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Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

AN OMINOUS PROPOSAL.

THE cablegrams that have within the last two or three weeks reached the colony, with respect to certain complaints made by the Pope as to the increased trials of his position, have doubtless had their origin in circumstances attendant on the penal code under discussion in the Italian Parliament, at the latest date to which we have detailed intelligence. Some of the provisions of the code were of a particularly monstrous nature, and their bearing upon the position of the Holy Father would be most galling and severe. Did they become law, for example, no bishop nor priest could, even in private, express an opinion in support of the Pope's temporal power without incurring a penalty, were he convicted, of imprisonment, varying in length from three to six years and of a fine from 300 to 600 francs. But if the offence were committed in public, the punishment might be imprisonment for life with hard labour. The iniquity of such a law as this is too clear to need any explanation, and we can well understand that its passing, or the probability of its passing, has keenly affected the Pope. It has been well suggested that the introduction of such a measure into Parliament, betrays a doubt on the part of Signor Crispi, whose proposal it is, that the cause of the Holy Father is more popular in Italy than he finds agreeable. But, at the same time, it shows a growing insolence and confidence on the part of the revolutionary and Socialist element in the population. It may, meantime, be in place to inquire how far consistent it would be for Germany, whose Falk laws are exceeded by this Italian code, to continue in alliance with a Government which had passed a law more severe than that which in the interests of civilisation and good order generally, as well as for other reasons, she has found it prudent to repeal. How, moreover, will an advance of the Socialist and revolutionary power in Italy be in accordance with the alliance now doubtless to be extended through Germany to Russia? What seems to us more consistent with the nature of things is that an alliance should be formed between the two great powers in question, to crush the revolution in Italy, and to overthrow the Government that are evidently in combination with it or under its yoke, and to this possibly the matter may eventually come. Whether the Pope will be obliged to leave Rome or not we cannot tell. It is, however, suggestive that the insult now offered to him comes accompanied by a series of insults and hostile demonstrations against the King and Queen, and on the presence of the Pope in Rome the safety of the monarchy certainly depends. Signor Crispi, then, may be fatuously hastening the event. The expulsion of the Pope he certainly aims at, or even its imminent occurrence, may lead to revolutionary demonstrations that would call for the interference of the great power whose alliance he has sought for the monarchy, and which, in common with its ally, Russia, cannot see without apprehension the advance of the Revolution in any part of Europe. This measure then which as we are told, fills the Vatican with indignation and alarm, may possibly form the beginning of the end. And indeed were the Bill passed, it would be an extravagant advance as could well be made. One step further would be undisguised and violent persecution,

SINISTER RUMOURS.

If the gossip current in Europe a few weeks before the death of the late Emperor was true, that event, notwithstanding the peaceful disposition of the Imperial sufferer, was in the interests of peace.—It

seems that, according to the Prussian Constitution, no monarch who is not capable of performing the duties of his lofty position is qualified to reign, and that, therefore, the Emperor's mortal disease, were the law strictly adhered to, would not have allowed him to ascend or occupy the throne. While Europe was at peace, however, it would hardly have been possible to insist upon the strict enforcement of the law, and, consequently, Prince Bismarck was suspected of harbouring a design to seek an excuse in war for the deposition desired by him. The Chancellor is further said to have made the dying man's state more trying to him by the punctilious manner in which he exacted from him personally instructions even on the minutest point—refusing

so much as to permit of the intervention of the Empress, who could have given very effectual help to the invalid, on whom she was in such constant attendance, and whose every look she could interpret. All this represents the man of blood and iron in a very unamiable light, and it is to be hoped, for the sake of humanity, that the case has been at least exaggerated. But with the Emperor's death there passed away the need of war, and we have certainly seen from recent events that it seems more remote. We had ourselves, however, already foreseen, as our readers may remember, the likelihood of a renewed alliance between Russia and Germany, such as has now been made evident in the visit of the Emperor William to St. Petersburg. This necessarily puts an end to the much-dreaded alliance between France and Russia, and alters the whole appearance of matters in Europe. The liberty of action it confers upon Russia, however, with respect to the East and Central Asia must place England in a more or less unfavourable situation. The peace, then, that has been confirmed, if rumour spoke the truth, by the death of the Emperor Frederick, has also its less agreeable aspects.

BLATANT BIGOTRY.

THE defeat of the Spanish Armada has been commemorated in England with all the ardour of Exeter Hall. Of the celebration itself we have not as yet received details, but the preparations in progress, of which we have some details, were sufficiently stirring. But, if it be true, as some of the divines engaged in these preparations assert, that hardly a minister in England is to be trusted, most of those belonging to the Anglican Church being really Roman Catholic missionaries in disguise, and many of those belonging to Non-conformist congregations being nothing better, the days for Armada celebrations in the country are evidently numbered and Rome has conquered after all. Under the circumstances, a great Protestant celebration is a mockery, and only brings more prominently into notice the defeat that has been suffered. Here, three hundred years after the destruction of the Armada, with which the last hopes of Rome, so far as England was concerned, were supposed to have perished once for all—a select band of Evangelical ministers declare the country to be almost wholly in the hands of Rome. And in truth, even apart from the wild exaggerations of these ministers, and the accusations brought by them, not only against Rome for encouraging deceit, but against Protestant principles for permitting men well trained in them to fall into the systematic practice of deceit, the revival of Catholicism has been a very wonderful thing and quite enough, were it rightly considered, to cast ridicule on any celebration of the defeat of the Armada as a great and final victory of religious Protestantism. The ministers in question, however, are easily satisfied as to the claims of Protestantism for they ascribe the pre-eminence of Germany on the Continent, of Europe and that of England in the world generally to it. So far as religion is concerned the contest in Europe has been that of Germany, taught by experience to acknowledge her need of Rome's alliance and assistance, against Judaism, atheism, and infidelity, in France, for these were and are the religious or irreligious principles directing the government and policy of France. And England's supremacy in the world, outside of the United Kingdom, has been that of a country adopting heathen and Mohammedan principles with heathen and Mohammedan peoples, and whose religious Protestantism, if it were engaged at all, has been besmirched with such associations as for example that hardly mentionable one which the other day formed the subject of a debate in the House of Commons that brought the blush of shame into the faces of the least squeamish men obliged to deal with it. But this still repeated claim of worldly success accompanying the profession of a religion is, at best, the perversion of the temporal glory promised to the Jews, were they obediently to receive the Messiah. At the worst, and there is nothing to prevent men actuated by rancour and bigotry from sinking to the level of the worst, it is the old heathen idea of the support of the stronger god. Christianity gives no promise of worldly prosperity, and Christ's kingdom is not of this world. But the celebration of the defeat of the Armada, as a great and final victory of religious Protestantism, is a mockery of that event, while not only is Protestantism as a form of the Christian religion dying out, but Catholicism is making marked and rapid progress among the English people. It is wonderful that those *habitués* of Exeter Hall, who themselves recognised and deplored this progress, should not see the inconsistency and folly of their action.