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EDITORIAL

## ARISTIDE BRIAND.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**S**WANS—so runs the ancient legend—sing beautiful notes just before expiring. Tested by this test, Aristide Briand, the resigning French Premier, is no swan, but a common duck.

Among the things stated by Premier Briand, in his letter tendering his resignation to the President, is that the Republican majority in the Chamber of Deputies has systematically striven to prevent him from carrying out his program by a process of obstruction which he is convinced was directed against him personally.

In other words, Briand admits that his program has fallen through, and he attributes his failure to personal hostility.

This is not the tuneful song of a dying swan; it is the quacking of a duck, whether alive, or in the act of “handing in its checks.”

No doubt, M. Briand received a larger dose of personal attack than usually falls to the lot of a public official. As far as modern French history is concerned, there was only one other French official who was similarly made a personal target of. That was President Casimir Perier—and he also resigned with a program left unaccomplished.

Casimir Perier’s case illumines Briand’s; and Briand’s refreshes the memory on Perier’s.

President Perier’s term of office was of the shortest. Elected President at the end of June 1894, he resigned in the middle of the following January—barely seven



ARISTIDE BRIAND (1862–1932)

months later, owing to the storm of personal attack directed against him, especially by the Socialist deputies and the Socialist organs. In resigning Perier and his supporters bitterly denounced the Socialists for their “personalities”—very much in the style now used by Briand. The Socialist answer was conclusive. “The personal attacks we directed against you,” said the Socialists, “would, indeed, have been unmannerly, were it not for your personal policy. That policy consisted in setting up your personality is answer to all doubts, questions and criticisms. Had you suppressed your personality and stuck to principles, we would have attacked the latter only. As it was, your personality was by yourself so intertwined with your principles that we could not attack either without attacking both.”

Identically is the case with Briand. Premier Briand’s personality formed a huge part of Premier Briand’s principles. The paranoid Ego that marks the Anarchist never left the ex-Anarchist Briand in the premiership. Did any supposed laxness on his part in the handling of the religious orders evoke criticism? Nine-tenths of Premier Briand’s answer amounted to a parrying of the attack with allusions to his unquestionable anti-clerical personality. Was he called to account for his drastic procedure against the railroaders on strike? Premier Briand’s defense was mainly “Briand.” And so all along the line.

Personal attack never hurts, unless the person and the thing are one. When personal attack obstructs principle, the principle is the person; and when the fact thereof is so notorious as to be admitted, then the pretended swan himself betrays the fact with a duck’s quack.

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