

SPIRIT OF THE PRESS.

EDITORIAL OPINIONS OF THE LEADING JOURNALISTS ON CURRENT TOPICS—CONTINUED FROM THE EVENING TELEGRAPH.

Results of the Session.

From the N. Y. Tribune. The session of Congress just closed has done the country as much service by its rejection of measures as by those which have actually passed. It has been a safe, and, with a few exceptions, a useful session. It has shown more moderation than its predecessor, and a more just appreciation of things to be omitted and things to be done.

The maintenance of the Reconstruction acts as they are a feature of the record at once agreeable and unexpected. There was long talk last December touching an alleged necessity for reopening matters in Georgia, and for enacting more stringent measures for the restoration of Virginia, Mississippi and Texas. It was feared that a desire to correct the mischievous action of the Georgia Legislature would lead to proceedings at variance with the fact of its reconstruction; and that the condition of Texas and Mississippi would be made the pretext for more stringent legislation. These apprehensions have not been verified. Georgia has been allowed to remain, as in truth it is, a State fully restored to the privileges of the Union; and the States still excluded are left to the operation of the existing laws. We cannot doubt that these will prove sufficient for the purpose to be fulfilled. They have brought back seven States, in spite of the bad influences of a hostile administration. With this obstacle removed, and an Executive in hearty accord with the law and the policy in which it originated, we may hope for an early completion of the work with whose history the Fortieth Congress is identified. At any rate, the session now ended has earned credit for forbearance, and faith in the efficiency of the law as it stands.

Failure to give effect to the compromise movement in Virginia, and to promote the revival of good feeling throughout the South by some generous and comprehensive measure in regard to disabilities, is a defect that ought not to be overlooked. By sweeping away remaining disabilities at a stroke, the majority would have fulfilled the magnificent promise of the Chicago Convention, and averted the suspicion which attaches to the relief of individuals who come endorsed by noisy partisans. By according to the proposition of the Virginia committee, and either eliminating from the new constitution its proscriptive provisions, or calling together a fresh convention to draft another instrument, Congress might have secured the early restoration of the State, and done much to win the respect and confidence of its people. The friendly reception extended to the committee, and the general fairness of the Republican leaders, encourage the hope that something of the kind will yet be effected.

The only positive action in any manner connected with the principles underlying reconstruction is the adoption of the fifteenth amendment, forbidding the denial of the right to vote by any State "on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude." The enactment of the amendment is by implication a repudiation of the ultra doctrine that would confer upon Congress power by mere legislation to control the suffrage. And the amendment, by guaranteeing impartial instead of universal suffrage, leaves all that is vital in the authority of the States untouched. Whether it fall or succeed now depends upon the will of the States themselves.

To what extent the popular demand on the subject of retrenchment has been met, it is difficult at this moment to ascertain. A certain confusion still hangs over the final condition of this branch of the business. This, however, is certain: efforts at retrenchment have been made with an energy that betokens reduced expenditures. The injudicious tendency of some of these efforts is pardonable, in view of the good that has really been accomplished. Army expenses have been cut down in a way not incompatible with efficiency, and generally a desire has been manifested to correct the extravagances engendered by the war. The fact that much is yet to be done in the direction of economy should not blind us to the savings already effected.

The reduction of expenditures has been rendered more significant by the refusal to tolerate schemes promoted by railroad and other "rings." The peril to the Treasury has been great. In half a dozen forms attempts have been made to pledge the public credit and to squander the public lands for the enrichment of corporations. To some of these schemes Senators have lent themselves with most suspicious zeal, but the firmness of Congress has prevented their consummation. The defeat of these swindles is among the gratifying results of the session.

On financial questions the course pursued has been practical, and on the whole beneficial. Little encouragement has been given to plans for legislating back specie payments. That which has been most persistently pushed is Mr. Sherman's, and we may well be thankful that it allmers in the Senate. The country will be glad to have resumption when it comes naturally and to last; but there is a wholesome aversion to contrivances which, under the plea of promoting resumption, would enlarge the debt, and inflict upon industry the evils of contraction. For all that is really useful in the matter of finance we may thank the House. The Public Credit and Coin Contract bill and the bills remedying the abuses arising from the certifying of checks and the locking up of currency as collaterals, were born in the House, and constitute the financial features of the session. Another measure not less necessary—namely, that forbidding the issuance of the bonded debt, preventing the jobbery and scandal of treasury agencies, and imposing upon the treasury the performance of its own duties—has been sacrificed in the Senate Committee. For this non-action Mr. Sherman is mainly responsible.

Foreign matters have been the occasion of much boresome and not a few absurd proposals. There have been "protectionist" schemes without number, and unlimited "sympathy" for peoples supposed to be oppressed. Little that is tangible, however, calls for mention. San Domingo has not been seriously touched; Ireland and Canada are suffered to remain under the British flag; a resolution which stultified itself by feigning friendship for Spain and love for the Cuban insurgents came to grief in the Senate. The prevalent feeling appears to be that, in now, we shall be most profitably employed in minding our own business and restoring to our own country the genuine peace and enduring prosperity for which it prays.

President Grant and Ex-President Johnson.

From the N. Y. Tribune. The farewell address of ex-President Johnson and the inaugural of President Grant ought to be read aloud by every freeman in the country. Having proposed repudiation to Congress in his annual message, Mr. Johnson is silent as to the obligation to pay our national debt in good faith. President Grant

is explicit and emphatic in insisting that we can and will pay the uttermost farthing; that we can easily do so from our vast and daily augmenting resources; and that our national honor, our lasting reputation, as well as our true interest, imperatively require that we should so pay. This declaration is worth counting millions to the labor, commerce, and prosperity of the Republic. Mr. Johnson's proposal of repudiation would have damaged us incalculably if it had not been promptly rebuffed by Congress. We have heard the last impeachment of American honesty, and the last assault upon American credit, from the Presidential chair!

Mr. Johnson harps incessantly upon his devotion to the Federal Constitution, and winds up by proposing a more radical change than has ever yet been made. President Grant simply urges the ratification by the States of the amendment already adopted by Congress—whether he likes the laws or not, he will obey and enforce them. Mr. Johnson assails Congress upon every conceivable ground—even for the failure to try Jefferson Davis! Over that proceeding Congress had no control whatever. The President makes and directs District Attorneys, and is charged with the execution of the laws. The audacity of this attack outdoes its intrinsic absurdity. Jefferson Davis was in his hands, as President, from the time he was captured in the pine woods of Georgia, and it was for him to see that he had a speedy and impartial trial. Congress had nothing to do with the matter, one way or the other, and made no effort to assert our authority. Mr. Johnson's assertion that he might have kept our vast volunteer forces embodied long after the R-ballion was suppressed, and even employed them in the prosecution of a foreign war, shows him to be grossly ignorant as well as conceited. The President has no power to make war. The Constitution confides that to Congress. Any attempt on the part of Mr. Johnson to have retained our volunteers under arms when they were no longer needed, would have rendered him even more detested than he now is. This expression of his supposed authority only shows how sadly he underrates the intelligence and republican spirit of his countrymen.

It is a blessed consolation that Andrew Johnson has ceased to disgrace his country in a public station. He will continue to be the low, unscrupulous demagogue he has already so often proved himself, and is still capable of considerable mischief. His power for evil can never again be a tithe of what it was. For three years he has done all that one bad man could do to keep the country in turmoil, to strengthen the spirit of Rebellion, and to excite a war of races. The most he can do henceforth is to defend as a local demagogue the wrongs which a national calamity so long enabled him to enact as President. Let us thank God that we are so easily and so happily rid of him, and that we can turn our faces with hope and trust to the glad auspices of future harmony and prosperity afforded by the accession and the inaugural of President Grant.

Gladstone's Position.

From the N. Y. Tribune. The cable summary of Mr. Gladstone's proposal to disestablish the Irish Church in the United Kingdom, though necessarily meagre in detail, yet supplies a digest of the plan sufficient to enable those conversant with the question to comprehend its scope. That Church has always been an anomaly. It represented the property, not the people. It was supported by the land-owners against the will of the tenants, and practically was a missionary church without disciples. Even within her own body a large portion of her revenue was held by lay impropriators who did nothing even in appearance for their annual income. Therefore it was ripe to fall, and the provisions of the bill foresee a fresh organization of religious bodies more suited to the temper and more efficacious to the moral advancement of Ireland than what has been hitherto misnamed the National Church. Its funds, amounting to above eighty million dollars gold, are to be applied one-half to compensation of the interests destroyed by the action of the bill, and one-half to the advantage of the Irish people, for relief in cases of unavoidable calamity or suffering—a skeleton outline which will be filled up in detail and thoroughly sifted during its passage through the two houses of Parliament; and here will be the great battle foretold by Mr. Disraeli in his memorable prophecy, "They will fight over the plunder." Ireland is pretty equally divided, for, though the Catholics greatly exceed in numbers, the Protestants hold four-fifths of the land and nearly all the trade and industry.

Unfortunately, the feeling has always been bitterly hostile between the Orangemen and Roman Catholics, and hitherto the oil thrown on the troubled waters has only biased the ferocity. It will be in the recollection of most that the education of the south of Ireland was provided for by the Queen's chartering a university, composed of colleges in various cities, where the instruction is wholly secular. This satisfied the wants of the Catholics, and for some years was acquiesced in by their hierarchy; but of late they have been the object of violent attack as "Godless Colleges" on the part of the bishops and the press of that religion, without, however, much impairing their numbers or efficiency. A serious difference arose in Parliament at the commencement of the session of 1866 between two of the leading members of the British Cabinet, the Premier and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, as to a political compact made with the supporters in Parliament of the Papal rule in Ireland to alter the charter in favor of an extended Council of Management to let in Roman Catholic bishops in exchange for political support. Neither of these gentlemen has forgotten the debate, or is likely to lose sight of the pledges given to the House and to the nation that no alteration by the Crown should be attempted but by and with the advice of Parliament; still less the signal failure of the attempt that was then made to do so. Hence the present appeal to the country, and up to the present time the almost unanimous concurrence of politicians, that the day is arrived for settling the whole question, and the only difference of statement is, as usual, the manner in which it is to be done. This is more than ordinarily hazardous in the face of the difficulty freely pointed out by Mr. Gladstone in his opening remarks on the preamble of the bill, viz: that in the ascendancy of any one church in Ireland, bitter feelings on the part of the Irish people would never cease. But the principle that answers so well in this country, as it has in every nation and people so blessed as to conquer their right to it, is more than ever applicable to Ireland—civil and religious liberty. If the union of Church and State has been productive of evil for centuries of oppression and retaliation, of pains and penalties, of denunciations from altars, of evictions and murder, it is high time to divorce such incongruous partners; and what Mr. Disraeli calls a conscientious and a disorganizing of ill-gotten and very ill-spent gains. The arm of the State will be freer on the one hand to foster and protect the institutions for educating and improving the people, for ameliorating their present low moral and social condition, and for placing on a broad and enduring basis schemes of

elevation and advancement of the much enduring but debased masses, and on the other will be less hampered and embarrassed in striking at the hand, however powerful, or whatever kin or kind may attempt to trammel or shut up the stream of education and knowledge for the welfare of the poor and friendless. This is the proper scope of a bill for the advancement of the Irish people. Sydney Smith says the translation of Erin go Bragh should be, Erin go bread and cheese, Erin go shoes and coats without holes in them. How much more education means to learn, means to simplify knowledge, to open up treasures of industry and usefulness, to give light to the eye, hearing to the ear, and understanding to the heart and brain. That such may be the result of this movement every well wisher of Ireland in America, as well as in England, may truly hope.

Ex-President Johnson's Valedictory.

From the N. Y. Herald. The valedictory of Mr. Johnson is, in some respects, a curious document, a strange jumble of truth, inconsistency, and misapprehension of the great forces which have been moving our people in the past four years. The vindication of "my policy" appears to be its key-note. We all know that "my policy" meant the restoration of political parties to the same relative status they held at the outbreak of the war—an impossibility, from the fact that political parties are the outgrowth of existing conditions, and the conditions existing to-day for political results are totally different from those of 1861. "My policy" meant, therefore, an attempt to turn the revolution and its innumerable changes back upon itself. The resistance made by the United States Congress naturally resulted in the complete stamping of the executive element that so stubbornly refused to recognize that the war had settled anything.

Mr. Johnson has no right to arrogate to himself the honor of disbanding the army; the people did it. Boasting of the position he held at the close of the war, at the head of the civil and military power, he says:—"With a large army and augmented authority, it would have been no difficult task to direct at pleasure the destinies of the republic and to make secure my continuance in the high office known to our people as the Presidency." Perhaps Congress may Mr. Johnson's inclinations in this direction when they put the onus on him so tightly. The power of this oration shows, however, how empty is the braggadocio that pervades the greater part of his valedictory. The people will never believe that the war was a "stupendous and deplorable mistake." Nearly eighty years of tremendous strides under two antagonistic systems of progress made war a necessity, and made it necessary that the conquered system should forever abandon its hopes. It was the support of these wrecked hopes by Mr. Johnson that has kept the country unsettled since active war closed.

Mr. Johnson says truly, however, when he states that the trouble between him and Congress has proven that the Executive power is very weak in a contest with the legislative branch of the Government, and that the supremacy of party, right or wrong, is to be feared. He says "it is not, therefore, difficult to see how easily and how rapidly the people may lose their liberties by an unheeded and uncontrollable majority in the law-making power." It is also true that the legislative power "have, in times of peace, increased the national debt by a reckless expenditure of the public moneys;" they have built up and encouraged monopolies and have thus added to the burdens which already weigh upon the people." These things have, however, little to do with the political battle between Mr. Johnson and Congress. They have not caused this or increased its bitterness. The last half of this curious document is full of the ineffectual of disappointment against the power which refused to recognize that there could be but one method of arranging our national troubles, and that method—"my policy." Mr. Johnson, with this angry and parting shot, steps from office clinging stubbornly to his opinions, embodying in his valedictory the most curious mixture of personal vanity and self-abnegation, statesmanship and narrow-mindedness, sound doctrine and untenable ones, inective and earnest appeal, denunciation and prayer, braggadocio and self-defense, that has ever appeared in any document issuing from the Executive Department since the formation of the Government. Is he sane?

Shall We Have a Federal Convention?

From the N. Y. World. We printed yesterday a temperate and well-reasoned communication advocating various amendments to the Federal Constitution; some of them merely for the purpose of symmetry and pruning away dead limbs and excrescences, and others for introducing what most intelligent judges would admit to be substantial reforms. The changes proposed by the writer are somewhat numerous, and could not be very well engrained on the Constitution except by a convention of the States—a machinery of revision which has never yet been called into play, although provided for in the Constitution. On the application of two-thirds of the States, Congress is obliged to call a convention, and its work, like separate amendments proposed by Congress, requires the ratification of three-fourths. We have no hesitation in endorsing the substance of our correspondent's recommendations, although, on fuller examination, we might differ from him considerably in details. We yield to none in veneration for the Constitution; but what we reverence is its fundamental principles, not its excrescences and imperfections, its occasional ambiguous phraseology and obsolete provisions. Enlightened appreciation of the great excellences of that admirable instrument is not promoted by a pedantic and superstitious worship of its imperable parts. It is not well to be perpetually tampering with its phraseology and changing its minor provisions; but it would be wise, after an experience of seventy years, and considering the greatly altered state of the country, to haul the good old ship for once into the dry-dock for advantageous repairs. A revision would be worth while, even for mere symmetry, although that motive is not sufficiently urgent to justify the calling of a convention. The separate amendments which have been made from time to time adopted, give the Constitution a patch-work appearance, the provisions which are annulled or modified remaining to disfigure the instrument, and the amendments, instead of falling in their appropriate places in connection with the subjects to which they are germane, are tacked on like loose shreds to the tail of a kite. Thus, there remains in the article relating to the constitution of the Executive Department the old obsolete provision which prevailed before there was a separate vote for Vice-President, and we have to seek in a dragging heap of miscellaneous amendments in another part of the act, the mode of electing the highest officers of the Government. So the amendment abolishing slavery superannuates numerous provisions scattered through the instrument which grew out of the existence of that institution, and which now remain not merely as excrescences, but as blots. Even the first ten amendments, which were adopted soon after the organization of the Government, are shoved into obscure

back seats, whereas their proper place would be in the very front of the instrument in the form of a bill of rights. These instances will suffice for illustration; they point to a kind of reduction which can never be performed except by a convention. There is no reason why there should remain in the Constitution things which have ceased to be in force, nor why the amendments which have cancelled them should be scattered haphazard at the end of the instrument without being digested into any order or method.

None of the changes recommended by our correspondent have a party bearing, a circumstance which ought to gain for them a candid consideration. Most of them are of such obvious utility that they will recommend themselves without much argument or explanation to all who have watched the workings of our Government and are acquainted with the doors by which most of the existing abuses have entered. But it requires a movement so extensive and concerted to set in motion the machinery for calling a Federal Convention, that we fear the languid interest our people feel in things not connected with party politics will prove insufficient to set the wheels in motion.

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