

## EUROPEAN POLITICS.

The quidnuncs in England are hard at work weaving theories of international politics. Lord Randolph Churchill's visit to Russia seems to have set speculation rampant, more especially on the continent.

Undoubtedly relations are so peculiar, and circumstances so complicated, as to furnish much ground for surmise, and it is hard to say what surmise may not at any moment be discovered to have been well founded. A Conservative Government, and, personally, Lord Salisbury, are, no doubt, distasteful to Russia, the chronic English distrust of her since the wretched Crimean War, having always been diligently kept alive by that party.

Again, a Conservative Government is unquestionably regarded with partiality in Court, and it would be a great mistake to imagine that Court prejudice and intrigue are past power and influence. The conduct of Russia towards Prince Alexander of Bulgaria is known to have been a sore point to the Queen, with whom family ties are very strong, and who is undoubtedly much attached to the Battenburg family.

It is said that the adoption of an increased frugidity of tone towards Russia coincided with the date of a recent visit to the English court by Prince Alexander.

However this may be, or whatever connection the visit of Lord Randolph, the head of the new departure in Conservatism, to Russia may have with the complicated nature of existing relations, Lord Salisbury's recent utterances have been such as might bear a tremendous significance if England should suddenly find herself involved in war as one of a real quadruple alliance. At Derby the Prime Minister warned the country that if a thunderclap of war should break, it would give no warning, and that if by untoward chance England were involved, her fate would depend upon her preparation in time of peace.

Coupling some ministerial indications with the perennial hatred of Mr. Gladstone entertained by Prince Bismarck, it has been surmised that English foreign policy may, during the recess, when it cannot be questioned in parliament, have been moulded in a shape not anticipated when parliament rose, and from which it may not be easy to divert it.

It would, indeed, seem difficult for England to escape one of the horns of a very puzzling dilemma. On the one hand, Russo-phobia is waning, and it is almost the only good point in Mr. Gladstone's foreign policy—in all other directions deplorably weak and ill-considered—to expedite its extinction. If, therefore, Mr. Gladstone should return to power, the quite unnecessarily strained relations of Great Britain with Russia might, and no doubt would, be ameliorated. But, on the other hand, the antipathy of Prince Bismarck, the soul of the triple alliance, to Mr. Gladstone, would not tend to improve the "enteinte" with the powers composing it.

After all, the possible complications might only result in the absolute neutrality of England, while Russia, and probably France, fought the triple alliance. But absolute neutrals often become the objects of intense hatred to belligerent parties, and who is to say how many of them might, after the "cruel war was over," unite to crush the power of which some of them, France chronically, and Russia, because she has been exasperated into unfriendliness, are intensely jealous.

Whatever the difficulties which may arise, they will be the legitimate outcome of two great blunders—the Crimean War, and Mr. Gladstone's policy in 1882. France, which then declined to aid in restoring order to Egypt, should have been boldly and sternly dealt with, and she would, from fear of Germany, have been easily kept from mischief; while, with France kept down, Russia could not, single-headed, venture on war with the other three powers. What changes may come over the scene from possible deaths or other fresh complication which may arise, none can say; but the existing jealousies and uneasiness seem to foreshadow a very lively state of things in the spring. It is, however, an ill wind that blows no good, and an European war, especially if Great Britain should become involved in it, would stimulate the agricultural interests of this continent in a very marked degree.

## HIGH TREASON.

We fail to see either the necessity or the appropriateness of a good deal of very unmeasured abuse poured out on the head of Mr. Ellis, M. P. for St. John, and proprietor of the *St. John Globe*, for his open advocacy of Annexation. It is an idea which, in common, as we believe, with a very considerable majority of Canadian citizens, is utterly and absolutely distasteful to us, and a measure for which we consider there is no earthly necessity. But it is impossible to ignore the change in the spirit of the times, which no longer threatens with the penalties of high treason the open discussion of an abstract question, even when it involves the idea of a change of allegiance. It has indeed become very difficult, in the face of a broadening liberty of thought and utterance, to say what constitutes treason. Numbers of the most respectable persons in England to-day openly advocate republicanism, and no one is blind enough to imagine that the policy of the extreme nationalist party in Ireland points to anything short of independence. In the early years of this century the utterances of either would have been treasonable, and the Cato Street conspirators were hung for a feeble plot, ludicrously overshadowed by any one of the least of the acts prompted by the League. Yet we hear nothing to-day of death penalties for treason, and a man only comes within reach of the halter if, in the course of violent resistance to the law, or illegal demonstration amounting to a public nuisance, blood is shed in a manner which justifies an indictment for murder.

As between the component parts of a federation we have, within a quarter of a century, seen the question of what is treason sternly settled by the sword, and there is much virtue in an arbitrament from which there

is no appeal. If then, public opinion has changed and broadened in such fashion as to refuse to abstract discussion the old opprobrium of treason, it is childish to scream and rage because the age does not allow us (if we wish to be thought sensible) to brand what we dislike with a stigma which, except to our own imaginations, has lost its sting.

The general consensus of toleration of opinion was very strongly marked in the case of Sir Alexander Galt, which was adduced, as we think, with propriety by one of our city contemporaries in justification of Mr. Ellis.

Sir Alexander, at a time when he believed that annexation was not only in the end inevitable, but might also be desirable, declined to accept the order of St. Michael and St. George without first ascertaining whether the opinion he then held would be considered a bar to his availing himself of the proposed honor. He submitted the case without reserve, and the result can only be construed to indicate the tolerance of the British Government of freedom of opinion.

There is at least, to our thinking, the merit of straightforwardness about Mr. Ellis' case. We are not disposed to like a man any the better for proclaiming himself an Annexationist; but, on the whole, we prefer outspokenness to the veiled Americanism which we cannot doubt to be the underlying sentiment by which some of our more restless politicians are animated.

But the day is long past at which we could pretend to burk the free discussion even of a question of such vital and national importance.

## THE NEBULAR HYPOTHESIS.

The assumed operations of the "nebular hypothesis" to which THE CRITIC recently drew attention in connection with the theory brought before the Royal Society by Mr. Norman Lockyer, are so well explained in the following extract from the *Review* we then had before us, that we publish it as it stands, for the edification of those (we believe not a few) who take interest in astronomical speculations of the higher and legitimately scientific kind:—

"When gravity first begins to draw the meteorites together we have the beginning of a nebula or a comet, as the case may be—the comet, so far as we know, being a swarm of meteorites which has become entangled in the solar system. As the nebula condenses further it becomes an incandescent star, and passes through successive stages due to the increasing approximation of the meteorites composing it. Ultimately the separate meteorites are fused by collisions of increasing violence and frequency into masses of incandescent vapour, and when by the development of this process all the meteorites are volatilized, and the *maximum* of temperature that can be produced by the forces in operation has been evolved, the process of cooling sets in. Stars of the type of Sirius represent, so far as we know, this *maximum* of cosmical temperature. Our own sun represents the next downward stage in the process of cooling, and a further stage is reached in stars whose spectra exhibit certain flutings of carbon—an element which, at any rate in its terrestrial form, has never been observed, in the spectrum of the sun. The coolest stage of all is exhibited in the non-luminous companions which are known to be associated with more than one of the fixed stars. Sirius, for instance, has such a dark companion, whose presence is attested by perturbations in the proper motions of the bright star of the pair, and the variable star Algol undergoes changes which are best explained on the hypothesis of periodical eclipse by a similar dark companion. Thus we have a continuous series exhibiting the evolution and gradual extinction, so far as temperature and its associated luminous phenomena are concerned, of all the heavenly bodies. Experience and observation in recorded time give us no evidence whatever of any stage ulterior to that of a star so cooled down as to be entirely non-luminous. But imagination may possibly conceive such a catastrophe as the collision of two of the larger heavenly bodies, in which case one or both would be reduced once more to the condition of primordial meteorites, and the whole cycle might be supposed to begin afresh. To speculate thus, however, is not only to travel far beyond the utmost limits of the hypothesis propounded by Mr. Lockyer, but to pass from the known to the unknown in a fashion which is disallowed by all recorded experience. It is enough if we can trace the origin and read the history of the heavenly bodies. In any case their past has been so immeasurable that speculation on their ultimate future may be regarded as altogether beyond the range of sober science."

We supplement the list we gave last week of the ages of remarkable individuals by a few more, which we then omitted. His Holiness the Pope will be 78 on the 2nd March. Prince Bismarck and Sir John MacDonal were both born in 1815, and are, therefore, in their 73rd year. The birthday of the former is, curiously enough, the 1st of April, but the world is, we should suppose, pretty well convinced that there is very little connection between him and an April fool. Sir Henry Rawlinson, the great Assyriologist, will be 78 in April. The Ex-Empress Eugenie will be 62 in May. The Duke of Cambridge, Commander in Chief of the British Army, is three months older than Her Majesty his cousin, and will be 69 on the 26th of March. The beautiful Empress of Austria, who was the cynosure of all eyes in the English hunting field a year or two ago, is 57. Mrs. Bright is 76. The King of Holland is 71. The Emperor of Brazil, 63. The King of Denmark, father of the Czarina, the Princess of Wales, and the King of Greece, will be 70 in April.

The Shah of Persia sends a letter to the Pope, replete with good taste, complimenting His Holiness precisely where a tribute of appreciation is due.