

October 27, 1888.]

THE SPECTATOR.

1461

they do not feel the pressure which alarms financiers, and they are more affected by slight fluctuations in wages, and in the volume of demand for the articles they produce or make. When, however, the body of electors hold stocks, and are solicitous for national credit, and see national credit shaking, and are at the same time conscious of heavy taxation, then the difficulties of the Treasury become political factors. It is so in France just now. As our readers are aware, a cry for economy rising from below has greatly affected votes in the Chamber, and it is in the midst of a spasm of financial fear, not acute, but still perceptible, that three grave financial events have occurred. The first of these is a very large demand by the Minister of War, M. de Freycinet, for the protection of the Eastern frontier. We find it difficult to believe that even he, with all his wild ideas about the resources of France, has asked the Budget Committee for £40,000,000 sterling; but it is certain that he has asked for a great sum to be raised in large instalments, as essential to the security of France, now imperilled by the failure of the Eastern line of forts, just finished, to withstand the newly invented explosive shells. The demand may be inevitable and excusable, like the similar demands of our own Admiralty for ever-enlarging guns; but considering the enormous sums already expended, it will be considered to indicate failure in the War Department,—the one on which the Republic has spent most. Moreover, the sum asked for, whatever it is, must be large, and must be added to the heavy loan of £30,000,000 admitted to be indispensable in order to enable the Treasury to carry its enormous load of "Floating Debt"—that is, of obligations which must be redeemed at short dates—estimated by the best authorities at more than sixty millions. A loan like this raised in peace-time shocks even peasants, and affects their hoards; and, moreover, if it is to be raised without extravagant payments, the interest must be visibly provided for. The great loan-mongers are restless under recurrent deficits. There must be a surplus, and a surplus cannot be hoped for even on the surface of the accounts, without either rigid economy or new taxation. Rigid economy will not be attempted, for it would require a strength which the present régime does not possess. The second-rate men who now govern France through the groups into which the Chamber is dissolved, have simply not the courage to reduce the terrible War Budget (£28,000,000), to suppress departments, to dismiss armies of small officials, and to stop the waste now going on in every office of the State. They think, if they do, the Republican machine will stop; and they know France. The only alternative is to increase taxation, and it is to avoid the hatreds which economy would generate, and for no other reason, that the Cabinet have resolved to break with financial tradition and to propose an Income-tax. They hope that if the measure exempts the poorer classes—that is, all with less than £80 a year—and if "incomes from labour" are taxed at half the rate of "incomes from possessions," the tax, which is to begin at 2½d. in the pound, will not be egregiously unpopular. They forget that at that rate the tax will not greatly relieve the difficulties of the Treasury; that the class with a little more than £80 a year is immensely numerous; and that it is the tax itself, and not its weight, which is so resented by French feeling. It is considered at once Socialist and inquisitorial. The payers are to declare their incomes at the Mairie; they are to fight out surcharges with the local officials; and unless the most absurd statements are silently admitted, secrecy will be nearly impossible to maintain. Secrecy about their property is of some value to all men; but to Frenchmen it seems indispensable. They dread not only the envy of their neighbours—the active and malignant envy showing itself in thefts—but the burden of those demands which, in a country where the family is the unit and not the individual, can only be evaded and cannot be defied. The classes liable will be furiously angry, and though they are not the majority, still among those angry will be the influential peasants, the saving shopkeepers, and the prosperous artisans who lead groups of voters, and with whom every form of government has ultimately to settle. So greatly did Gambetta—not a timid man—dread the influence of this class, that he publicly rejected a project of conversion rather than offend them; and even doctrinaire Radicals, when in power, have shrunk from carrying out sound economic theories. The Chamber will shrink sensitively from irritating all its

leading constituents, and adding the weight of the small men who are well-to-do to the great army of reaction; or, if it does not, it will face the electors twelve months hence amidst a storm of unpopularity. Its position, indeed, will be almost desperate. If the Deputies reject the Income-tax, the Government must go. If they reject M. de Freycinet's demand, he must go, and with him the only civilian whom the French Army, owing to his share in the events of 1871, will obey as Minister of War. On the other hand, if they accept the proposals, they will go before their electors, at the latest by November, 1889, with a new direct tax in their hands, and with an acknowledgment that Eastern France is not, as they have told everybody, "girdled with impenetrable fortresses;" or they must "upset everything" by saving at least six millions a year on the expenditure. Englishmen would run the latter risk with light hearts, but Englishmen still think of the sea as their natural moat; they are not afraid of their Army, and they do not look to State clerkships as the ideal employment for their sons.

Financial difficulty hardly more serious than this helped on the insurrection against the Provisional Government in 1848, and it is aggravated by another and less definite cause. An impression has been widely spread in France, and almost universally in Paris, that the difficulties of the Treasury are due in part to deeply seated corruption. The rougher men, who support Reaction or General Boulanger, cry now everywhere, "À bas les voleurs!" and the cry was at the opening of the Chamber specially directed against the Deputies. The Wilson affair shook general confidence in the Republicans more deeply than is supposed, and now another pecuniary scandal is on every tongue. A hardly known Deputy, M. Gilly, declares that the Committee of the Budget contains "twenty Wilsons,"—men, that is, who have made fortunes by selling their influence to Companies or individuals seeking favours from the State. An inquiry is to be instituted, and it is not difficult to foretell its result. The general body of the accused will be fully exonerated, but about some one individual there will be grave moral doubt, inadequate evidence, and no punishment except from opinion. Indeed, as the members of the Committee grant no contracts, sell no goods, and have no direct financial authority, it is difficult to think of the law which would punish an offence only to be defined as "selling an influential opinion in favour of the advisability of not rejecting a particular application to some department." The guilt or assumed guilt of one will be attributed to all, and thousands of voters, already sore at increased direct taxation, at the huge expenditure on fortresses which are declared to be useless, and at the sudden rise in bread, will be further excited by the assertions of a hundred orators and journalists that one main cause of all the trouble is speculation by representatives. So clearly perceived is the irritability of the people on this score, that not only furious declaimers like M. de Cassagnac, but grave men like the Comte de Paris, head attacks on the Republic by denouncing first of all those "who are wasting the public fortune of France." The actual danger to the French Treasury, though serious, is not yet fatal, for France is rich, and with bold retrenchment continued for ten years, and the slow sale of the immense masses of dormant property belonging to the State—for example, its future right of claiming all railways—the finances might again be made to flourish; but the danger to the Republic is more immediate. It is under the Republic that the extravagance has received its greatest impetus, and where is the Republican with the courage to face the shock consequent on stopping it dead? He may exist, but until he is to the front, it is impossible to deny that its finance is one main danger to the stability of the present form of government in France. The people have already too much to pay, and every Deputy asks for more.

THE DECAY OF RETICENCE.

THE *Quarterly Review*, in an article upon "Robert Elsmere," blames Mr. Justice Stephen for undermining by certain magazine articles those sanctions of religion to which he officially appeals whenever he administers oaths in Court. The censure raises an interesting question which on this occasion we shall only state. Has a Judge a moral right to attack the hitherto accepted sanction of the law he administers, if he is not prepared to replace it by a sanction equally effectual? Mr. Justice

Stephen is probably convinced that the belief in God and in judgment to come has had a very powerful influence upon human conduct, and that its influence is still appreciable, at all events upon uneducated people. He is further, we will assume, convinced that this sanction will ultimately be replaced by others equally effectual, and, in addition, capable of demonstration. But he can hardly be of opinion that these novel sanctions have already the influence with mankind that he expects them to have in the end. Ought he not, therefore, to wait until they have gained this influence, before openly taking part in the assault upon the popularly received sanctions? Is he not, if he does otherwise, pulling down in one capacity what he builds up in the other?

This is not, however, the point that we wish to deal with to-day. We are rather inclined to take Sir James Stephen's action as an example of a tendency which has of late years become exceedingly common,—the tendency to a revelation of self. If, says the *Quarterly Reviewer*, Mr. Justice Stephen "feels too strongly on the subject to be able to restrain his pen, let him write, as he has written before, and as he has abundant opportunities of doing, anonymously." But it is one of the peculiar characteristics of the time, that to write anonymously does not satisfy as it once did the impulse which drives men into print. It is no longer their opinions that they wish to make public; it is themselves. Unsigned journalism does not give them what they want, because what they want is not merely to convince or persuade, but to reveal. Take the very book that has suggested this observation. It is difficult to suppose that Mrs. Humphry Ward is so impressed with the happiness the world will derive from her new religion, that she feels bound in duty to her fellows to make it known. Robert Elsmere cannot be said to have either lived or died a happier man than he would have done if he had never met with the Squire. The new brotherhood may be a momentary refuge to men whose theological *glissade* has already begun; but even its authoress will hardly maintain that its modest hopes are a complete equivalent for the undoubting faith which they seek to replace. It cannot, therefore, be a desire to make mankind happier that has moved Mrs. Ward to write; it must be the desire to put on paper the history of her own mind. Here, too, is the secret of the book's popularity. After every allowance has been made for the prevailing passion on the part of women to be abreast of the enlightened male thought of fifteen years back, "Robert Elsmere" would hardly have sold its thousands had it not been for the interest belonging to it as an individual revelation. We are all of us perpetually wishing to know what other people are thinking, not merely what they are saying or doing; and other people of all descriptions are continually meeting us half-way. From Emperors down to theatrical managers, they are as anxious to speak as we are to listen. They are so ready to wear their hearts upon their sleeve, that we can only suppose that the daws' beaks have ceased to hurt, and that nerves are soothed by being laid bare.

Formerly, men had two lives,—a public life and a private life. The former was necessarily passed in the light of day. The world has a right to know the story of a professional career. A barrister's opinions upon points of law, a physician's opinions upon principles of medicine, an official's opinions upon problems of administration, are the property of his employers or of his clients. But until lately, the private life was designedly kept in the shade; it was only the poet that cared to take mankind into the secret of his emotions. The politician, the lawyer, the doctor, had an extra-professional sphere, into which they entered after working-hours, and shut the door behind them. To-day this is all changed. Each man pauses on the threshold, and invites the world to enter with him. It is a large part of the business of an accomplished magazine editor to collect and set out the opinions of a vast variety of persons upon subjects on which they have no obvious or professional claim to have opinions. The list of articles sometimes suggests that the subjects have been put into one bag and the authors' names into another, and that the table of contents is the result of an impartial shuffling of the two. Our interest in the views of the statesman upon politics, of the physicist upon science, of the preacher upon theology, is languid compared with that which we are expected to take when the subjects are interchanged, and the statesman discourses on religion, and

the man of science or the theologian upon politics. And the reason, we imagine, is that the subjects that lie outside his profession bring out the real man, and that the real man has somehow become public property. To return to the instance from which we started: to know Mr. Justice Stephen's opinion of the influence of the doctrine of a future life upon the behaviour of a witness in the witness-box, would be far less piquant than to know the same eminent Judge's opinion about the truth or falsehood of the doctrine. When we have the latter, there is a sense of getting behind the scenes. Possibly at all times the gratification of this sense would have been attended with pleasure, but it is only in the present time that the invitation to the mental green-room has been given and accepted with equal enjoyment.

We see the effect of this decay of reticence in the multiplication of autobiographies, designed not merely to benefit the historian of the future, but to interest the writer's contemporaries in the writer's lifetime. The old injunction to literary executors to keep a man's papers secret until all who could be pained by their publication have passed away, will soon be unmeaning,—so unmeaning, indeed, that the Court of Chancery will probably set aside any survival of it as contrary to public policy. What is the pain of the few compared with the pleasure of the many? Indeed, rightly understood, why should early publication give pain even to the few? They will have the advantage of knowing all the ill the dead man thought of their common friends, and this may well outweigh the passing annoyance of discovering that he thought but poorly of themselves. Perhaps, too, the early publication of private papers does more than anything else to realise the Comtist idea of immortality. The prospect of becoming a subject of universal conversation for a whole London season may not be an exalted source of pleasure, but it will be a perfectly sure one. Carlyle could have no doubt of living after death, if he had known the service Mr. Froude was going to render him; and in proportion as the habit of putting the world in possession of all that there is to be known about a man the moment he is dead, becomes confirmed, every one who is important enough to be the subject of so much as a newspaper biography may look forward to a temporary resurrection on the tongues of his acquaintances. The only fly in the ointment of the biographer will be the danger that the increasing decay of reticence will in time spoil his market. Men are becoming so ready to take everybody into their confidence, that there will soon be no disclosures to be made after death. The hero will have anticipated his valet.

THE SERBIAN DIVORCE.

KING MILAN will find, we fear, that he has committed the error of his life. We say "we fear," not because of any sympathy with him, but because his position in Serbia helps to preserve the European peace, and to prevent the Servians from losing themselves in the great Russian morass. Any rival to King Milan must depend upon Russian support; and as Austria-Hungary could not permit Serbia, with its control of the Danube, to become a Russian outpost, the existence of the Obrenovitch dynasty has become an important factor in the maintenance of European tranquillity. Even a necessary King must, however, obey the rules of modern civilisation, and in the astounding method which he has adopted to secure a divorce, the King, as it seems to us, has set them all at naught. He has oppressed his own Church, has superseded the law, has defied opinion, and has given a wound to the instinctive sense of justice, all at the same time. We do not doubt that he has, on the political side, grave cause of complaint against his wife. Provoked, it is believed, as much by her husband's personal conduct as by sympathy with her own people, the Queen has lost her judgment, and has placed herself at the head of a party one object of which is to depose King Milan from the throne. The King is not expected by reasonable politicians to bear that; nor would George IV. have been expected, had Queen Caroline, while still an innocent woman, done the same thing. If in addition to this she had tried to make England an appanage of France, the people would have declared at once that domestic wrongs were no excuse for political misfeasance, and would have supported the Government in any action,—except in securing from an incompetent authority an illegal sanction to an illusory divorce. That is oppression, if there is oppression in this world. The King was not left without