

OLD MAIDS.

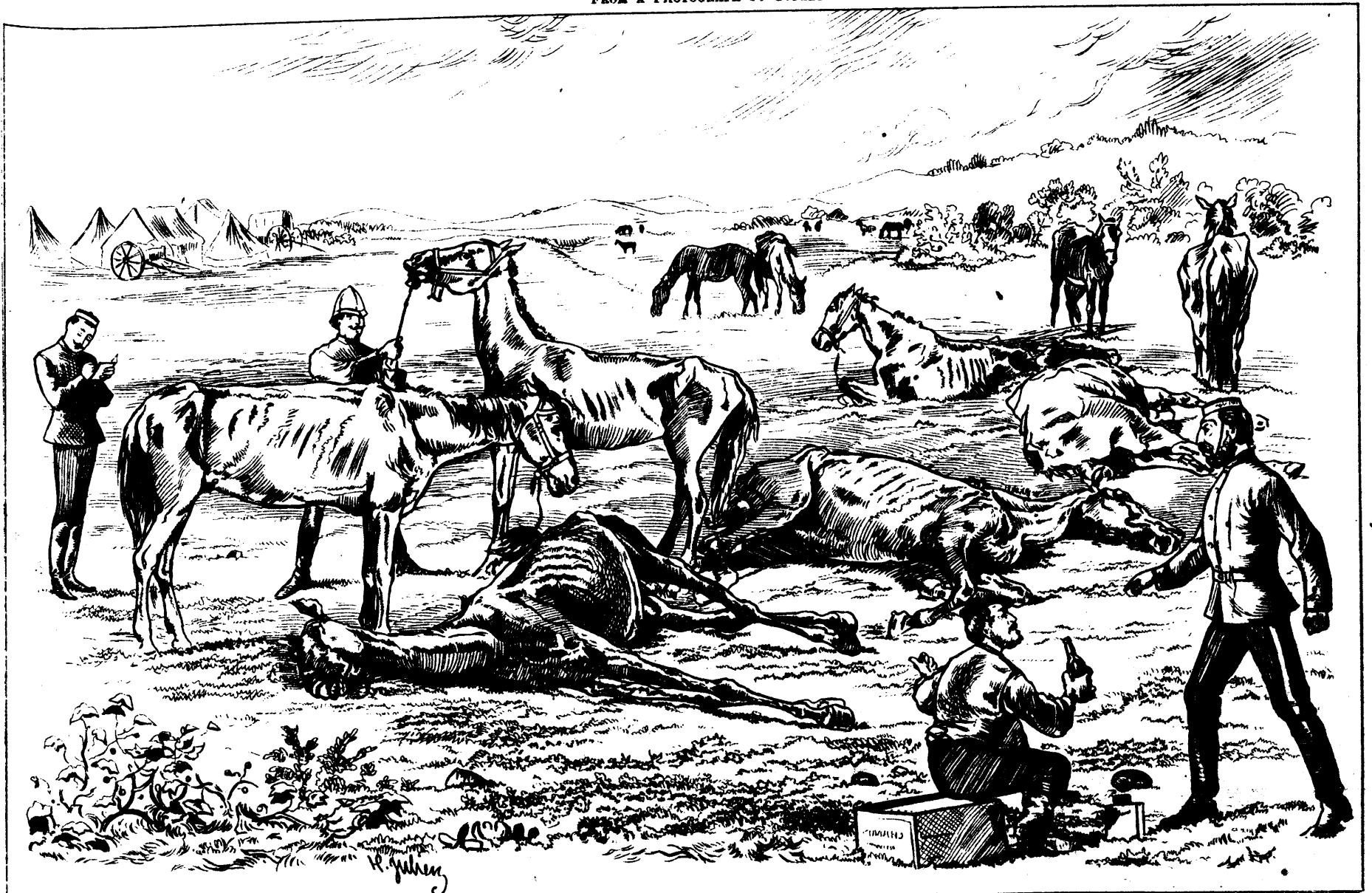
Mrs. William Grey lectured lately at the Chelsea Literary and Scientific Institution on "Old Maids," and, commencing by definitions, remarked that an honourable member in a speech in Parliament called old maids "social failures." A rev. gentleman who took the chair at a meeting for promoting the higher education of women in speaking of the half-million of women who are in excess of that number of men in this country, and can therefore be paired, said women were by that half-million superfluous. In one of Miss Austen's charming novels, Emma, being told that she will be an "old maid," says, "Never mind, Harriet; I shall not be a poor old maid." The unmarried lady of good fortune is a single woman, and only the poor one is an old maid. There is another definition, that of St. Paul:—"The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord that she may be holy in body and in spirit; but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband." As to the difficult question of age, "His Majesty is as old as people in general," was said by a cautious attendant of Louis XIV. Others would answer with a character in Racine's "Plaideurs," and estimate sixty as the prime of life. Mr. Buckle said a woman reached her prime between thirty-five and forty; for, though her beauty had then lost the charm of youth, it had acquired that of expression. We might content ourselves with laying down the rule that as soon as youthful manners and youthful amusements become ridiculous the woman who affects them is an old maid. To consider the definitions in their order, in what sense is the old maid a social failure? She has failed of matrimony. It is understood in young ladies schools that it is a young lady's duty to get well married. If she succeeds, she takes, for three months at least, the first place in every society; if she fail, it is *ve victis*. Mrs. Oliphant describes a woman whose youth is gone, and who is still obliged to think of marrying as a provision, and who goes into society as a laborious trade, and yet cannot stoop low enough—who looks with envy even at the widow clothed in the dignity of a great sorrow. To old maids of this class the stigma does apply. They have failed. Passing to the "superfluous" theory, it involves the uselessness of 500,000 human brains, 500,000 pairs of human hands, 500,000 human minds and hearts. One recalls the massacre of St. Ursula and 11,000 virgins at Cologne, and asks oneself whether their murderers were imbued with some such theory of the inutility of single women. The same disregard for female existence, except as it ministers to male uses, lies at the root of the ancient practice of infanticide. In Scinde, when a female child was born to one of the Princes, it was brought to him in Durbar, and if he did not approve of

OUR CANADIAN PORTRAIT GALLERY.



No. 242.—BENJAMIN SULTE, ESQ.—AUTHOR OF "LES LAURENTIENNES" &c.
FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY TOPLEY.

it, it was put under the cushion upon which he sat, and extinguished by the gentle pressure of his paternal weight. But were unmarried women superfluous? In our own country alone they gave us, in literature, Miss Austen, Miss Edgeworth, Joanna Baillie, Harriet Martineau, Frances Power Cobbe. Was Elizabeth Barrett superfluous till she became Mrs. Browning? In science, was Miss Herchell superfluous, whose labours were invaluable to her father and brother? Was the devoted sister of the poet Wordsworth superfluous? In philanthropy, could they count as too many Florence Nightingale, Lady Burdett Coutta, Mary Carpenter, Octavia Hill, and the great sisterhood of nurses of every denomination, under every garb? Could we spare Miss Davies and Miss Buss in education? As to the third view, that expressed by Miss Austen's heroine, no wonder if women who, when their home was broken up by death, first learnt the worth of money, became soured by cares and disappointment, and were not all like Miss Bates, described by the same writer, who, though tiresome, chattering, irrelevant, incoherent, with little sense and no beauty, single and poor, "was very much to the taste of everybody." Yes, she won the world by love-heartedness—*bonté*. It is more than moral goodness, it is the goodness which diffuses itself outwardly and socially—*bounty*. *La bonté est la coquetterie des vieilles femmes*, and perhaps it is the want of it that makes old bachelors less amiable and less useful, without being more ornamental, than old maids. No doubt, marriage was the highest form of life, both for men and women; but there are old maids from choice, who with a genius for friendship, have never experienced love, and of these she repeated the words of the Apostle. Though a sacrament, marriage came to be looked on in its lower aspect, as a concession to human frailty, instead of as the highest form of companionship. The type of womanhood was taken, not from the women who followed their Master to the foot of the Cross, but from Eve, tempted by the serpent, and in her turn tempting the man to forbidden fruit; and in mediæval pictures the serpent is represented with the face of a beautiful woman. Protestantism had rehabilitated marriage, but not woman in the same degree, and she was now looked upon as inferior and ministering to man, and not as an equal being, with equal rights of free development. The conquest of a higher position in public estimation must be made by our single women, who, not being bound like married women to care for the things which please their husbands, may claim the right to devote themselves to the things of the Lord, the cultivation of whatever faculty He has given them towards perfection. They need not be social superfluities; and many of them are, indeed, necessities.



SIX MONTHS IN THE WILDS OF THE NORTH-WEST:
DEAD HORSE VALLEY, 19th SEPT. 1874.