The Press.

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The Press.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 28, 1858.

A Remarkable Ministerial Escape.

There has lately been some talk, among the European Powers, about the future disposition of the Ionian Islands, diplomatically known as the Republic of the Seven Islands, which have been almost in revolt for the last five or six years, from dislike to the protectorate of Great Britain, to which they have been subjected since 1815. Although called the "*Seven* Islands," their number is greater. They consist of Corfu, Cephalonia, Zante, Santa Maura, Cerigo, Theaki or Ithaca, Paxo, and many smaller islets, lying along their coasts, such as Merlera, Meganista, Fano, Servi, &c. The population is not quite 250,000, including an English garrison of 3,000, and about 9,500 strangers. Besides the military force necessary to keep the Islands quiet, England has a frigate and war-steamer stationed at Corfu, and two steamers, under the Ionian flag, employed in communicating among the Islands. The Lord High Commissioner, paid £5,000 by England, exercises the full authority of a Viceroy or Governor, and annually convokes and prorogues the Legislative Assembly, and sanctions or disallows their bills. The Legislative power is vested in the Assembly, consisting of forty members, elected for five years, and the Executive in the Senate, consisting of five members, and of a President, who is appointed by the British Sovereign.

These Islands, wrested by Venitian conquest from the Ottoman Porte, were seized by France in June, 1797, and ceded to France by the Treaty of CAMPO FORMIO, 17th October, 1797, by which France and Austria divided the possessions of the Republic of Venice. During the disasters which followed the departure of General BONAPARTE for Egypt, a Turco-Russian fleet took possession of the Ionian Islands in March, 1799. By a convention concluded between the Porte and Russia at Constantinople, March 1800, it was stipulated that the Seven Islands, and the coast depending on them, should be constituted into a Republic, to be tributary to the Ottoman Empire. The Treaty of Amiens, in 1802, confirmed the loss to France of the Ionian Islands, by declaring them independent, and placing them under the protection of Russia. The Treaty of Tilsit, 1807, restored the Seven Islands to France, which retained possession of the Islands until the year 1814. She then renounced all claim to them by the third article of the Treaty of Paris, the 30th of May, 1814. Finally, in consequence of the treaties concluded between the Allied Powers on the 4th of July, and 5th of September, 1815, the Ionian Islands were placed under the protectorate of Great Britain.

Almost from the first, the Ionians have been dissatisfied with British governance. They got a Constitution in 1817, which really was a very good one—as times go. It has since been greatly altered and improved. They were allowed, albeit nominally a Republic, to have titles of nobility, and even a special Order of Knighthood was instituted to tickle their vanity. From the time when revolted Greece became an independent sovereignty, the Seven Islands have desired to be attached to it. But Greece is under the influence of Russia; and Russia wants territory in the Mediterranean; and if Greece had the Seven Islands, Russia would speedily coax her or bully her out of one of them; and the rest of Europe, to prevent such a contingency, and preserve "the balance of power," has submitted to England's retaining the protectorate—*at her own proper cost.*

Various eminent British subjects have ruled the Viceroyalty in these Islands. The first, and perhaps the best, was old Sir THOMAS MAITLAND (who is often referred to in Captain MARYATT's novels), who was usually called "King Tom," and ruled his vice-subjects in a rough and ready manner, with a sort of brusque justice, which usually did what was right, but sometimes in a very wrong way. The late Sir CHARLES JAMES NAPIER, the hero of Scinde; Lord NUGENT, the author; and Sir HENRY G. WARD, now Governor of Ceylon, have been the most noted of King Tom's successors. Sir HENRY WARD, who ruled from 1849 to 1855, managed so badly that he almost drove the Ionians into Rebellion. He was succeeded by Sir JOHN YOUNG, who had been Irish Secretary, and was considered a man of sagacity and judgment. With the best intentions in the world, Sir JOHN contrived to make the Assembly and Senate quarrel with him, and indeed, only for being overawed by the British regiments, the strong likelihood was that the Ionian Islands would have annexed themselves to Greece, to which, undoubtedly, they geographically belong.

To try and adjust these difficulties, the British Government lately sent Mr. WILLIAM EWART GLADSTONE, a Puseyite politician, who is not a statesman, to visit the Ionian Republic. Various reasons may have caused the selection of such a man. Sir EDWARD BULWER LYTTON, Colonial Secretary, has sent a published despatch to the Lord High Commissioner, in which, slurring over the fact that, as a Cabinet Minister, Mr. GLADSTONE's career has been one of heavy speech-making and melancholy failure, he praises his appointment as Mediator in the Seven Islands, because his "renown as a Homeric scholar will justly recommend him to the sympathies of a Hellenic race." [Mr. GLADSTONE lately published three big volumes on HOMER, in which he tries to prove that the Christian Trinity was but a continuation of the old mythology of Greece.] Mr. DISRAELI and Lord DERBY would be glad enough to place a rival in a tight place, and Mr. GLADSTONE can never achieve a reputation in the Ionian Islands. However, his vanity properly tickled with the idea of acting as Ionian Pacificator, Mr. GLADSTONE swallowed the bait, and hastened on his journey to Greece. He duly reached his destination, and, as the last English journals tell us, "at a meeting of the Senate he delivered a speech, in which he stated that the object of his mission was not to inquire into the British Protectorate, but to examine in what way Great Britain may most honorably and amply discharge the obligations which, for purposes European and Ionian, rather than British, she has contracted." The President of the Senate gave a curt reply, promising to assist the Homeric book-maker in his views. But GLADSTONE who spoke, and the President who answered him, well knew that a trifling incident had arisen, which probably would make the mission wholly nugatory.

About eighteen months ago, when Lord PALMERSTON was in power, Sir JOHN YOUNG, Lord High Commissioner of the Republic of the Seven Islands, sent a despatch to England, in which he set forth, in good set phrase, his private conviction that the islands were determined to become part and parcel of the Kingdom of Greece; that he (Sir JOHN) thought it would be difficult, if not impossible, to retain them under the protectorate of England; that, to save part, England should let part slide away into King OTHO's possession; and that Cephalonia and Corfu, which are the principal islands of the groupe, should be retained as British colonies. What Mr. LABOUCHERE, Colonial Secretary in 1857, may have thought of this letter, is unknown. But, the very day after GLADSTONE had quitted England for Cephalonia, this identical and *very* YOUNG despatch was published in the London *Daily News*, a liberal journal of much ability and high character. How it got there, nobody knew, but the