

PARIS LETTER.

The French do not know what to think about the discussion in the English press, respecting the relative naval strength of England and France. Some of the best writers on public affairs—no connection with the Boulevard scribes—whose names are a guarantee for their competency and standing, have repeated, and do repeat, that France has neither the naval strength of England, still less, the vast dockyard resources of that country. *Per contra*, equally excellent specialists on behalf of England avow their country is below the high water mark necessary for the protection of her commerce and the defence of her foreign possessions, and that 250 millions frs. are necessary to bring British naval strength up to what it ought to be. Who are we to believe? The argument that has most forcibly struck the French is, if their existing naval strength be adequate to protect their merchant marine—but ninth in the rank of the trading vessels of the world—and their colonies, what is the meaning, or rather the object, of piling Ossa on Pelion? One can understand the French competing with Continental Powers in the matter of bloated armies, but to “try a fall” in addition with England, in a race for a bloated navy, is not so evident. It is on the sea that the coming big fight between the grouped nations, is next to generally accepted, will be decided; a power that is locked out, and blocked in; from the sea, cannot indefinitely hold out. Russia is a case in point, both after the treaty of Tilsit and the Crimean war. Armed peace is becoming as expensive as actual war.

France is glad the Chambers have at last re-opened, though well knowing the era of difficulties and anxieties is consequently commencing also. It is essential to classify the deputies and take stock of their opinions. The first tie division will be over the election of the President or Speaker. M. Brisson is the candidate of the true blue Republicans, and M. Casimir-Perier, that of the Moderates and the floaters—the odds are in favor of the latter—both are good men and true—the more so, as M. Perier is likely to succeed M. Carnot in the election for the Presidency. The labor questions will be pushed at once to the front by the Socialists; but the latter must be prepared to indicate where the money for pensions and compensations is to come from; till the necessary millions be found, the amelioration of the labor laws is merely the placing of the cart before the horse. Now there is nothing new to be taxed in France save bachelors and cage birds; nor can the existing taxes be augmented, without giving rise to general discontent. The revenue is nearly 25 million frs. in deficit in the last nine months. In itself the sum is not much; the sickly point of the financial situation is, that the revenue keeps on declining, like a tuberculous affection. The advanced reformers are the Radicals; they say, no patch-work measures will do; the whole fiscal basis is wrong; it is out of joint, because it is built upon monarchical foundations. The remedy lies in an income tax, that will sweep away a locust swarm of *petit* taxes, and a legion of employés to collect them; this reform will aid the workman, who up to a wage scale of 2,500 frs. income will be exempted from direct taxation, and from large indirect imposts also, and he can enjoy almost a free breakfast and a free dinner table. The income

tax will strike the rich, and the poundage, too, will mount with the income. The state must not be a party to crushing the life out of the keeping-of-body-and-soul-together wage earned by artisan or navy. In France, the socialism of the masses is this: We are willing to work—obtain it for us, since you have need of our lives to defend the country; we claim the right to be able to gain by a scale of wages, to live as human beings, not in a state of chronic half starvation, and in a condition condemned to a permanent slum. If society wants us, we want society to secure us work, and so enable us to sustain ourselves.

There is a *point noir*, a little cloud the size of a man's hand, down for early discussion in the Chamber. During the visit of the Russians, the legislators had no means of officially marking their sympathy with the Muscovites, and of coming formally into line with the national hurrahs. Deputy Denecheau intends submitting a motion, binding the parliament in solidarity with the nation's love for Russia. But Deputy Lockroy, while having no objection to the marriage of the French Republic with autocratic Russia, desires at the same time to know if a treaty of alliance has been executed between the two countries; or is the interchange of compliments, only good wishes and mutual admiration, not a working treaty? Lockroy feels anything but satisfied; asserts France has the right to know the truth in the matter, and hints that the system of *chut!* of hush! is unsuitable with universal suffrage. The way to avoid deceptions of the morrow is to have no delusions to-day. Ex-Foreign Secretary Flourens continues his chauvinistic campaign in favor of Russia; his writings do not enhance his value as a statesman. One extraordinary statement among others: he accuses England of ejecting France from Egypt! Hitherto people with a little memory attribute that to France evicting herself, by the Chamber declining to vote the credit of 40 million frs. by a majority of nearly 400, to send an expedition to remove Arabi Pacha. At present the British are not so occupied about evacuating Egypt, as in preventing another power, or powers, from replacing her. The establishment of a Russian fleet in the Mediterranean will not facilitate the English quitting the Nile. The rumor is current that England is negotiating for a coaling station in Sweden. The British Baltic Squadron would mean a great deal. The owners of dockyards are likely to be in for a “boom.” It is gratifying to be able to record briskness in some trade.

The Republicans have never forgiven the Pope for becoming Republican. Nor are they enamoured at the revelation that it is to His Holiness the honor reverts of having brought about the Franco-Russian alliance. They believed the unionism to be due to the affinity of opposites. They accuse the Holy Father of wanting to intermeddle with the internal—not eternal—condition of France. M. Lichteheart Ollivier is vehemently denunciatory of the Pontiff's policy towards France, believing it tends to sweep what remains of the independence of the Church of France into a vast European clerical co-operation society. The Governmental organ, *Le Temps*, does not see the hand of the Pope in the relations now existing between France and Russia; that “the Gallic soul and the Slavonic soul have been brought together by common business

wants and political interests.” But these are just the reasons that have led Germany, Austria, and Italy to unite as allies; that will induce England to do the same when the moment—very near at hand, and no time to be lost, think many—arrives to hook-and-eye with China, Sweden and Chili, to say nothing of stars of lesser magnitude.

Once a year, the Japs of Paris celebrate a mass, as if it was in full Tokio; at the Guimet Museum, where the gods and curios belonging to all the religions of the world are shown, the Buddhists assembled, carrying their souls, for the ceremony is only addressed to the latter. The salle loaned to the worshippers was ornamented with busts of Buddha and statues of his branch virtues and other side lights of Asia. All was very artistic, very simple, aye, very innocent. One thousand and sixty-one persons were present. The altar was a plain table below two large candles; in the centre the statue of Buddha; before him, offerings of incense; on each side vases of chrysanthemum flowers; then two ether tapers; eight strokes on a gong by a Jap valet, who precedes the priest towards the altar. The priest is a native, belonging to a noble family, and very young, perhaps a Buddhist curate. He is quite an ascetic, a fine head, delicate features, expressing nothing coarse, symbolizing serenity rather than intelligence; he is dressed in a yellow surplice and a purple scarf over neck and shoulders. There is no music, as in the western churches, nor vocal chants as in the Russian. The priest salutes the statue of Buddha, then intones a prayer to it in a guttural voice. That voice from so delicate and artistic a body had the same effect on me as when a very pretty French girl speaks like Macbeth's raven—croaking with hoarseness. Having purified the offerings on the altar, the priest rings a little silver bell, having the most delicious sound a musical ear could desire. Next was taken a silver salver laden with petals of flowers, and distributed, pinch by pinch, to secure calm and happiness in the “ten worlds.” Then on his knees, an invocation for Buddhists in particular and the wicked world in general—that's the *Domine salvem fac Regini*, and perhaps *Rempubliam*. After a silent prayer another little bell is rung, but devoid of the angelic sweetness of its sister; the priest then rises, bows to the faithful—or the curious—stands till all pass out before the altar; then he bolts into a closet and shuts himself in. The next mass will be twelve months hence. The lotus of Buddha will hardly dispossess the rose of Mary, in France at least. In summer, Professor Rosny gives Buddhist picnics, and always in a forest in the neighborhood of Paris. He and his whole party were arrested last year by the forest guards on suspicion of being poachers, but every creed has its martyrs. When the Buddhists number one hundred thousand, they can claim legally a state endowment.

The dramas of respectable poverty are perhaps the direst of the dire. A professor of mathematics, connected with several noble families of France, aged 58, could obtain no employment. He could not dig, and to beg he was ashamed; he tried chopping wood for a working day of twelve hours, at a wage of less than one half-penny an hour. On this pittance he had to pay rent and support his wife. The latter he wed two years ago. He fell in