

A curious theory has been recently broached, that, in the bygone ages, the moon's orbit being more eccentric than now, which involved a nearer approach to the Earth in the smaller diameter of the ellipse, the Earth's superior attraction actually drew from the satellite the water, the utter absence of which in her is now so conspicuous. Whether our still abundant water-supply may be an ill-gotten gain or no, it is certain that, at this era of the system, we may congratulate ourselves on it; for without the primary element—speaking according to an old-fashioned and unscientific nomenclature of elements—the population of our Earth would soon become restricted to an extent which would speedily eliminate all the advances of civilization and science. As it is, we may be thankful that our atmosphere is still capable of secreting and pouring down upon us an almost limitless supply, for it was not without deep reason that hoar antiquity postulated the water as the great Mother of Life.

Readers of naval novels will be familiar with the marked type of Naval Officer formerly known as "Masters," a valuable class, whose duties—the navigation of the ship, her stowage, and the control of her stores—were most onerous and responsible. They generally came in from the Merchant Service, and for years occupied an invidious position, a Master of 20 or 30 years standing ranking below all Lieutenants. A reform in their favor was made some years ago, by instituting the ranks of "Navigating" Sub-Lieutenants and Lieutenants, and "Staff" Commanders and Captains. Ultimately it was decided to abolish the class, and entries were stopped. 1889 will witness the extinction of the Navigating Lieutenants, of which rank only 17 or 18 remain, and there are now only 15 Staff Captains and about 100 Staff Commanders on the Active list. The navigating duties are now performed in most ships by ordinary Lieutenants who have qualified themselves for navigating duties.

Like America, Russia seems to lose her distinguished Generals at a comparatively early age. The great Engineer who defended Sebastopol was not, if we remember rightly, an old man when he died, nor was Kauffman, the conqueror of Khiva. Skobelev was cut off in the fullness of manhood, not without suspicion that his uncompromising Pan Slavism and his extreme popularity caused him to be removed, and now, in the last days of the past year, we learn the death of General Count Loris-Melikoff, at the comparatively early age of 62. Loris-Melikoff, statesman as well as able soldier and successful commander in the field, developed, as Governor of a District, and as Minister of the Interior, a liberality, combined with firmness, in dealing with the Nihilists, which ought to have produced greater results than it eventually did, and which might perhaps have done so, but for the unfortunate assassination of the Czar Alexander II. It is quite possible that his boldness and confidence were not so acceptable to his successor.

Nationally, as individually, indiscreet acts entail a long series of consequences of which no man can foresee the end, or venture to say when the ripples of the vortex will lose themselves and become inappreciable in calm water. It seems as if England would never hear or see the last of the consequences of her continual blundering and easy-going old-time diplomacy. One of these follies was the admission of any French rights in the Island of Newfoundland, and allowing France to retain any territory in Canadian waters. France is now about to urge on the British Government the suppression of certain lobster factories which, the French allege, interfere with their treaty rights on the Newfoundland shore. If England had been as unscrupulous as some other nations she might have put a summary end to French pretensions in this hemisphere, when Germany had France by the throat. Probably France will find enough to occupy her at home during the coming centenary of her grand saturnalia of anarchy and blood.

Considering the advanced age of a number of the prominent personages of the world to whom we alluded a year ago, but a moderate proportion of those whose span of life has been extended far beyond the scriptural three-score years and ten, have been gathered in by the beneficent Reaper. Of these the most conspicuous was the grand and chivalrous old German Emperor. Of old, but not great, soldiers the record shows, of Englishmen, Field Marshal Lord Lucan, in his 89th year; and among Frenchmen, Marshals Leboeuf and Bazaine, whose ages were considerable, but whose reputations were sinister, rather than glorious. Archbishop Lynch, of Toronto, a worthy prelate, had more than attained the conventional span; and in literature, Mrs. Mary Howitt was of ripe years, as was also General Sir Charles Ellice, lately Quarter-Master-General of the British Army. As many of the remainder as we can call to mind were but of little more than middle age. First and foremost, and most to be lamented, stands the Emperor Frederic, whose premature demise, while it brought forth in clearest light the heroism of his character, was felt as an irreparable loss to Europe, groaning under a system of jealous military preparation, which his peaceful temperament and liberal aspirations might have done so much to lighten. Three Flag Officers of the Navy have been removed from the Active list. Admiral of the Fleet Sir A. P. Ryder, Vice Admiral Sir William Hewitt (a very distinguished officer), and Rear Admiral William Codrington. Popular science sustained a great loss in the death of Professor R. A. Proctor, the well-known astronomer, and literature, perhaps a greater, in the lamented Matthew Arnold. America has lost a brave and brilliant soldier in General Sheridan, late Commander-in-Chief of her army; a notable politician in the person of Mr. Roscoe Conkling; a charming writer in that of Louisa M. Alcott; and an excellent lady in Mrs. Sherman, wife of the famous General who was Sheridan's predecessor in the command-in-chief. In Canada the death of Mr. White, Minister of the Interior, was a decided public loss, to which must be added those of Mr. Plumb,

Speaker of the Senate, and of the Hon. Mr. Ferrier. In the last days of the year comes the news of the death of the Russian General, Loris-Melikoff, a soldier and statesman so conspicuous that we feel constrained to allude to him a little more at length in another note.

A good deal of astronomical nonsense has been talked in connection with the elementary disturbances of the year to which we have just bid farewell. It has even gone the length of ascribing to Mars (a planet, taking diameter, mass and volume together, not more than one-sixth the size and attractive power of the earth) an influence which it is altogether unlikely he could exert at a mean distance of 48,000,000 of miles. With more probability, allusion has been made to an unusual development of sun-spots. Sun-spots are evidences of disturbance in the enormous highly-heated and luminous atmosphere of the sun, of which the effect on the earth is so direct that any impact sufficient to produce phenomena such as have been observed in stars which have for a time blazed into abnormal apparent magnitudes, and then vanished from sight, would reduce to a very plain matter of experience the lurid description of the end of the world in the last chapter of the second epistle of Peter (of doubtful authorship.) A multitude of sun-spots is a diminution of heat and radiance, and might account for exceptional humidity and absence of heat.

At this season last year we alluded to the ancient superstition (connected with the expression of numbers by letters of the Greek alphabet) that the figures 888 symbolized all that was good and perfect, in contradistinction to 666, the number of the "Beast," which used to furnish food for the wildest speculations of millenarians. Notwithstanding the number of perfection, however, the year '88 has been far from what we think perfect, especially as to weather. If its casualties were reliably summarized, we fancy they would be found to be more calamitous than for very many years. Cyclones, earthquakes, rain storms, blizzards, floods, and convulsions of nature of one sort and another, frightfully destructive of human life, to say nothing of property, have marked 1888 with a gloomy distinction. Floods, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions, have desolated whole Provinces of China and Japan. Germany, Spain, Poland, and other European countries have suffered to an almost unexampled extent by floods and the absence of summer warmth, great storms have swept the coasts of Great Britain, and throughout all Europe the crops have been unprecedentedly short. Mexico and the United States have had their full share of catastrophe from cyclone and flood. But from the most destructive elementary disturbances our own favored land has enjoyed a singular exemption, and curiously enough, Great Britain has not suffered in any proportion to other countries.

The year 1889 is an ominous centenary—that of the outbreak of the sanguinary Revolution which convulsed all Europe, set back the current of freedom of thought for half a century, scared right-feeling men inclined to Liberalism back to the uncompromising Conservatism which so long remained a baleful barrier to the extension of political freedom, and intensified the worst features of the French national character. Since the terrible year 1789, France has seen a Republic, a Dictatorship, an Empire fraught with woe and debt to all Europe, a restoration of the Monarchy, a brief overthrow of it, and a second Restoration. Then a Revolution which seated another branch of the Bourbons on the throne, to be ignominiously driven from it by a second Republic, which again merged into a second Empire. This was prostrated by the German arms, and a third Republic established on its ruins after the customary interlude of anarchy and murder. If we do not greatly misread the signs of the times, 1889 will not pass away without another convulsion for France. It may be precipitated at any moment by some accident applying the match to the magazine of the vast armies of the great powers which now glower at each other across their frontiers, but is just as likely to (indeed it seems almost inevitable that it should) come to pass through the weakness of the Republic, the growing power of Boulanger, and the intrigues of Legitimists and Bonapartists. If the eruption break forth in France, it may be taken for granted that the surrounding combustible material of the other nations will at once be ignited.

It is not without danger that the slightest concession can be made to our grasping and unscrupulous neighbors. "Punica fides" (Punic faith) became a byword in ancient Rome for diplomatic treachery and over-reaching. It is time for some one to invent an epigrammatic term to apply to those modern Carthaginians, the United States, in the same sense. The indulgence recently accorded to an American fishing vessel to tranship her cargo under circumstances which seemed to justify the concession as an individual and exceptional favor, has already, we understand, been treated by the astute Consul-General in Halifax for the United States, in a manner plainly developing the intent to erect this case into a precedent. The *Empire* has the following very true and pertinent remarks on the subject generally:—"When a New England fishing vessel comes into a Canadian port for repairs the law has frequently been relaxed, to prevent the loss of the perishable cargo, by permitting its sale. The return for this neighborly consideration is a chorus from United States consuls, senators and journals that Canada has abandoned its claims to make laws for its own territory, and has conceded to the United States the right to dictate our policy. Of course that section of the United States press which is published in Canada hastens to swell the pæans of triumph. The consequence naturally is, that such favors to our neighbors in distress cannot be so freely conceded, since our kindness, instead of evoking gratitude, is made the basis for fresh attacks upon our territorial rights. So those whose misconduct prevents their being received with a generous hospitality, which they abuse, will raise a fresh outcry that they are brutally treated, and journals pretending to be Canadian will not be ashamed to support these false charges."