

THE CRITIC.

The Welfare of the People is the Highest Law.

50 PER ANNUM.
(SINGLE COPY 3 CTS.)

HALIFAX, N. S., FEBRUARY 12, 1886.

{ VOL. 3.
{ No. 7.

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THE CRITIC,

Published every Friday, at 161 Hollis Street, Halifax, Nova Scotia,
BY
CRITIC PUBLISHING COMPANY.

Edited by C. F. FRASER.

Subscription \$1.50 per annum in advance. Single copies 3 cents.

SAMPLE COPIES SENT FREE.

Remittances should be made to C. F. FRASER, MANAGER.

EDITORIAL NOTES.

The crown jewels of France are to be sold, and the proceeds used as a fund to assist aged laborers. Their value is said to be \$40,000,000. Rubies, pearls and diamonds, are not counted as legitimate State assets under a Republican form of Government.

Uncle Sam pays out \$5,500,000 annually to clothe and feed his Indian wards. Some years ago he paid a larger sum to shoot them down. The dead Indian may be the only good Indian, but the peace policy pays in the long run.

What would the United States be to day, were it not for its railway system? Without railways, the immense western prairies would still be the home of the Indian and the buffalo. A country that adds 3,112 miles of rail to its system in 1885, and has an aggregate mileage of 128,500, is keeping well abreast of the times.

Civilization advances but slowly in the sunny isles of Oceania. The predilection of their inhabitants for roast missionary is well known, but just at the time when we were led to believe that cannibalism had been stamped out, there comes to us a report from Borneo, that at a great native festival monkeys were served up whole. Such aping cannibals should not be tolerated.

The illiterate voting population of the United States has assumed such enormous proportions since the adoption of manhood suffrage, that politicians are trying to devise special measures to reduce the amount of illiteracy in the country. There are 1,869,245 illiterate voters in the States, of whom over a million are colored. In some parts of Britain, too, the amount of illiteracy among the voting population is alarming. In Donegal, Ireland, at the late elections, five-sixths of the voters could not read the ballots, and were at the mercy of the returning officers. Yet the streamlet of their political influence trickles into the legislation of Britain, and may have its share in deciding the destinies of the greatest nation on earth.

In this age, speculators are allowed to ride rough-shod over the people. The ready command of large capital being not unfrequently used to increase the cost of the necessaries of life. The capitalists of New York and Chicago have combined for the purpose of purchasing all the wheat now to be obtained in the West. Thus they will hold until the price has advanced sufficiently to recoup them handsomely for their outlay. Fortunately for the bread-eaters of the United States, the supply of wheat from Canada, India, and Australia, is steadily increasing, and it is probable that the days of corners in wheat are numbered. The aggregate wealth of the people is never increased by the speculative enterprises of individuals.

A tourist who wrote from Cape Breton last summer to the *Chicago Inter-Ocean*, thus referred to the "country people" of the Island—"I find them remarkably free from dishonesty, fraud and hypocrisy, and from other such devices of civilization." Yes, they are without other devices of civilization; the men in whose hands is the government of the Island have hitherto carefully protected it from asylums, railways, and such other devices of civilization.

We have been told that in some of the Halifax Churches single sittings may be purchased for the modest sum of twelve dollars per annum—the cost of an entire pew for the same time being fifty-two dollars. It may be necessary to raise money to pay the minister his stipend, and to defray other expenses in connection with a church, but we fail to see why this could not be done were the plan of free sittings adopted. The selling and letting of seats in the house of God is as unscriptural as it is unchristian, and should be condemned by both pastor and people.

A bill to extend the Franchise in Parliamentary elections to women has been introduced into the Legislature of Ontario. At the late municipal elections in that Province, a large number of women voted, without, as far as can be ascertained, entailing any of the domestic and social evils at one time believed to be inseparable from the exercise of the Franchise by women. True, party feeling is not so strong in municipal as in parliamentary contests, and to the latter the objections commonly urged mainly apply. In some parts of the world, at least, time will decide.

St. Valentine's Day, with all its sentimental and romantic associations, is again approaching. It is said the observance of this day is due to the fact, that on or about the 14th day of February, the birds in southern climes choose their mates for the ensuing year. The custom of exchanging gifts at this season has degenerated of late years, and the privileges of St. Valentine's now only serve to license ill-bred people to annoy and wound the feelings of their neighbors. The modern pictorial valentines, such as displayed in many shop-windows, are a disgrace to our civilization, and a reproach to our christianity.

The author of "Underground Russia," and "Russia under the Czars," has been interviewed at his residence, i. e. London, by an enterprising representative of a New York Journal. "The Russian people," said Mr. Stepmark, "are bound hand and foot. The better classes desire to secure responsible government. The outgrowth of this desire is Nihilism, and Nihilism will, sooner or later, make itself felt. Every lover of liberty must sympathise with the efforts now being made to relieve the Russian people from their triple yoke of bondage."

Halifaxians displayed no enthusiasm over the proposed winter carnival; but among the more enterprising citizens, there is a strong conviction that if the proposition had been cordially received and carried out with vim, Halifax might have been filled with visitors during a season of the year when the city is more than usually dull. A summer carnival is now proposed, but as this is everybody's business, nobody will be found willing to devote sufficient time and trouble to insure its attainment. Some of these fine days Halifax will wake up, and then St. John will close her shutters.

It is said by those unfavorable to the further extension of the franchise, that if manhood were taken as a basis for suffrage, the political destiny of the country would be under the control of persons having no stake in the welfare of the Dominion. If the ownership of land entitled a man to citizenship, we could understand the objection; but when a two-dollar monthly rental places the privileges of the franchise within the reach of room tenants we cannot see how its extension would be injurious to the country.

The eyes of the civilized world are now fixed upon Japan. During the past decade most important governmental reforms have been carried out without disturbances. The Executive Council, which now includes the Prime Minister and the Ministers of the Right and Left, will, in April next, be superseded by a Cabinet responsible to the people's representatives, in which there are to be nine Departmental Ministers. In the more civilized West such a radical constitutional reform could only have been accomplished after years of agitation, perhaps civil war.

One of the most important questions before Congress this session is the Blair Bill, which proposes to give \$77,000,000 of the national funds to be used in diminishing the evil of illiteracy. This sum, in cash, is to be divided on the basis of illiteracy, giving "to each State or Territory in that proportion which the whole number of persons in each, who, being of the age of ten years or over, cannot write," bears to the whole population. The objection raised is that the Bill is *ultra vires*, on the ground that with each state rests the duty of providing for the education of its own people, and that, therefore, the Federal Government cannot assume this burden or vote any of the general funds towards it.