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AT HOME AND ABROAD.

THE

A writer in the Contemporary Review for March gives particulars respecting the referendum in REFERENDUM. Switzerland-both of its history and its working. Of the twenty-five cantons, he says, ten have the

compulsory and eight the optional referendum. By the compulsory system, he explains, "the people are called together once or twice in the year to ratify the principal acts of the Legislature. Each citizen receives in advance the text of the measures to be submitted to him, together with a message explaining them and a voting paper on which he writes Aye or No to each of the proposed measures. On the day fixed for the ballot he goes and deposits his paper in toe ure. In some cantons the electoral assembly, meeting at a fix d hour in each commune, may re-discuss the measures proposed before proceeding to vote; but in general this discussion takes place through the press or in non-official public meetings." Of the optional referendum the writer speaks thus :-- "It consists in the right of a certain number of citizens to demand within a given time that such and such a measure shall be submitted to the people for adoption or rejection. If the term of delay is not utilised in the prescribed manner, the bill or resolution is held to be passed. If, on the other hand, the signatures to the demand attain the requisite number, the text of the controverted proposal is distributed to all the active citizens, who are summoned to vote on a given day. The optional referendum, being in its nature an act of opposition, generally provokes a pretty lively contest, first over the getting of the signatures, and still more over the votes themselves " The writer goes on to speak of the relative value of the two systems. "This question," he says, "is intimately associated with another question. What are the matters which have to be submitted to the referendum?" It was found, for example, by the experience of several cantons, that, owing to its repeated rejection by the people, the budget could not be included. "Toe confederation itself has been obliged to exclude from the referendum, not only the budget, but the ratification of international treaties, where a rejection might place the country in an impossible position. It has also been found necessary to restrict the class of resolutions which are dependent on the referendum to such as are of general import. Such are the encouragements held out to agriculture, to technical education and so forth. Those resolutions on the other hand, which refer to such matters as public works, the construction of buildings, the conservancy of rivers, and the like, are treated as purely administrative and not requiring the formality of popular sanction. Finally, it has been necessary to provide for the plea of urgency being admitted in certain cases." The drawbacks to the system, meantime are, that the optional reforendum "plays too much into the hands of the Opposition. In order to obtain signatures, the Opposition has to create a sort of adverse current, which is afterwards very difficult to control." Again-"tae fear of the referendum tends to make timed regislator , who sometimes lack the courage to vote for what they believe to be the best for the country, or having voted for it, to stand up for it before their fellow citizens; they prefer to let it go without a struggle. The referendum has also given birth to a camarilla of politicians who exploit the credulity or passions of the populace in order to oppose measures which are perfectly legitimate." The system, nevertheless, says the writer, has borne good fruits. The people, on the whole, have shown themselves wiser than meddling politicians, and the net result has been a great tranquilising of public life. The writer in summing up expresses an opinion that the system cannot easily be adopted elsewhere. "In constitutional countries it would be necessary, to begin with, to adopt the Swiss doctrine that a negative vote on the referendum does not entail the dissolution of the Chambers ; otherwise the result would be a state of perpetual agitation, worse than that it was sought to remedy. Logically, according to this doctrine, the Cabinet also ought not to be obliged to retire before an adverse vote of the Chambers; and hence would result again the periodicity of ministerial functions, which would put an english that

office-hunting which is the chief motive of many a Parliamentary man. It would mean a radical transformation of political life in those countries. . . . If in these countries the appeal to the nation on any question were to originate with the nation itself, as is the case in Switzerland, one cannot conceal from oneself that it would probably lead to the most unexpected consequences. It would, indeed, be possible to fix beforehand the subjects on which it should be obligatory to consult the people, which would deprive the reference of any hostile character. But, with the ideas current in those countries, would there not still be a tendency to regard a negative vote as an expression of want of confidence, before which the representatives of the people would be constrained to retire?" writer concludes by expressing his opinion that, in all probability. the referendum, as it exists in Switzerland, could not succeed in any other country, whose government was not, in all respects, the same.

ODDS AND

THE death of Sir Robert Peel is reported, which took place suddenly from hemorrhage of the brain. Of Sir Robert Peel, who was the eldest son of the famous Statesman of the name, and the inheritor

of his title, we had of late years heard very little. There was, nevertheless, a time when, as a young man believed to be a rising politician, a good deal of public attention was given to him. Our personal remembrance of the manner in which he was spoken and written about is that it was somewhat like that in which, of later years, the late Lord Bandolph Churchill was mentioned. A fair share of latitude seemed to be allowed him, and nobody appeared quite able to make up his mind as to whether he was to be respected and liked or treated in a different way. A memorable event in the political career of the deceased was a journey which he made through Ireland when-at the beginning of the "Sixties," if we recollect aright-be filled the position of Chief Secretary. The tour was then a new departure from the associations of the office-and at first something was expected to come of it. The distinguished tourist expressed himself pretty freely with regard to what came under his notice, and, in particular, we remember that he gave, in certain quarters, dire offence by describing the town of Galway as a "hung y place-which, in fact, it still was, although it had in some degree thrown off the phase of Dantesque horror, so finely and exactly described by Sir Charles Gavan Duffy in his recollections of Carlyle. Sir Robert Peel, however, came and went, and it remained a matter of indifference whether people in Connaught were hungry or full, until Mr Balfour, driven by desperation in an attempt to check the national movement, made a similar trip, with, for the time being, more helpful results. For that, nevertheless, considering his motives, he was little to be thanked. Of the later events of the life of the deceased baronet we had heard little or nothing. It is plain, however, that he had not fulfilled any promise he had given as a

The small majority, that of 14 only, by which the second reading of the Bill for the repeal of the Irish Crimes Act was read a second time in the House of Commons has given Lord Rosebery cause to reprove the Members of the Liberal party for their apathy. A large number of the Labera's, it appears, abstained from voting. If, nevertheless, abstract justice were allowed by these gentlemen to have any claim on them, it would be difficult to account for their indifference. Ireland's record of the past year or two is almost crimeless, and, under the circumstances, to suffer her to labour under the burden and stigma of such an Act is outrageous. It is to be feared, in fact, that Mr J. E. Redmond is not altogether without foundation for his assertions. There seems, at least some reason to suspect that Liberal apathy may not be much less harmful in its results than Tory oppression. Lord Rosebery declared that the Government would continue to hold office until defeated. The obsticacy of the House of Lords, he added, was not the fault of the Government, but that of the Liberal Party, which must bestir itself.

The debate on the Bill was made an occasion by O'Donovan Rossa, who was in the strangers' gallery at the time, to distinguish himself in a characteristic way. Referring to certain remarks that had been made concerning him by one or other of the speakers, he cried out, "An assassiu's blow is being given me in this house, and