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THE PALL MALL GAZETTE

An Evening Newspaper and Review.

No. 1.—VOL. I.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 1865.

Price Twopence.

THE QUEEN'S SECLUSION.

A LITTLE paragraph appeared in the newspapers lately, to revive a hope which was to have been fulfilled to-day, and has not. "We are informed that Her MAJESTY the QUEEN will open Parliament "in person next session:" this was the little paragraph—printed, too, in that authoritative large type which carries conviction straight into the minds of most newspaper readers. But somehow the herald who brought such good tidings from Court was little credited. The trumpet sounded—that we all heard; but no confirming echo answered it—not even in those hollow places in our own hearts where dwells the hope of what we much desire. The most timid inquirer hesitated to believe; and he whose faith in editorial announcements had hitherto been complete, found himself disturbed by a strangely courageous scepticism. Was the announcement authorized at all by any one? Had we not been told of journalists and politicians who endeavoured to achieve what they wished by declaring it already certain? These questions were asked by many people. The answer to the first one is that the QUEEN never at any moment intended to open Parliament this session—(here is our own authoritative large type to prove it)—and to the other, that if the trick was played, it was a trick which only a very few philosophers can muster morality enough to condemn. There may be some politicians of the fermentative platform kind who secretly rejoice that (if tried) it did not succeed, but they are not philosophers.

It is when we consider what these gentlemen are that we most regret the QUEEN'S long absence from what is called public life. If it were not for them, and if Her MAJESTY'S retirement were not brought home to us strongly now, when a Parliament is about to end and agitation to begin, we should say nothing about it. There are, indeed, other reasons for regret, but none that we can think of which justifies the remonstrant tone in which some journalists have lately discussed the subject. What would justify such a tone is a state of things which does not exist. The Sovereign of England is not an autocrat, sold to cares and committed to responsibilities which must necessarily be neglected in the indulgence of personal sorrow. Her Ministers are able and honest; and, what is more—what is conclusive, in fact—the QUEEN is known never to neglect the real duties of her sovereignty. Their faithful performance goes on, and has always gone on; and while that is so, our concern that her grief also continues should cease with the sympathy of a loyal and home-loving people. Of such sympathy there cannot be too much. Taking it for a moment out of the region of mere human kindness where it were better left, we may go so far as to say there are sound political reasons why it should be encouraged; unless, indeed, the country has had enough of the great blessing which the QUEEN'S reign is said to have brought upon it ever since her rule began. We have all been lying under a mistake for twenty years if the nation has not been purified by an example of homely affection and of household faith in that place where example is so potent for good or evil—the palace. Some observers are of opinion, indeed, that a certain reaction against this beneficent influence has set in: be that as it may, we cannot think the reaction likely to be forwarded by the sincere and lasting sorrow of a wife for the loss of her husband; or by our respect for it.

There are some other considerations which have been almost as much forgotten as these. There is the fact that a monarch is still a human being; and that a people has no right to ask him to smile when his heart is ill at ease, or violate the most natural, most pious, most imperative instincts of his human nature in order to make a pageant. Again, our affection for the QUEEN, our deepest reverence for her, has grown out of the knowledge that she is not only a queen, but a good and most womanly woman: and yet how many people have considered that the very qualities they reverence in the woman have embittered the grief of the queen? We all understand what is meant by the "sacredness" of sorrow, and know that to turn our eyes upon one whose heart is deeply smitten, is to add to the pain a new and intolerable distress. This is so if you are happily unknown to all but a dozen people, whose gaze you easily can and do escape. But if you are a queen, then you cannot escape; your grief, which should be secret to be endurable, is known to all the world—talked of by all the world—gazed upon wherever you turn. And the more womanly you are, the more you are

conscious of an observation which is scarcely the less painful for being sympathetic. Therefore we say Her MAJESTY'S seclusion is exactly what might have been expected of her position and her virtues; and that inasmuch as we respect them we must respect their natural consequences, nor forget that her retirement is the most natural one of all.

But this is not saying we wish the seclusion to continue. What we do say is, that with the fullest sense of what is due to Her MAJESTY, with the strongest inclination to take no part in the discussion of this subject, we cannot resist the suggestions of the ceremony of to-day. In brief, we cannot help speculating, not upon the regret or the disappointment of the nation at large on seeing another fair occasion for the QUEEN'S re-appearance amongst us pass by, but upon the satisfaction it may give that small, determined coterie of Americanized politicians who are so particularly active just now, and whom we shall behold still more active before another Parliament can be assembled. Who can doubt that they do find satisfaction in the QUEEN'S absence, once more, from the most important and significant of all State ceremonials? To be sure, they are not likely to acknowledge such sentiments. There are many bold speakers amongst them, and a carnival of declamation is fast approaching; but we do not suppose any demagogue so rash as to suggest the question yet awhile, that as the country gets on very well with a monarch in retirement (the Board of Trade returns will sufficiently prove it), why not abolish the monarchy altogether? We do not expect *him* to point out so soon that people may become so accustomed to the absence of a Sovereign from public business as to make them ready converts to Americanism and the democratic idea. But it is just because he is not likely to speak that we feel bound to speak for him—now, while the people are not quite accustomed to the QUEEN'S seclusion, and earnestly desire her back again. Perhaps the event of to-day was not the most fitting occasion for her return to public life; perhaps we may hope that when the new Parliament is called together, Her MAJESTY will come once more face to face with her people. If so, we shall all rejoice—all but those who are speculating hopefully now upon the probability that her seclusion may be confirmed by habit, and who are perfectly prepared to turn it into a political argument.

Private letters from St. Petersburg and Moscow say that the example of the Moscow assembly, which has adopted by a very large majority an address in favour of a constitution, will be followed by the nobles of the other provinces of the empire. The proceedings at the Moscow assembly were published without being submitted to the censorship, and the printer of the journal in which they appeared is being prosecuted criminally.

The *Standard* published a letter yesterday from St. Petersburg, in which the writer, apparently an official, sets before the English public, with great complacency, the reasons current among Russian functionaries of all classes for discountenancing the courageous endeavours of the nobility to obtain the establishment of a representative assembly. Such an assembly would, of course, be a terror to the members of the public service, whose acts it could criticise, if it could not legally control them. This is just the good—perhaps the only good—that the Reichsrath has done in Austria. "But," say the functionaries and the democrats of the baser kind, "if a legislative body were to be formed by election in the present day, only members of the aristocracy would be chosen, for it is well known that they alone are capable of discussing political questions. The merchants are careless about such matters, and the peasants are steeped in the greatest ignorance." The functionaries, then, from fear of exposure, and the democrats from mere envy, would postpone the formation of political assemblies indefinitely, or what comes to the same thing, until the spread of education throughout the empire should raise the other classes to the level of the nobles! These views, in default of more plausible ones, have been adopted by the Russian Government, and we find them expressed with great earnestness in a paragraph which bears the following curious heading:—"The Moscow Nobility demanding a Constitution!"

How perverse on the part of the Russian nobility! So in ancient times the discontented Hebrews, in the sinfulness of their hearts, called out for a King! But the Hebrews had their King; whereas the Russian landed proprietors, with an autocrat, supported by a mass of bribe-taking officials on one side, and with hordes of newly-liberated serfs on the other, have no chance whatever of getting a constitution. A few of the leaders may have the privilege accorded to them of going to the East of Russia in their own carriages, and remaining there until further notice. The others will have to be silent; or they may have the same measure meted out to them which they were so glad to see meted out last year and the year before to the Poles.