GENERAL BUTLER AT BOSTON.

From the London Saturday Review.

General Butler's insolent speech at Boston, although it is below intellectual criticism and moral censure, may perhaps portend mischief. The most prominent member of a class of politicians peculiar to the United States, General Butler scarcely pretends to self-respect, to honesty, or to regard for justice. His reasons for proposing an unprovoked war against England are stated with a candor which in other communities might be deemed imprudent. The Republicans, he says, are disunited on every question of importance; they have no recognized leaders; the Western members of the party oppose the demand of the Eastern Republicans for protection; and in the last Congress the administration failed to carry any of its measures. If the process of disintegration continues, the Democrats may probably return to power and carry the next Presidential election. It therefore becomes expedient to devise some popular policy on which the whole party can unite; and American tradition points to the unfailing resource of hostile declarations against England. Only two years ago General Butler thought it possible to restore harmony to the party by proposing the partial repudiation of the national debt, and he succeeded in inducing a large majority of the House of Representatives to adopt his proposal; but robbery of the public creditor has gone out of fashion, and now it seems better to make England pay the price of the restoration of harmony in the Republican party. The Emperor Napoleon commenced the present war with the analogous object of establishing his dynasty permanently on the imperial throne; but he has never had the audacity to avow that he attacked Germany in pursuance of a domestic French intrigue. General Butler is bolder or more open, and he has not even thought it necessary to invent so respectable a pretext for war as the Hohenzollern candidature. It is a simpler plan to make an ostentatiously insulting demand upon England, with the alternative, in case of refusal, of a declaration of war. In one of his speeches he was moderate enough to suggest that the cession of Jamaica, Bermuda, and Nassau would be accepted in full payment of the Alabama claim; but on another occasion he intimated that the whole of British America must be surrendered to the United States. It was troublesome to maintain custom houses on a land frontier of four thousand miles, and the union of the provinces into the Canadian Dominion was in itself an offense and menace to the United States. Perhaps General Butler may have been conscious that he was parodying the French quarrel with the North German Confederation. With a similar readiness to copy the worst European precedents he offers a plebiscite to be taken by separate provinces. "We will have nothing to do with your Dominion, which you put up to make an unfriendly power on our Northern border, when you thought we should have a powerful enemy at the South in the successful Confederate States." Agents of the English or Canadian Governments are to be prohibited from interfering in the operation of voting, which is probably to be conducted by American commissioners. It is not inconceivable that before the war M. Emile de Girardin or M. Paul de Cassagnac might have made a similar proposal with respect to the Bavarian Palatinate or to Rhenish Prussia. General Butler informs his audience that, when some of the Canadian provinces have voted for annexation, the remainder must necessarily after a time follow their example. The details of a scheme which is merely intended as an affront to England and an occasion of war scarcely require discussion.

When such outrages on right and decency are perpetrated, it is more material to ascertain the position and resources of the offender than to inquire into his motives. In some respects General Butler might be thought not to be a formidable enemy. By the best of his own countrymen he has been repeatedly denounced as the most discreditable specimen of an unscrupulous class. As an administrator he was loudly accused of pecuniary corruption; as a soldier he incurred the contempt and censure of his chief. In politics his most effective weapons have been bluster and calumny; and when he acted as a manager of the impeachment of President Johnson, his foul-mouthed violence provoked the indignation even of the ultra-Republican majority of the Senate. In all respects he resembles the Cleon of Thucydides and Aristophanes, except that he never achieved a casual military success. Unfortunately it is possible that he may also resemble Cleon in directing or influencing for a time the policy of the nation which tolerates him. His coarse vigor will make him, since the defeat of General Schenck in the recent election, the inevitable Republican leader in the House of Representatives, and although the strength of the party in the House has been largely diminished, a considerable section of the Democrats will always be ready support hostile measures against England. General Butler has recently been again returned to Congress by the Fifth District of Massachusetts, which discredited itself by electing him when he appeared as the most prominent candidate of repudiation. Few American peculiarities are more puzzling to foreigners than the general indifference with which the language and proceedings of the House of Representatives are regarded. The members are rarely chosen, as in Utopia, for their wisdom and virtue, or, as in England, on account of their social and political importance; and the Constitution wisely provides that the House shall have no direct control of policy or administration. In ordinary times the debates attract little more attention than the discussions of the Convocation of Canterbury; but nevertheless a House of Representatives which expressed a strong popular feeling might, especially under the guidance of a skilful demagogue, exercise for a time considerable power. A determined majority acting in concert with the President might perhaps balance the power of the Senate; and General Butler has some ground for hoping that he may control both the executive department and the House of Representatives.

The Confederate leaders introduced a great improvement into their version of the American Constitution by lengthening the term of the Presidential office, and at the same time prohibiting re-election. It is a great evil that the head of the Government should devote himself during the latter half of his administration to the business of canvassing. The many plausible objections to hereditary power are outweighed, in the opinion of the majority of European statesmen and legislators, by the identification of the interests of the reigning family with the welfare of the State. The Americans have not succeeded in providing a similar security against the operation of selfish motives. A President who hopes for re-election is constantly tempted to prefer his party to his public duty, and himself to his party. In his former candidature General Grant relied on his great and recent public services; and the most upright of his supporters hoped that they had at last discovered a President strong enough in reputation and public confidence to disregard factions and personal interests; but apparently General Grant's political knowledge and ability were not proportionate to his military skill. During the war he had shown both generosity and judgment in the choice of his lieutenants, and in his cordial appreciation of their services; but apparently as an American and a soldier he thinks that any man is good enough for any civil office. His struggles against the domination of election managers and trading politicians have constantly become fainter; and his early attempts to assert his independence in the choice of his Ministers have been finally abandoned. Mr. Hoar and Mr. Cox have been successively sacrificed to the remonstrances of partisans who complained that the Attorney-General and the Secretary of the Interior preferred the efficiency of the civil service to the encouragement of Republican voters. General Grant's concessions are necessarily attributed to his anxiety for re-election; and the professional politicians are prepared to play still further on his weakness. Mr. Boutwell, who, notwithstanding his defects as a financier, holds an independent position, is expected to resign the Treasury, and it is rumored that Mr. Fish is to make room in the Department of State for General Butler. Such an appointment would indicate an immediate rupture with England, with the ulterior purpose of securing the election in 1872 of a patriotic soldier as President. Although the President cannot declare war without the assent of the Senate, he can at any time give directions to the army or the navy which would render war unavoidable. It would be unjust to the President to anticipate such a policy on his part; but it is known that General Butler has lately become one of his chief political advisers. During the last months of the war General Grant stated, in a published despatch or general order, that General Butler and his forces might as well have been corked up in a bottle as have held the position which they had occupied throughout the campaign. In deference to the opinion of the General-in-Chief General Butler was dismissed from his command, and he remained without employment during the remainder of the war. It has since been remarked that he has become the eulogist and friend of General Grant, although persons of his temperament are not in the habit of forgiving crushing slights without sufficient reason. Perhaps he could have secured no more effectual revenge than by becoming the political guide of his former military superior. General Butler understands far better than the President the manipulation of factions and of elections; but it would appear from the correspondence on the resignation of Mr. Cox that he has found a docile pupil. It is unlucky that an English cruiser has had occasion to capture an American vessel for some real or supposed trespass on the Canadian fishing-grounds. It is true that the act may be justified if it is legal, and that there will be no hesitation in disavowing and repairing any error which may possibly have been committed; but on several recent occasions General Butler has endeavored to fasten a quarrel on England in connexion with the fisheries, and even if the trespass which led to the capture was not committed at his instigation, he will not fail to take the opportunity of appealing to popular passion. There are probably many Americans who would disapprove of bloodshed and plunder deliberately planned for the benefit of political adventurers; but it is not the custom of the country to defend by public protest the cause of justice or morality, which happens also to be the cause of England.

CITY ITEMS.

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