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WEEKLY; ONE PENNY.

NOTES ON PASSING EVENTS.

PRINCE BISMARCK has made his speech, set all Europe guessing as to what it might mean, had his Army Bill thrown out, and dissolved the Reichstadt, and now he is to have another by March; energetic work enough, but what does it all mean? First, one may suppose that he knows he is not going to live much longer, as he said, and that he wants to leave the German army still the tremendous engine for the purpose of reaction which it has been for so long; which it cannot be unless it is systematically increased and perfected. As to his speeches, so plain-spoken and yet so capable of reading between the lines, doubtless a great deal of the threatening and ominously warning tone of them was due to the fact that he wanted to scare, not the present Reichstadt (for doubtless he expected the hostile majority), but the electors of the new House to assemble in March. Therefore, no doubt he was bound to make the most of the possibilities of a French war, of the prowess of the French army, and the terrible results of a French victory; and that all the more as he was also bound to parade the good understanding between Germany and Russia, so as at one blow to destroy the hopes of Austria for German help against the advance of Russia in her direction; and also to point out to the French that when the day for the advance of the German army came no attack on their rear from the Russians need be expected. Since it had to be made clear that no danger was to be apprehended from that quarter, the danger in the other quarter had to be made the most of.

Nevertheless, all deductions made, the speeches of Prince Bismark were ominous enough; let everything be ready they seemed to mean for the demand on the French of disarming under pain of invasion; and who shall say how long it will be before that demand will be made? Nor need any one think that Prince Bismark's defeat the other day means relief from imminent war; the army is to be duly augmented, vote or no vote; and the necessities of electioneering will force the Chancellor to appeal to the Jingo spirit in the forthcoming contest, so that we may expect an increase and not a decrease in the fever of German "patriotism"; as it is pretty certain that Prince Bismark will sweep the table clear in the coming elections and have a big majority at his back.

And what then? Will not this be the position? The German bourgeoisie will practically say, Germany as she is is too poor to bear this big army ever crying out for fresh steps towards perfection; in order to avoid its eating its head off, it must undertake some expedition, the result of which will be expansion for German commerce on the grand scale.

"Thou hast a fine sword, my son," says the father in an eastern tale, "but where is the head for the shearing?" "Doubt not, father," says the son, "but that I shall soon find a head for the shearing." No doubt the primary use of the German army is the upholding of "law and order" in its own land, but to find "a head for the shearing" is necessary for it as for all other such weapons in the hands of reactionary Governments.

The "great Liberal meeting" of January 12 was of course a regular caucus meeting. No doubt from that point of view it was a success, the present staggering of the Tory party being an encouraging sight for Liberals, as they are beginning to feel sanguine (rightly or wrongly) of having one more innings as a party—perhaps as a "united" party. All, however, was not unity at the meeting; a section of the Radicals perceiving that the fate of their party would be to be smothered under the incumbent weight of conventional Liberalism, moved an amendment, put forward by a prominent Chelsea Radical and Mr. Foote on behalf of the Metropolitan Radical Federation, which had the fate of Cassandra's warnings, as might have been foreseen. Mr. Bradlaugh, in a speech which gave the *Daily News* ecstasies of delight, took the side of respectability, and practically begged the Radicals to allow themselves to be smothered, lest the party organisation should be weakened before the Tories. So the London Liberals and Radicals are declared "united"—until next time.

There were some demonstrations in the hall, however, with which the more respectable part of the meeting could only have been half pleased. But it is a pity that those genuine Radicals who were there couldn't see that it will not advance things much to merely hiss

"God save the Queen" and cry out for the "Marseillaise." Strange that they don't understand that the changes which such demonstrations hint at will not be allowed to be furthered in the party of such respectable persons as Mr. Bradlaugh and Mr. Shaw-Lefevre! The Liberal Party is willing to use the Radicals to attack the Tories on the one hand and snub the Socialists on the other; but mighty little of their own way will they have, till at last they will look round and find the Liberal Party gone and themselves a weak army indeed before the united forces of Reaction, and weak not only from want of numbers or cohesion, but from what is worse, lack of definite principles.

The best advice one can give to Radicals at present is to stick tight to genuine Home Rule and the attack on landlordism in Ireland, and to see where that will lead them—it will not be into the arms of the "Respectable Party." Unless they make up their minds to give up all their aspirations towards freedom, and all attempt to look seriously into social questions, the Respectable Party will not want them long.

Meantime the Conference of Conciliation has met and—parted—till after Parliament meets, or the Greek Kalends, as the case may be. The idea still seems to hold that Jonah is to walk the plank with all decency, in the interest at once of the Unity of the British Empire and the Unity of the Liberal Party. Truly our recognised political parties are running an eager race towards the goal of Unlimited Shabbiness, and 'tis hard to say which will get there first.

Our comrade Mahon tried to get a hearing at the Mansion House meeting about the Colonial Institute, but of course was not allowed to speak to foregone conclusions. In fact the promoters of this scheme are quite right to do their best to prevent all discussion on the subject, as even the sheep-like general public are beginning to see that it is nothing but a barefaced job, bolstered up by servility and flunkeyism of the basest kind. However, since the money to float it will only be a part of the general robbery of labour, it would be scarcely worth while noticing it if it were not for the astounding impudence of it, and its connection with the humbug of Imperial Federation which is being so busily pushed forward by one of our Philistines. A scheme which, with much parade and volumes of clap-trap speeches from those who are paid to lie to the people in various ways, proposes to collect money and do with it something (not specified) for the honour and glory of the empire, is worth noting as a triumph of jobbery, even in these days.

W. MORRIS.

POET AND POLITICIAN.

Two men have spoken out their thought upon the affairs of to-day, two men much alike in many things, and both of them figures that fill a large space in the record of our time. Both old; both having negated in the chill of age the sentimental starting-points of their youth, diverse as they were; both steeped in bourgeois tradition and fulfilled of the spirit of the present system; Alfred "Lord" Tennyson has from the "wisdom" of his age answered the exuberance of his early manhood, and William Ewart Gladstone has criticised the performance, and given his version of the true verdict.

Wellnigh inexorably does fate avenge the proneness of youth to accept a belief from mere sentimental adhesion and without due thought. Thus, in either of these men, the poet and the politician, is a curious contrast between their earlier and their later selves. The one, democratic in sentiment—fiercely so—the writer of stirring democratic verse, who saw the labouring folk as "Men, my brothers, men the workers, ever reaping something new, That which they have done but earnest of the things that they shall do," this one now, in place of wearing only what Gladstone calls the "livery of the muse," is become the venal songster of a court and a member of the class of professional hereditary obstructors. The other who began as a Conservative from an emotional clinging to long-established usage, has attained the utmost limit of his possible development, and tentatively dabbles in the side-work of the revolutionary advance, timidly though it be and with much backward shrinking.

In their development, and in their thought-position now, are both of these men wholly formed and governed by the present system. Fervent revolt while young and ardent against conventional formality and unfairness; gradual regression before the opposing forces of established wrong; and at last a bitter outcry from so much of him as remains