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THE WAR-CLOUD IN EUROPE.

THE aspect of affairs in Europe changes from week to week, and almost from day to day. Whether the status quo is to be preserved, or whether we are to have a disastrous and desolating war before the advent of summer is a question which is just now exercising many minds, and which nobody on this continent is capable of satisfactorily answering. In western Europe the disturbing element is the untoward state of public feeling in Alsace and Lorraine. The discontent there is commonly attributed to the machinations of French sympathizers, though of course there are those who attribute it to the iron hand of Bismarck. The great Chancellor's methods of repression are beyond all doubt aggravating enough, but the element to be repressed is not one to be governed after the kid-glove fashion. The expulsion of a deputy who had been elected to the Reichstag was in itself a thing well calculated to arouse popular antagonism, and this expulsion has been followed by a rigid hunting out of alleged French agents and sympathizers. As a matter of course all France is indignant, and a considerable part of it is hysterical and clamorous for war. The rulers, however, are very far from desiring war, and this may probably be said of Germany as well as of France.

So much for the state of affairs in the west. In eastern Europe the pressing question is: Does Russia propose to descend upon Bulgaria at an early date? There are certain indications of an affirmative. For instance, there are some very significant utterances of the imperialist press, which will not admit of any other construction. Then there is the fact that the Russian war office has recently issued a call for tenders for large supplies of medical stores and munitions of war. Again, there has been an interview between M. Flourens and the correspondent of a prominent Russian journal in which there is a clear intimation of a prospective alliance between Russia and France.

In Bulgaria itself affairs are in a condition of great disorder, and the outlook is regarded as ominous. There is a constant succession of local conspiracies against the regents. These have all been quietly nipped in the bud, but the Bulgarians have not fixed upon any eligible candidate for the throne, and seem afraid to do so while Russia maintains her present aspect of menace. "On the whole," says the *London Times*, "it must be acknowledged that the aspect of affairs in Bulgaria is full of anxiety. The regents hold their own, and have so far been able to cope with the plots against

their authority. But the recurrence of these plots is a very disquieting symptom, whether we regard them as due to a foreign or to an indigenous origin. Even if they are all fomented by Russian agency, they point to the existence of a disaffected party in Bulgaria, since Russian intrigue would not be able to foment them unless the seed were sown in fertile soil."

The question of war or no war still waits for an answer.

ARTISTS AND CRITICS.

JUST as it is not often the gift of an art critic to be able to use pencil and brush successfully, so it is not always Nature's intention to fit a painter with the reasoning qualities necessary for accurate art criticism. Reynolds, Hogarth, Walpole, Vasari and a host of writers, some of whom were also painters of the highest ability, have endeavoured to justify their personal impressions concerning the fine art of painting; but many of their speculations are utterly wrong and absurd, opposed to facts and inapplicable to practice. The greatest art critic of this day, and the most broadly seeing and deeply truthful of all art critics, has on more than one occasion proclaimed loudly against any formal set of critical rules. While the principles of art are as fundamentally fixed as the laws of nature, their application becomes a matter of constant mutation. Ruskin was denounced as an æsthetic lunatic by the majority of men, artists and others, when he started his crusade against all depravity in fine art. He has lived to witness the triumphs of the truths he enunciated. Not long ago he incurred the wrath of Mr. Whistler, one of the most original of living artists, who, with ten o'clock vigour and impulse, showed clearly that some artists, when aroused, can lay aside the palette and lash their most able assailants smartly in modest black and white. Mr. Whistler also clearly proved that mere cleverness of diction is not always convincing, and that close association with the practicalities of art does not of itself warrant the authority of a painter to pose as a capable and correct exponent of art-truths. In this regard, therefore, it may be possible that Mr. J. W. L. Forster, desirous of contributing to art-knowledge in papers on "Portrait-Painting," may not prove as capable a theorist as a colourist; nor may his deductions be as rightly drawn as his pictures. In differing from him on certain matters of abstract art, however, we take much pleasure in according our most cheerful tribute of praise to the good work he has done and is doing, with hopeful confidence that he has much greater and better work yet to do. In ranking portrait-painting next to the highest ideal painting, we think Mr. Forster has erred. With his preliminary canter over safe ground we cannot find much fault. The classification of painting into still-life, landscape, marine, animal and figure will be generally admitted. No argument is necessary to prove the degrees of art in producing the counterfeit presentment of a clothes basket, a prairie scene, a sea storm, lions at bay, or a group of children. These are self-evident to even the uneducated spectator, and most persons would naturally place them in correct order. But when we reach the higher forms of the art which Mr. Forster chooses to call portrait, historical and allegorical, the matter becomes more difficult, and more than a mere glance is required to find the true order.

Is Mr. Forster's placing of portraiture next to the heavenly allegory correct? Does it surpass the historic and dramatic schools? Let us first understand rightly what is portrait-paint-