

SPIRIT OF THE PRESS.

EDITORIAL OPINIONS OF THE LEADING JOURNALS UPON CURRENT TOPICS—COMPILED EVERY DAY FOR THE EVENING TELEGRAPH.

Thinking Things Out.

It would probably be found, if it were possible to make an examination of the matter, that most of the delusion which seems to be spreading in the West about the currency is due to the too prevalent practice of "thinking things out;" that is, of not mentally pushing political doctrines to their extreme conclusion, or of not trying to conjure up before the mind's eye the whole of their results if put into practice. It is almost painful, when one hears the Western "cry" about the currency, and reads the utterances of such financiers at the East as General Butler and Mr. Thaddeus Stevens, to recall the loose thinking and talking in support of the Government credit which prevailed during the war, and which was due to the same unfortunate habit of mind as the loose thinking and talking in opposition to the Government credit which one hears now. For instance, during the years 1863 and 1864 there prevailed, only too generally, an indifference to the amount of the public debt fully as marked and as alarming as the restiveness under it which we now witness. All expressions of anxiety about the rapidity with which it was increasing were treated as indications either of a constitutional tendency to crank or of sympathy with the public enemy, and of a desire to put a stop to the war. The unlimited capacity of the American people to bear taxation was then as loudly preached as the excessive burdensomeness of taxation now is, and we are afraid, by many of the very orators and journalists who are now busy in contriving dishonest means of relieving the people of their honest liabilities. We do not place General Butler and Mr. Stevens amongst the number; but we greatly fear that if any inventor, foreign or domestic, had approached either of them for advice in either of the years we have mentioned, when the Government loans were dropping under the influence of Rebel successes or Rebel persistence, he would have received a very glowing account of the mineral resources of the United States, and been shown that the product of the Nevada and Colorado mines alone would in four or five years pay off the national debt, to say nothing of the wealth of the rest of the country. In fact, during the mining fever of those years the gold and silver mines were constantly dwelt upon in speeches and articles as ready means of meeting the burdens of the war if taxation should be found unpalatable or inconvenient, and this was done, too, by men making great pretensions to be statesmen and financiers. A little thinking of the matter out would, however, have made it clear that to talk of the Government paying off its debts with the product of the gold and silver mines was as absurd as to talk of its paying off its debts with the product of the coal mines or with the hay crop. The Government can only get money from mines either by working them itself—in which case it must work them on the same terms as private individuals, and can make no more out of them, if so much—or else by taxing those who do work them; and if it taxed them so heavily as to reduce the rate of profit below that of other business, of course capital would desert them and mining would cease. In fact, the obfuscating effect of mere names on the popular mind was never better exemplified than in the easy, satisfied way with which this comfortable doctrine was received. The difficulty which the miners themselves have since had, and we believe will always have, in making even a living for themselves out of the proceeds of their labor, has completely demonstrated that nothing short of actual taxation would probably have been sufficient to do it, so general in the tendency to believe what is pleasant to believe.

Another delusion also used in support of the national credit during the war was the theory, which was fully as often propounded, if not oftener, than the foregoing one, "that the whole property of the country, real and personal, was pledged for the payment of the debt." Nor was this confined to stump speeches or brokers' advertisements. We remember to have seen it solemnly and formally laid down in a pamphlet on finance, written by the President of one of the New York banks, and which was given in confidence and consolation to millions of people in dark days. Here again, however, a little thinking out would have cleared away the fog, and shown that there was not the smallest basis in reason for this really astounding assertion, and that anybody who lent his money on the strength of it was really induced to lend his money on false pretenses. In the discussions which have recently taken place on the nature of the representations made to the public creditor, attention has only been given to the speeches of Congressional committees, and to the letters of the Secretary of the Treasury and the advertisements of bond brokers. But the heated and enthusiastic utterances of loyal men in their speeches and writings have probably been as much, if not more, influential in leading the public creditors to believe what is pleasant to believe, as the formal official promises and explanations of the Government agents.

The idea that the whole property of a nation can be pledged for the payment of its public debt is, in fact, a revival of the fallacy on which the French based the issue of their "assignats" in 1790, and which was in substance that the holder of the assignat having simply a general claim against the enormous mass of church property confiscated by the State, he must be sure of being paid. But it was soon made perfectly clear that nothing can be called a pledge for the payment of money which the creditor does not either hold in his own possession or can lay hands upon when he pleases. Now, the real and personal property of the people of the United States is not a thing which the public creditors could seize, or, if they could seize it, is not a thing they could turn into money and divide. Moreover, if such a seizure were physically possible, it would be logically absurd to expect it. If the Government debt were not paid, it would be owing to the unwillingness of the people to pay their taxes—what is, a small portion of the theory of the theory if the people deliberately refused to pay over a small portion of their income, the public creditors could not have a remedy in taking from them all they possessed in the world; in other words, that the nation, although unwilling to save its honor, by paying a little, for that purpose, of course its entire property of this account of the mere state-credit is sufficient to explain the absurdity. It is now never heard of, and is back to it simply for the purpose of showing that the wild way in which the public credit is now assailed has nothing new about it, that

it was in use on the other side during the war, and that it does not owe its origin so much to defects of heart as of head.

The Western theory about greenbacks is, that as when the currency was being expanded prices were rising, business was brisk, and everybody was thriving, and as when the process of contraction began prices began to fall and trade languish, plenty of greenbacks must be all that is needed to put business in a healthy condition, and make taxation seem light. Here again the delusion is due to stopping short and not following out the doctrine to its last limit in its practical working. Western men are such great producers that they are apt to forget in toto that they are also consumers. Moreover, they generally sell their products in large quantities, and what they gain by a rise in prices being received in a round sum, makes a deep impression on their imagination. The way in which a rise in prices caused by an inflation of the currency affects their outlay they do not so readily perceive, however, as their outlay is made in small sums, and is extended over the whole year, while their income is received in one or two months. A small addition to the price of the articles in daily use in a household is not noticed as the articles are bought, but the amount at the end of the year would be a considerable sum. Moreover, the ease with which taxes are paid does not depend on the amount of a man's receipts; but on that of his expenditure, or, in other words, on the sum he has to spare after providing for his own wants, and this depends on prices in general and not on the prices of the particular commodity which he produces. There is little use of pouring a splendid stream of water into a barrel if there is a hole in the bottom which lets out just as much as flows in, and yet this is what the Western inflationists obstinately refuse to believe. As long as they do not see the hole in the bottom they refuse to believe in its existence, and propose to go on pumping cheerfully, with the expectation of speedily filling the barrel. If any one can get five or six Western Congressmen of the inflationist school into a room, and force them even by threats of personal violence to working out a full account of all the effects on prices of a large addition to the currency, he will do the country some service, as it is a process through which, we venture to say, few if any of them have ever gone.

The Progress of Tolerance.

In lately looking over some out-of-the-way annals of the American Revolution, we were struck with the greater degree of partisan bitterness and animosity which prevailed then than prevails now, between opposing leaders and parties. True, there is enough now; but there was far more then. We are becoming, with each successive generation, a more tolerant people, both in politics and religion.

Not long ago, we had occasion to remark that the Independent had not for several years had a controversy with any other journal. This statement, we are proud to say, is true of the whole period of this journal's existing editorial administration. Controversies between editors (with rare exceptions) are unprofitable pastimes for readers. There was a period—happily now past—when the religious press of the country abounded with gladiatorial wranglings in the arena of theological debate. But, although the indomitable Mr. Graves, of the Tennessee Baptist, still keeps up the old-fashioned tournaments, we do not call to mind any other religious journal that now joins him in the Quixotic example. Nor do controversies between secular journals rage so briskly now as in former years. Still (it must be confessed) many daily duels are fought with editorial quills. It is not our business to say how other people should conduct their journals; but, since we are professionally compelled to read all the leading presses of America, we cannot forbear suggesting that there is no one point in which the secular newspapers of our great cities could be more strikingly improved than by a cessation of their daily habit of chopping each other into mince-meat. The best service which an editor can render to his editorial opinions is, generally, to state them in strong, impressive, and eloquent words, without stopping to controvert his opponent's counter-views—and, above all things, without descending into any disparagement of his opponent's honesty and candor. Nevertheless, a prevalent mode of setting forth editorial opinions is to quote some other journal's opposite opinions, and answer them. But the Tribune is always more impressive when it argues for the negro's enfranchisement without making allusions to Democratic organs, than when, for the sake of pointing the same moral, it makes too frequent and too wretched quotations from the Express. The New Testament never stops to reply to Jew or Greek. Argument, at the best, is a second-rate kind of reasoning; and controversy between newspapers is, generally, a second-rate kind of argument. An intellectual man has reached an enviable point in intellectual discipline when he can see his most cherished convictions flatly contradicted, and yet make no reply. And, in nine cases out of ten, if such a man conducts a public journal, his best reply is to make no reply at all; but simply to restate his own views more clearly than ever, and omit all reference to any journal by which he has been contradicted, misrepresented, or slandered.

Stop my paper, if you wish to be the cry of almost every subscriber who found his convictions crossed by his favorite sheet. But no (to judge from our own experience) very few subscribers part company with an editor because he frankly speaks his mind. No editor in this country offends runs directly counter to the views of his readers than Horace Greeley; and yet the great mass of the readers of the Tribune never think of stopping their paper on account of any sudden philosophic aberration of its grand old editor. In the year 1850, when the Independent was edited by three able and eminent clergymen, who won for themselves great honor by manfully opposing the Fugitive Slave law, this journal, on account of its courageous fidelity to justice, lost many subscribers. But, since that intolerant period, we do not believe that ten copies a year—out of our own immense subscription list—have ever been discontinued on account of the editorial position of this journal on any question, financial, political, or religious. And this is saying a great deal; for the Independent holds and speaks very positive opinions, and differs always from its foes, and often from its friends.

The habit, too, of hissing public speakers is dying away. In fact, those orators who were born and brought up in the midst of mobbed anti-slavery meetings, and to whom every hiss was a golden spur to speech, find now, in the loss of opposition from the audience, a loss of opportunity to the speaker. Mr. Emerson used to say that eloquence was dog-chasing among the abolitionists. Still, with all the precious advantages of divinely-inspired mobs, let Heaven be praised that the days of mobs seem at last, like the winter of the turtle-dove, to be "over and gone!" The Congress of the United States has not gathered in past years, pre-eminently distinguished by courtesy of debate. The nation

has oftentimes been shocked with exhibitions of gross indecorum on the floors of what ought to be the most gentlemanly debating society in the world. During the last session, a great many ugly things were said, by members of the same political party, against their rivals. During the coming session, we hope that all these sharp words will be husbanded into one thunderbolt, which, at the proper time, shall fall upon Andrew Johnson, and smite him from the Presidential chair.

Religious persecution cannot be said to exist in this country. Yet we notice a disposition, in many quarters, to array Protestant and Catholic against each other in something of the style of the middle ages—except that the Protestants are to be the persecutors, and Catholics are to be the victims. We frequently receive urgent requests—and from some of the best of the people—to make our columns bristle with bayonets pointed against the Catholics of this country. No; we shall do no such thing. If the doctrine of toleration has any meaning at all, it means that Protestants must tolerate Catholics, just as Catholics must tolerate Protestants. If there is any one thing more offensive than Roman Catholic views, it is the persecution of Roman Catholics for holding such views. A nation that tolerates Mormonism cannot refuse to tolerate Roman Catholicism.

The Negro and the South.

The Memphis Avalanche declares in substance, as follows:—After a fair trial, the negro has failed. To bring him up to a high standard is impossible. It is of no use for the farmers of Tennessee to waste their time and money on him, for already their crops have fallen short one-fourth. The loss of his labor makes a serious vacuum, but practical measures can be adopted which will restore everything to its former vigor. An association must be formed at once to get labor from abroad. A new system of farming must be inaugurated which will require least labor. This will be grazing and grain-growing, and the farmer must teach his children to work. The main idea is to turn grass and grain into stock. It is true the negro did well during the war, and he was a power in the State; but now he is sadly demoralized, and his mind is so charged with radicalism that he will not permit a decent white man to approach him on anything like friendly terms. As for growing cotton any longer, it is out of the question. One cannot stand the tax, and if Congress does not remove it the golden goose will die. Even now the world's market does not depend on our snowy fields, and it never will again.

We had understood that the South raised a very large corn crop this year, and never before so much wheat. That, however, is short may be stated to be because the weather was unfavorable and injurious insects abounded. Had these causes not operated, one would wonder why cotton did not yield as bountifully as grain. We are told they will get laborers from abroad. These, we suppose, will be Irish, for Southern agents, now in Europe, say that Germans are out of the question. Suppose, now, ten thousand Irishmen with their families land at New Orleans, come up the river to Memphis, and, taking the railroad for Western or Middle Tennessee, hire out to work on the plantations. Every planter in Tennessee knows that such help will not be worth a pittance a day. More than all these planters are the remotest idea that any human beings on the face of the earth, except their old negroes, will accept the rations which they continue to give, of a peck of corn and a few pounds of bacon a week. Let nobody get the foolish idea that Irishmen are coming to America to starve. In their poor cabins along the railroad, they live in a style the Southern planters would call a perpetual frolic. Ireland is known as the Emerald Isle because the grass is so green, and an Irishman is accustomed to milk and butter, and, above all, to potatoes. Think of these long weary miles through the South, where scarcely a spear of green grass is to be seen. Milk is a rarity, butter a myth, and it is doubtful whether the dozen wagon-loads of round potatoes are raised for market between Nashville and Memphis. To expect that an Irishman is going to live on seed tick coffee, rusty bacon, and corn-bread, when there are good wages, beefsteak, and Democratic carriages in the North, is an absurdity.

At last, it is granted that Cotton is not King. When the King dies the name of his successor resounds. The successor of the dead monarch is labor, and before him every knee shall bow. We have so much land that even skillful cultivators in the most favored regions of the North relax their grasp on large farms, for the contest with the cheap hands of the West is overpowering, and one who has not skill in other pursuits must, himself, work or die.

That plan of teaching white children to work is a good one, and the sooner it is carried out the better. Mr. Topp, the President of the Charleston and Memphis Railroad, stated before the war, that there were over 30,000 country people in Tennessee who had no work to do, while the corresponding class in the North were active in various mechanical industries.

Now, as the white people are going to work, and on the new system, we hope they will not take offense if we give a few directions. In the first place, as grass is to be the leading crop, the seed must be obtained from Louisville or Cincinnati. But do not imagine that these old cotton fields, which have been cropped for fifteen or twenty years, will bring grass, for they will do no such thing. To try it is to throw away the seed. You must have land which has been cleared only a few years, and where the deadened trees begin to shed the bark; or, what is better, clear new land, no matter if it is hilly, raise crops for one or two years, then sow a mixture of blue-grass, clover, and red-top. Then you must mow the weeds as often as they appear, and keep off the cattle for a year at least, for the soil is tender, and the stock will pull up the young grass by the roots. But do you say you want this fresh land for

the growing of grain, that you cannot do without it, and that it was the cotton fields you were proposing to put in grass? Alas! young man, that old system of farming, which resulted in demands for Western Territories—which resulted in war, and finally in the negro being, as you say, good for nothing, is precisely what is the matter with your cotton crop this year. You raised corn and wheat on your fresh land, and your old cotton fields—barren and dusty and worn into gullies—did the best they could, but they were unable to bring something out of nothing.

The dilemma in which Southern soil and the planters are placed is appalling, and we rejoice to see a faint appreciation of a remedy. We have said before, and we repeat, that we are in favor of a good round appropriation by Congress for the establishment of model farms, in various parts of the South, which shall teach the people—many of whom never saw a scythe—how to grow grass, and to establish more varied industries. There are millions of acres of idle land, supposed to be worthless, but which can be put into excellent business, and add untold millions to the wealth of the country. Besides these, there are large bodies of upland valleys or marshes, which, if drained, would produce heavy timothy grass. But the people are too poor to invest capital and to wait, and, worse than all, they do not know how to go to work. Now, inasmuch as the two sections, North and South, must stand or fall together, it is the duty of the North, with its greater capital and experience in farming, to help the South rise to a position which shall make her an equal. But the South must try to be in better humor with the poor colored people. We know they are ignorant, superstitious, and have some bad habits; still, they do know how to work, and this is worth millions; besides, they are your people, they have your habits and customs, and if you treat them fairly they will like you much better than the North-ern people. Both of you think North-ern folks have queer ways. But they want friends, and they reach out their hands to those whom they think their friends.

Let us consider that the blacks are in the South for a wise purpose. Laying aside the old statements belonging to anti-slavery discussions, we will agree that a hot climate is most suited to the black man. For a few years the white man works well beneath that hereby blazing sun, but after a while he droops and longs for the icy air and cooling streams, while he of the black skin sweats, and laughs, and shines. The idea that the Irish, German, or any other white man can, as a general thing, do fair work, year after year, in that climate, and withstand the malaria, epidemics, and depressing influences, is chimerical. The whites had better turn their attention to small farms, to commercial pursuits and the trades, leaving the blacks, under wise guidance, to restore the soil to its original fertility. It would not be a bad plan to try experiments by selling to the negroes a few acres of land, and see what they will do. It is hardly fair to say that a people deprived of land are utterly unworthy. There are no truster and valued men anywhere in the world who are destitute of land and home. Let us be calm and look at a whole country. Liberty has taken final refuge in America. On our soil all the nations of the earth are destined to be partakers of her precious gifts. Providence has placed the African in the burning South, and along with him the European, that he may teach and elevate him. Duty is to be done. The more northern parts of our country are fitted for the people of Northern Europe. Hence the Swede finds a congenial home in Wisconsin, the Norwegian in Minnesota. That Asia, the nursery of the human race, may also share in the blessings of liberty, thousands crowd from China to our distant Pacific shore. All these people have rights and occupancy from which they cannot be dispossessed.

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