

# THE CRITIC:

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## EDITORIAL NOTES.

It would perhaps be a mistake to attach too much importance to the generalities generally embodied in such documents as royal and presidential speeches and messages, yet they are always supposed to embody some outlines of the general tendency of political events and opinions. Regarded in this modified and restricted aspect, the recent message of the President to the Congress of the United States may be considered with tentative satisfaction. Mr. Harrison is reported to have admitted that Canada has administered the Fishery laws with as little friction as possible, and to have stated that all questions pending between Great Britain and the United States were in process of amicable adjustment. He further urged the enlargement of the list of extraditable offenses so that the territory of neither power can in future become a safe harbor for the evil-doers of the other. So far as the official utterances go they may be said to be satisfactory.

Portugal is, it appears, appealing to the Powers for support in her claim to jurisdiction over portions of Africa now claimed by Great Britain. As the other colonizing European countries are all more or less jealous of English energy and expansion, she will probably meet with considerable sympathy in a tribunal of nations. The worst of it is that Portugal, once the most enterprising and effective of colonizing powers, is now playing the dog in the manger, and will neither utilize the territories she claims, nor allow other countries facilities through them. She now lays claim to the chief avenues to the wealthy regions of Central Africa, apparently with no other object in view but to obstruct a commerce she will not or cannot carry on herself. This spirit was fully instanced in the matter of the Delagoa railroad, her conduct in respect to which even struck President Harrison as a subject of some complaint in his recent message to Congress. The result of her appeal will be awaited with some interest.

A forcible illustration of the great power vested in the Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, adverted to in another note, is presented in the facts that the present great political issue in the States is now dependant on legislative action, and that Mr. Reed, of Maine, an ultra-protectionist, has been elected Speaker in the place of Mr. Carlisle, who was a tariff reformer, if not a free-trader. The choice of Mr. Reed cannot, therefore, but have a pronounced effect upon this great issue. The capture by the Protectionists of the all powerful machinery of the House will, not improbably, materially promote the cause of the free traders or tariff reformers. For two years at least there is no likelihood that any measure abating the evils caused by the existing tariff will pass the House; the protectionists, consequently, will do nothing to mitigate the abuses which are now instilling into the minds of the public free-trade ideas in a manner such as no

spoken advocacy could accomplish, and the probability is that the practical lesson will be taken to heart.

The *Empire* remarks that as Job survived the visits and condolences of his comforters, Canada will in all probability likewise get over the Jeremiads of the pessimists including, more particularly, Dr. Goldwin Smith. In view of the remarkable material progress of the Dominion during the last year or two, the dreary vaticinations of the weak-kneed and unpatriotic among us are ludicrous enough. One instance is striking. In 1880 the discontented and morbid Professor declared—and his melancholy forebodings were shared and given expression to by many others—that already from a commercial point of view the C. P. R. was “an admitted failure,” and added with imposing gravity: “People are already beginning to talk of its (the road’s) abandonment, and when a far shorter route is open, as it soon must be, through the States, our Government may find itself compelled to stop a scandalous waste by winding up the concern.” And much more to the same effect. “The fact is,” says the *Empire* with perfect truth, “that the Professor cuts a poor figure in the politics of a young and rapidly developing country, and ought to stick to that literary dilettantism where his abilities find some scope. His political predictions are just as doleful to day as they were in 1880, and just as certain to be overwhelmed by the stern logic of events.”

One by one the distinguished actors in the great periodical episodes of the world’s history are passing away. The veterans of Trafalgar and Waterloo are well-nigh extinct, and, besides Admiral Wallis and Commodore Hull, there can be but very few survivors of the great war period which came to an end in 1814-15. The men of those stirring times, however, seem on the whole to have lived long, while those of later cataclysms seem by comparison to have gone more rapidly the way of all flesh. This has been notably the case with the heroes of the Crimea, of the Indian mutiny, of the Franco-German war, and of the civil war of the United States—in the latter particularly. The last death of an eminent actor in that convulsion, however, is an exception, the late Mr. Jefferson Davis having, at his demise, recorded last week, attained the ripe age of 81 years. Jefferson Davis has been since the war of the secession so entirely identified with the civil function of the Presidency of the Confederate States, that but few remember that he had, many years before, been a distinguished soldier, as well as Secretary of War during the presidency of Mr. Pierce. Mr. Davis served with great distinction in the Mexican war, and was so desperately wounded at Buena Vista that, despite his advanced age, he never ceased to suffer more or less from his injuries. His first wife was a daughter of General Zachary Taylor, twelfth President of the United States. He married a second time Miss Howell, who with two daughters survive him. His ability in the conduct of affairs is well known, and in private life the ex-President was equally respected and beloved.

The prevalence of the Rabbit Pest in Australia is a singular instance of the evils which may result from man’s short-sighted interference with the laws of nature. Hares were introduced for coursing. Pet rabbits were brought over, and a few pairs of grey rabbits were turned out to make a warren. The last lots are believed to be the fathers of the mischief. The rabbit army generally tends toward the north because it started from too near the ocean to advance south. Night travellers along the Murray river used to describe the noise made by the rabbits scampering off from the coach lights as something like the pattering of a hailstorm. The colonists made a first mistake in having the dingoes, or native dogs, destroyed, because they were dangerous to the sheep. Then the kangaroos began to multiply, taking advantage of the accommodation provided for the sheep. As soon as they were reduced to manageable numbers the rabbits appeared. The twenty or twenty-five millions of sheep pastured on the Riverina plains are being gradually eaten out by rabbits to an extent ruinous to the unfortunate owners. Foxes have been introduced in the belief that they might help to keep down the rabbits, but have themselves become an additional and increasing nuisance. Mr. C. G. N. Lockhart, in Blackwood’s Magazine, advises that the rabbits be fought by the encouragement of their natural enemies, cats and iguanas. Cats hunt them industriously, and it may be estimated that the progeny of one pair of cats will in the fifth year be equal to the slaughtering in one year of two millions and a half of them. Iguanas, in the growing scarcity of opossums, their proper food, may probably learn to eat rabbits. The bounties offered for the destruction of rabbits contribute to their perpetuation. The professional trappers find them a profitable game, and take care to keep up the supply. Hence they make war upon the cats with much more anxiety for their extinction than they show against the rabbits. The first step towards the mitigation of the evil would seem to be the abolition of the professional hunters.