

THE CRITIC.

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THE FRANCHISE ACT.

The protracted discussion of the Franchise Bill still continues to drag wearily along in the House of Commons, and unless the Government agree to withdraw the measure, or Mr. Blake and his followers consent to discontinue their obstructive tactics, the House will still be in session for many weeks to come. Notwithstanding the fact that this Franchise Bill has been before the country for the past two years, many of its provisions were objected to by supporters of Sir John's administration, and the fact that the Premier has evinced a willingness to remodel the measure so as to meet their views, would indicate that Sir John and his government had not given to this Bill the consideration which its importance merits.

We give in another column the various amendments to the Act which have so far been adopted by the Commons; these it will be seen are decidedly liberal in their tendency, and serve to bring the measure nearer to that of one based upon manhood suffrage; and for these concessions we are profoundly grateful, seeing that they will give the right of citizenship to many persons who would otherwise have been excluded from the privileges of the Franchise. For those who have raised a hue and cry against the enfranchisement of Indians we have no consideration; as we have not heard any valid reason why the red man, who possesses the proper qualifications, should not be entitled to the Franchise just as much as the man whose skin happens to be black or white. All men are equal in the sight of God, and we see no reason why they should not be placed upon a similar footing in the eye of the law.

THE BRITISH NATIONAL DEBT.

The financial record of Great Britain during the nineteenth century is one that must redound to the credit of her statesmen, and free her as a nation in the eyes of posterity from the baseless charge of selfishness and avarice. At the close of the Napoleonic wars the national debt of Great Britain had reached the enormous sum of nine hundred million, four hundred and thirty-six thousand pounds. Within the ensuing fifteen years the debt was reduced by upwards of fifty-five millions of pounds; the period being one of unparalleled peace and prosperity. Notwithstanding the commercial depression which affected trade throughout the world between the years 1830 and 1840, and the constant deficits of the revenue which had to be made up by the chancellors of the exchequer, the nation while not in a position to diminish its public debt actually paid out the sum of twenty million pounds sterling for the emancipation of the negroes in the British West Indies, an act of philanthropy unrivalled in the history of the world.

Between the years 1841 and 1854 the national debt was reduced by upwards of forty-four million pounds; which, considering the calls upon the treasury which resulted from the famine in Ireland, must be considered most satisfactory, the actual outlay on account of the famine having been about eight million pounds. Between the years 1854 and 1857 the national debt was increased from eight hundred and two, to eight hundred and thirty five million pounds, the increase of upwards of thirty million pounds being due to the Crimean war.

During the past twenty-seven years the national debt of Britain has been reduced to the extent of eighty-nine million pounds, and when it is remembered that thirty millions of this sum represents expenditure upon reproductive works, such as the Suez Canal, the Telegraphic lines, etc., it will readily be understood that the reduction is greater than it actually appears; as, however, these are regarded as dead expenditure, they do not affect, directly, the national liability, which in 1884 was seven hundred and forty-six million, four hundred and twenty-four thousand pounds, shewing a reduction in the past sixty-nine years of upwards of one hundred and fifty-four million pounds. It is estimated that at the present rate of reduction the debt will in the ensuing twenty years be diminished by one hundred and seventy million pounds.

A national debt is generally regarded as a source of strength to a nation, inasmuch as the resident bond-holders have a common interest in the preservation of the nation, and in this sense the debt is considered to form a bond of union; such generalizing may be accepted by thoughtless persons as incontrovertible, but this is far from the truth. A national debt is a national obligation, the burden of which rests on all classes of the community, and for the payment of the interest upon which each and every citizen is directly or indirectly taxed. In a new country like Canada it may be necessary in the interests of the present generation as well as that of posterity to employ borrowed capital in developing and opening up our varied resources, but the statesman who would impose heavy responsibilities upon the present generation with a view to the prospective benefits to posterity, seriously impedes the progress of the nation.

THE CHINESE IN CANADA.

As British Columbia is an integral portion of the Dominion, the live issues which are now engaging the attention of the people of that Province cannot fail to be of some interest to those residing in other parts of Canada. British Columbia, which has an area greater than that of the Republic of France suffers from the sparseness of its population, and the lack of railway communication with the great centres of civilization on the continent. The early completion of the Canadian Pacific railway will provide the Province with the much-needed railway facilities, and no doubt over this line thousands of European emigrants will find their way to the rich agricultural and mining districts of the Pacific slope. Meanwhile, however, the white inhabitants of British Columbia are suffering from the competition of the Chinese labourers, who each year arrive in the Province in ever-increasing numbers; their numerical strength at the present time being at the ratio of two to seven of the entire population. These Celestials willingly work for exceedingly small wages, and as they can live for about one-third of the sum required by a labouring white man to maintain himself and his family, they virtually exclude him from the labour markets of the country.

In order to complete the construction of the C. P. Railway it may have been necessary to employ cheap Chinese labour, but as that work is to all intents and purposes now finished, it is time the Dominion Government took notice of the several memorials upon the Chinese question presented to them by the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia. Semi-slave labour, such as that of the Chinese, may be advantageous to a country in the early stages of settlement, but if allowed to exist for a long period it is apt to retard and hinder its growth and development. Thousands of the emigrants who yearly arrive in Canada, have to commence life in the new world as day-labourers until they shall have saved a sufficient amount to engage in agricultural or other pursuits upon their own account. The cheap labour of John Chinaman has a tendency to prevent emigrants of this class from settling in British Columbia, and as it is upon such emigrants rather than upon the Chinese that the future greatness of the country depends, it appears to us that the Government would be recreant to its duty were it not to give the preference to desirable immigration by discouraging undesirable immigration. The report of Mr. Chapleau upon this question recommends that a tax of \$10 per head be levied upon all Chinese immigrants; the recommendation is strongly supported by the people of British Columbia, and as they are best able to judge of the probable effects of such an embargo, the Government should not hesitate to take action in the matter.

EDITORIAL NOTES.

Great Britain annually imports merchandise to the value of two billion and ninety-two million dollars, three fourths of which sum represents her foreign and one-fourth her colonial trade. The value of her exports exceeds one billion, four hundred and eighty-eight million dollars, of which the colonies receive about three tenths. It is scarcely to be wondered at that the commercial men of Germany second the aspirations of Bismarck in securing for that empire extensive colonial possessions.

The city of Halifax has for many years suffered from financial embarrassment, which was the direct outcome of the unfair and pernicious system of taxation upon rental, previously in vogue. Under the present civic administration several legislative reforms have been carried into effect, so that the outlook for the future of the city is much more encouraging. The lack of good pavements in the more populous portions of Halifax is constantly felt by pedestrians. No doubt Mayor Mackintosh and the city fathers fully realize this want, but we should like to see them take some vigorous step towards remedying the defect.

Canada is taking no mean place among the nations of the world in respect to her agricultural products; while her mining, manufacturing and fishing industries are now being recognized as much more valuable than they were previously supposed to be. Our exhibit in the Antwerp Show is said to have attracted the attention of a large number of the visitors from all parts of the European continent. The indirect returns from such an advertisement will, in the long run, pay handsomely for the trouble and expense involved in collecting and forwarding our exhibit.

It now requires but thirty days for a traveller to accomplish the distance between Halifax and Calcutta, and but forty days between London and Melbourne. The Globe may have a second Jupiter to those living upon it a hundred years since, but to the present generation it appears no larger than one of Jupiter's satellites, steam and electricity having almost annihilated space.

The consumption of tea, coffee, and cocoa has been more than trebled in the world during the past forty years; the increase in the consumption of coffee has been comparatively small, while the consumption of cocoa and tea has been quadrupled.

On another column will be found a letter from the celebrated authoress and philanthropist, Miss Frances Power Cobbe. This gifted Irish lady has devoted most of her life and writings to battling against the prescriptive wrongs of certain oppressed classes of mankind, and has of late years extended her sympathies and aid to the dumb victims of vivisection. We congratulate our valued contributor "Franc-Tirour" on his winning, now for the second time, a spontaneous tribute of praise from an eminent trans-Atlantic writer.