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The Passing Show

A Record of Personal Opinion and Dissent

WASHINGTON, Thursday—That benefactor of his race, the military inventor, seems now to have thought out a missile that will make a hole in any practicable armor plate as easily as you can put a hot knife through a pat of butter. From all that can be learned by way of the fan-light over the door of official secrecy it appears to be a pointed steel bolt greased with graphite. Its performances are said to be eminently satisfactory to the man behind the patent, who is confident that it will serve the purpose of its being by penetrating the naval appropriation bill. Well, here at last is “an improvement in weapons of destruction” to which the non-militant tax-payer can accord a hearty welcome. If it is really irresistible to armor, armor to resist it will go out of use and ships again fight in their shirt-sleeves, as soldiers do. It will sadden us to renounce the 550-dollars-a-ton steel plating endeared to us by a thousand tender recollections of the assessment rate, but time heals all earthly sorrow and eventually we shall brace up and renew our joy in the blue of the skies, the fragrance of the flowers, the dew-spangled meadows, the fluting and warbling and trilling of the politicians. In the meantime, while awaiting our perfect consolation, we may derive a minor comfort from the high price of graphite.

Inspired by its name, the House Committee on Labor has been doing something for its keep. It has reported a bill to protect free labor from competition with prison labor. The bill as reported is described as “a simple proposition to permit the states to settle the problem of convict labor competition for themselves.” Fine old horny-handed sons of toil, these committeemen! I have the honor to suggest that they credential themselves as practical workingmen by enlisting under the banner of industrial discontent as members of the Union of Diligent Snorers, or the League of the Sweating Chin.

I hope that success of “The Journal’s” noble battle against New York’s thieving ice trust does not in any way depend upon ice being “a necessary of life.” The use of that general term in legislation will defeat the purpose of any law containing it. A “necessary of life” is something necessary to the support of life—something without which no one can live; mere comforts and conveniences do not come under that head, though loose writers seem to think so. The only particular, material things that are necessary to the support of life are air in its fluid form and water in its liquid form. Greatly to the sorrow of the trust gentry, the former of these is not subject to monopoly. It can be liquefied and then it is, as water can be solidified, and then that is: but neither is then necessary to life. I mean necessary under ordinary, normal circumstances; for it we consider abnormal, accidental or unnatural circumstances, almost anything may be a necessary of life—the bush to which a man clings in falling over a precipice, a plank when one is drowning, whisky for a snake bite, and so forth. When a sick person dies whom ice would have saved, it is not the lack of ice that kills him; it is the fever

or the weather—a fact that somewhat mitigates the satisfaction that the controlling trust naturally feels in the poor devil's mischance.

There are other necessities of life besides air and water, yes food and, in our climate, shelter and clothing. But these names are generic, covering a multitude of things each, and therefore without meaning in laws against monopoly. Food is necessary to life, but meat is not, for many persons live and enjoy good health without it. Bread is not, for there is cracked wheat. Cracked wheat is not, for there is bread. Clothing is necessary, but a coat or a petticoat is not. What laws we have to prevent or punish monopoly in what we eat, drink or wear I do not know, but I think I know that conviction cannot be had under one that does not name the specific and particular thing whose monopoly it forbids. And there is no reason why it should not. The list of articles interdicted to the monopoly need not be very long, though length would be no objection. If it is desired to prevent a corner in ice why not call it ice? Laws against "combinations in restraint of trade," or against control of "the necessities of life," are idle nonsense, and of such is the kingdom of legislation.

As to whether the New York ice trust ought to be broken up there can be no two intelligent opinions. In a general way I am a believer in aggregations of capital—in so-called trusts—and a disbeliever in the efficacy of laws for their prevention and suppression. I think their general effect is to better the quality of their product and cheapen it to the consumer. If in the long run this, in a particular instance, is seen to be so, that trust is intelligently managed on lines most profitable to itself. But there are fool trusts, scoundrel trusts—for a scoundrel is only a fool under another aspect—trusts which invite competition, blackmail and destructive legislation and litigation. This New York concern appears to be of that order of merit. It is to be hoped that somehow its managers, now basking in the genial consciousness of their identity, may eventually feel in the steeper beam of that mounting luminary a discomfort making them envious of Judas Iscariot, who once a year is permitted "to cool him on his floe" in a circumpolar paradise of paleocrystic joys.

Admiral Dewey denies that he said the United States could "whip" any nation excepting Great Britain. If he did say it, all right; if he did—O, well he naturally feels a pride in his high rank and probably wanted to show that he was a full Admiral.

The Boers are the most religious people in the world. A people who go into battle with prayer and come out of it singing praises to the Almighty if it is a victory and praises if it is a defeat, that it is not any worse, are not a people to be spoken of lightly or contemptuously by anyone.—Senator Teller.

Still they are not a people of whom anyone having a logical mind can speak with entire respect. If soldiers ask the Lord's assistance in battle and the Lord suffers them to be defeated they should conclude that one of these propositions is true: (A) Their cause was unjust; or (B) The Lord is unjust; or (C) The Lord, if just, was powerless. It will not do to say: "Our cause is just and the Lord is with us, but for some purpose that we cannot comprehend preferred that we lose." If in a case of this kind, or any kind, I cannot comprehend the Lord's purpose I cannot be sure that I comprehend it in any case; therefore I cannot know if it is a good purpose or a bad purpose and have no foundation for the belief that he is a good Lord. If I praise him for the defeat that might have been worse, why should I not blame him for the victory that might have been better? An incomprehensible God is not a proper object to worship; he may be intending to do anything. He may be anything. Perhaps he is a larger Teller!

Yes, the Boers are a religious people. It is not known what their Constitution is today, for it may be altered or abolished at the will of the First Raad on the initiative of the President; but a little while ago, and down to the time of the Jameson raid, it forbade any Roman Catholic or Jew to vote or hold office; and for a long time no Protestant could do so unless he were a member of the orthodox Dutch Church. If the pious Mr. Teller's ancestors had settled in Pretoria (I wish they had) he could not have got his nose counted on any question affecting his own welfare. He is here a member of the Upper House; he would not have been so there and I don't believe he will be in the world to come. We know that he honestly admires the South African theocracy; he has left us in no doubt as to that. But we know, too, he is just as thankful as he can be that he is not subject to the deep damnation of its authority.

The French duel has at last won a place among agencies deleterious to human life. On the 27th of last month, a Parisian sculptor fought a journalist who had ungently criticised his work. Having sustained without damage his adversary's fire, the aggrieved artist magnanimously exclaimed:

"My religion forbids me to take human life," and with a superb gesture turning his pistol away from his antagonist drew the trigger, and killed the surgeon. Moral: Don't be loitering about where you are not needed.

For the puzzle page: If in legging it athwart the lea to escape nomination to the Vice Presidency Governor Roosevelt should fall over his own feet and break his neck, could Senator Platt be indicted for murder?

By the way, this "trial of speed" recalls an old anecdote about a foxhound for which a Virginia planter had paid a fancy price. One day the dog started a fox and both vanished into the woods, the planter pursuing. After running a mile or two the planter came to a woodchopper, and with what breath was left him, inquired if a fox and dog had passed that way. "Yes," answered the tree-butcher without looking up from his work—"right through yander field." "And how were they making it?" inquired the proud planter. "O, 'bout nip and tuck—dog a little ahead." If any part of this present race were run in the open, it is likely that the nomination would be seen a few lengths in the lead.

Editor Stead, of London, can be heard at a considerable distance lamenting the intolerance of his compatriots in that they interrupt the peaceful proceedings of meetings that are called to hearten the enemies of his country. He is of the conviction that England is no longer the land of the untrammelled tongue, albeit himself is publishing unmolested in the heart of it a journal of infamy for dissemination of treason. His government protects him, for it can; but no government ever did, or ever could, curb the passions of the people when disloyal orators denounce a popular war and add themselves to the obstacles that impede it. The worst indictment than can be drawn against war is, not that it takes life, but that it takes reason; not that it kills the soldier, but that it brutalizes the civilian. Does Editor Stead expect his countrymen to be immune to "the fury of the non-combatant?" That is a universal fever, generated by war as typhus by exhalations of a swamp. And Editor Stead is himself a walking conflagration.

It seems to be thought that the Canadian schoolboy who is to convey a message of sympathy to Aguinaldo may have to hunt a long time for him. Possibly, but he will have little difficulty in finding some of his troops. He has only to go to one of the "conquered"

provinces where “the war is over” and join the American garrison in a fortified town. They will come that way pretty soon.

McKinley—Sir John, have the goodness to say to the Turkish Minister that unless his government pays up we shall send a fleet to the Dardanelles.

Hay—Yes, Your Majesty, but would it not be better to say through the Dardanelles?

McK.—I don’t know about that. One does not like to promise more than one may be able to perform. Admiral Dewey tells me there is a doubt about getting through: The strait is fortified at every turn.

H.—Why, Admiral Dewey said, apropos of a Nicaragua Canal, that fortifications were worthless—that they only invited attack!

McK.—That was when he was standing by the admin—I mean when he was a loyal servant of the crown. He is now a Pretender and dares to say what he thinks.

H. (aside)—Great Scott! I’d give ten years of life—nay more; six weeks of officer for the same courage.

McK.—Sir John, what are you muttering in your beard?

H.—A prayer for your Majesty’s health.

McK. (aside)—Ah, yes, I suffer from Hay fever.

(Observing him about to sneeze, Hay gives himself the happiness of taking snuff).

Hay—I greet your excellency with rapture! Ali Ferrough Bey—May your wives be as the leaves of the forest. May it please your Excellency, McKinley says that if your august master finds it inconvenient to pay that little account he need not hurry.

A.F. B. —Allah forbid that the light of the universe should hurry about anything!

H.—The matter will keep and an ultimatum delivered about the first week in November would—

A. B. F.—May jackasses sing on your grandmother’s grave! Do you think you can use the Brother of the Prophet to further your cursed election schemes? I shall advise that the bill be paid at once.

H.—Exalted sir, I fear you are pleased to talk through your turban. But I pray that you will now permit me to withdraw; I must go and tell Mac. (Exit Hay).

A. F. B.—The divil go wid him, the blitherin’ thaif! If I hed him in Shatambowl I’d give the soles of him a taste o’ the Holy Shilelah, or I’m no Thru belaiser!

McKinley—Sir John, did you deliver my ultimatum to the Turkish Minister?

Hay—Aye, that I did! And not only did I say we should send a fleet into the Dardanelles, but I ventured to add that Colonel Bryan would go into commission at once.

McK.—And did he say that he would advise his august what does he call him to pay down on the nail?

H.—My liege, I am pained to say that he did not. He said that he would see you in Helfurst.

McK.—Where is that?—it sounds Dutch.

H.—Yes; it is in Pennsylvania.

McK.—Well, I’ll meet him there and talk it over if you think the character of our ultimatum permits.

H.—Certainly; it is the ultimatum tentative.

The matter of a “memorial bridge” across the Potomac between Washington and Arlington has again reared its hoary paw in the halls of legislation. Almost any kind of bridge will do. It need not be a monument to anybody’s memory in particular, just a bridge.

Sometimes one wishes to go to Arlington to be buried, or on other business of importance and one likes to do so without a sense of imminent peril to one's cleanliness through immersion in the water that we drink. A journey to Arlington is an adventure—a challenge to the law of probabilities—an exercise in rough riding with a chance of being drowned. But doubtless the national capital will be a long time getting that famous new bridge. It is at present spanning the dream-waters of the Nicaragua Canal.

On an isle of the peaceful sea,
Is the Fallible Filipee
The fellow infers
(But he widely errs)
That he has the distinction to be.
He says: "The top entitee
Of the scale of being—that's me!"
But his mind is linked
To untruth. Extinct
In the land of his birth is he.
Now Otis comes over the sea,
Redhanded, a great grandee!
MacArthur remains
To efface the stains
Of the Fallible Filipee.
But something (O, what can it be?)
Disturbs the serenitee
Of the men that mop
The spot. They stop,
Remarking aloud: "Hully Gee!"