

the power of posterity to heap on us the worst reproach which statesmen can incur, of having allowed a great opportunity to perish in our hands.

The notion is very prevalent and is very earnestly preached, that with the destruction of slavery all danger of the re-establishment or perpetuation of an aristocratic class at the South has passed away. This is a most mischievous delusion. There is no country in the civilized world in which the social organization is so intensely aristocratic, in which class government is more firmly established, and in which the working population is more powerless and degraded, than England, and yet there has not been a slave on her soil for five hundred years. To establish and maintain an aristocracy, with all its consequences, both political and social, all that is necessary is that the power of government should be lodged in the hands of a *single class*, strong enough and energetic enough to retain its hold on them; and this is the very thing which a large number of intelligent people in the free States propose that we should now do at the South.

THE GREAT FESTIVAL.

BEFORE this meets the eyes of our readers, the Fourth of July will have been celebrated, as it was never celebrated before, and with good reason, for never before have we had such cause of rejoicing. It is not simply the birth of the nation which we now commemorate, but its regeneration; and even more than its regeneration. We celebrate not only the close of a long and bloody civil war, but the close of the contest which preceded and led to it, that, as it was well called, "irrepressible conflict" which for half a century absorbed all the intellect of the country, perverted its understanding, corrupted its morals, and employed most of its moral and mental energy, either in the attack or defence, in the nineteenth century of the Christian era, of one of the worst forms of barbarism;—a conflict, too, which, during the last twenty years, began to exercise a paralyzing influence on industry and to poison social intercourse. We celebrate, in short, not simply the national independence, or the return of peace, but the close of the agitation about slavery, and the extinction of slavery itself. How tremendous an influence this fact is likely to have on our moral and intellectual progress, we can now only conjecture; we for our part believe that the next quarter of a century will have a wondrous story to tell on this point.

There is one other feature of our fête which is too marked to be overlooked or forgotten. It is not simply the triumph of American democracy that we rejoice over, but the triumph of democratic principles everywhere, for this is involved in the successful issue of our struggle with the rebellion. We need have little hesitation in predicting that the effects of the revolution through which we are now passing upon European politics will be still more marked than the effects of the revolution of 1776. It is evident already that the reaction of 1849 has been arrested, and that the tide is turning in favor of liberalism with resistless force. The French democrats already begin to show signs of life and activity, and the English Tories are retiring to their inner line of defence before the persistent assaults of the non-electors on the citadel of privilege. "Cæsarism" has received from our successes, in what it considered its proudest moment, a fatal blow. The wonderful vigor of popular government, the prodigious national vitality which it develops and fosters, received its most splendid illustration in our last campaign, within a few weeks of the publication of the work which the French Emperor intended to be an elaborate declaration of its failure. There is, in short, no believer in the capacity of the human race for greater happiness and greater virtue than it has yet attained, in the existence of a wider field for its powers, and a nobler goal for its striving than it has yet looked upon, who cannot and will not rejoice with us this week. We utter no idle boast, when we say that if the conflict of ages, the great strife between the few and the many, between privilege and equality, between law and power, between opinion and the sword, was not closed on the day on which Lee threw down his arms, the issue was placed beyond doubt.

Of the extent of the material prosperity which is opened up to us by the final cessation of domestic strife, and the final disappearance from our soil of a form of industry which has in every age blasted all that it touched, and pulled down political fabrics that seemed even

stronger and better cemented than our own, thousands of willing tongues will this week tell. The theme is a grateful and a popular one. For our part, we love better to dwell on the possible moral and intellectual and æsthetic results of the wealth which awaits us, of all that it may enable us to do for religion, for art, for literature, and for science. For we are satisfied that democracy has in it, in a still larger degree than any other form of society, in spite of all that has been said and written to the contrary, the seeds of the highest excellence in every field of culture and research. The world has yet to see what a free people can achieve with great wealth, the results that the general diffusion of material comfort can produce in stimulating the pursuit of knowledge, and in intensifying the pleasures of the understanding and of the taste. We have already furnished an indication of what we may accomplish in other and nobler fields by the extraordinary amount of success in the cultivation of one of the most difficult of the sciences—that of war—which has been revealed by the military operations of the last four years. We cannot help believing that the national genius has a still stronger bent and a nicer adaptation for the victories of peace.

If we cared just now to play the part of the slave behind the Consul in his chariot in the triumphal progress, we might say much of the risks we still run, of the stumbling-blocks which still bestrew our path, of the temptations to which we may succumb, or of the thousand sins that will assuredly beset us. We prefer to reserve this less agreeable portion of our task to some season when it will be listened to with more attention, and will not be liable to damp honorable and fairly won rejoicing. There are few who celebrate the Fourth of July this year, who do not find, in the recent history of their own families or those of their friends, reminders enough that the brightest picture has its dark side. For how many thousands who went forth to hasten the great consummation over which the nation is singing pæans, do the bells ring, and the banners wave, and the music swell in vain!

WERE THE STATES EVER SOVEREIGN?

IN most of the discussions which have taken place on the question of reconstruction it has been assumed that any admission that the organizations known as the States have been in any locality destroyed by the rebellion, involved also the admission that a State could get out of the Union. It has been maintained, therefore, very stoutly, that the only way of escaping the conclusion that a State could secede, was by affirming that it was indestructible, that it was not only sovereign, but immortal. There is, however, another mode of getting out of the difficulty, which is ably discussed in the subjoined letter, addressed to Mr. R. H. Dana by one of the most vigorous thinkers and ripest scholars the country has produced, and now resident in Europe. We do not adopt all his conclusions, but his argument with regard to State sovereignty possesses at this juncture the highest importance.

"Slavery has always been a veiled, half-legalized form of rebellion against the fundamental principles of our Constitution. So long as it was, in a certain degree, quiescent, we were unhappily bound by national compact to tolerate it as a sort of prisoner of war upon parole. There was, in all the negotiations which resulted in the Constitution of 1787-9, an implied understanding, a virtual pledge, on the part of the South, that the institution which the whole nation, with scarce a dissentient voice, acknowledged to be both a crime and a curse, should soon be abolished, and there is little doubt that all parties looked forward to the cessation of the slave trade in 1809 as the beginning of the era of emancipation. But when slavery declared itself to be not a wrong but a right, a divine ordinance above the jurisdiction of earthly legislators, a social relation more sacred than any claim, possession, or duty sanctioned by human law, or derived from human compact; when it became aggressive and proclaimed a holy war, a Mohammedan *jihad*, against the principles and the institutions on which not our Union alone but all truly Christian society is based, it violated its parole and forfeited the indulgence which in an hour of extremity had been granted to it. It was thereafter entitled to no courtesy, to none of the privileges of honorable warfare; it wore the wolf's head of the outlaw, and stamped out the righteous self-imposed doom of Cain: Every one that findeth me shall slay me!

"At the adoption of the Federal Constitution in 1789, we were one

Copyright of Nation is the property of Nation Company, L. P. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.