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Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

ANOTHER
FALSEHOOD
EXPLODED.

A WRITER in *La Controverse* of Sept. 15, gives a clear and interesting account of the causes which in the 16th and 17th centuries led to the decline of the kingdom of Spain. As the falling-off in question is frequently laid to the charge of the

Catholic Church and is one of the stock arguments every now and then advanced against her, we can hardly do better than summarize the very full and satisfactory explanation to which we refer.—In the first place, then, the writer attributes the misfortune he deals with to the discovery of America and the events that followed.—Spain, whose population was already insufficient, which in the preceding century had lost two thirds of its inhabitants by the black death, and had been also engaged in frequent wars with the inevitable results, could not afford the emigration that consequently took place.—The result again, of the abundance of gold and silver yielded by the New World was to increase the demand for manufactured goods and produce of all kinds and make it greater than the supply could meet, and therefore prices rose and with them the wages of the workmen.—But here the government stepped in and taxed the daily wages, at the same time that it taxed raw material and hindered exports while it left imports free—and this method of internal management lasted for nearly two hundred years, or from the reign of Charles V. to that of Philip V. Naturally the manufactures of the country could not survive such a course of treatment as this, and thus one great source of the country's prosperity was destroyed.—Circumstances, meantime, had prevailed that hindered the prosecution or improvement of agricultural pursuits.—During the Moorish occupation the Spanish inhabitants had occupied themselves principally in breeding and maintaining large flocks of sheep which could be removed from place to place as the necessity arose, and in which for the most part their wealth consisted. When, however, the Moors had been overcome it was the interest of wealthy and influential men still to retain wide pastures for the maintenance of their flocks and to resist any attempt to encourage the adoption of agriculture instead of pastoral occupations.—A considerable part of the land of the kingdom besides reverted by entail to the heirs of noble houses, and they neglected its cultivation in an extreme degree.—In this respect also the clergy both regular and secular failed and fell short of what was commonly accomplished by them in other countries.—Their estates, indeed, were comparatively well managed, and the produce was made use of as elsewhere principally for charitable purposes. But as the land yielded sufficient for the immediate wants of the day, no pains were taken to render it more productive. Another cause of the decline alluded to was the contempt for industry and work of all kinds that was engendered generally among the Spanish people, and this also was a consequence of the Moorish occupation. During the time in question, the Spanish inhabitants had been divided into two classes, the *hidalgos*, who lived in the hills, and principally waged war against the invaders, and the *pecheros*, who inhabited the plains, and followed peaceful industries so far as it was possible for them. When the Spanish cause, however, became victorious, the contempt of the *hidalgos* fell heavily upon the *pecheros* and their employments, and the result was a desire on the part of the latter to identify themselves with the higher class, and to renounce all tokens of their inferiority in the industries they followed. A dislike for industry consequently became wide-spread throughout the nation. The writer speaks of the expulsion of the Jews also, and, warmly condemns the alternative offered of conversion to Christianity which, in many cases, had grievous results. He, nevertheless, denies that the continued residence of this people enjoying all their privileges in the country could have done anything to prevent the course of events described by him. He alludes as well to the similar treatment given to the Moriscos, but he quotes no less enlightened an authority than that of Cervantes as a testimony against their character. This writer represents them as engaged exclusively in robbing the Spaniards, and speaks of them as "vipers" whose presence formed a national danger. We see, therefore, how the decline of Spain occurred apart from all religious considerations, and

was the plain result of accident, misgovernment, and human frailty.—A less religious nation than the Spaniards, under like circumstances, would probably have fared still worse.

AS a final proof that the Catholic religion had nothing to do with the decline of Spain, the writer, in *La Controverse* contrasts the condition of the Basque provinces with that of the rest of the

country.—The Basque provinces, he says, inhabited by the most religious population in the peninsula, never knew the misery that desolated the central districts. The mountains of Guipuzcoa Biscay, nevertheless, do not offer to the husbandman the same resources as the plains of Castile and the fertile soil of Andalusia.—The mortmain estates, besides, were as numerous there as elsewhere; the Inquisition flourished and a special tribunal was in operation at Estella. Whence then arose the difference of fortune.—The true explanation is that the Basques, under shelter of their *fueros*, avoided the excessive taxes that harassed the Castilians; and under shelter of their mountains had not to suffer like Catalonia the scourge of war. Attachment to their native land restrained within due limits the desire for emigration; and, finally, an industrious and chaste life assured to these bold mountaineers necessary resources, and the fruitfulness of families.

ARE we to witness before many months have passed another change in the government of France? If we are to witness a war, at least, as is now threatened, such an event seems extremely likely

The times are indeed threatening, and present a strange spectacle to the world. Mutual distrust and anger alone, without any disguise or pretence, between two great nations bid fair to provoke a contest that must needs prove gigantic and whose result would surely be to alter once more the map of Europe. Dismemberment must follow defeat in either case, and either France would see others of her provinces sharing the fate of Alsace and Lorraine, or the German Empire would lose something of its extent and strength. Perhaps, indeed, it would be wholly broken up and things restored to their former condition.

WHAT the exact chances are at present of the outbreak of war it is impossible to say. The hour of revenge perhaps has come for France. The

pamphlet, for example, that created so much stir about a year ago by stating that it was so and that the country was fully prepared for the struggle, may have had a deeper meaning than that of creating a passing sensation and the spirit roused by it may last among the people. Germany may feel the impossibility of continuing to support the great armaments necessary in sight of the French determination to take revenge, backed up as it is by the resources of a richer and more productive country. France can prepare and delay with comparative ease, but delay accompanied by preparation means ruin for Germany.

IN event of this war's occurrence, however, the fortunes of the French Republic as such are what we are principally concerned about.—If France be

conquered, or if she prove victorious what will come to pass? It is no very wild suggestion to make that in either case the Republic must fall. Perhaps, following on victory over the Germans we should see the French again entering on a course of aggressive warfare. It is evident that the spirit of a nation that merely for the sake of taking revenge risks a doubtful and terrible struggle, which by a more moderate frame of mind it might easily avoid, is not to be depended on, and preserves all the elements that have ever made it formidable. The desire for glory alone is not dead within it and the old halo, let it even be as it has been described that of burning straw—has not lost its power to dazzle. The sun of Austerlitz has still warmth in its rays and neither Waterloo nor Sedan has made the heart of France impervious to them. A repetition of the Napoleonic wars, therefore, made under some other successful military dictator is not impossible, and so sure as history repeats itself in this manner so surely will it be met by a repetition of the combination that saw its final results in St. Helena and the Restoration.—But