THE "THIRD TERM."

The "third term" discussion does not seem to make much headway. Nothing that has been said in it, as yet, has made any perceptible impression on the public mind. Indeed, it would be difficult to meet anybody not an official, outside of a newspaper office, who thinks there is anything in it. That General Grant himself looks forward to a third term, we do not in the least believe. We have no doubt that when the proper time comes he will announce his intention of retiring into private life, and will carry it out if he is left to himself. He has many faults, but he certainly never has shown the slightest trace of morbid ambition. The quality which just now seems growing on him—love of ease—is not one that leads to prolonged success in political life, and it has certainly not been due to any political exertions of his own that he has filled the Presidential chair so long. His own inertia, the growing dissatisfaction with his use of the civil service, the strong repugnance, to use a very mild term, of the people to anything like a departure from established political usage in the direction of greater concentration or fixation of power, combined with the natural longings of the leading politicians for a change, will probably put an end to all talk of a third term before the convention meets, unless some catastrophe should occur at the South in the meantime calling for a renewed exertion of military strength on the part of the North.

This talk is, however, none the less a very unpleasant phenomenon. It may be mere raving, but then raving is not a healthy symptom. "Wandering," we know, is often the first sign of protracted illness. The talk has undoubtedly a certain gravity, not because it is likely to result in anything, but because it is one of, and is due to, a number of conditions of the body politic just now which may fairly be called very morbid. There can be little doubt, for instance, that it would hardly have been raised were it not for the prevailing public apathy about all political questions. There has been for several years profound discontent among the best portion of the voting population with the manner in which politicians are "running" the Government, but all attempts at reform have met with very indifferent success. The Cincinnati movement took the public at a very favorable moment, when its disappointment with General Grant's Administration was in its first flush, but the result was so pitiful that it produced a distrust of all organized opposition which has as yet by no means passed away, nor has there been any revival of confidence in the Republican management. The chiefs evidently try to believe that the so-called "reforms" of the last year or two have reconciled people to the existing régime; but everybody who knows anything of the feeling outside Custom-house circles, knows that this is a mistake. The reforms in question have all been mere removals which the party itself had created. To suppose that it can in this way renew its hold on the popular confidence, is very like supposing that a readiness to pay on detection for the crockery he smashes, or to restore the spoons he has stolen, will convince people that a man is a useful and upright citizen.

There is, on the contrary, deep disgust with the party management, great sorrow and astonishment over the morals and manners of its leading men, but there is at the same time a deep-seated unwillingness to take any active steps to overthrow them and put anybody else in their place, and it is the appearance of stolid indifference which this unwillingness assumes that has led some of the lighter heads of the organization and some of the quidnuncses of the press to begin talking about an indefinite extension of General Grant's Presidency—for a third term would of course mean indefinite extension. If we have to make any man President for twelve years, there will be no good reason for turning him out as long as his faculties are sound.

Now, this unwillingness to make any change, which no intelligent man can under the circumstances help considering a very unwholesome sign, is in truth simply due to the growing doubt and hesitation of the North over the experiment of Reconstruction at the South. That experiment, which was one of the noblest as well as most difficult any people ever undertook—the raising of four millions of slaves into the citizens of a free state—was unfortunately undertaken with instruments which everybody now acknowledges were entirely inadequate. The machinery which works well at the North in industrious, homogeneous communities has been tried at the South, and found very defective. The negroes have not displayed any capacity for self-government, and the whites, so far from helping them out, witness their failure with a sort of glee; and the result is, that from one-half of the Union not only does there not come any support for free and orderly administration, but there do come constant solicitations and temptations to arbitrary and violent processes. In other words, to one-half of the States the Union the President appears simply as a military commander; and the officer who once was his legal adviser, the Attorney-General, has been converted into a kind of Adjutant-General. The negroes in many of the States are constantly calling for armed guards to supersede the sheriff, and the whites openly declare that, so far from dreading military rule, they desire it. Anybody who reflects upon the exceeding delicacy and subtlety of the influences on which constitutional government rests, and must rest—on the慈善 and inscrutable combination of affection, habit, tradition, and forethought in political matters, among all classes and conditions of persons, in all parts of the country, which is necessary to make such a government work—must see that this state of things at the South is a source of enormous danger. A single discontented province puts the institutions of a free state in peril. Moreover, it is not only the deflection of the South which is dangerous. The influence of that deflection on the temper of the North is also dangerous. No thoughtful man can avoid anxiety about the future when he sees the way in which the news of Southern disturbances is received at the North—the rage for violent measures, the disregard of American traditions and of the vital conditions of American government, and for the most solemn and impressive lessons of history, which they produce among many. When we heard of the recent rising in Louisiana, execusable as it was in many of its features, there was on the part of large numbers of the very best of us an outburst of the true despotic temper—that is, a choleric readiness to put the worst possible construction on the motives of the actors, and to take the darkest possible view of the consequences of any display of forbearance towards them—a fierce irritation over their insolence in resisting the arrangements their conquerors had made for them—and, worst of all, a portentous eagerness to send down infantry, cavalry, and artillery as the best mode of dealing with such wretches. In one highly respectable illustrated publication, a picture of the affair represented the President of the United States charging a battery in the streets of New Orleans on horseback, in uniform, as if this was the true way for the chief civil officer of the United States to deal with political discontent. It carried one back to Vienna or Berlin in 1849, and made one ask whether this was the view of the character and functions of that office which we wished to impress on the minds of the rising generation; and whether the American people were really forgetting the great political lessons they were the first to teach the world, and particularly that greatest of all, that malcontents are hardly ever sheen devils who rebel from love of disorder, that behind all violence on the part of large bodies of men there is pretty sure to be ignorance or prejudice or solid grievance, and that it is not wise or just to try grape-shot on them until all other remedies have failed.

We have all along held that the worst sufferers from the state of things we have allowed to grow up in several of the States lately in rebellion were the negroes. Nothing more deplorable could possibly happen an ignorant people, without even the smallest social training, than to fall at their very entrance into free civilized life into the hands of the class of white and colored men who poured down to take charge of their politics after Reconstruction. It is, therefore, in their interest, even more than in that of the whites, that the Northern people are bound to take this Southern problem into their own hands and put an end to the delusion which is furnishing to the small party of designing and selfish men who manage the
Republican party their sole capital, and their chief excuse for neglecting totally every other measure of reform. We are far from defending the policy or conduct of the Southern whites during the last ten years, but we are deeply sensible of their difficulties and temptations, as every thinking man must be, and hold that nobody has any right to condemn them, much less legislate for them or bombard them, without having honestly tried to put himself in their place. Nobody who has done so can help feeling a good deal of sympathy with men who—belonging, in spite of their unhappy history and surroundings, to the foremost civilization of the world, and ranking among the very highest in capacity for all the arts—find their social organization, with all its delicate machinery of credit, industry, justice, finance, and taxation, suddenly taken possession of by a large body of people sunk in barbarism, and managed by the dregs of Northern society, and administered solely for purposes of oppression. It is not the unrest of the whites under this régime that inspires us with alarm. On the contrary, it makes us hope. If the whites of South Carolina and of Louisiana accepted their fate with silent melancholy, we should see no better future for them than Guatamala or Costa Rica.

The theory on which most Northern men refuse them their sympathy, and on which the Conklings and Mortons use the Southern disturbances as capital for the Republican party, and as reasons why, whatever it does or leaves undone, it should be kept in office, is that the whites of the South will not let the negroes alone, but keep murdering and harassing them, and, if it were not for the interference of the Federal troops, would reduce them to "practical slavery." Now, if this theory were correct, the negroes ought to be worst off in the States in which the whites are most numerous and powerful and happiest, and most secure in those States in which they are themselves the largest proportion of the population. We have been for some time, however, struck by the last that the complaints of turbulence, and the cell for infantry, cavalry, and artillery, and the thanks to God that we had a soldier in the White House;" come from those States in which there are most negroes, or, in other words, in which the whites ought to be most cowed and submissive. Impelled by this suggestion, we examined the census of 1870, in connection with as honest reports as we can get, both public and private, of the condition of the various Southern States. Those we have used here are, however, those of the Republican press most eager to magnify civil purity and considerable prosperity; while in these States in which the blacks have the majority, or the two races are nearly equal in numbers, there is constant disorder and violence and great material depression. The meaning of this is that the whites are resolute under the rule of poor ignorant negroes led by Northern thieves, defaulter, and adventurers, and try in wild and lawless ways to get rid of their oppressors. It furnishes a complete answer to those who say the negroes cannot trust the whites to govern them. Where they are forced to trust them, all goes well.

**POTTER AND HIS LAW.**

**This** Wisconsin law has been discussed so much in our columns of late that we shall refrain from saying a great many things which Mr. Adams's letter in another column suggests, and are quite content to accept his history of the "Potter law" as accurate. There are a few observations on it which, however, we feel bound to make:

1. He defends the Farmer's honesty at the expense of his knowledge and common-sense. This is not reassuring to investors in Wisconsin, seeing that the farmers there at least hold the balance of power. It matters little to me, for practical purposes, whether I place my property in the power of a designing knave or of a passionate fool. If the accounts which have been sent to the New York Tribune by its correspondent, speaking for the Grangers, and which Mr. Adams gives us of Granger notions of rights and duties, be correct, we repeat that it is not safe to hold any immovable property at their mercy. A man who considers honesty to be "devices by which certain people call bondholders get railroad-construction gangs to double honest farmers' taxes," may be a good fellow, and may mean well, but if he gets absolute control of the government of a civilized state, people with money to invest will do well to give him a wide berth.

2. "The people of the West who are struggling to get the railroads, as a whole, to submit to be governed by law," appear to forget that on the two points on which they are most excited—"unreasonable rates" and "unjust discrimination"—the railroads are already governed by law, or might be. They are and have always been common carriers, which have been from time immemorial forbidden by the common law to charge unreasonable rates or to discriminate between forwarders of freight. What was wanted, therefore, was not a new law, but better machinery for enforcing the old one. There was needed also, however, owing to the novelty of railroads and the complexity of their management and of their operating expenses, and of their relations to the community, a new definition of reasonableness and of discrimination. Anybody could have told in Coke's day what was reasonable for a carrier to charge for conveying goods in his wagon. Every man who owned a horse was an expert on that point, and competition was open and easy. But the elements which enter into railroad charges are so varied, so obscure, and burdened with such a variety of considerations, that the fixing of them has become one of the most difficult of modern occupations. If the law is to undertake the creation of any standard, it ought to be drawn, after the most careful enquiry, by disinterested and skilled men, and not by a politician from a county "which does not possess a railroad of any kind, and who is said to be without experience in railroad matters."

3. The railroad is, however, not only a common carrier—it is a public highway of a novel and peculiar kind. The great function it discharges toward modern society, and the one which has produced the most striking social and industrial results, is the equalization of distances from the great markets. That is to say, the most valuable and important thing it has done for the world is the putting of producers who live far away on an equality with those who live near by. It is this which has created the wonderful industrial activity which we are now everywhere witnessing. It has absolutely