SOUTHERN INDISCRETION.

The wisdom of the old adage recommending people not to "balloon till they are out of the wood" has received a striking illustration from the history of the "reconstruction" process during the last few weeks. We have already commented upon the remarkable power of adaptation and the great practical sense displayed by the Southern people after the resistance in the field had ceased. They at once prepared themselves to do whatever might be required of them as the condition of their release from the punishment of conquest was approached. They laid down their arms, denounced all attempts at guerrilla warfare, acknowledged that their slaves were free, and, in fact, gave the Government to understand that it had only to name the terms on which it would restore civil government in order to have them formally acceded to. The North was still heated by battle, maddened by Mr. Lincoln's murder, and Mr. Johnson was generally supposed to be a furious ex-soldier who thirsted for aristocratic blood. At that time, in fact, most Southern men looked forward to exemption from hanging and forfeiture of goods as the utmost they could hope for.

The suddenness and completeness of this submission seem to have completely disarmed Mr. Johnson. The amnesty proclamation was already out with the $80,000 clame, which was to unite the leaders to the dust; but he at once set to work to take the sting out of it by wholesale pardons. He then entered on his plan of reconstruction, which was so much more favorable than the Southern hope for that it electrified it once more into something like its old political activity. He turned a deaf ear to all the warnings addressed to him from the North showing that in the condition of the negro was to be found the key to the Southern problem, and treated this condition as if the really important matter was not what it should be, but who should regulate it. He created machinery for the restoration of the States to the Union, and put its management into the hands of the very men who had borne a more or less active part in the rebellion, and asked for no modifications of the old State constitutions which the fortune of war had not already rendered unavailing.

Now, the two things which the South feared most of all, as consequences of their defeat, was the confiscation of their property and the interference with the North's claim to the political status of reconstruction. The North, with the political status of reconstruction, had no more objection to the abolition of slavery than they had to wet weather, short crops, or any other dispensation of Providence, and were no more disposed to resist it. It did not cost them a single pang, either, to repeal the ordinances of secession any more than it would cost them to surrender their old colonial charters. Sacrifices of claims which people have not the slightest hope of ever making good are never very painful. And yet, at the outset, these two things were virtually all that Mr. Johnson asked of them in return for the restoration of their civil rights. They were, of course, astonished at his moderation, and with good reason.

We confess we were of the number of those who thought that he ought to have seized the opportunity offered by the state of depression in which he found the South at the close of the contest, not to humiliate, or insult, or trap on her people, but to exact of them such changes in their political system as he was satisfied were necessary for the future peace and prosperity of the nation. He told Major Stears he thought such negroes as could read and write, or as owned property, or as had served in the army, ought to be allowed to vote. We presume when he said this he meant that it would not only be just to allow them to do so, but expedient. He might have exacted this from every State at the South, just as readily as he has exacted the repudiation of its war debt, the abolition of slavery, and the adoption of the Constitutional Amendment. The plan so much relied on at one time, that he could not constitutionally interfere with State suffrage, was always an almost absurd one, and, we are glad to see, is now never put forward.

The negroes whom this modification of the law would have admitted to vote might have been very small in all the States; in some it might have admitted none at all. It is possible, too, that the immediate value of the vote to the colored race would have been very trifling; but the concession of it on any conditions with which a man could comply without the working of a miracle, would, at least, have settled a great principle and put an end at once to a troublesome agitation. And what was almost as important, it would have taught the South a lesson which, in our opinion, would have powerfully influenced both their opinions and acts during the remainder of their reconstructive labors. He refused, however, to touch the matter, and some people are now of opinion that he finds some justification for his refusal in the recent vote in Connecticut—an argument which will have some value when it can be shown that he has a right to prescribe what white men shall vote in Connecticut, or to set up a "provisional governor" beside Governor Buckingham.

The result of his excessive leniency was, as many Negroes expected, to arouse in these Southerners their old audacity. The submissive tone which followed Johnston's surrender was soon haled aside, and we began speedily to hear of things which the South would not do, and which Mr. Johnson ought not to require. The conventions first began to make ugly faces over admitting negro testimony in the courts, and this pill they never would have swallowed if it had not seemed the only way of escaping the jurisdiction of the Freedmen's Bureau. They are now wringing their hands over the repudiation of the rebel debt, and during the coming week will probably be engaged in swallowing the Constitutional Amendment; but Mr. Johnson has had to exact all these things from them by successive stages, supplementing his original plan little by little, as the spirit and purpose of the men he has hitherto dealt with became more fully apparent. We do not say that this is not wise, prudent mode of action. Under ordinary circumstances it is always a safe one, and it is a way of reaching political results with which nobody but goons can always dispense; but his resorting to it shows that it was not the radicals who were wrong last June.

It has had in this instance the good effect of betraying the South into a revelation of its real feelings and intentions, and of satisfying the President that he was too basty in reaching his conclusions as to its temper. His refusal to withdraw his provisional governors, even from the States which have complied with all his requirements, reveals the full measure of his own disappointment, though his is probably not half as great as that of the Southerners themselves. The secrets they have betrayed, however, in their hurry to get back under "the old flag," may, if we be wise, prove invaluable. We now know that there is really hardly a man at the South who believes that the negro can be treated as an equal; that the negro is to be respected, as, moreover, that he ought not to be, and are determined that he shall not. Governor Humphreys has said as much in his message to the Mississippi Legislature; the newspapers of the State re-echo the sentiment, and we hear already, before the sound of the last shots of the war have well died out, the old threats of lynching Northern men who may venture to open their lips about the negro's condition. There is a vapid bill before the same Legislature, the very reading of which is a disgrace to American civilization, and which, if enacted and put in force, would not only restore slavery in a modified form, but stamp us at the North, if we looked calmly at its working, with indebted disgrace.

The other States have not got so far yet as Mississippi, but we hear already from South Carolina, which is next in the reconstruction race, that the "labor laws" which will almost restore the negro to his old state, minus the liability to sale. The South Carolina press openly warns all whom it may concern that that State will neither provide education for the blacks nor allow others to do so. The most moderate and intelligent and humane Southern men now, if pressed hard, confess their belief that the negro race is doomed to "die out," or at the common run of Southerners less mincingly call it, to be "killed off," and everybody who knows anything of human nature knows how apt prophecies of this kind are to bring about their own fulfilment.

We say nothing here of the stories which reach us of wholesale assassination of negroes in every direction, and of the terrible mortality amongst them from hunger and exposure, and of the general indisposition
tion at the South, as revealed in all the acts and words of the people, to regard the life of a negro as that of a human being. But from no quarter does there come, or has there come from first to last, the slightest proof of the existence of any widespread willingness to do anything, or allow anything to be done, to raise these misfortunes above their present condition, or to give them even a fair chance in the race of life. What Mr. Johnson insists upon is due, and that grudgingly; but he has insisted upon nothing which will prevent the reduction of the blacks to a condition but one degree removed from, and in some respects more marked by physical suffering than, slavery itself, the minute the States are restored to the Union and the military force withdrawn. In short, unless Congress does its duty, we shall, in our opinion, witness at the South, during the next few years, one of the most tremendous and revolting crimes ever perpetrated by a community laying claims to civilization, and we shall witness the substitution for slavery of a social organization marked by every feature which made slavery politically dangerous.

FRENCH MORALS AND FRENCH POLITICS.

This letter which we published in our last number gave a picture of society in Paris so repulsive that, we presume, those who have not watched the growth of the arts by which the empire has been built up and consolidated, must have had a good deal of difficulty in believing that it could be faithful. But, unhappily, the very same story is told by all who have enjoyed reasonable opportunities of observation.

Partly owing to the example of the court, and partly to the extraordinary love of luxury produced and fostered by the great commercial activity which the empire has undoubtedly created, the distinction between the monde and the demi-monde, which, unsatisfactory as it may have been in the best of times to the moralist, at all events proved that there was still something respectable about virtue, has been all but effaced. There is hardly a species of triumph valued in society which the fine ladies of the Quartier Bréda are not now as able, even better able, to achieve than the fine ladies of the Faubourg St. Germain. Accordingly we hear that parties are now given by women whose name would, a few years ago, never have been mentioned above a whisper in a respectable house, which in everything that makes a party attractive far surpass those of the best women in Paris. The rooms are as handsome, the lights as bright, the flowers as fresh and costly, the wines as fine, the cookery as delicate, and the music even better than any duchess can furnish, and what is worse than this, that the company, at least as far as the gentlemen are concerned, is as "select" as any which can be got together by any species of attraction under an honest roof. And worse even than this, the demi-monde has last succeeded in acquiring the last and sweetest of all distinctions, that of setting the fashions, in clothes, hair-dressing, attitudes and gestures, and even intonation. Of course, where their manners are copied, so are their morals. M. Dupin, in the speech, which we may now call famous, delivered a few months ago in the Senate, on female extravagance, gave utterance to opinions as to the effects of the prevailing rage for fine clothes on domestic morality, which called forth hearty expressions of concurrence from his audience, and the correctness of which neither the press nor the public has ventured to question. There has, however, always been a good deal of elegance and refinement about French vice. To the imperial régime belongs the credit of having stripped it of these attractions, and made it hideously coarse. We are assured that it has for some time been a favorite amusement in court circles to sing bar-room songs, with appropriate gestures, and now the climax is capped by the present correspondent describing, of dragging the most notorious and least fastidious of the cafés chantants into aristocratic salons to entertain the company with the coarsest songs in their répertoire.

Unfortunately, the example of the court was never so contagious in France as now. Government has at all periods occupied the position of a providence to the population in that country in a greater degree than in any other in Europe, and by its guide, philosopher, and exemplar. But, under the ancien régime, the strict and well-defined division of society into classes prevented the morals or manners of the court, let them be ever so bad, from influencing anybody but the noblesse of the capital. The bourgeoise never thought of apeing the aristocracy. In Paris, as in all the provincial towns, there was, down to the time of the Revolution, a large middle class, composed of the families of lawyers, belonging to the various "parlements," and of those of traders and manufacturers, whose life was sober, contented, secluded, to a degree that a Puritan would have almost called "godly," amongst whom traditions of simplicity, probity, and decorum were preserved with religious care, and who looked upon the gay and licentious life of the court circle as something with which they had no concern, and by which they were neither touched nor tempted.

That class exists no longer. There is now hardly such a thing as a class in France. Every position, social as well as official, is attainable by everybody; but the influence of the court, while as powerful as ever, extends, of course, over an area proportionately wider than ever. There is nobody who does not thirst, and even hope, for a share in court amusements, and who does not feel himself entitled, if he pleases, to imitate court manners or adopt court morals. It is in this fact that is to be found the full atrocity of the modes of distracting public attention from the great game of politics to which the Emperor, or the men he has about him, is resorting.

What will be the ultimate result of the experiment which he is making, whether a Cæsarean despotism can really be founded by such arts as those in a Christian country, and in the middle of the nineteenth century, time only can tell. Our correspondent, who is well qualified to express the feelings of all that is best in the French nation, is confident that the heart of the people is still sound, and that a terrible reaction against the debasing process to which French society is subjected will take place before very long. There is no question that there is in the French people of all conditions a capacity for appreciating whatever is lovely and of good report, such as is found in other European countries only among the cultivated and refined; that the sentiment of personal honor, of dignity, and self-respect goes deeper down in society there than anywhere else, and that in the heart even of the peasant or the private soldier, the poet or orator or preacher may find a response for which, amongst any other people of a similar class, he might look in vain.

But when we come to calculate what the influence of the spirit of this commercial age on French manners and morals, and consequently on French politics, is likely to be, we are met at the outset of the enquiry by the disagreeable and embarrassing fact, for fact it is, that almost all that portion of the population which has extricated itself from the bonds of superstition is completely given over to materialism, has little or no faith in anything above or beyond this solid earth that we live on. Nor is this something altogether new. Frenchmen have always tended strongly in this direction. One of the ablest of French writers has wittily described French want of spirituality by saying that the truth is that France has never been thoroughly convinced of the vanity of the world; an exact and firm appreciation of the things of the earth—this is her heritage. It is, however, one of the most important and suggestive facts in political history that no people has long maintained its public any more than its private virtue after it has generally lost faith in things unseen, or ceased to consider this world as but the passage to a better one. Whatever political force the consideration of the effect of one's conduct on the happiness of one's fellow men may acquire hereafter, it is certain that up to this time the cause of freedom and good government, as well as of domestic virtue, has been found to languish just in proportion to the popular devotion to merely material pleasures. And just as there has never been an age in which the tendency to the pursuit of profit and profit and the enjoyment of profit and profit and loss, of more or less clothes or jewelry or furniture, was stronger than in this, so there has never been an age in which it was in so great a degree men's duty to keep their eyes fixed steadily on remote results, and to refuse to submit either their conscience or their conduct to the regulation of accountants or custom-house officers or upholsterers. Imports and exports may rise, cotton may be plenty, the consumption of beef, silk, and jewelry may increase, but the last word is still not said. The goodness or badness of government has still to be judged by another standard, and it is a standard which no people has ever yet suc-