THE POLITICAL CRISIS.

It is difficult to write about the “Political Crisis” seriously, except so far as the contempt may be serious. The bungling with flutter for their patriotism of those members of the Government who are wanted to take themselves off; the flutter among the lesser men lest they too should be pulled off their perch and be boiled down for grist by the new coalition pie; the terror of some Conservatives, like the Standord, lest Mr. Chamberlain should climb half way down the tree; Mr. Goschen’s anxiety that his position should be misunderstood, whereas all the while it is as plain as the nose on Mr. Goschen’s face that he is in a hurry, is a certainty, and all this is sufficiently grotesque, and once more illustrates happily enough the dignity and honesty of Parliamentary Government, but otherwise does not concern us in the least.

All this on the Tory side; the Liberal position is perhaps a little more noteworthy, but also considerably more discreditable. The confusion in the Tory camp has given them hopes of success once more, and it is quite clear that most of those may be called the responsible men of the party do in consequence look upon “compromise” in quite a different light than that in which it showed a few weeks ago. There are rumours afloat that Mr. Gladstone is to be heard, and it is thought his views on the Home Rule Bill, as he is already, so that it would amount to nothing but a perpetual English-Irish squabble in the Westminster Parliament. This rumour the Daily News denies with all official solemnity; but as it admits the almost plenary power of the “Conference” to be held presently, which will have only one sincere Home Ruler (Mr. Morley) in it, this denial is not of much significance. Mr. Labouchere put the matter in a ridiculous fashion in his address to the working men of Kettering, when he practically pointed out that no conference between those who were for Home Rule and those who were against it could mean anything but surrender on one side or the other.

Clearly whatever comes of it the Gladstonians are anxious to surrender, if only they can put a good face on it and hoodwink the rank and file of their party to the extreme baseness of the proceeding; otherwise they would have insisted on genuine Home Rule being made the basis of the Conference. It can scarcely be doubted that the Responsible Liberals will, if they dare, heave the Irish Jonah overboard; the only thing which will prevent them from doing so will be their fear of the consequences of their being accused of his murder when they reach the shore. Even if they do not they will have weakened themselves by their shilly-shally ways; if they do, no man with even the remains of wits in his head will take the trouble to distinguish them from their Tory competitors for leaves and fishes.

The moral to be drawn from these corrupt and degrading dodges and shirking is simple. Let the genuine Radicals turn from the collection of incompetent tricksters, and the battered and disgraced idols whom they hold up to our worship, and concern themselves with the serious questions of the day. Shall England make alliance with reactionary powers to crush out Revolution? Must we accept the idea of some patriotic war on hand in order to a fresh chauvinist-market for the harm of barbarous countries and our own unhappy population? Must we always have a mass of unemployed workmen hanging about, till to many of them, by the force of habit, work becomes impossible, and they are turned into mere lodos, a constant disgrace and a periodical terror to Society? Are we to be for ever satisfied with bestowing “mere subsistence livelihood” (i.e., semi-starvation) on the upper class of our population at the expense of the artful class for ever to be condemned to live poorly, without leisure or pleasure, in constant anxiety of falling into the gulf below them? Is the lower middle-class for ever to be stupid, vacant, and vulgar, and the upper middle-class to oscillate between blank Philisim and simpering preciousness? In fine, why are these “classes,” and what end do they serve? Let them face these questions unconventionally, and really come into their own, and only then can the idea of finality in politics and social matters, and the old parties will soon be united in desert opposition to the one Party of Progress, the Socialist Party.

WILLIAM MORRIS.

A DREAM OF JOHN BALL

(Continued from p. 18.)

He said: “Many strange things hast thou told me that I could not understand; yea, some my wit so failed me, that I could not so much as ask thee questions concerning them; but of some matters I will ask thee, and I must hasten, for in very sooth the night is worn old and grey. When thou sayest that in the days to come, when there shall be no labouring men who are not thralls after their new fashion, that their lords shall be many and very many, it seemeth to me that but a few are there; and that they are more by the strength of thy word, and number of them, than they must verily feed and clothe and house their thralls, so that the power which they take from them, since it will have to deal out amongst many, will not be enough to make many rich; since out of one man may arise but one man’s work; and such him never so sorely, still as aforesaid ye may not pinch him so sorely as to feed him. Therefore, though the eyes of my mind may see a few lords and a few thralls, I see mirth: that they not serve one another, and if the slaves be many and the lords few, then some day shall the thralls make an end of that mastery by the force of their bodies. How then shall thy masterclass of the latter days endure?”

“John Ball,” said I, “masterclass hath many shifts whereby it striveth to keep itself alive in the world. And now hear a marvel: whereas thou sayest these two times that out of one man ye may get but one man’s work, in days to come one man shall do the work of a hundred men—yea, of a thousand or more: and this is the shift of masterclass that shall make many masters and many rich men.”

John Ball laughed. “Great is my harvest of riddles to-night,” said he; “for every man I ask the same question, and while he is a working, ye shall but make two men or three at the most out of him.”

Said I: “Sawest thou ever a weaver at his loom?”

“Yea,” said he, “I saw a man, he was a little and thin; and then said: ‘Yet I marvelled not at it; but now I marvel, because I know what thou wouldest say. Time was when the shuttle was thrust in and out of all the thousand threads of the warp, and it was long to do; but now the spriding of the loom is but a stroke, and this and that of the warp cometh forward and the shuttle goeth in one shot through all the thousand warp-threads. Yea, so is it that this multiplieth a man many times. But thine art is so already; and hath been me measur, for many hundred years.”

“Yeas,” said I, “but what hitherto needed the masters to multiply him more? For many hundred years the workman was a thrall bought and sold at the will of his master; and other times, they have been a vile, that is, a working-beast and a part of the stock of the manor on which he liveth; but thou and the like of thee shall free him, and then is manhood put upon him for what he is, not what he is when he doeth no other work than with law as his chattel, nor any longer by law owneth him as stock of his land, if the master hath not that which he on whom he liveth may not lack and live wthall, and cannot have without selling him!”

January 15, 1887.