

It is perhaps a little late to discuss the great assembly of rural labourers which took place in Memorial Hall, London, a month ago. But the fact is that not till the fuller reports of the proceedings brought by the mails had come to hand and one had had a little time to think about them was it easy to get a clear conception of the significance of this remarkable gathering. Remarkable, indeed, it was, but in order to take in its full meaning, it is necessary to remember that it took place in England, where the farm labourer has never hitherto been accustomed to consider himself, much less to be considered by others, qualified to hold and express opinions of his own on political questions. Hence the meeting was a revelation not only to leading politicians of both parties, but to the townspeople who have so long been in the habit of thinking for their rural neighbours on all questions of a public character. The first query that suggests itself is whether and to what extent the meeting was what it claimed to be—genuinely representative of the English rural labourer. On this point there seems to have been left no room for doubt. The speakers were, we are told, men who are either employed directly on the land, or in occupations immediately dependent on agricultural pursuits, that is, they were real rural labourers. And not least among the surprises of the occasion was the fact that these men conducted the business of a large convention as creditably as the workers in towns, with all their advantages, are accustomed to do. Those who were surprised at this had no doubt forgotten, as the editor of an influential weekly suggests, how many agencies have been at work during these last years enlarging the mental horizon of the dweller in the country, and fitting him for taking the part that he henceforth means to take in the management of public affairs, so far at least as his own interests are specially concerned. But the main question is, what does Hodge particularly want that he should take so bold and unusual a departure from the old paths in order to make it known? On this point, too, the speakers uttered no uncertain sound. He wants access to the land, either by renting or by purchase, in order that as occupier he may make the most of it for the support of himself and family. Alarm has been created by the tendency of the agriculturists to leave the farms and flock to the cities. Here is one remedy, say the labourers: let us have the land and we will stay at home and till it. "It is notorious," says the *Independent*, "that at present, as a rule, the labourer is discriminated against in the letting of land. Allotment land is often let at from 10s. to 15s., £1 an acre more than land adjoining it, while in most parts it can only be got as a favour, from men who would not tolerate allotments at all if they could help themselves." As to the common assertion that the farm labourers would be no better off with the land in possession than they are now, the best answers seem to have been made by some delegates who have tried both methods and so could testify from experience. Some of these who had risen from the very lowest position as employees, and are now successfully tilling holdings of considerable size, were emphatic on this point. Another innovation insisted on is the parish and district council, in other words, complete local self-government. The rural toilers want to have something to say about the use of parish endowments—charitable, educational, or otherwise. They want parish land for all schools. They want places available for public meetings. And above all—for the convention was unmistakably Non-conformist—they want Disestablishment to free them from the domination of the parson, as they want the land by allotment or purchase to free them from that of the squire. These will now seem to many to be radical demands. A quarter of a century hence they will probably be regarded on all hands as matters of simple justice and fair play, and the wonder will be that they could have been so long withheld.

SERIOUS attempts have been made in at least two or three of the States of the American Union to prevent foreigners from holding real estate. Some years since a man named Scully and certain others, all aliens, purchased extensive tracts of land in several counties in central and northern Illinois, and are said to have treated their tenants with great harshness. The result was that public feeling became aroused to such a pitch that in 1887 an Act of the Legislature was passed making it unlawful for aliens to acquire lands in the State. Why there should be greater danger of rack-renting by absentee landlords in the case of foreigners than in that of American citizens we are not informed. The question of the constitutionality of the

law was recently raised on behalf of some Germans who have fallen heirs to parts of an estate, and the law has been declared *ultra vires* because in conflict with the provisions of a treaty under which citizens of Germany are permitted to hold lands in the United States. A similar law against alien land-holding passed by the Texas Legislature has been declared invalid by both a district court and by the Supreme Court of the State, to which an appeal was taken. This decision was based by both courts on a technicality, but the *Christian Union*, to which we are indebted for the facts, says that the decision against the law was received with much satisfaction throughout the State, and that the injurious character of the legislation has been so completely exposed that its re-enactment is not probable. "If these forecasts should prove correct," says the *Christian Union*, "an interesting chapter in the history of a phase of the proscription of foreigners will be brought to a close." It is impossible not to feel a certain degree of sympathy with the primary object of this narrow legislation, and it may well be questioned whether it would not be wise to set strict limits to the amount of land that may be held by any one man or company in this western hemisphere. But the absurdity of seeking to forbid foreigners from acquiring an interest in the soil ought, one would think, to have been sufficiently apparent without actual experiment. New countries can hardly afford to check the inflow of foreign capital by arbitrary measures of that kind.

SOME disquietude was caused a few days since by the rumour which came from Washington sources to the effect that some new difficulty had arisen to delay proceedings in connection with the Behring Sea arbitration. There is now good reason to hope that either the rumour was unfounded or that the difficulty has been overcome, whatever may have been its nature. There seems, however, to be a good deal of delay in completing the arrangements, and if the fault is on the part of Lord Salisbury, it would not be surprising if the United States authorities should become a little restive since it must be to their interest to have their rights defined before the opening of another fishing season. This is assuming that they may reasonably expect to have certain territorial rights recognized, and to be enabled thereby to mount guard over a certain area more effectively than was done last season under the joint arrangement. Whether they have any good ground to expect such a concession is another question. Be that as it may, every one concerned will feel a sense of relief when it is announced that the arbitrators have been finally chosen and a day fixed for the commencement of their deliberations. That this consummation will soon be reached there seems now every reason to hope. Having gone so far it is incredible that any minor question, such as the choice of arbitrators, could now be permitted to interrupt the negotiations. Whatever the award, the object-lesson set before the world by these two great English-speaking nations sitting down for the second time to have their disputes adjudicated upon by an impartial tribunal will be one of great moral value. It may be hoped that the effect of the example may not in this case be minimized by any apparent injustice in the award. Incidentally one feels constrained to wonder that Sir Baden-Powell should think it consistent with his duty, if that duty is so complex and delicate as he would have the public believe, to talk so much. His course in this respect has been from the first in so marked contrast with the judicious reticence usually observed pending such negotiations that one can but wonder whether the British Government approves such not overwise freedom of utterance under the circumstances.

"FEUILLES VOLANTES POESIES CANADIENNES."

THIS is the title of a charming book of French poems, by Dr. Louis Fréchette, our French-Canadian Laureate, published and beautifully printed by Granger Brothers, Montreal, 1891, and containing twenty-one pieces on divers subjects, all interesting, written in graceful and effective verse, forcibly expressing the author's feelings and views on the matters he deals with; the first being a long and eloquent eulogy of Jean Baptiste de la Salle, a secular priest, founder of the schools for the people in France and of the Order of the Brothers of Christian teaching. De la Salle (a distant relative of Robert de la Salle, who discovered and first explored the Mississippi), was a citizen of Rouen, and for many years the director of a school there; and in remembrance of this his statue, in bronze, by the famous sculptor, Fulgière, was erected in the city, and in the same place with the

statues of Napoleon and Corneille. Our poet's enthusiastic love for his fellow-men, and for those who had loved them, and made their condition happier and better, finds eloquent expression in his eulogium, in which he tells us that De la Salle made humanity better, and that through his efforts four hundred thousand children learned to read and to pray. Fronting the three statues, he saluted those of Napoleon and Corneille standing, but knelt to salute that of De la Salle, whose story and character are beautifully told. The next piece is a charming description of a town and country on the banks of La Creuse, a Breton river, the scenery on which, with the remembrances it calls up and the feelings it excites, moves our poet as poets only are susceptible of being moved; love and admiration for Brittany could find no more vivid expression.

We have next a burst of passionate indignation at the insults offered by the populace to Alphonso XII. of Spain on the occasion of his visit to Paris with an enthusiastic enumeration of the glories of Spanish history and the benefits Spain conferred on the world by her discoveries and the acts of her illustrious sons, and a wail of bitter grief that France, the set and proclaimed lover of liberty, should have so disgraced herself. "Le Pelsevin" (the Pilgrim) is another tribute to the beauty and hospitality of Brittany, whence our Britain derives its name and Canada many of her foremost children. "A Quinze Ans," a sweet little poem, tells the tale of our poet's first and most enduring touch of the tender passion, born of the vision of the sweet face of an English girl at the window of an old country-house, through the foliage that surrounded it, and never seen again, but present to his fancy whenever he passed that spot, to which he was drawn by an irresistible attraction.

Seventeen other poems follow, on many subjects and addressed to divers persons; all characteristically treated, and evincing their author's warm attachment to his country and his friends, deep religious feeling in "La Chapelle de Bethlem," "Noëls," "Première Communion" and "La Masse de Minuit," and kindly home feeling, family affection and playfulness in "Les Rois" (Twelfth Night), "Le jour de l'An," and the address to "Madame F. X. Lemieux," on the birth of her fourteenth child. He tells a touching story in "La poupée" of the arrest and imprisonment of a poor half-starved boy, who had stolen a doll for a New Year's gift to his dying sister, and expresses earnest regret that magistrates should be compelled by duty to pass the harsh sentence of the law on such an offender.

There is no political ill-feeling, no bitterness or race prejudice in the book. In the address to Mathew Arnold at Montreal, we have the expression of a hope that the English poet will sing the beauties of the scenery of our country and the glories of its magnificent future. And if in "Bienvenue," the welcome to our American visitors, we have an intimation that in that far distant time our two countries may have one flag in which the Stars and the Tricolore may both appear, we must remember that few among ourselves suppose that our State will forever remain what it is, and if our poet forgets having told us that Lévis "bowed upon the golden fleurs de lys," and not on the ensign of the revolution, we must remember too that Canada was "deserted at her utmost need" by the white flag of the Bourbons, and that if some of her children forgot their allegiance to our Tricolore, England's "Red, White and Blue," it was for causes of which we have since acknowledged the force, by removing them. Let us follow the hint Burns gives us as to such case, to "suppose a change of place," and think how things would look to us from the opposite standpoint.

Dr. Fréchette has given us a modest volume which should tend to soften the tone of those who say that Canada has no literature, and we thank him for it. We wish more of our readers could read and appreciate his work, and that some at least of our English-speaking rulers could speak French as well as some of our French ones speak English, it would be useful, especially when we come to exercise that treaty-making power some of them are so fond of claiming; for conferences between nations are still often conducted in French, and those who are best versed in the language in which they are so, will always have a great advantage.

We conclude our notice with an English version made for us by a friend of the Epilogue with which our book closes, a sort of brief epitome of a poet's life:—

EPILOGUE.

At twenty years a fretful bard,
In the sweet and rosy hours of spring
I wandered in the woods to ease
My wayward heart,
And murmuring to the breeze, alas,
The dear name of some faithless fair,
I breathed the fragrance of the flowers,
Musing on her.

In sweet illusions ever still enwrapped,
My heart by every fancy swayed
Later to Fame's seducing charms
Opened the door:
And Glory the deceiving sprite
So apt to spread her wings and fly,
Surprised me often, in her turn,
Dreaming of her.

But now when I am growing old
Such lying visions cheat no more,
And my poor heart, more wisely sad,
Prompts graver thoughts:
There is for us another life
Open to every faithful soul,
And—hate, alas—upon my knees
I think of heaven.