NOTES ON THE POLITICAL CRISIS.

The past fortnight has been fertile in surprises. By something as sudden as the stroke of Harlequin’s wand, the Gladhurst Ministry found itself resigning as the consequence of a defeat which was the result of “accidents,” say the Liberal leaders, with so much solemnity that it would be ungril to doubt them. Yet when one considers that they were pledged to bring in a Coercion bill, which the Radical wing were pledged to oppose (though, indeed, they would probably certainly have broken that pledge), one begins to help thinking that if it was not an accident caused for it was an accident that resulted from a sudden flash of inspiration on the part of the leaders, who saw on the night of the debate what could be made of the turn which things were taking. By such inspirations do great generals win battles, and usually they are not so modest as to call them accidents afterwards.

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The trap, though thus laid in the sight of the bird, was entered with apparent willingness. But then comes another surprise. The Tory leaders, who surely might have taken it for granted that they would have to be at least as kind to their enemies as to their friends, seemed to think it worth trying whether they could not have a Session without any enemies at all; or, perhaps, as their heads cleared from the intoxication of their triumph, they began to see that they might, in turn, put their opponents in a more or less awkward position, which would tend to discredit them before the new electorate. Hence has resulted a curious game of some interest to those who are fond of watching the domestic game of “Patience,” of no interest otherwise, except so far as it may discredit both parties before all sensible people.

But where are the “sensible people”? Scattered thinly, I fear, among the general population. Yet, if they would only unite, they would move the world.

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Meanwhile Mr. Gladstone, having threatened more than once to retire altogether, has had his hand forced by the offer of the gilded shelf of an earldom, and has declined it to the great jubilation of the semi-radical Liberals, who, probably with reason, see in his refusal a token of his sticking to his post of leader, even when this “crisis” is over.

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Sir Stafford Northcote, on the other hand, has been shoved on to the shelf willy-nilly—an incident of little significance even in the insignificant game of politics.

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Except that it betokens that, whatever other results the “Political Crisis” may have, it will at any rate have put Lord Randolph Churchill in the place he has been playing for the virtual leadership of the Tory party. Time will show what he will do there. It may turn out that his cleverness is only that of the ordinary Parliamentary trickster, and that he will simply kick down the ladder by which he has mounted, according to the rule in such cases; or he may show the higher qualities of the gamer, and be original enough to stick to his text of Tory Democracy, in which case he may lead his party into some queer places, out of which it is possible that the worker may win some advantage.

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Nervousness about the consequences of action on the results of the General Election seems to have weighed much on the possible office-holders. For instance, a small instance: Sir M. Hicks Beach, tackling by temperance societies as to his utterance in the Budget debate championing the licensed victualers by favouring a tax on tea and sugar rather than spirits and beer, is driven to a reply which recalls Mrs. Wilber to us; for he says, in fact, that when he advocated the said taxes, he did so with the reservation that he didn’t mean it in any sense whatever.

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Again, as to the coercion for Ireland. At first it was asserted (or assumed) that Lord Salisbury would only take office on the understanding that the Liberal leaders would pledge themselves and the party to help in passing the said “reign of order” in Ireland. But again, the Standard indignantly proclaims that there is no foundation for this assertion. Indeed, the Tory Ministry would be in a tight place here; for surely their passing a Coercion Bill would mean their giving up all hope at the general election.

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The imaginative man is almost driven to suppose that this surrender and acceptance of office is a sham battle on a hotbed—a tacit plot of Whig, Tory, Liberal, Radical, in view of the general election, to let coercion slide with a certain amount of dignity. If so, it is a curious illustration of the proverb—When rogues fall out honest men prosper.

Mr. Chamberlain seems inclined to pronounce in favour of Home Rule, and condemns the Castle Government unsparingly, whatever his opinion once was. After all, we are getting on, along some lines at least. Or will there be a fresh reaction after the general election, when it turns out that the new Parliament is composed of much the same elements as the old?

The Times calls on Lord Salisbury to make alliance with the moderate Whigs rather than with the Tory democrats. A writer in the Pall Mall follows suit, and has a vision of a “patriotic” party of the future. It is clearly quite impossible for Lord Salisbury to follow this advice at present; but perhaps such a coalition will one day take place, and will produce a party not only reactionary, but of such portentous priggishness and stupidity, that it will be of great service to the cause of the people.

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And now at last the crisis is over, and Lord Randolph Churchill and his cloak, Lord Salisbury, are “masters” of the parliamentary bubble. Nor need anybody sleep the worse for it to-night, not even the editor of the Pall Mall, although he threatens dreadful things, the Russian ambassador, for instance, leaving London unless he gets an explanation of the language used by Lord Salisbury and Lord Randolph. Well, well, he will have the explanations, I suppose, and will stay.

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And Mr. Chamberlain and Sir Charles Dilke, longer sighted than some, are going to Ireland to get used to the atmosphere of Nationalism—or to try and outbluff Mr. Parnell. Who would have thought it four years ago? Not I, who heard a Rail meeting yelling with joy at the announcement of the
arrest of Mr. Parnell by the Government of which the two allies
were members. So the world moves.

If in the foregoing notes the subject of this crisis seems to be
treated with levity, I can only say that it is almost impossible to
speak seriously about such contemptible trifling, which is unpardoned by anything in the world. The changes in the
worst period of the Byzantine Empire. If only people could
see how contemptible it is, and so duly estimate the worth of
Parliament.

One thing, of course, it points to—the break-up and con-
fusion of all the old parties. There is hope in that, at any rate.
Fatole as the new Parliamentary parties will certainly be, they
will not be so long-lived as the old, consolidated as these have
been by tradition and long habits of attack and defence. Destinies
like cisterns jump will be for a long time the characteristics of the new
parties, under which, contemned by all "respectabilities," the revolution will
form, and at last, when it gets strong enough, will drive all parties
which are not of it to consolidate into one party of open
conscious reaction. We may all live to see the day which will
bring that about!

William Morris.

THE FACTORY INFERNO.

Mr. RODHLAVE, chief inspector of factories, has recently issued
his report for 1884. The student of its predecessors will be
pained, but not surprised, to find that this latest report is
misleadingly liberal. There is no secret in the same indifference
towards suffering and to human life; the same kinds of diseases
affecting the workers but never the masters; the same crowd
of preventable accidents; the same prosecutions of employers
for breach of the acts, with acquittals or wholly inadequate
quarters; a quick victory against masters and magis-
trates.

The sanitation question in all its aspects is vexing the minds
of the inspectors almost as much as is the earlier years of the
workmen's struggle against the poverty of machinery. The difficulties of so much of the question
as refers to ventilation are made greater by the susceptibility
partly real, partly imaginary, of the workers to cold draughts of
air, I say "partly imaginary," because the English working
classes are almost as antagonistic to fresh air as a German in
a railway carriage. They do not understand its value, and they
over-estimate its likelihood of doing harm. If the grinding toil
in which they exist left them time to study a little elementary
physiology, they would know that a thousand times more injury
is to result from a close room than from one with a little
draft in it. Whilst, however, the prejudice against
sweatiest trace of draught is true, I think, absurd, but it
should not be forgotten that the present struggle by fear as a whole
and of themselves, has been understood, and there is
an over-susceptibility to chest affections.

The inspectors who visited the London millinery and dress-
making shops, report that in comparatively few places are
any special means taken to secure adequate ventilation. Some
of the details given in regard to the East-end sweaters' estab-
ishments are painfully interesting. Visits were made to 1478
shops. 724 were not under inspection at all, and 367 were
not within the control of the inspectors as far as sanitation
were concerned. In 907 of these, alterations were required.
In 132 of the 367 wholly under supervision, alterations were
required. Here are one or two cases.

"No trap to sink. Drinking water from cistern not covered over.
Fifty haphazard: no proper dust-bin. Water supply to W.C. (from
cistern) not covered over. Three families in this house.

"Very dirty place. Place strewn with filthy rags and bones. No
drain. W.C. the receptacle for refuse.

"Overcrowded. Drinking water and W.C. supply connected. Tap
for drawing drinking water is in the W.C.

"W.C. almost inside workroom. No water supply, except in base-
ment not accessible to tenants. No dust-bin. Condition of drinking
water at times unsanitary. All houses on this side of street supplied from
one cistern as No. 18."

The modern system of production drags in its train diseases
that affect the workers only, and not the exploiters. Only three
are mentioned in this report: those of the wool-sorters, the
millers, the file-cutters. In Bradford the wool-sorters' disease
is not very serious. The cases of meningitis are due to careless
work, or to conditions of work that make the workshops that read like the directions one sees posted in
a hospital for some virulent disease. But carrying out these regulations is only, every regulator knows that it
means nothing.

Upon the subject of millers' asthma the report runs thus:

"It is quite exceptional to find a person who has worked any time in a flour mill who is more or less affected as to the respiratory
organs. The average life of millers is stated to be only forty-five years."

Flour-mills are not under the Acts. Here is one out of many
pitious cries to the inspectors:

"Sir,—If it comes within your duties under the Factories Act to pro-
tect men obliged for over forty hours to twenty-one hours per day, I
shall ask you to look up some of the flour-mills in this town. Health
is sacrificed for the sake of holding bad situations.—Yours,
Hopeing for help.

January 28, 1884."

The file-cutters suffer from lead-poisoning. One symptom of this affection is the dropping of the wrists and the weakening
of the thumbs. An increase in the number of cases pre-
senting these particular phases of lead-poisoning has been
observed of late. This increase is due to the increased straining
and jar on the muscles caused by the greater hardness of the
steel used in making files.

"A hammer 7lbs. weight is required to do the work at the present
time which twenty-five years ago could be done with one 0lbs. weight."

This is another instance of the way in which advances in manu-
facturing industries tend, and not for, the workers.

In 1884 there were 403 fatal accidents that came under the
notice of the inspectors; 1,357 cases of amputation of a limb; 893
fractured limbs; 901 injuries; 433 fractures of the face; in all, 8,954. If to these
reported and recorded cases are added in imagination the large
number of accidents that never come under the notice of
the officials, it will be seen that England does pretty ill in the
way of making its workers.

The larger number of these are preventable, and would be
prevented if the employers were not blinded with their wild
race for wealth. The two chief causes of them are the non-
regulation of machines; and the cleaning of machines in motion.
The former is clearly the fault of the masters only. The latter
is due to the habitual payment of piece-wages. This habit
begot in the workmen, women, and children a feverish anxiety
not to lose a moment even if the attendant risk was black. With regard to the fencing difficulty I quote one case only:

"With your consent, I lately prosecuted an important company for
having neglected to fence certain mill-gearing. A poor girl had been
told to remove dust in brick-works as a spot (as the manager stated)
8 feet from an unshod fence and cobbled wheels. She was not on that
day cautioned not to approach the shaft where most of the dust was to be
found. Her clothing was caught by the shaft; she was gradually
dragged into the wheels. Both legs were cut off and one arm broken.
She died the same day."

"At the hearing of my case, an engine-driver (who stated that he
had been in charge) in the company's court was asked if he had not thought a guard necessary, and, although a girl had been killed, he
was still of the same opinion.

The chairman of the company prosecuted would, I am convinced,
have acted generously to the relations of deceased had he not conscien-
tiously believed that his managers had taken all reasonable precautions,
and that a dangerous precedent would have been established by admis-
sions.

On the cleaning of machinery in motion Inspector Coles writes:

"I am sorry to see that the number of accidents, especially in tex-
tile factories, has increased very much of late. The truth is, that
nearly one half of all the accidents which take place in these works
are caused by persons cleaning the machinery when it is in motion. In some
mills, however, I am afraid scarcely sufficient time is allowed for cleaning
the machinery when stopped, though in many cases the fault lies with the
employer himself, who, being a piece-work, are reluctant to lose any time by stopping the machinery."

Quarries, in which very frequent and very terrible accidents
occur, are not under the Acts. As to the ship-building yards the
only accidents that need be reported in any are the fatal ones,
and wherever only men are employed they are not used not even accidental need be reported and the ins-
pectors have actually no jurisdiction at all.

I cannot refrain from quoting, ere I leave the subject of
accidents, one case that is tragically interesting in view of the
laziness of which this book is so teeming:

"I had twice told him verbally that he must fence an upright
shaft, running through the first-floor room from door to ceiling. Finally
I sent him an order to fence at once. He always assured me that there
was no danger and he apprehended from what occasion it had been.
He neglected to comply with the order sent, and shortly afterwards was himself killed through the shaft holding a
hold on his overcoat as he was standing near it."

From the list of prosecutions of employers for infringing the Acts, one or two old, old truths came out again. The cases of