

THE NEW AGE

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NOTES OF THE WEEK.

KING EDWARD is rapidly becoming as completely his own Minister for Foreign Affairs as ever the Kaiser is in Germany. If affairs of the dimensions of our relations with Europe are to be continually relegated (if even that is the word) to non-representative hands, it will soon be time to drop the pretence of representative government. Domestic politics involve the fate of political parties only, but foreign politics involve the honour as well as the fate of the whole nation. We therefore regret that a professedly democratic and representative Parliament should permit these very highest national concerns to slip out of its hands into areas where criticism, much less control, is practically impossible.

* * *

How nearly we have already drifted into a restoration of the perilous traditions of monarchy may be seen from the startling announcement of the King's proposed meeting with the Tsar of Russia. Nothing will convince us that there is the smallest desire in England for any closer rapprochement. On the contrary, the intelligence of the English Court has been grossly employed if it has not realised the positive loathing with which the name of the Tsar is regarded in this country. With the Russian people the sympathies of all England are unanimous and profound, but with the Tsar, at once the most feeble and the most despotic ruler in Europe, there cannot be and there must not be the smallest sign of friendship. The very circumstances of the proposed meeting are plainly significant of the relations of the Tsar with the Russian people. Even his entertainment of the King of England must take place outside the soil of Russia, outside, in fact, the soil of Europe altogether. Moreover, as if to emphasise the banal features of England's reported action, King Edward is to be accompanied not by the usual Minister of the Crown, but by one of the permanent officials of the Foreign Office.

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It is extraordinary in our view that the announcement should have been received in England with

equanimity. The "Daily News" has honourably raised and maintained the note of alarm; the "Nation" hears "with mixed feelings"; but for the rest, with timid exceptions, the whole Press of England has either nothing to say or only apologies and excuses to offer. If that is the measure of England's sensitiveness in the matter of national liberty and honour, we do not wonder at the callosity of our politicians. But, as we have said, we deny entirely that England is so insensitive. The Liberal Cabinet is seriously to blame both for allowing foreign affairs to slip out of its hands and in this particular instance of assenting to the proposed visit. Half-an-hour with "Pam" would blow a good deal of sycophancy out of the Cabinet atmosphere, and restore something to Liberalism that Liberalism sadly needs.

* * *

We comment elsewhere on the "sensational" announcement made by Mr. Asquith to a deputation of sixty Liberal members on Wednesday last. The deputation asked for the half loaf of facilities for Mr. Stanger's Bill on Women's Suffrage; but in reply Mr. Asquith promised instead a whole loaf of Reform before the end of the present Parliament. Unfortunately there is no virtue in political promises; and half a loaf at once is generally better than a whole loaf in two years' time. Nobody can foresee what may happen to the present Government from session to session, still less from year to year. The Suffragettes, at any rate, are not disposed to be put off again; and with excellent promptitude resumed on the very next day their violent demands for their Bill in this session. Mr. Asquith has shown commendable weakness in opening a mind long declared to be finally closed on the subject of the enfranchisement of women; but there is no reason whatever why it should not be open as well on Mr. Stanger's Bill as on the hypothetical Bill of next year or the year after. No possible harm can befall the prospects of Adult Suffrage by the immediate extension of the franchise to women.

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The second reading of the Education Bill was carried on Wednesday by a majority of 165. In spite of this, it is safe to say of the Bill, as Mr. Balfour said of it, that it has not a single whole-hearted supporter in the House, or, we may add, in the country. Everybody realises by this time that the Bill has nothing to do with education. Its sole object is to settle the religious