, meant Home Rule. At midwinter it was stated that he had invited Parnell to confer with him on the scheme, and to suggest guarantees for the preservation of law and peace in Ireland when Home Rule should have been conceded. Nevertheless, many Liberals refused to believe that there was any truth in the reports, and several of their party leaders announced that they still remained opposed to any grant of legislative independence to Ireland.

But when the Tories had been evicted from office in January, 1886, and Gladstone came into power, his proceedings showed that rumour had not lied. It soon became known that the premier was drafting a Home Rule Bill, and that violent dissensions were on foot in the cabinet, since several members of it were not prepared to follow him in his new departure. In March, the president of the Local Government Board, Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, the best-known leader of the

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