

SPiRiT OF THE PRESS.

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

HOW NOT TO DO IT.

From the N. Y. Tribune. The trial which has so deeply interested the Methodist Church in the United States came to an inglorious end last week after a seven days' course. The only result of the inquiry has been to sow dissension in the Church, to arouse uncharitable feelings in the ministry, and to fill the outside world with suspicion not only of the commercial prosperity of the great Methodist Publishing House, but of the disposition, or at least the ability, of the committee to investigate thoroughly its condition, or correct any abuses which may have crept into it. This bitter fruit of the long controversy may have sprung in part from professional ignorance of the ordinary forms of dispensing justice, because ministers are not often familiar with the processes of courts; but surely common sense might have saved the committee from the egregious blunders which have marked their whole course in this important matter. It is about fifteen months since Dr. Lanahan published his charges against the management of the Book Concern, alleging that there had been heavy losses through fraud or gross misconduct in the administration. The Book Committee met to investigate these charges, and found that they were in the main true; but meanwhile a violent hostility had been excited against Dr. Lanahan, and in January, 1870, the committee was called together again to revise its former decision. The result of these supplementary proceedings was a majority report whitewashing the Book Concern and declaring that there had been no losses at all, and a minority report reiterating the previous judgment.

To unprejudiced outsiders it seemed clear that Dr. Lanahan's accusations, whether true or false, had at least so much apparent foundation that for the credit of the Church an exhaustive examination by the tribunal of last resort should have been ordered without delay. But while the charges of fraud and mismanagement were still practically undecided, the trials having resulted in what was equivalent to the Scotch verdict of "Not proven," the opponents of Dr. Lanahan preferred an indictment against that gentleman, and in October last he was suspended from his office of Assistant Book Agent until a joint tribunal, composed of the Book Committee and a certain number of the bishops, should decide upon his guilt or innocence. The offenses laid at his door were described as official misconduct and malfeasance, neglect of official duty, untruthfulness, insubordination, slandering disposition, insubordination, inefficiency, etc.; but the specifications resolved nearly all these into the one capital crime of impugning the honesty and efficiency of the management of the concern. Dr. Lanahan, in his answer, said in effect, "I have asserted that frauds and corruptions exist in the management of the Book Concern, and I stand by my words." The trial began on the 12th instant. A whole week was passed in taking testimony and debating rules of practice before the excellent gentlemen composing the court realized the position in which they had placed themselves. Nothing was proved on a single charge. It was evident that nothing could be proved. To every accusation against the Assistant Agent that he made such and such slanderous statements respecting the Book Concern the answer was the same, "I admit the statements; they are not slanderous; I am prepared to prove them." To go to trial on such an issue was as if the Court of Sessions should suspend the trial of indictments until it had first tried the District-Attorney for slander in drawing them up.

The Methodist tribunal seems finally to have realized that in practice, if not in theory, Dr. Lanahan is the prosecutor in this controversy and the Book Concern is the defendant, and the attempt to put the prosecutor in the dock and the accused on the stand is a travesty upon justice. The trial is abandoned. The Assistant Agent is restored to office. A special commission is appointed to probe the affairs of the Book Concern to the bottom, with the assistance of experts, and the charges against Dr. Lanahan are referred to the General Conference for such action as that tribunal of last resort may deem proper. This is a sensible course at last. The conference does not meet until 1872, and there will thus be opportunity for learning whether Dr. Lanahan's charges are true before he is indicted for making them.

THE NAVAL ACADEMY.

From the N. Y. World. According to the Navy Register we have 12 admirals, 25 commodores, 50 captains, and 99 commanders—in all 177, or more than 3 for every first, second, and third-rate vessel—besides 182 lieutenant-commanders, the seniors of whom command fourth-rates, and the juniors doing duty as so-called "executive," navigation, and watch officers. There is, therefore, no lack of commanding officers, though a large proportion of them have only had five or six years' experience at sea. Besides these there are 146 lieutenants, who have only been in the service from eight to nine years; 84 masters, who have been in it from seven to eight; and 70 ensigns, from six to seven years—in all 300 for duty as watch and division officers. Excluding the four years these youths were employed at the Academy "on shore duty"—that is, were studying all they know besides the scanty supply of "reading, writing, and the first four rules of arithmetic" which they brought with them into the service—the lieutenants have had an average experience of from four to five years, the masters from three to four, and the ensigns of from two to three; and even this not all at sea, but also "waiting orders," on shore duty, and in getting ready for sea. It is evident, therefore, that in the event of a foreign war we would have to go to the merchant service, as we did during the Rebellion, for competent and experienced officers to navigate, work, and fight our national vessels. The rough, sailor-like acting master, though despised by the kid-gloved fiddling of Porter's Naval Academy, was the officer who really saved our navy from discredit, fought its battles, gained its victories, and prevented the shipwreck of nine-tenths of the extemporized men-of-war which defended our dangerous coast through so many stormy winters. The war over, these gentlemen's services were most ungraciously and summarily dispensed with, and men like West, Girard, and Conroy pronounced not qualified for the regular navy by boards which did not qualify a set of boys whom the older officers unhesitatingly say they would not trust alone on deck. Indeed, one very distinguished admiral declares that he is glad that he is retired and does not have to go to

sea, since he would never dare go below in a gale of wind, without fear of being capsized, with the young incompetents now termed lieutenants in charge of the deck. It is a matter of notoriety that the late Captain Napoleon B. Harrison, recently commanding the frigate Congress, lost his life in consequence of exposure on deck for forty-eight hours to inclement weather because there was not a line officer on board his ship in whose skill or judgment he could rely! It is less generally known that an old captain—himself a very distinguished sailor, and no less distinguished for his independence of department cliques and influences—testified about a year ago before the Retiring Board in behalf of a young officer, who was affected with a serious constitutional disease, that that officer was the only one on board the vessel under his command who understood his profession and could be left alone in the discharge of his duties, and the board actually allowed him time for medical treatment rather than retire one whose professional qualification was so exceptional. There is scarcely a commanding officer of any note who does not privately bewail in his friends' ears (for few of them dare do so openly) the incompetence not merely of his own and the division officers but of his so-called "executive officer," though the latter always belongs to the comparatively elevated grade of lieutenant-commander. Of the 180 lieutenant-commanders no less than seventy have been out of the Naval Academy only from four to five years, and another seventy only from eight to nine, during which periods the first set may have performed one full cruise at sea and the others two, when they acquired all the experience they possess of practical seamanship. It is hardly to be presumed that their summer pleasure-journeys to Europe and Madeira in the school-ships as cadets avail them much, in view of the fact that out of forty midshipmen who were graduated in 1869, and who had a year's additional experience on board the Sabine, no less than nineteen have just failed to pass an examination for promotion, and have been returned to the Naval Academy for further instruction. Judge a tree by its fruits, and since these are the fruits of the United States Naval Academy, how rotten must be that trunk which bears them!

CIVIL SERVICE REFORM.

From the N. Y. Times. Senator Wilson's bill regulating the appointment of inferior officers in the civil service, is in some respects the best effort that has been made in the direction of a very important reform. Except upon a single point, it is superior to the plan with which Mr. Jenckes' name is honorably identified, because guarding against abuses which the Rhode Island representative failed to touch, and operating with simpler machinery. And it is infinitely more efficacious than the bill of Mr. Trumbull, who aims at arresting the political demoralization which the present system entails upon Senators and members, but without making provision for otherwise improving the service itself.

Instead of organizing a civil service commission, as proposed by Mr. Jenckes, Mr. Wilson would make all appointments subject to the approval of a board of three examiners selected by the head of the department in which the appointees are to serve. In the first instance, moreover, the appointments are to be temporary—the question of continuance being contingent upon the practical efficiency and propriety exhibited during the probationary period. When thus formally made, the appointments are for four years certain—any removal meanwhile being contingent upon incompetency or impropriety of conduct, as reported upon by an examining board.

The weak point of the scheme is the limitation of the appointment to four years. The fact that the persons holding offices are eligible to reappointment, without further examination, upon the recommendation of the chief of bureau or head of the office in which they may be serving, does not essentially improve the case. Every four years, under this bill, the victorious political party might make a clean sweep of the department, and the fitness is indeed an obstacle to the flooding of the departments with incompetent men, and is, so far, a vast improvement upon the system as it is. But the less to the country arising from the time required to familiarize the officers with their duties will be continued, and the opportunity for wholesale change will introduce other evils. It may not be desirable to offer bonuses to young men to enter the service of the Government; but if its service is ever to be as efficient as is sought to be by a sense of permanence must be created. Only thus can capable officers be induced to give the Government the full benefit of their capacity. The fact that every change of the Federal Administration will virtually send them adrift, will naturally induce the best men in the service to be on the look-out for openings elsewhere. And the politicians, with their eyes upon the recurring opportunity for rewarding their friends, will avail themselves of the discretionary authority vested by Mr. Wilson's bill to prevent the reappointment of incumbents who stand in the way. The remedy for these forms of mischief is the making appointments permanent, subject only to removal for just cause.

Apart from this defect, there are two features in Mr. Wilson's bill which cannot be too highly commended. One forbids any person holding office by appointment to take part in any political committee, convention, or like organization, "under penalty of summary dismissal." The other prohibits all assessments of money upon clerks or other employees of the Government, anywhere, for political or other purposes—making the superior official who permits such assessments, or fails to prevent them, subject to dismissal and punishment by fine and imprisonment. Both of these provisions are excellent; the second is of the highest importance. Put an end to the levying of assessments in Custom Houses, in the Post-office or Internal-revenue Service, and in the Departments at Washington, and a more excellent work will be performed than Mr. Trumbull's bill could possibly effect.

We cannot hope that the reform for which Messrs. Trumbull, Wilson, and Jenckes are all working will be achieved at present. The war with which we are so strongly a man as Mr. Morton resists the action contemplated by the Illinois Senator indicates the tenacity with which mere politicians will battle against a change that would confine their influence to legitimate channels. As against their hostile zeal, there is little besides lukewarmness and a disposition to compromise at the expense of vital principles. The truth is, that civil service reform implies not a little self-denial and disinterested devotion to duty on the part of legislators, and these are qualities for which we can scarcely look until the people realize more vividly than they seem now to do the damage inflicted by the present system upon the morale of the Government and the interests of the country.

GENERAL GRANT'S NEW DODGE.

From the N. Y. Sun. General Grant, having thrown the Republican party into confusion by the disgraceful manner in which he has crossed his San Domingo job upon Congress and the country, seems to be casting about for some other ground on which to rally his broken cohorts. He has selected for this purpose the alleged disturbances and violations of law in some portions of the late rebellious States, and especially in relation to the elections. We warn the Republicans that this question will not afford material for restoring the waning supremacy of their party in that section of the country. Candid men at the North, while ready to admit that society before the Potomac and the Ohio may not be at all times, and under all circumstances, and in all places, as peaceful and law-abiding as in New England, suspect that the picture is overdrawn, and that, too, for partisan purposes; and, in view of the events of the past ten years, they are rather surprised that society in that section of the Union is so quiet and orderly as it is. At all events, the great majority of those who firmly stood with the Government through all the late convulsions are decidedly opposed to the passage of any more reconstruction acts by Congress, and think the time has fully come when the control of the Southern States should be confided to their own citizens, without any exceptional interference on the part of the Federal Government.

It is now five years and eight months since the Rebel armies were disbanded; and, after vexatious and seemingly needless delay, the last of the Confederate States is about to be admitted to full representation in Congress. Is it not time that the Southern people were left untrammelled to try their hands at governing themselves? Ought not the results of the elections of the past autumn to teach the Republicans that a long-continued policy of coercion will finally recoil upon its authors? Do they believe that they can forever pin the people of the South down to obedience to the laws with Federal bayonets? Is it not better to put them upon their good behavior, and, as in ordinary cases, let pains and penalties follow rather than precede the commission of offenses? Do the Republicans imagine that by any system of legislation, or by any muster of military forces they can preserve to themselves the entire negro vote of the South, and thereby carry the old slaveholding States for their Presidential ticket in 1872?

Of course General Grant, if he thought that by so doing he could restore his tarnished prestige with the Republican party, and revive his blighted prospects for a renomination, would not hesitate to raise false issues in regard to the condition of affairs in the South, and plunge that section of the Union into renewed confusion. But it will not prove to be a winning game for him, while it may render it impossible for the party to elect any one to the Presidency next year. Intelligent Republicans had better take the management of the party into their own hands, and not leave it any longer to a man whose narrow vision does not allow him to contemplate anything beyond the promotion of his own selfish ends.

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