

nalists whose political reputation is not good in the eyes of the authorities, and who are not allowed to practice their profession, this circumstance of itself shows pretty clearly that those who have anything to lose are afraid to agitate for a freedom which they must in their hearts approve and intensely desire.

Rebuff in the
Reichstag.

The crushing defeat of the Anti-Revolutionary Bill submitted by the German Ministry to the Reichstag, no doubt with the approval, if not at the instance, of the Emperor himself, is a rebuff which the autocratic spirit of the Emperor will find it hard to brook. The great majority of the members of the Reichstag seem to be wisely disposed to remember the homely adage: "Wide will wear, but tight will tear." The leader of the Socialists did not hesitate to accuse the Ministers of seeking an opportunity for the military to try their new rifles upon the people. Certainly nothing could be better adapted to precipitate, not to say provoke, civil conflicts, than too severe repression of freedom of speech and assembly. While disclaiming, no doubt honestly, any such intention, the German authorities might do well to take a leaf from the policy of the British Government. There is probably no nation in the world which is so tolerant of free speech as the British, and perhaps none which is so safe from any movement of an anarchistic or revolutionary character. It is equally true, at the same time, that there is none in which any overt movement of a dangerous character, tending to domestic disorder or to the overthrow of good government and established institutions, would be put down with a prompter or sterner hand. But British statesmen have long since learned the value of free speech as a safety-valve for demagogues and notoriety seekers. Another, and probably the most important factor in bringing about her comparative immunity from the dangers which are now keeping other governments in a state of chronic uneasiness, is the frank and genuine recognition of the authority and rights of the sovereign people, which pervades the speeches and the legislation of the British Government and Parliament. The effect of the emphatic rejection of this high-handed measure upon the German Emperor will be watched with some curiosity. Probably even he may in time come to perceive that discretion is the better part of valour, even in a powerful and self-willed Kaiser.

Anonymous Letters.

A CASE of annoyance by means of anonymous letters, recorded in the papers during the last few days, recalls to the mind one of the worst cases of this kind which occurred lately at Berlin, the capital of Prussia, and which must be fresh in the memory of our readers. These cases may suitably lead us to some not unnecessary reflections on a very unpleasant subject.

Everyone professes to believe that the writing of a malicious, anonymous letter is one of the most disgraceful and contemptible actions of which a human being can be guilty; and probably the majority of men do so believe and would be incapable of such a crime. Everyone professes to think such letters utterly contemptible and unworthy of notice in any way; yet a good many persons are so weak that they actually do pay some attention to them.

It is unnecessary, in this place, to point out the wickedness and mischievousness of these anonymous slanders. No one can secure immunity from them. A man has only to incur the ill-will of some unprincipled scoundrel, whom he may in some way have displeased, and he is at the mercy of

his enemy. There is no way of answering such calumnies. The stab is in the back, and the assailant is unseen. To offer any defence is merely to propagate the falsehood; and however little ground there may be for the anonymous accusation, or however improbable it may be, there will always be a certain number of people who cannot be classified among those who "think no evil" and "believe all things" in the way of good. These are the people who are ready to declare that where there is smoke there is fire, and who will not examine very closely to see whether the smoke may not be dust. There are the people who give force to the adage: "Throw plenty of dirt and some of it will stick;" and who practically encourage the throwing of this dirt.

It is very curious that a good many persons—rational or semi-rational—who would be indignant to the point of passion, if anyone paid attention to any slander against themselves, conveyed in that fashion, are yet quite ready to attach importance to the same kind of assault directed against others. In this case the golden rule would not seem to hold.

There is, in fact, only one way of protection from this most brutal and cowardly form of attack, namely, that all persons having the least claim to being regarded as ladies or gentlemen, should agree, or act as though there were an agreement, to pay no more attention to such things than they would to the howlings of a lunatic or the maledictions of a felon: and that they should consent to think worse of a woman or a man—especially a man—who should give any heed whatever to them. There is absolutely no other safe or satisfactory manner of dealing with such offences.

Yet we are continually coming across foolish people who are not merely violently affected by such things, but who are resolved, as they say, to get to the bottom of them! And what do they expect to gain? They make it known that they have unscrupulous enemies, who will do them any hard or wrong that they can compass. But it is highly improbable that any of them will be discovered, still more improbable that they will be brought to justice; and even if some of them are, there will be others, and, perhaps, the worst, undiscovered.

The recent case at Berlin may serve to illustrate these remarks. A number of anonymous letters were sent to ladies and gentlemen and noblemen moving in the highest circles of Berlin. The accusations contained in those letters were so grave as to cause quarrels and estrangements between persons and families previously on friendly terms with each other. The matter was becoming so serious that all the detective agencies of the Prussian capital were employed to hunt down the offender or offenders. At last a gentleman in a high position was arrested and thrown into prison; and it was thought that justice would now be done.

But, alas! the imprisonment of the suspected man did not put an end to the letters; and further inquiries were made which led to the conclusion that the person first suspected was innocent, and ultimately another person was arrested. What the result of the measures taken has been we do not know, nor whether any result has been reached. But these facts will be in the remembrance of those who read the European telegrams in our daily papers; and they teach a very simple moral.

If the receivers of those letters at Berlin had treated them with the cold contempt which they deserved, and had consigned them to destruction, as far as possible, without reading them, and altogether without mentioning them to any other human being, these letters would soon have ceased. Miscreants who are capable of such misdeeds soon get to know the kind of people who are influenced by their evil