

SPRIT OF THE PRESS.

Editorial Opinions of the Leading Journals upon Current Topics—Compiled Every Day for the Evening Telegraph.

POLITICAL DISABILITIES.

When a man gets up and talks as Governor Vance of North Carolina has been doing, about his having been all through the war a Union man, and nothing but a Union man, we doubt very much the expediency of exposing the falsehood of his assertion. There has been a great deal said, and much of it justly said, about the necessity of repentance on the part of the Rebels, before we can again safely admit them to full participation in the government of the country; but then it will not do to be too particular about their mode of showing their repentance. It is useless to expect them to go down on their marrow-bones, and acknowledge that they sinned, and were deceived when they tried to overturn the Union. The essential thing is that they should in their hearts be sorry for having rebelled, and be sincerely determined never to do the like again; but it matters very little in what way they reveal this state of mind. Governor Vance made, during the war, some very ferocious, and indeed we may add atrocious, speeches to the Rebel troops, and that he lay in wait to instigate the prosecution of Union men and recalcitrant Confederate conscripts in North Carolina. We suppose there is nothing easier than to prove all this before the Senate; but then he can hardly give a stronger proof of his having repented of it, and of being hereafter resolved to lead a sober and loyal life, than his coming boldly out in the presence of his neighbors, and in the character of a Union man, and talking as if no disloyal words ever passed his lips. This is not certainly a formal expression of repentance, but it is a sign of repentance which there is no mistaking. Indeed, it involves, to a man of any self-respect, an amount of humiliation which almost entitles it to the name of penance. What good purpose can be served by asking for anything further, provided the principle be once conceded, as it has been conceded, that Rebels may purge themselves of their guilt in some manner or other, so as to qualify them for a seat in Congress? Considering what has happened in Missouri, we trust the question of a general amnesty will receive an early discussion from Congress. The result of the election there has shown one thing clearly—that there is, or is likely to be, enough division of sentiment among Republicans in all the Southern States on this subject to make the continuance of the existing disabilities, imposed on persons guilty of having taken part in the Rebellion, a probable, if not actual, source of dissension and weakness in the party; and this division is likely to grow wider and deeper as time wears on and the passions excited by the war subside. Moreover, there is a very general and very well-founded feeling at the South, that these disabilities are injurious to the business interests of the Southern community. Apart from its influence on State politics, it is not possible to divide a community into two classes, one of them under a cloud, and governed by the other, without creating or protracting more or less bitterness of feeling; and from bitterness of feeling business always suffers, even if it does not show itself in open violence. It is, however, of the utmost importance, both to blacks and whites, that business should prosper, and the tide of immigration be attracted south of Mason and Dixon's line, and it will not be so attracted so long as existing political questions, deeply affecting men's feelings as well as their interests, remain unsettled in that region. The character of the men who have risen to the surface in Southern politics ever since the war, and particularly of that portion of them which has been contributed by the war, has done the South serious damage, moral as well as material, and it will not be mended greatly—though we think the colored voters are rapidly beginning to understand the Whites—until the whole community of each State is admitted to the management of its affairs, and that this may be done without damage now, we have no doubt. In the last five years the negroes have learned to take care of themselves pretty well, both at the polls and otherwise, and in this field of activity they are certainly more likely to improve than to go back. Then, it must be remembered that the ex-rebels, be they bad or good, useful or mischievous, are not going to leave the country. They are here among us, an element, and a large, important, and influential element, in the population. It is one of the principles, and soundest principles, of our Government, that all elements of the population, bad or good, ought to be represented, and that the safety of the State requires that each should have a recognized outlet for its feelings and opinions, whatever these may be. The whole Union is undoubtedly the better for having even such a constituency as New York city appear by members in Congress, and give vent to any badness there may be in it, and show by the very character of its representatives what the political tastes, standards, and opinions of its majority are. This rule applies no less to political heterodoxy than to moral corruption, as long as it involves no danger to the State. Vance's extraordinary declarations about his past record show that the Government has at least nothing to fear from him. It is quite certain that no good purpose would be served at this time of day by punishing him, and it only remains to consider, therefore, whether if he represents the views and feelings of any considerable portion of the people of North Carolina—and there can be no doubt that he does—it is in the interest of the rest of the country to keep him out. We imagine not; if he or his constituents have any treason left in them, or still entertain any sentiments hostile to the peace and dignity of the Government of this Union, the sooner and more correctly they are blurted out in some conspicuous place, the better; for all history shows that traitors are never so dangerous as when they are gagged.

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sends annually to Congress prevents his probing to the quick the temper and tendency of an unfriendly Government. Such political surgery proceeds war, whereas the United States are so strong, and will soon be so irresistible, that we shall have our due and realize our destinies without war by sheer political weight. A journal is not under the same duty of reserve and reticence as the President, and we hold it to be our business to signalize in this action of the authorities of the Dominion the conception, so hostile to the United States, which actuated the statement of England in bringing about the new North American confederation. When our civil war broke out European statesmen, short-sighted, jealous, and ill-informed, conceived that the moment was come to arrest forever the development of the United States into a single great power, ruling the whole North American continent. There may have been no exact concert to that end; but the measures taken were skillful and might have prevailed if they had not been in utter contradiction to the inevitable majestic march of events, and an attempt—Machiavellian in its want of principle—to exalt the whole future history of North America the same scenes of inevitable division and hostility which have always prevailed in Europe. The design had two great features. One was the creation of the Mexican empire under Maximilian; the other was the establishment of the new federation of all the British-American provinces north of our own boundary line. The confederation was founded expressly as a check upon the United States, and much exultation was expressed at the time by British statesmen and journalists at the disavowal of so exalted a future for placing on the flank of the republic a power which, together with the independent Southern confederation, would forever insure the disruption of North America. This foolish and unrighteous idea still prevails in the British mind. Even so late as last year Mr. Goldwin Smith, a resident among us, and a sympathizer, according to his feeble professional capacity, with our institutions and ourselves, wrote a letter to an English journal in which he expounded with approval this precious piece of philosophical statesmanship. It is not necessary to quote the letter, but its drift was that the hardy northernmost Americans, with their simpler lives and more monarchical tendency, would qualify and balance the more effervescent and progressive republican Union; with more rubbish of that sort; all showing that the question of inevitable supremacy on this continent was as sealed a book, at that late date even, to Mr. Goldwin Smith as to the driest English Tory at home, whom he so heartily despises.

Founded on ideas like these, and stimulated to assert themselves ridiculously in such a direction as this, even by the teachings of a Goldwin Smith, we cannot wonder at the unfriendly conduct of the authorities of the New Dominion. We have it on the authority of the President that they are harassing American fishing vessels with a severity not practiced heretofore, and subjecting our ships to exceptional legislation which must not be allowed to stand for a moment. They are advancing pretensions and making laws to enforce them which the British Government itself has not hitherto ventured upon—pretensions which are little short of impudent. A statute of the Dominion prohibits the fishing vessels of the United States from having on board any merchandise whatever except what is necessary for such fishery, and subjects them to seizure and condemnation if they have, enforcing this by police visitation and intolerable inquisitorial proceedings. Such policy must be resisted at once. It is simply intolerable. It combines insult and injury, and seems more calculated to bring about trouble than to satisfy any legitimate interests. But even more flagrant is the attempt of the New Dominion to exclude American citizens from the navigation of the St. Lawrence. The President shows clearly that this is connected to the whole tendency of international action for seventy years all over the world in respect of rivers whose outlet runs through-out separate sovereignties. It is difficult to understand the drift of such legislation and policy, unless it aims at providing British statesmen with a spurious equivalent in the settlement of the Alabama claims. "As satisfaction for those," they may say, "we will open the St. Lawrence." We can hardly suppose them capable of such pettifoggery; but why, then, do they permit the New Dominion, which the President rightly describes as irresponsible, to play such pranks as this? The legislation of the Dominion is subject to imperial veto, and is, of course, controllable by the Governor-General, appointed by the crown. It is his business to keep this over-lively young power in order; for they must be perfectly aware themselves, and they ought to teach their subjects and proteges in the Dominion, that the theory of checking and balancing and qualifying and harassing the United States by a new North American Dominion is blown to pieces forever. This attempt to close the St. Lawrence to American vessels is a plain recurrence to ancient barbarism in the matter of river navigation. The principle was solemnly adopted at the Vienna Congress in 1815, that river navigation should be free, and no more offensive and unrighteous application of the opposite principle can be imagined than that which pretends to bar the great American West and Northwest from access to the sea through the basin of the St. Lawrence. The idea and the attempt to do so are so laughable and contemptible that they expose the Dominion and England to the derision of all civilized mankind. England cannot afford to irritate civilized sentiment in this way. Upon this subject, at least, we ought to be peremptory. The Union ought to brook no action which deprives its citizens of the free navigation of the St. Lawrence basin. The interests and the dignity alike of the United States require that this should be set right without delay, and we are satisfied that American opinion will back the President in requiring of Great Britain that these questions with the Dominion should be settled forthwith in conformity with justice and American claims; for the policy of the Dominion, an American community, ought no longer to be under the inspiration of dynastic European, balance-of-power ideas which the undoubted supremacy of this republic makes as out of date on this continent as the cat-worship of the Egyptians.

When Porter was a Rear-Admiral and Grant a General, Ford wrote a letter expressing his honest and contemptuous opinions of Grant. In the course of time Grant has become President, with power to confer upon Porter the much-coveted office of Admiral, and had already taken the first step towards it—only awaiting the assent of the Senate to nominate him for confirmation. At this critical juncture Porter's letter of six years ago came out, and Grant's vengeance was aroused. The fires were lighted for Porter, and he is to be brought to the stake by the refusal of Grant to nominate him as Admiral. Like Cramer of old, Porter has declared the relative miseries of a public recantation against the agony of a public withdrawal of his name as Admiral, and, as in the case of the archbishop, the love of the good things of this life has conquered the fear of the contempt of the world, and he has recanted—recanted with a depth of self-abasement far lower than his wretched prototype ever reached. It is difficult to comprehend the spirit which could induce such words as these: "I do not write for the purpose of exonerating myself, for I would rather be the writer of the letter than its publisher. It is almost impossible to suppose that such a man could find consolation in the reflection that there was at least some meanness man than himself; and when we examine the relative claims to meanness, it is by no means certain that Porter is entitled to draw consolation from the comparison. True it is that some one has betrayed an implied confidence in publishing a letter which he might have supposed its writer did not intend for public circulation; but what has Porter done? He assures the President in his present letter that the former one contained "sentiments I know I never felt, and which are so at variance with those that I have uniformly expressed towards you." He recollects well enough that he never entertained the sentiments expressed in his letter, while he admits that he wrote it. If this be true, the offense he committed was a gross libel upon a man of whom he honestly entertained favorable opinions; and in our judgment this is a graver wrong both to society and to persons than the publication of an official letter in which no injunction of secrecy was contained. If the situation of the parties were reversed, I know I never felt, and which are so at variance with those that I have uniformly expressed towards you." He recollects well enough that he never entertained the sentiments expressed in his letter, while he admits that he wrote it. If this be true, the offense he committed was a gross libel upon a man of whom he honestly entertained favorable opinions; and in our judgment this is a graver wrong both to society and to persons than the publication of an official letter in which no injunction of secrecy was contained. 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