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The Passing Show

A Record of Personal Opinion and Dissent

WASHINGTON, March 22.—A kind correspondent, benevolently desirous of conferring upon me the advantages of a belief in spiritualism, cites a number of well-authenticated instances of “materialization.” In all but one I observe the spirit has appeared “in his habit as he lived.” Of the remaining one the matter of costume is left in doubt, but with a strong presumption of costume of some kind: had there been no clothing the fact would have been so remarkable as to have been noted in the narrative. Now, I submit that, like nearly all the proponents of his beautiful faith, my correspondent demands a larger credulity than he knows—asks me to believe more than he believes himself. He unconsciously affirms not only that human “flesh and blood” have the ability to reappear after dispersal of their elements by decay, but that the same power inheres in such artificial things as woven fabrics, buttons, pins and all manner of substances that go to the making and sustaining of our apparel. That seems to me pretty hard to accept. My correspondent must humor my disability and try to be content if I reverse his evidences of immortality without believing them.

If convinced of the existence of such things as spirits I should find no difficulty in believing that they are as likely to be here among us as anywhere else. It is only to stand where I am, taking no new ground, but satisfied with the rock of conviction already attained. Thence to the belief that the spirits may have found some means of communicating with those of us who have denied ourselves the advantages of death is a short and easy step. From that hummock to the “unsteadfast footing” of faith in their power to resume their old form and substance—to “materialize”—is a rather long and difficult leap. I think I should ask the services of a bridge of proof—a rather substantial one. I should have to feel, knead, knuckle, pull about and pinch the spook said to be present in the flesh. To this point all is conceivable in a way; beyond lies the dark domain of incomprehensibility. Resurrection of the flesh is a doctrine so long affirmed, so familiar to imagination, that we seem to get a certain loose grasp on it. But resurrection of woollen, linen, silk, fur, lace, feathers, hooks and eyes, buttons, hatpins and the like—well, really, that is going far. No, I draw the line at clothing. The materialised spook so pealing to my senses for recognition of his ghostly good character must authenticate himself otherwise than by familiar and remembered habiliments. He must be credentialed by nudity—and that regardless of temperature or who may happen to be present. If he deem these hard conditions he is at liberty to remain on his reservation and try to endow me with a sense of himself by other means.

I have treated this matter at a considerable length because I do not remember to have seen this question of the resurrection of the products of the loom and the workshop raised by anyone else. It is a “difficulty” that would probably always have been overlooked by protagonists of spiritualism, for theirs is not of the order of intelligence that discerns the lions

in its path. Like their afflicted fellow-creatures of other cults, they are blind and deaf to the implications of what they affirm—the unspoken residue of speech. They had not learned, and are mostly incapable of understanding, that what a man declares that he believes is only one of the many convictions to which the declaration commits him. It is cheerfully admitted that a believer in “materialization” may be a law-abiding citizen and a conscientious taxpayer and might justly be taxed on his belief.

The Insurgent Junta here (in Manila), in conjunction with that in Hongkong, is growing active.

Reports are current here of active rebel reorganization in the Province of Morong.

It is also reported that the rebels are reorganizing in the Province of Zambales.

Evidence accumulates of the treason and perfidy of the municipal presidents in the Provinces of General MacArthur’s district.

Travel between the towns garrisoned by Americans is becoming more dangerous.

All wagon trains must be escorted by heavy guards.

Three months have passed since Aguinaldo was actively pursued.

All this, with much more of the same sort, is from a Manila telegram dated last Sunday. It does not seem to confirm in any adequate way the almost daily tale that “the war is at an end,” but as long as “General Otis has the situation well in hand” it would be unfair to complain. General Otis with the situation well in hand is so picturesque and fascinating a figure that we should be sorry to forego the spectacle through lack of a “situation.” A man cannot control a team of wild horses unless there is a team of wild horses for him to control.

That we are near the end of the war in the Philippine Islands may be true easily enough, but—which end? There are wars that last centuries, as our war against the Indians has done, the Dutch war against the natives of Sumatra, and so forth. Some peoples never give up. These are all savages or semi-savages inhabiting countries distinguished for impenetrable jungles, inhospitable deserts or impossible climates. Given some unhappy combination of these kinds and such traits of native character as cruel courage, ignorance and the lust of loot, and we have the fundamental elements of a perpetual war. In the Philippines climatic and topographical conditions favour the forecast, and the natives have the needful ignorance and piratical instincts. If they have also the brute courage and capacity of hatred, the end of the war—the other end—is at a distance measurable by centuries. Their long submission to Spanish rule, which appears to have been but little better than ours is likely to be, affords a presumption of peace if we can overcome their organized military resistance. To do this we must have one hundred thousand men and take away General Otis’ roller-top desk.

The Filipinos may fight forever, though it is unlikely, but old Paul Kruger’s talk of resisting to the death is all moonshine. We hear the same sort of meaningless declamations from every underdog in every fight. We heard it from the Confederates in our civil war. Man, woman and child, they were all going “to die in the last ditch”; yet all their beaten armies, one after another, very sensibly surrendered “in order to prevent the needless”—and disagreeable—“effusion of blood.” We heard it in the Franco-German war: The “Lively Gaul” unstable in all else,

And variable as the shade

By the light quivering aspen made,

was a firm as the iron hills in his preference of death to submission. Yet, when beaten he surrendered by the hundred thousand at Metz, at Sedan, at Paris. And so it will be in South Africa. The character of the country is not favourable to the guerilla, nor is the character of its people. If Kruger and his advisers have the courage and determination of their soldiers there is still to be a good deal of hard fighting, for the military situation is by no means desperate; but if hopelessly beaten they will “quit” and sue for peace. Kruger himself, though, may try to run away; for this popular hero of Europe and America is but little better than a common thief, and if caught may have to answer for his crimes against the pocket. It is to be hoped that the good gentlemen now so diligent in promoting his apotheosis may not themselves be arraigned for complicity. There is no evidence that they got any of the money; their crime is penury of knowledge aggravated by wasteful garrulity.

A few years ago Paul Kruger was a petty official of the British government, whose suzerainty he then recognized to the extent of a small monthly salary. Today he is worth millions, nearly all got by extortion from the Uitlanders. When one of these wanted a “concession”—a license to do business, or some fundamental commercial right—he commonly got it. But commonly, too, it was observable that he had become a land-owner—had purchased a tract of worthless veldt from good old Mr. Kruger, or good old Mr. Kruger’s son-in-law, who had not previously been known to own it. It was through such deals as this, with officials of high authority, that the Uitlanders came into unwelcome possession of nearly all those lands of which seven acres were required to sprout a bean. And that is the foundation of the charge made against them of having cheated the Boers out of all the best land in the country.

When the people of the Transvaal who had “fled from British misrule” because it did not include slaveholding, invoked British misrule to save them from extermination by the blacks, and voluntarily surrendered their independence by way of gratitude and continued protection, the “relieving force” found not a Boer in office, for there was not a pound sterling in the treasury. Later they revolted and were again given virtual independence. The Uitlanders, lured by promises that were not kept, settled up the country, opened the mines, built cities which they were not permitted to govern, and brought comfort and prosperity to all. Now observe the change. Last year every official in the “republic” was a Boer, and the salary list had risen from nothing to £1,216,394 sterling—more than six million dollars; about enough to give every adult male of the Boer population two hundred dollars a year! It is, I hope, needless to add that every adult male Boer was not invited to participate in the division.

A high officer of the army kindly suggests a use for harbour fortifications not mentioned in these columns on Sunday last. Forts at the termini of the Nicaraguan Canal, he points out, would make harbors a refuge for our fleets when driven off the seas. Now there’s a man with an able-bodied imagination; he can conceive a squadron of American warships (commanded, say by Admiral Dewey or Rear Admiral Erben, retired) scurrying off the Caribbean before an enemy’s guns, huddling into Greytown Harbor behind our forts and fighting among themselves for precedence in taking to the hills by way of that canal! And it is simple justice to say that in the effort to accomplish that unearthly conception he suffered no visible damage from overstrain or fatigue. Apparently he deemed the terror and flight of Admiral Dewey (or Rear-Admiral Erben, retired) before a fleet of modern and presumably non-Spanish warcraft one of the most natural and least remarkable things in the world. Wherefore, I infer that something in army life begets atrophy of the organ of veneration.

It is thoughtful of the Republican orators in Congress to hold out the hope that under certain circumstances they may “extend” the Constitution to Puerto Rico. Perhaps they will some day be so considerate as to extend the Decalogue to Luson, and to the Sulu Islands the useful if humble law that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles when the weather is right.

England’s new big gun with a range of twenty miles suggests the coming of that happy day when wars will be prosecuted without invasion and the soldier’s trade be classed among sedentary occupations. When guns are “laid” by calculations of latitude and longitude and the rotundity of the earth is an important factor in determining the elevation of the piece, we can truly say that the kingdom of science is at hand, and hail the dawn of the military millennium.

And now the industriously discontented are evoking firmamental echoes in vilification of the tyrant capitalist who is said to have denied the right of a poor man to marry. Before further troubling deaf heaven with these bootless cries might it not be as well to get a gleam of light upon the veracity the “Spokesman” who says that the tyrant capitalist said it? Men have died and great trees have grown out of their graves, the world has grayed of age and suns have burnt themselves to swirls of ashes since the Angel of Truth roosted nowhere else than in the Cave of Adullam.

As the tyrant capitalist who forbids the banns at the poor men’s wedding is a resident of Chicago one is naturally reminded that within the last few months that storm centre of “industrial discontent” has lost, or stands to lose, several hundred million of capital by its removal to New York. One large manufacturing concern migrated, entire plant, employees and all. When it is remembered by men of sense and learned by others that not a cent of money can bring any profit or pleasure without employing labor, this outflow of opportunity to the working men will be regarded with less satisfaction in Chicago and more in New York than if that axiomatic truth were forgotten or unknown. Chicago is beginning to reap the whirlwind, and there is visible promise of an abundant crop; but when her swains and maidens gather to let it o’er the green under the harvest moon in commemoration, the festivities will possibly lack something of spontaneity and heart. And it will not surprise if the holy fathers of the Church of St. Altgeld be willing to forego their tithe.