

# THE WEEK.

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## CONTENTS OF CURRENT NUMBER.

CONTRIBUTED ARTICLES—		PAGE
England and English Affairs.....	Goldwin Smith.....	571
Our Paris Letter.....	L. L.....	572
Notes from the Continent.....		572
President Cleveland and Party Government.....	B.....	573
Jottings along the C. P. R.....	E. S.....	574
PHENICIAN ANTIQUITIES.....	Selected.....	574
POETRY—		
A Modern "Sir Galahad".....	Ferrars.....	575
TOPICS OF THE WEEK—		
The Chambly Election.....		576
Sir John A. Macdonald's Visit to the Pacific Coast.....		576
Canadian Foreign Trade.....		576
Government by Coercive Justice or Love?.....		576
Russia and Austria.....		577
Russian Designs on Turkey.....		577
The Eastern Question in Asia.....		577
NOTES.....		577
THE TOYS.—Poem.....	Selected.....	579
A TRIP TO NEWFOUNDLAND.—II.....	Portia.....	579
READINGS FROM CURRENT LITERATURE.....		580
AMONGST THE SHEAVES.—Poem.....	Selected.....	581
OUR LIBRARY TABLE.....		581
LITERARY GOSSIP.....		582

## ENGLAND AND ENGLISH AFFAIRS.

THE last few days have been passed by me in a scene which, amidst all this political turmoil, seemed an oasis of religious peace. Salisbury Cathedral, which is unquestionably the most perfect and uniform in design and execution of all the English cathedrals, appears to me also the most beautiful; at least when it is taken with its surroundings, the broad expanse of lawn from which it rises, and the Close, full of ancient and ecclesiastical houses, which forms its calm and congenial domain. This cathedral has, moreover, to me a special historical charm, since, being in the early English style, it belongs to the freshness of medieval faith. The later Gothic styles bespeak the decline of Catholicism, and the great ecclesiastical buildings of the fifteenth century are rather works of architectural taste and magnificence than of spiritual aspiration. But Salisbury Cathedral, we may be pretty sure, was a work of spiritual aspiration, and a more divine employment can hardly be imagined than that of rearing this pile of loveliness in the belief that it would not only delight the eye but save souls.

The Cathedral Chapters, in common with all whose income is derived from land, are now financially in a critical situation. Their revenues have sadly fallen off, and there appears to be no prospect of recovery. On the contrary, matters are likely to grow worse if our North-west provides wheat to the extent to which we suppose it will. The incomes of rectories have declined in like manner, and those of which the endowment is glebe are miserably impoverished. Colleges and other patrons begin, I am told, to find difficulty in getting suitable men to accept their livings. Whether the Church of England is destined to be disestablished or not, she seems in imminent peril of being disendowed by the operation of economical circumstances without any revolutionary legislation. The landed gentry are even in worse plight, since their estates in many cases are heavily mortgaged through the improvidence of their predecessors, who spent money recklessly when rents were high, or are encumbered with jointures and with rent charges in favour of younger children. Not a few of the great country homes are shut up, and more would be were it not that their possessors have often other sources of income, such as house property in towns. It is needless to say what a change the ruin of the squirearchy would make in the social life of rural England.

In the meantime the outward aspect of rural England never was more lovely than it is now. The greenness and richness of the landscape, the perfection of finish, the signs of wealth and taste which everywhere meet the eye, with the grey church towers, old manor houses, and immemorial trees, which mingle with the gay creations of modern opulence, are, to one who comes from a new and unfinished land of promise, a perpetual feast. Every cottage garden is full of flowers, every cottage wall is covered with them. Everywhere appears the picture of prosperous and joyous life. All is so trim and delightful to the eye that, as an American friend said to me the other day, it seems as though the whole country were on exhibition.

POLITICAL events march. While I am writing, the Cabinet is sitting in Downing Street to ratify the resolution to resign formed at the Cabinet

dinner of Saturday last. I thought it would be so. Mr. Gladstone seemed to be in the temper for desperate courses; his last letter was so violent that people began to think it was almost time for Dr. Andrew Clark to appear upon the scene. But Mr. Gladstone's colleagues are not like him "in a hurry;" most of them have a political future, and their hope lies in a reconciliation of the Liberal party; but the reconciliation of the Liberal party would be impossible if the Government had met Parliament and constrained the Unionist Liberals to concur in a vote of censure. It is not at all likely, however, that Mr. Gladstone will feel at liberty to enjoy his "long coveted repose." His exasperation at his defeat is far too keen. If a French interviewer may be trusted, he has already declared his determination to continue the great work of his life, which he represents as being the deliverance of suffering nations; as though the Catholic and Celtic Province of Ireland were, or ever had been, a nation by themselves, and as though they were suffering under any practical grievance which the Parliament of the United Kingdom is not perfectly willing and able to redress. Mr. Gladstone is still physically strong, and if he is resolved on proceeding in his unpatriotic course, his powers of injuring his country are far from being exhausted. Not the least of the wrongs which he does is by propagating with his great authority, and impressing on the minds of all foreign nations, especially on that of the American, a version of British history in relation to Ireland which, so far as the period since the Union is concerned, is the calumnious offspring of an imagination heated almost to frenzy by the struggle for power, and utterly reckless of national honour.

THE political horizon as yet is very far from clear. The highest necessity of the country is a strong and stable government, but it is not easy to see how such a government is to be formed. The Conservatives have not a majority of their own, and if they are weak in number, they are still weaker in men, especially, where strength is most needed, in the House of Commons. But Lord Hartington, it seems almost certain, has, to the general disappointment of all Unionists and all who care for the country more than for Party, let it be understood that he will not take office with the Conservatives. He has been renewing of late his pledges to Liberalism, and it is very likely that he would have great difficulty in inducing some of his supporters actually to cross the House. It is too probable, however, that his view of the case as a statesman is seconded if it is not partly suggested by his personal dislike of the toils and responsibilities of office. This is his weak point. On the question of the Union, with regard to which he feels strongly, he has acted with noble energy, and his conduct during the last three months has raised him immensely in public esteem. But he is by nature a man of pleasure, averse to labour and unambitious. A story was current about him some time ago which, whether it was true or not—and I have reason to suspect that it had some foundation,—shows the general opinion of his character. He wrote, it is said, when a member of the Government, to a friend, who was also a member of the Government, for information about a horse. The friend, being unable himself to furnish the information, handed on the note to a member of the Carlton Club. He had not, in reading the note, turned the leaf; but the member of the Carlton Club did, and found on the second page the postscript, "When will this confounded Government of ours go out?" There is, I am convinced, a large element, especially among the commercial classes, of moderate Liberalism which, even apart from the immediate exigency, would welcome a Liberal-Conservative Government; but it would require, as a justification for its allegiance, the presence of some trustworthy representative of Liberal principles in the Cabinet. There is a recoil from Disunion and the general tendency to revolution with which Disunion is connected; but there is no Tory reaction, nor would it be possible for any reactionary government to maintain itself in power. Lord Hartington's refusal, therefore, whether inevitable or not, is a great calamity.

For my own part I am not a Conservative, but I look upon the Conservatives as the only body of men capable of forming a strong bulwark against Disunion. I am not a believer in the permanency of the hereditary principle, but I regard the monarchy as forming, at the present juncture, the symbol, pledge, and rallying point of national unity. As a citizen, I should deem it my duty, were I resident in England, simply to support the Queen's Government in resisting the enemies of the State. There will be