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CONTENTS:

THE TIMES.	CHIARO-SCURO OR CHIAR-OSCURO.
CHRISTMAS.	THINGS IN GENERAL.
A CHRISTMAS PARABLE.	POETRY.
THE SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN.	TRADE, FINANCE, STATISTICS.
BANKING REFORMS.	CHESS.
ON PRAISE, a Sermon by the Rev. Gavin Lang.	MUSICAL.
	♫. ♫. ♫.

THE TIMES.

CHRISTMAS DAY.

Christmas Day is fast losing its hold upon the popular mind so far as its religious character is concerned. When it was invented by the Church it undoubtedly served some good purpose. To a people given over to debauchery and violence, feast days and fast days, which forced upon them some spiritual thoughts, and at least occasional pauses in their career of animalism, Christmas Day, with its story of Christ's birth into this world of passion and sin, must have been a useful institution. Even now it serves a great and good purpose. A sense of gladness seems to fall upon all classes of society. The rich become generous; benevolent societies make successful appeals for funds, and they give out largely and ungrudgingly to a grateful poor. We all seem to have the idea that none should be allowed to suffer hunger or cold during this time of general feasting. In London some ninety thousand poor have been fed for a day as bountifully as heart could wish; Paris has fed fifteen thousand; Dublin, sixteen thousand, and Edinburgh, six thousand. That is good; that is right; a warm expansive charity is a blessing to him who gives and him who receives; and taking this as prophetic of the time when Christmas-tide generosity shall swell into every day of every year, I join the general chorus and say to friends and others, "A merry Christmas, and a happy new year."

RIGHTS OF LABOUR.

Unquestionably the Montreal meeting called for the consideration of Ireland's wrongs, and to send a petition to the Imperial Parliament in respect thereto, was a great success. That is to say, the hall was filled with a sympathetic and enthusiastic audience; the local politicians were out in force—having an eye to the Irish vote and the next election—Mr. M. P. Ryan, M.P., managed to talk some nonsense about the manner in which English politicians have persistently tried to drive manufacturing industries out of Ireland—and some other gentlemen talked in a very earnest and sincere manner of Irish troubles and the duty of England to make Ireland happy. But the main argument turned on the "rights of labour," and very much oratory was used to insist on the acknowledged and incontrovertible truth that "labour has its rights as well as property." But not one of the speakers—so far as I can find—ventured to attempt a precise definition of the nature of those rights. No one will dispute that property or a property-holder has rights—that is to say, he has the right to use it or to let it lie in unproductiveness—he has the right to put his own price upon it—he has the right to employ what labour, or labourers, he may choose. The only right which is above this is the right of the State to legislate against him in the interest of the many—so that full compensation is made.

The right of the labourer is this—to put his own price upon his own labour; to take that labour to any market anywhere, and, when his work is done, to demand that his employer carry out his part of the bargain. He has no right to say, I will work here and nowhere

else—you shall pay me so much, and not less, although you may be able to get other men to do it for less. And so much is conceded in all Ireland, as in all other civilized countries. So that all the fine talk about "the rights of labour" was only a waste of good words and good time. Had the speakers turned their attention to the iniquitous tenant-at-will system, and to a discussion of a readjustment of the land-laws, some real and practical good might have resulted. As it was, much fine talk was spun out to no good purpose whatever.

There can be no good and sound reason why the surplus of the Irish Church fund should not be used for the relief of the present distress among the farmers; for Government has power to do this by the terms of the Dis-establishment account. Mere eleemosynary aid cannot meet the dreadful emergency at hand, and the money which the Government has at disposal should in all justice be used to alleviate the present distress. Really, there is no need that money should be sent from this continent to Ireland. England has ways and means in abundance.

SIR FRANCIS ACQUITTED.

The Bench was once regarded as the corrective of the sworn-twelve, but happily it is not without the means of correcting itself. Judge Monk, to his honour, now recognizes that there was misdirection in his charge to the jury that found Sir Francis Hincks guilty, and unites with his brother Judges of the Court of Appeals in setting aside the verdict, and in relegating the temporary victim to his honoured place in society. The general public will believe in the decision of the Court of Appeals, not so much because it is legal, but because it appears to be just. The last tones of the foreman's voice had scarcely uttered "Guilty," when I wrote, "It is much to be feared that the prevailing prejudices unduly persuaded the jury to convict"; and added, "The price of satisfying the public wrath has been too exorbitant." I rejoice with unfeigned pleasure that this earnest forecast has been verified. I had followed the trial carefully. Not satisfied with the sworn proof, I made a careful personal examination of the Bank's books. All the investigation cried out against the finding of the jury. Many of us entreated the Judge to "reserve the case in a reasonable way." The reserve was made, and the highest judicial tribunal in the Province has affixed its seal to Sir Francis' freedom and innocence.

A NEW SOCIETY.

A new departure has been made in Montreal, which we may reasonably hope will lead to good results. I refer to the establishment of a political economy society, or club. The object of the society is to bring men together for the discussion of questions which involve the present and future of this Dominion. It is felt by very many that the time has come when we must look our future fairly in the face, and not simply forecast it, but determine what it shall be. We do not desire that fierce partizanship shall carry matters in its own way unchallenged, or that everything shall be left to the chapter of accidents, but we desire to know what we ought to do, and how it ought to be done. Under the surface of general public society a great agitation is going on; public men have one set of opinions for public life, and quite another set of opinions for private life. The time has come to bring these opinions out to the light of day for inspection and criticism. Let them be brought forward and examined. We are Canadians, and we ought to know, and we ought to do what is best for Canada.