

Daily Alta California
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Letter from London

At a great Conservative demonstration, last week, at the Crystal Palace, Mr. Disraeli “made out the Tory case” with statesman-like comprehensiveness, if he did not state it with lawyer-like accuracy and minuteness. Such as it is, the Conservative programme is before the country, and if it is not much of a programme it must be remembered that not much of a one was required or possible. When a political party has very little work to do except to protest against that done by the other party, its “plan of campaign” may be easily drawn up; and as the Liberals are doing all the real work, of course their opponents have merely to say over a sufficient number of meaningless general phrases, and call it stating their position.

What the Programme Is

Briefly stated it is this: First, the Conservative party will uphold and defend “existing institutions,” viz: the throne, the House of Lords and the Church. Remembering that none of these are in any kind of immediate danger, and that the other party is equally pledged to their maintenance, it may be confidently predicted that Mr. Disraeli and his zealous hosts will see their efforts crowned with entire success. I do not mean to assert that the Liberal party would stand by “existing institutions” through thick and thin, but no more would the other. Let the throne show a disposition to exercise any important one of its traditional prerogatives, and the Conservatives would set it back into its quiet corner as quickly as anybody. Let the peers try to grasp the reins of that power which they are permitted to keep up an appearance of guiding, and Mr. Disraeli’s voice would mutter warning thunders as readily as Mr. Gladstone’s. As for the Established Church, I rather think it has more latitude of misbehaviour, but at least the Liberals are as active in its defense as their opponents are. Only the other day the Liberal House of Commons defeated by a majority of two hundred and one Mr. Miall’s motion for the appointment of a Royal Commission to obtain information concerning the property held by the Church and how acquired. It was known that the measure was a mere entering wedge between Church and State, and the Commons declined to permit its insertion. Mr. Miall intended to obtain the information desired for the purpose of using it against the Church; and very effectively, no doubt, it might have been used. The prompt rejection of the motion was certainly a frank admission that no light was desired upon certain dark places; but it was at least evidence that whomsoever Mr. Disraeli’s party may fear an attack upon the Church from, they may confidently rely upon the assistance of the only power that is in a position to make an attack.

Secondly, the Conservative programme includes the maintenance of the Colonial possessions—the empire must be preserved intact. Everybody else, however, is of the same way of thinking; though the Premier did, the other day, decline to establish a protectorate over Fiji.

To decline to extend the empire over the “Cannibal Islands” is not to menace it where it already exists, however.

Thirdly, the menu comprise the substitution of social for political reform. This is very good—if it means anything. What it probably does mean is the amelioration of the condition of the working classes. Disraeli wants them to have better water, more ventilation in their houses, wholesome food, and more of it. But he does not—at least the lords do not—want them to have the ballot. Mr. Gladstone’s government not only have the general welfare of the labouring classes quite as much at heart as the Opposition seems to have, but are trying to protect them from the tyranny of their employers by taking from the latter the power to compel them to vote “by the card.” Upon the whole, it seems a pity that the Liberal party should not have neglected to do some important thing for the interest of the country, so that the Conservatives might set about it themselves and so have a definite aim and an excuse for their political existence. It would be unfair to conclude this brief review of Mr. Disraeli’s intentions and omit mention of one of his most important ones. Mr. D. intends, he says, to rely for success “upon the sublime instincts of an ancient people;” and Punch has been cruel enough to understand this fine and foggy speech as indicating a disposition to depend upon the Jews—of which “ancient people” Mr. Disraeli is an ornament.

The Peers in their Favorite Character

I think I told you in my last that the peers had taken the kernel out of the Ballot bill by making secrecy in voting optional, instead of compulsory. In this shape it went back to the Commons, who promptly rejected their lordships’ amendments; and now it remains to be seen whether the upper house will bow to the will of the people’s representatives or persist in a course of obstinate pig-headedness. There is good ground for believing that they will hold out during the present session and yield the next. For of course the bill will come up next session; and then, if the lords won’t back down, Mr. Gladstone will have enough other lords created to over-ride the present loss and run the measure through. It is very odd to think that a Commoner like Mr. Gladstone can “turn off” peers as a child slips beads off a string, until he has enough for his purpose. This power, however, is a rather dangerous one, and has been seldom used. It is found that the newly created lords, though serving the immediate purpose of their creation well enough, cannot be relied upon as a regular thing; and the Premier usually finds that like Pygmalion, he has called into existence a world of mischief for his own plaguing. You will probably know before you get this letter what their lordships have done about it.

Church of England Hospitality

The reason that I write so much about the Church is that England is a country of intense religious activity. Not exactly that, either; what I mean is that there is always a fight going on in the Church. The Church being an adjunct of the Government, this rioting always gets into Parliament in some shape or other; from Parliament it passes into the Press, and from the Press into common discourse. So there is always something of a sacred nature for Englishmen to grow profane about. Nearly all the unpleasantness comes to the dissatisfaction of the Dissenters. These people (who are mostly poor) want—I do not say equal church endowments, but—equal privileges under Government. Perhaps they are not altogether wrong in their demands; it is certain they are not altogether successful. The latest squabble has taken place over a bill

introduced by Mr. Cowper-Temple, permitting the bishops and clergy of the Church of England to occasionally invite into their pulpits the clergy of other denominations. It is not at all likely, by the way, that Mr. Cowper-Temple introduced this measure at the instigation of the dissenting ministers upon whom it was to bestow so exceptional an advantage; these gentlemen, so far as I can learn, would, as a rule, decline an invitation to minister to the needs of a congregation whose faith good taste would not allow them to deride. Still, it would seem that such a concession by the powerful and wealthy Church of England to her weak sisters would have been a most gracious instance of the charity she has maintained, at considerable cost, to teach. But it was refused, upon the distinct ground that the people might become indoctrinated with heretical notions—Mr. Beresford-Hope contending that it would open the door to Buddhist and even Mormon proselytizers. Why these would be more dangerous than Wesleyans and Baptists he did not condescend to explain.

Fancy Reporting

The opening of the Bethnal-Green Museum, the other day, by the Prince of Wales (this sort of duty is usually done by his younger brothers, and right active it keeps them) furnished a rare occasion for the nimble-witted reporter. Bethnal-Green, as your readers are probably aware, is about the most squalid part of the town; it is to speak with some latitude of construction, the exact antipodes of the aristocratic West End, that habitat of the nobility and gentry and paradise of sojourning Americans; I live in another quarter. Of course Bethnal-Green being always ill-clad, always over-worked, and commonly hungry, is intensely loyal to “existing institutions.” It turned out *en masse* to see that prince and princess; it decorated their line of march with an abundance of cheap bunting; it left its bone-boiling, dust-sifting, its thousand-and-one other honest but unpleasant pursuits, and cracked its dry throat with huzzaing for the well-beloved Albert Edward. The reporters were delighted; their professional incursion into the East End was fruitful of material for copy; they straightway described the sights and sounds, the characteristic manner of life, the moving scenes and incidents of Bethnal-Green, with the eager minuteness of first discoverers. You would have supposed that not a man of them had ever been there before in his life; in other words, you would not have supposed that some of them live there. The *News* and the *Telegraph* were particularly happy in description; every one said who read their accounts that they were simply inimitable. No such writing had ever graced the “local” columns of a London journal. The Bethnal-Green people thought so, too; they at once held an indignation meeting, and have since held two or three more—monster assemblies—what these same reporters would under other circumstances have described as “seas of surging humanity.” They pledged themselves to use all legal endeavors to stop the sale of the “live papers;” and so far as the swarming hives of Bethnal-Green are concerned they have done it. A falling off of ten or twenty thousand copies in the daily circulation of a London newspaper is not a great matter, but it is something. At least it is too much to pay for a single clever article. It is only fair to say they have accepted the situation with dignified acquiescence, neither whining nor even apologizing. But I don’t know how it fares with the reporters.

These two journals being the leading Liberal organs, the Conservative papers have, as was to have been expected, taken advantage of the merely accidental coincidence to preach many a good readable homily upon the tendency of Liberalism to stab the honest workingman while pretending to caress him; and altogether the matter has been the talk of the town. As such, I repeat it.

A Notable Concert

I attended a morning concert yesterday at St. James' Hall, Regent street, for the benefit of the widow and children of a well-known literary man, lately dead. The matter had been kept in profound secrecy from the public, with such admirable success that only a dozen persons were in the auditorium; anyhow, there were fewer than a hundred, if you require truth. But besides much other talent upon the stage, there were the famous composers, Brinley Richards, and Gounod, who writ that glorious *Faust*. Then there were Sims Reeves, the world's foremost tenor, whom to hear is worth an Atlantic voyage, and Santley, who if not the best male singer in the world is going to be. These two gentlemen are certainly as good fellows as they are good singers; for in response to encores from that ridiculously little audience they sang their sweetest songs over and over again! I don't know what is Santley's custom, but when Reeves is paid fifty pounds for a song instead of, as on this occasion, giving his services gratuitously, the devil an encore will he notice without additional guerdon. An audience of ten thousand persons might stamp the house down, but it couldn't stamp him out. In this respect, at least, the concert was a notable one.

A Dry Spell

The "water-famine" in Bermondsey, of which I wrote you last week, is all right now; the cause of it has been discovered and officially pointed out. If this has not slaked any tongues that were parched "through utter drought," it has at least given peace and good order to the afflicted district. No Englishman ever thinks of rioting after his grievance has been officially investigated, and the cause regularly reported upon by a committee. I believe, however, the suffering has in some sort abated, and is in process of entire alleviation.

Red Arms Strike Hard

I don't know if I told you about a determined strike of the washerwomen in Kensal New Town. These "ladies of the tub," as they describe themselves, organized a mighty uprising for "three shillings a day, brushes found, and two half-pints of beer." They did not obtain quite all this; in fact, considering the disproportion between their demand and what small advantage they actually secured, the strike was a failure. Not being a washerwoman, but simply a patron of the launder's art, I cannot of course describe why the movement failed; but I can tell you what their leader says upon this point. This woman, whom the *Daily Telegraph* describes as "a young giantess, with a shrewd, cool head on her mighty shoulders, a woman of education," says of her sister nymphs of the suds: "They are not like men, who will keep a point steadily in view; and they won't keep civil." I reach out a long arm and lay this dry bit of practical character-sketching reverently at the feet of Madame Pitts-Stevens.

Divers and diverse are the views of the Alabama matter now entertained by the British head. Probably the most common—and for my part I think it the most sagacious—one is that in this game of diplomacy the John Bull has been a trifle over-reached. It is held that America has not abandoned these claims, but has merely withdrawn them from the consideration of a tribunal which had declared they did "not constitute a good foundation for an award of compensation." This is I say the opinion most commonly expressed, and the language of America in accepting the declaration of the Arbitrators certainly justifies that view of it. This language appears to me

to be excellently non-committal and disingenuous: the President accepts the declaration “as determinative of the important question of public law involved.” There is a delicious uncertainty as to what he is to be understood as meaning by the “question of public law” alluded to. To have done other than withdraw the claims after the Board had decided them invalid would have been simply foolish; but it is difficult to see how he could have done it with less of a pledge not to present them in future than he made. But notwithstanding this little speck of cloud, there was so great a sense of relief at the judgment of the Arbiters upon a matter which England claims was not before them, and upon which, by England’s own showing, therefore, their judgment is not determinative of anything, that all classes have agreed to regard the arrangement as a tolerably good one, and trust to luck for the future.

You can have no idea of the irritation those preposterous indirect claims caused among the thinking classes here. A month ago it was unusual to hear an Englishman speak temperately and calmly upon the subject. The newspapers, which at that time were “holding in” with all their might and (deucedly creditable it was in them to do so) did not at all reflect the popular temper, which was as unamiable as that of an ancient sow, listening to the shrieks of an imaginary pig tortured by a ventriloquist in the fiction of a rail fence.

(Source: California Digital Newspaper Collection, <http://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc?a=d&d=DAC18720728.2.5&e=-----en--20--1--txt-txIN----->)