

PASSING NOTES

BY "MERCURIUS."

The events of the week remind one of Lord Salisbury's dictum that the Prime Minister who has a Churchill in his Cabinet is like a man with a boil on his neck. Thirty years ago, when Lord Randolph Churchill was four years younger than his son is to-day, he, too, resigned from the Ministry, dramatically stated his case to the House of Commons, and bounced out of the country, just as Winston has done this week. "Will he ever re-enter the Cabinet?" somebody asked Lord Salisbury. His lordship eyed the inquirer curiously for a moment, and then laconically answered the question by asking another. "If a man has had a boil on the back of his neck, and has at last got rid of it, does he try to get it back again?" I daresay Mr. Asquith feels in pretty much the same way. When Lord Randolph quitted the political arena, he went lion shooting in Africa; Winston will get all the shooting he wants nearer home. He has already smelt powder pretty often. He has done some campaigning on Indian frontiers; has marched his men across the Egyptian desert; has served with the Malakand and Tirah expeditions; has participated in the captures both of Omdurman and Pretoria; and has fought with the Spaniards at Cuba. Since then, he has sat in the House of Commons, first as a Conservative and then as a Liberal; has been Under-Secretary for the Colonies, President of the Board of Trade, Home Secretary, First Lord of the Admiralty, and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. And now, a trifle over forty, he goes to the trenches. May good luck go with him!

The cables have this week informed us that the Kaiser has ordered Christmas dinner for himself and a hundred thousand men to be prepared in Constantinople. About this time last year the Kaiser was worrying about his Christmas dinner; ordered it for Paris, but found the line blocked, and had to have dinner at home. As Sir Owen Seaman sings:—

A year ago I had to decide
Where I would spend my Christmas-

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tide.
Various pleasant schemes I had—
Paris—London—Petrograd—
But I couldn't have painted all three
red,
So I finally stayed at home instead.

Now Yule is on us again, and I'm
Still bound by the laws of Space and
Time,
My heart, like a common man's, is torn
Between the above and the Golden
Horn,
With matins under a Moslem dome;
But, how can I do all four—and Rome?

The Kaiser's extreme anxiety as to the precise whereabouts of his Christmas dinner almost suggests some concern on his part as to whether he is likely this Christmas to get any decent dinner at all.

I looked in at the rose show on Wednesday afternoon principally to see the roses, but partly also to escape for a little while from the suffocating dust storm raging outside. Under all the conditions, the show was really excellent, and the promoters deserve congratulation. Moving about among the exhibits, I came upon a prominent member of the Royal Society, and the conversation naturally turned upon the lecture on Nietzsche, with which Mr. Morris Miller favoured that Society on Monday evening. The subject was not altogether foreign to our surroundings, for Nietzsche himself has a poem on "My Roses," which, I can only suppose, Mr. Morris Miller has never met. If he had come across it, he must have taken the hint that it contained. For Nietzsche asks:—

"Will you stop and pluck my roses?
Oft mid rocks and thorns you'll linger,
Hide and stoop, suck bleeding finger—
Will you stop and pluck my roses?
For my good luck's a trifle vicious,
Fond of teasing, tricks, malicious.
Will you stop and pluck my roses?"

This, as I understand it, is Nietzsche's way of saying that he is not to be taken seriously, and that if Royal Societies, university lecturers, and the like will persist in meddling with him, they will have bleeding fingers to suck afterwards.

We must assume, therefore, either that Mr. Morris Miller and the Royal Society had not noticed Nietzsche's warning, or else that they defied it at their own peril. They stopped and plucked the roses. Did they have to suck a bleeding finger? As soon as Mr. Morris Miller resumed his seat, Mr. Dechaineux rather cruelly inquired whether the gentleman on whom Mr. Morris Miller had been lecturing was a madman! It is a somewhat disconcerting question with which to confront a lecturer immediately after his peroration. Mr. Morris Miller seemed a trifle sensitive on the point, and vaguely admitted that "Nietzsche was undoubtedly a man who suffered greatly." But why such squeamishness? Why not say outright that Nietzsche was as mad as the March hare? "He was pronounced hopelessly insane," says Dr. F. C. Scott-Schiller; and Nietzsche's most popular biographer says bluntly that "Nietzsche went mad. He spoke much and loudly; he paid gold for trifles; he imagined he was a famous murderer; he was the King of Italy; he was God!" I admire Mr. Morris Miller's delicacy; but it looks a little like sucking a bleeding finger after plucking the roses that his hero warned him not to touch.

It struck me that the lecturer pricked his own bubble at the outset by declaring that we are all wrong in supposing that the Nietzsche cult had something to do with the War. If Mr. Morris Miller is right, there remains no further reason for interesting ourselves in the mad philosopher and his ravings. But is he right, or has he again torn his fingers on the thorns among the roses? One of the greatest living interpreters of Nietzsche, in a work published several years ago, points out that Nietzsche's craving for war was insatiable. War was to him the true divinity, the saviour of nations. He revelled in the hope that an age of war was fast approaching. In vindication of such ideas, this interpreter points to the then condition of Europe—every frontier bristling with guns, every nation armed to the teeth. And, most striking of all, he points to Bernhardt, whose book had then been recently published, and claims him as a product of the Nietzsche school. He quotes some of Bernhardt's flamboyant sentences in glorification of war, and points out that the instant popularity

sentences in glorification of war, and points out that the instant popularity with which the book was greeted proves that it appealed to a general sentiment. And then he mentions, as a singularly significant circumstance, that Bernhardt's book bore, as a motto on its title-page, Nietzsche's saying that "War and courage have done more great things than love to the neighbour." Mr. Spencer Arden describes Nietzsche as a philosophical tease, a practical joker, a man who delighted in contradiction and aggravation, one who never expected to be taken seriously. Did Nietzsche not say as much himself in warning us off his rose-beds? If Mr. Morris Miller takes my advice—and Nietzsche's—he will suck his bleeding finger and leave the madman's flowers severely alone in future.

The novelty of the thing having worn off, the second recruiting campaign lacked the snap and vigour of the first. Perhaps men of the right stamp are getting harder to catch. They are like fish in a stream that has been too often visited. I attended a good many of the meetings, but it struck me that the speakers were feeling that they had got hold of the wrong people. We

may, like the authorities at Home, have to introduce some ingenuity into our recruiting methods. Personally, I am among those who hope that we shall be able to finish the business on a voluntary basis; but this week's cables make it look as though the best way of getting volunteers is to fix a date for conscription. The men are tumbling over each other in their eagerness to enlist before the date comes. Possibly we could run the thing on the Federal War Tax principle; fix a date, and then keep on postponing it, a fortnight at a time, until the end of the war! By the way, I caught a good many references at the recruiting meetings to Tommy Atkins. Has anybody noticed that it is just a hundred years this week since that famous nickname came into existence? On the Army forms issued in 1815 there appeared, as a guide to illiterate soldiers, the imaginary signature "Thomas Atkins, his mark." The men soon got into the way of referring to each other as Tommy Atkins, and, here we are, a century afterwards, still using it as a

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term of honour and admiration.
