

Prof. Saunders, Director of the Central Experimental Farm, has, it appears, tested the first 50 samples of frozen grain sent by farmers in Manitoba and the North-West. His analyses show that nearly one-third of the farmers in the districts which suffered from frost were unprovided with reliable seed. It is apparently implied, though not distinctly stated, in the source from which we take the information, that had the seed been sound its product would have been less vulnerable to the action of frost. If this be so the tests are of great value, and vindicate, in an important direction, the usefulness of the Experimental Farm.

We laugh at astrologers in these days, and pity the blindness of the Middle Ages, but the astrologer is still powerful enough in one of the greatest empires in the world to set back an important step in civilization. A disastrous fire broke out recently in Peking, which also destroyed some of the Royal Palace buildings. The young Emperor is about to be married, and the mischance was regarded as a bad omen. The astrologers decided that it was a manifestation of displeasure from on high, and that the recent construction of a railway, against which they have always fulminated, is the root of the trouble. It is therefore probable that this encouragement of western civilization will have to be abandoned till a more propitious season.

It would appear from an insidious article in the *Toronto Globe* that Ontario is more or less exercised about the Jesuit appropriation of Quebec. We cannot see what the people of any other Province have to do with it. The Quebec Government grants \$400,000 to Catholic educational institutions, together with \$60,000 to the Protestants of the Province for similar purposes. The amounts do not seem to be out of keeping with the relative proportions of the population. Without going into figures we should imagine the sum awarded to the Protestants to be liberal. At all events the Quebec Protestants have not, so far as we are aware, raised any protest, while it would seem that Quebec, under its own representative Government, has an indefeasible right to enact such legislation as it sees fit for its own strictly internal affairs. Quebec is essentially a Catholic Province, and we fail to see that it is any business of the people of Ontario or any other Province.

A merchant of Indian extraction, well known to the *Times* correspondent at Suakim, has arrived at that place with intelligence from the interior, and the *Times* correspondent vouches for his trustworthiness. He has traded in the Soudan for seven years, but his property has been confiscated by the Mahdi. He left Khartoum at the end of November. In October a steamer arrived there, bringing three officers, supposed to be Egyptians, from an outpost of Emin's territory, with 100 blacks and slaves, who had surrendered to the Mahdi's forces. The trader positively declares that Emin was not captured, and he saw no European prisoners. He reports defeats of the dervishes by El Sonoussi, that their rule is everywhere detested, and that the tribes long for a better Government, and for a return to the "true religion." He believes the Mahdi will never conquer the Equatorial Provinces and cannot long hold Khartoum, which is in ruins and misery. The Emirs can with difficulty collect a force to attack Dongola, the tribesmen constantly deserting. He holds that 5,000 troops could easily re-conquer the Soudan.

Wine, regarded as to either quantity or quality, is not a matter of vital importance to most people, as the great majority cannot afford to drink it, but the decline of the splendid and interesting industries its production involves in so many countries must be a subject of regret. Since the introduction of the Phylloxera in France the yield of wine has decreased from 1,820,000,000 gallons to 677,298,000, and a great part of the latter is a vile decoction from raisins, currants, and other substitutes for the grape. In the departments of Charente and Charente Inferieure the yield has fallen from 320,000,000 gallons to 14,000,000. In the Champagne and Burgundy districts the yield fell off one-half last year, but that will make not the slightest difference to the quantity consumed. In Hungary, some of whose wines are very choice, though less generally known than those of France, the disease has also spread with equal rapidity. Very few persons know now whether they are sipping a genuine wine or a clever chemical compound, but if the yield of the great European wine districts continues to decrease, they will at least soon enjoy the satisfaction of certainty.

The *Electrical Review* thus records a trip of its representative on an Electrical Omnibus through some of the busiest streets of London:—"Starting from the depot at the Haymarket, the omnibus was taken by Charing Cross along the Embankment, through Queen Victoria Street, Cheapside, Newgate Street, Holborn Viaduct, Hatton Garden, Leather Lane, Theobald's Road, across Oxford Street, and by Shaftesbury Avenue back to the depot. The trial was thoroughly successful, and the steering gear was put to a severe test at several points, for instance, in Leather Lane, where the 'bus had to be kept clear of the stock-in-trade of the costermongers, who were taking up their positions along each side of this narrow thoroughfare, leaving very little free passage. The substitution of this system of traction for horses could scarcely fail to be both an improvement and an economy, in the case not only of omnibuses, but still more of delivery and collecting vans, which are for a considerable part of their time stationary, and the question is one well worth the careful consideration of the railway and carrying companies." The application of electric motive power to heavy vehicles not running on rails may be taken as an additional argument in favor of its adoption on city tramways, and we may entertain a sanguine hope that horse-flesh will be soon delivered from the wearing street-car work in all cities and large towns.

The exceedingly lively Colony of Queensland has not furnished much history since the accelerated departure of her bumptious Premier. She has not, however, entirely ceased to afford material for amusement. The mutiny of a company of her national force has been settled by dismissals, reductions to the ranks, and fines; but the luckless *Gayundah* figures once more in an unfortunate contretemps. At a monthly parade of the Naval Brigade, which was to have embarked on that now celebrated gun-boat for heavy gun drill, three seamen only turned up, and the Commandant was the only commissioned officer who put in an appearance. The three men and their commandant, however, embarked, though of course they could not man the guns, and the redoubtable *Gayundah*, having steamed out and "taken a look at the weather outside," returned to her anchorage without having fired a shot. "Can anybody," says an English exchange, "doubt Queensland's competence to defend herself against the new six millions' worth of German cruisers, or be surprised that with a navy as adequate and efficient as this, they have judged it superfluous to spend an additional £10,000 a year on the maintenance of the Imperial Australasian squadron?"

In an article headed "Halifax Notes," and signed "A Countryman," which appeared in the *Eastern Chronicle*, we find the following:—"THE CRITIC has succeeded in getting a hold on the reading public, which is equalled by no other paper in the Province. Part of its reputation is no doubt due to the contributions of Mr. F. Blake Crofton, whose unsigned (but none the less recognizable) articles possess a literary finish, that the ordinary writer must sigh for in vain. I would be doing an injustice to your excellent contemporary, were I to assert that its editorial staff are not aware that political and social questions present some very intricate problems, but I am not unjust when I say, that the said staff sometimes hasten to give dogmatic decisions, upon subjects which it is only too apparent they are not in a position to discuss in all their bearings." "A Countryman" has our sincere thanks for this kindly reference to THE CRITIC, and our staff feel in no small degree elated at the fact that the style of our writing has led "A Countryman" to the mistaken conclusion that to Mr. F. Blake Crofton is due the credit. We fully recognize Mr. Crofton's literary ability, but as his contributions are generally over his own signature or a *nom de plume*, it is scarcely fair to the staff to credit its productions to a correspondent. The general assertion as to our dogmatic decisions needs no special comment, since "A Countryman" leaves us quite in the dark as to which particular social or political question "we are not in a position to discuss in all their bearings."

Another Postal reform urgently required is the abolition of the Departmental Franking system. The privilege of Franking, previously accorded to Peers and Members of Parliament of Great Britain, was abrogated in 1837. In Australia—at least in Victoria, and we think in the other Colonies of the Island Continent—it never existed, and the Government Departments in Melbourne regularly procured their necessarily large supplies of stamps from the Post Office. This system involved the employment of a Despatch Clerk in each Department, but it entirely obviated that abuse of a privilege which is sure to obtain wherever it is allowed. It was also done away with in the United States during General Grant's first administration. Its retention at Ottawa is open to the most extensive abuse, and must entail a very considerable loss to the Post Office Department. It is, no doubt, very pleasant to the Government Officials to be able to post their letters, and very likely a good many of their friends', free; but, as is justly remarked by the *St. John Evening Gazette*, "The Civil servants at Ottawa are fully paid for their services, and have no right to use the stationery of the Government and the Frank of the Department they belong to for their private affairs." On the other hand, there is really no reason whatever that persons all over the country, having occasion to address Government Departments, generally on their own business, should not also pay postage, as they have to do when writing elsewhere. We strongly recommend this reform to the Government and the Postmaster General.

Alta California, a journal belonging to a country whose Secretary of the Navy explains how easily Canada is to be conquered, and whose Senators and Congressmen have made themselves a spectacle of ridicule and disgust to the world, by their truculent vamping, attains a sublimity of brazen impudence in the following effusion:—"Sir John Macdonald, the Canadian Premier, is reported to have addressed some very belligerent remarks to Canadian volunteers in a drill-hall. He looked and talked fight, and drew a cheer by referring to the ridiculous Butterworth and his boshy annexation resolutions. Sir John need not trouble himself to fight any battles before war is declared, nor to violate the requirements of courtesy by swash-buckling. The incident shows how much better our Government observes the requirements of courtesy toward other nations. It would be taken as an affront to our own people if the President or Secretary of State should visit an armory of the National Guard and harangue the militia upon their brave achievements to be in a war with Canada or any other power with which we are on terms of amity. Sir John is simply guilty of very bad manners, but his truculent tricklings alarm no one on this side of the line. We are respectful of the rights of our neighbors, but if Canada should provoke war, the militia of the State of New York alone could whip her into the Gulf of St. Lawrence and send her blubbering for help to the Home Government." So far as we remember, there was little in Sir John's remarks beyond a deserved tribute to the Canada Militia, and certainly any reference to the impertinence of Mr. Butterworth, or others who have insulted Canada and Great Britain in unmeasured terms, was perfectly justifiable. But when Sir John is gravely declared guilty of bad manners—and by an American—it is too rich for anything! But we forget—the American Government "observes the requirements of courtesy towards other nations" so perfectly. Oh, yes!