The Fernie Free Press

ESTABLISHED 1898.

G. G. HENDERSON,.....EDITOR AND MANAGER.

Address all communications to the Manager.

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THE FERNIE FREE PRESS,
FERNIE, BRITISH COLUMBIA.
G. G. HENDERSON, Manager.

SATURDAY, MARCH 4, 1899.

THE CROW'S NEST CHARTER.

Several of our contemporaries have devoted their editorial columns recently to pointing out the incalculable injury inflicted on the reputation of the Dominion by reckless and unmeasured vituperation of public men. It has been urged with justice that if our leading statesmen and officials were half as bad as they are painted by the Opposition press, we should be nothing better than a country of thieves and liars. This is a singular feature of Canadian public life and one which cannot be too strongly deprecated.

Among the public men who have fallen under this castigation, not one has received a fuller measure than the Hon. Joseph Martin, the present Attorney-General of the Province; and of the countless enormities of which it was predicted he was capable, and would assuredly accomplish, perhaps the most significant was to be the repeal of the land grant conveyed in what is known as "The Crow's Nest Charter." The confident supporters of this policy of confiscation, and their name is legion—from disappointed "bummers" down to discredited "penny-a-liners,"—never ceased, in season and out of season, to "walk round the walls" blowing their trumpets and foretelling the certain destruction of this piece of legislation. But while they were filling the air with denunciations and turning everything to "wind," the important works authorized by that charter were being pushed forward with an energy and thoroughness which have earned general commendation, until the Province is already reaping the benefit of railway communication through a rapidly developing country in the south west, and plentiful and cheap supplies of coal and coke for smelting and general purposes.

In the face of these achievements, so fraught with importance to the Province, there were not wanting some who believed that the Attorney-General had it in his mind to repeal the land grant which formed the basis of this enterprise, and to launch out into a policy of confiscation which would have discredited its author and the whole Dominion in the eyes of every fair-minded man, as well as damming up the source of supplies for the future development of the Province.

We never believed that any Minister could be found in Canada with the responsibilities of office on his shoulders who would inaugurate such an immoral policy, least of all a man who had stood high in the esteem of his party and who, abandoning the sphere of his earlier labours, had re-entered public life to make for himself a high and honourable position in the West; and the result shows that our confidence was fully justified, for in spite of the clamour of a few partizans, and their exultation when it became known that the Attorney-General was about to introduce a Bill repealing the land grants to "certain railways," the result speedily proved that the "wreckers" had counted without their host, for when the Bill was read a first time the honourable gentleman set all doubts at rest by declaring that "it was not intended to "interfere with any company which had "acted under the charters granted. The "Crow's Nest and Kootenay Lake Rail-"way Company had been the British Col-"umbia Southern originally, and when "the Bill reached the committee stage, "he would ask that the section, as it re-"ferred to that charter, should be left "out." No other course was to be expected from an honourable man or from a Government charged with the public interests of the country. Any other action would have set back the clock of progress in British Columbia at least twenty years, and that just at a time when the magnificent resources of the Province are being recognized and the shyest of all suitors—capital—is beginning to woo her favors. The Attorney-General is to be congratulated on the firm stand he has made against a "cabal" even though it be in his own party; and among the many acts of his public career there is not one upon which, in the years to come, he will look back with more satisfaction than his resistance to this policy of confiscation and his maintenance of the best traditions of the British Constitution in its regard for the rights of property and the honourable fulfilment of just obligations.

WE are pleased to note that the appeal for a school building at Fernie has at last been recognized by the insection of two thousand dollars in the estimates, but our satisfaction is considerably discounted by disappointment at the smallness of the grant, and at the total absence of any provision for a teaching staff. True, there is what may be called a lump sum set apart for this purpose to cover contingencies in the Province, but like the grant for a building, it is totally inadequate. We have at the moment one hundred and sixteen children of school age and it is practically certain that before the close of the year there will be from two hundred and forty to three hundred. To provide suitable accommodation for these will cost at least five thousand dollars and means that the small sum now set apart can only build a section and will have to be supplemented at a very early date. But the most serious omission is with respect to the teaching staff. Are our children to run about the streets for the next three or four months while all the preliminaries for building a school are being arranged? They have done too much of this already, and with at least one suitable building available there is not the slightest excuse for delay. We urge the immediate election of school trustees and that intimation of their appointment be made to the government, together with the strongest possible representation as to the necessities of the case. This work must, in the interests of the town, go ahead at once, and if the government cannot be aroused by ordinary means to a sense of their responsibility, we must take the law into our own hands. Cranbrook, with twenty-six school children, has a vote for building and teaching staff. Fort Steele, with less than one hundred, has, unasked for, an assistant teacher appointed in addition to the ordinary staff. Why not Fernie?

WE announced a few weeks ago the formation of a committee to canvas the town and neighborhood in order to ascertain what persons were entitled to be put upon the voters' list for the Province. We understand that the committee have about completed their investigation and that the report will be ready in a few days. In the meantime we are able to foreshadow the result and feel sure that it will be with a measure of surprise and gratification that our citizens will learn that by July next over 300 persons now resident in this town will be entitled to vote. Of these about 75 represent removals from other parts of the Province—the remainder becoming British Columbians for the first time and constitute an addition to the voting power of the Province. This large list is due to an alteration in the qualification of voters made during the recent session of Parliament reducing the time limit to six months' residence in British Columbia, and two months in the town, and in the case of Fernie has the effect of bringing our list up to 300 in July instead of December. This places Fernie far ahead of any other town in East Kootenay, as Fort Steele, the next in population, only claims 180 voters, and Cranbrook 100, so that at present we have more than the two put together, and in view of the large works projected here during this year it is probable that by the end of the year our list of qualified voters will reach eight or ten hundred.

We have not hitherto said one word about the relative importance of Fernie and the other towns in East Kootenay, but now that a reliable census by an independent committee composed of men of all parties and shades of opinion has proved that we have a resident population of 1,500 and a voters' list of 300, we venture to make two suggestions. The first is: Let the Government of British Columbia turn an attentive ear to the supplications of a town that can support its opinions by a solid vote of 300; and the second is like unto it—let Fort Steele and Cranbrook cease their internecine strife and join forces with Fernie in the interests of East Kootenay as a whole. In this way they can secure a strong ally in any matter of general interest to the country, and by accepting a flag of truce will bring their war of extermination to a close and reserve their energies for a worthier purpose.

IT seems as if there will always remain differences of opinion regarding the utility of vaccination. Drs. D. C. Maclaren and A. Quackenbush, two Ottawa homeopathists, protest against the proposal in regard to compulsory vaccination in the following letter: "The fear of small-pox has aroused the periodic frenzy for vaccination, and as we are constantly being asked for advice on the subject we wish to state publicly that we definitely oppose vaccination, and desire to warn the intelligent public against it for the following reasons: (1) As a safeguard against small pox its boasted powers are utterly delusive; (2) it is always attended with serious risks to life and health, from the constant danger of transmitting tuberculosis and other dangerous diseases; (3) in spite of all statements guaranteeing the purity of the vaccine furnished, it is inconceivable how any such putrid matter can ever be considered pure."

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