

The Public

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A Weekly Narrative of History in the Making

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Let Us Rejoice with Sobriety.

To few generations of men in the life of a nation is it given to make political and economic changes so decisive and so momentous as those at this hour being passed upon by the British electorate. But Arthur J. Balfour, than whom no man less desired the popular verdict that is rising like a cry from those who "are trespassers in the land of their birth,"—Arthur Balfour has spoken this true word of warning, that "the tremendous issues now before the English people will not be settled by one election, nor probably by two." Let us fill our hands with great patience and set our faces steadfastly, for the way is long yet to go, and the stones of disappointment are sharp. But behold, brethren, the light of the morning is on the hills!

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The Gulf That May Not Be Bridged.

"Blessed are the peacemakers," is a beatitude which admiring friends of Mr. Taft have often quoted as applicable to him. Nor was this praise wholly without reason and justice. Although capable of excessive irritation and indignation on unusual provocation Mr. Taft's ordinary temper and habit of mind is sunny and good-humored. He has charm in his personal manner, and he has shown in the small matters of life and in many great ones, tact and skill in harmonizing differences and soothing animosities. He has poured

oil on many troubled waters. In the Philippines, between native and foreigner, between soldier and civilian, between ecclesiastic and layman, and even between intolerant Catholics and intolerant Protestants, he was exceedingly successful under trying circumstances in negotiation and accommodation. In Cuba, a marked and unexpected success attended similar exertions to secure mutual concession and accommodation between hostile and contending factions. But in his attempt to bring about reconciliation between the differing and rapidly dissevering wings of his own political party which unitedly placed him in the position of its leader and elected him President, he has entirely failed. What is the reason?

It seems to us that the reason is not far to seek, and that it is full of hope for the future of democracy and true progress in the politics of the United States. Had the conflict now openly in progress between the warring divisions of the Republican party been superficial; had it been over patronage, or sprung from personal devotion to different leaders; had it even been only sectional, Mr. Taft would have scored another triumph as a peacemaker and compromiser. But the differences were and are on other and more fundamental lines. They are differences going to the very bottom of our social and political life. On one side are the sturdy defenders of privilege and monopoly which have been in these later years turning the Republican party of Lincoln's times into a far different kind of an organization. On the other are men democratic at heart who have never broken away from the nominal political affiliations which had become to them almost sacrosanct, and those of a younger generation who have joined, as they supposed, the party of the political faith of their fathers, and are discovering that it is leading them to an entirely different social, economic and ethical creed. They, too, at heart are lovers of liberty, equal opportunity and true democracy. Between these wings of the party, differing on fundamental and basic principles, no final peace is to be secured by a negotiator, however tactful, however non-committal, and in whatever position of power and leadership he may be.

This is the cause of Mr. Taft's failure. It points directly to a new alignment of parties, and to that cleavage on vital issues which will bring the true democrats in both parties into a political struggle, not between themselves, but against a common foe. Whether in such a contest, present

party names, full as they are of historical association and sentimental connotations, will give way to others; or whether there will be an "exchange of prisoners," and each party, honeycombed as it is with persons dissenting from its present dominant and more or less clearly indicated tendencies, will purge itself of those dissidents, cannot yet be foreseen, nor is it in any wide sense material. The fact remains that the portents are all of a restatement of political issues and a new birth of democratic feeling. It is needless to say with what joy such a consummation should be welcomed. Here, as in England under such conditions, it would be good to be alive that one might take part in the fight!

And in the situation is revealed, as it seems to us, the deficiency in Mr. Taft's character or training which will prevent him from being, or ever becoming, the forceful leader his too enthusiastic friends believed him to be. It is not the tactful negotiator or the successful diplomatist, the sunny-tempered and good-humored friend, or even the cautious and deliberative politician, that the times demand for the Republican party leader, if that party is to hope to retain the ascendancy it has enjoyed so long. It is rather the bold and quick thinking, quick acting fighter, who will place himself distinctly at the head of one or other of its wings, and avow the faith that is in him. Were Mr. Taft to ally himself with the "insurgents" and "progressives," he would rally to his support myriads of Democrats who are attracted to him personally; and might well hope to succeed himself in his present office. Were he as rigorously to head the defenders of "vested" privilege and reaction, that hope might also still exist; for those forces are still, sad to say, immensely strong in the United States. Attempting the impossible, trying to be with both parties simultaneously or alternately, in shunning Scylla he will fall into Charybdis; or, in more homely language, between the two stools he will fall to the ground, unless the fates are kinder to him than we look for them to be.

The President's Conservation Message.

The long expected message of the President to Congress on "Conservation of National Resources" followed very quickly on the removal of its chief champion and representative from his office. It is a very mild and rather colorless document, of which the most definite proposals are in favor of the issuance of ten-year bonds to the amount of thirty millions of dollars, to complete irrigation