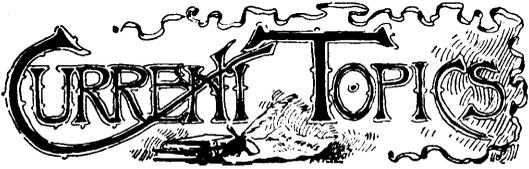


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There is, perhaps, in the record of Greek tragedy nothing more sweepingly tragic than the facts summed up in this passage from the chapter in "Abraham Lincoln; a History" (January *Century*), headed "The fourteenth of April," in which the authors portray the inmates of the doomed President's box in the theatre on that fatal night: "Here were five human beings in a narrow space—the greatest man of his time, in the glory of the most stupendous success in our history, the idolized chief of a nation already mighty, with illimitable vistas of grandeur to come; his beloved wife, proud and happy; a pair of betrothed lovers, with all the promise of felicity that youth, social position and wealth could give them, and the young actor, handsome as Endymion on Latmos, the pet of his little world. The glitter of fame, happiness and ease was upon the entire group, but in an instant everything was to be changed with the blinding swiftness of enchantment. Quick death was to come upon the central figure of that company—the central figure, we believe, of the great and good men of the century. Over all the rest the blackest fates hovered menacingly—fates from which a mother might pray that kindly death would save her children in their infancy. One was to wander with the stain of murder on his soul, with the curses of a world upon his name, with a price set upon his head, in frightful physical pain, till he died a dog's death in a burning barn; the stricken wife was to pass the rest of her days in melancholy and madness; of those two young lovers (Major Rathbone and Miss Harris), one was to slay the other, and then end his life a raving maniac."

We can fully sympathize with St. John, N.B., in its exultation at the start on its initial trip of the *Portia*, the pioneer vessel of the Canada, West Indies and South America Steamship Company. This is an enterprise which has been too long postponed, and the eagerness with which the freight accommodation of the *Portia* was taken advantage of proves—if any proof were required—that it is called for by the needs of commerce. It would be hard to find two countries so admirably adapted by their natural products and comparative nearness, to supply each others' wants as the Maritime Provinces and the West Indies. Mr. Robertson, vice-president of the St. John Board of Trade, expressed, on the day of the *Portia's* departure, the strongest conviction of the success of the new line, and he was happy to know that his faith was shared by influential men, not only in his own seaboard city, but also in Montreal, Toronto, and other centres of the interior. There was already the

nucleus of a fine trade and it was sure to gather volume with every successive trip. Last year the United States sent to the West Indies and Demerara goods valued at \$9,000,000, and there was not an article in the list that Canada could not supply as well. Some of the merchandise exported thither by the States was in fact Canadian, and this—fish especially—could now be sent direct instead of by way of Boston. Railway communication was gradually shortening the distance between St. John and the other industrial and commercial centres, so that they could all participate in this trade. It would be constantly enlarging, taking in the Spanish as well as British West Indies, and the independent states of South America, as well as British Guiana. Even the transfer of coolies could come by the C. P. R. more conveniently than by the old route. Mr. Robertson closed by urging the claims of the Jamaica Exhibition, in which, it is to be hoped, that Canada will be worthily represented.

H. M. Stanley is not the only African explorer that has been achieving triumphs of late. Captain Trivier, of Bordeaux, who started from Loango early last year on a march across the Dark Continent, reached Mozambique at the same time that Stanley reached Bogamayo. It was Trivier's intention to make the latter point his destination, but, when he reached Kasongo, he learned enough of the condition of Central Africa to convince him of the advisability of making a *détour*. He promptly acted on the hint given by his dark informants, and leaving the lake regions to the north, he pushed on with admirable despatch until he reached the Portuguese territory. As yet we have received only the barest outline of Captain Trivier's journey, but it will doubtless prove of considerable scientific and economic value. One incident of it is sincerely deplored—the loss of M. Trivier's companion, Emile Wessenburger, a native of Alsace, who disappeared in September from the explorer's ken.

Though Spain has been shorn of the mighty empire that she built up on the American continent, she still clings to an insular domain that is more productive and more populous than some of the independent republics of the mainland. Cuba and Porto Rico, separated from each other by the island of Hispaniola, have a population greater than that of any of the Central and some of the South American States, and for natural wealth are surpassed by no region in the New World. The inhabitants, including the coloured races, African, Asiatic and American, number more than two millions and a quarter. It was only to be expected that the Cubans should share in the aspirations for freedom, of which they had seen the fulfilment in the colonies of the mainland, but they never succeeded in throwing off the yoke. For some twelve years the island has been only slowly recovering from the effects of the long and bitter struggle that followed the outbreak of 1868. In crushing the insurrection the mother country had sent out more than 150,000 soldiers, and yet for ten years the insurgents were able to maintain their ground. When, in 1878, General Martinez Campos took charge of the military operations, and after a sharp conflict restored order in the island, Cuba's trade had decreased, her crops had been reduced, and her taxes almost trebled. For some years past an influential party has been directing its energies to the attainment, not of separation, but of autonomy.

The cause of self-government has been ably pleaded in the *Revista Cubana*, a monthly magazine published at Havana. What interests us in this plea is that, in the arguments employed, Canada is the constantly quoted example of the good results of the system desired, not only in promoting the welfare of the colony, but also in deepening its attachment to the motherland. The writers who deal with the question have thoroughly mastered the principle of responsible government, of which Canada is the only real representative in the New World. Senor Conte, who has made a comprehensive study of England's later colonial policy, treats the whole question with remarkable lucidity. Of the affairs of Canada, he has evidently an intimate knowledge which must have been derived from sources other than books. Even the controversies that have divided us during the past year he has anxiously sounded in search of any possible stumbling-block in our constitutional practice. He finds none. Whatever is blameworthy for our dissensions, it is not autonomy. Rivalries of race and religion existed before the era of practical independence and are due to causes with which the relaxation of metropolitan control has nothing to do. Besides such drawbacks, which are common to all mixed communities, are really trivial compared with the progress, development and prosperity that have marked the course of events since Canada became mistress of her own destinies. It is impossible to read this rational yet earnest plea for autonomy without sympathizing with Cuba's patriotic aspirations. Nor can there be any doubt that, under a generous system of self-government such as we enjoy, Cuba would attain a status of prosperity and importance in harmony with its great resources.

To a Montrealer must be ascribed the first explicit and well supported warning of the precarious position of the Panama Canal scheme. At least four years before the shareholders were brought face to face with the unwelcome truth that the enterprise was a failure, Dr. Wolfred Nelson had made it clear by ample data collected on the Isthmus that M. De Lesseps had deceived himself and the promoters of the project as to the character and cost of the work. The reputation of the great projector who had made the Suez Canal a reality, after some of the most distinguished engineers in Europe had pronounced it impossible, engendered a faith in the minds of thousands, which even the direst and most disastrous facts and figures were incapable of shaking. They simply refused to believe that M. De Lesseps could have been mistaken in his calculations. What he had undertaken to construct was an open cut canal, on tide-level, from ocean to ocean, at a uniform depth of twenty-seven feet, six inches, below the level of both oceans, in length about 45½ miles; width at bottom, 72 feet; at water-line, 90 feet. This work Count De Lesseps thought he could carry through at an outlay of \$120,000,000. After the survey and sanction of the technical commission, work was begun in February, 1881. Needless to recapitulate the successive changes of estimates and plans, the oft repeated promises, the unheeded warnings, that preceded the final collapse. Dr. Nelson has kept a record of the course of events from start to close, and has made it the central theme of a most interesting and instructive book, "Five Years in Panama." When he wrote his preface, in October, 1888, in spite of hope so often deferred, the hearts of the shareholders had not