

# THE CRITIC:

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Rumors are rife of "strained relations" between General Harrison and his Ministers, on account of the interference in departmental affairs by the President.

A decision has recently been given by a Pennsylvania Judge that the electric light companies are not manufacturing corporations, and therefore are not exempt from taxation. The term "manufacture," he holds, cannot be applied to any corporation which does not produce material substance, and neither electricity nor the electric light is a material substance. We hold this judgment to be a sophistry and an adhesion to the letter rather than to the spirit of the law. The electricity generated for lighting purposes is, though intangible and imperceptible, as much a material of manufacture as petroleum or gas, and the question might even arise what position gas would hold under such a decision? And who is to say that electricity is immaterial? Gas is material and capable of confinement in pipes and metres, electricity is also capable of storage. We cannot but think the decision wrong.

In an address in Washington before the United States Geological Survey, Professor Gilbert gave the following interesting information regarding the recession of the ground under Niagara Falls.—The estimate is that for the past forty-four years the falls have receded at the rate of 2.4 feet in a year. The Horseshoe Falls are at the head of the gorge, and the American Falls at the eastern side, but the time was when both were together, before the little point called Goat Island was reached. The recession is more rapid at the centre than on the sides. As the crest of the Horseshoe Falls retreats the water tends to concentrate there, and the time will probably come when the sides of the present falls will have become dry shores. The gorge is known to be 35,500 feet long. A calculation has shown that, on this basis, the falls began to wear away the rock of the escarpment near Lewisiston about 7,900 years ago.

When General Harrison affirmed in general terms the principle that civil servants of the United States should be judged by character and efficiency rather than by party exigencies, we did not, we confess, entertain very sanguine anticipations of effort in that direction. It was evident that the pressure of the struggle to uphold the (in this case) infamous aphorism of "the spoils to the victors" would sweep down the winds General Harrison's no doubt sincere wish that he could do otherwise. It has been, as we—as we suppose every one—foresaw, and the new Republican Government is making as clean a sweep of Democratic officials as any previous one has ever done since General Jackson gave unhappy currency to the pithy but ill-omened axiom. Verily, Canada may be pardoned if she ventures to think that, with all her short-comings, her ways and institutions are better on the whole than those of her neighbor across the border.

An interesting astronomical point has recently been made in the discovery of a double star through its occultation by the moon. In this process the light of an ordinary star is instantly extinguished, and as quickly comes in view when the moon has passed it, instead of gradually being hidden, and as slowly coming in view on the other edge of the moon, which would be the case if the moon had an atmosphere. These observations are valuable for determining the exact position of the moon, which they give to a tenth of a second. Mr. Barnard was recently observing the occultation of a prominent star, and noticed that only a part of the light was first extinguished, followed an instant later by the balance. This star appeared at the other edge of the moon in the same manner, so he was led to conclude that the star was double, although no telescope had ever shown it as such. Mr. Burnham then pointed the great telescope to the erratic star, and it was found to be double.

The eleventh number of the Statistical Abstract of the United States for 1888, just issued from Washington, gives some instructive figures concerning the debts and tax rates of the several States. Says the *Boston Weekly Globe*:—"The grand total indebtedness of all the States is about \$220,000,000, and their average taxable property is estimated at \$22,637,338,298. The highest amount raised by taxation for State purposes in 1888 in any State relative to assessed valuation was that levied in Nevada, whose people paid the State tax-gatherer 90 cents per \$100. Nebraska State tax was 75 cents per \$100, and Louisiana's 60 cents per \$100. Excepting Delaware, which has no tax rate at all, Massachusetts shows the lowest rate of State of taxation in the Union, 11½ cents per \$100. This is rather strange when it is added that Massachusetts has next to Virginia the largest State debt, aggregating over \$31,000,000. Virginia's funded debt is \$23,550,696, and its unfunded debt \$8,312,347. The total debt of New York State is only \$7,000,000, while Illinois, West Virginia, Wisconsin and Colorado are free from State debts."

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The editor of THE CRITIC is responsible for the views expressed in Editorial Notes and Articles, and for such only; but the editor is not to be understood as endorsing the sentiments expressed in the articles contributed to this journal. Our readers are capable of approving or disapproving of any part of an article or contents of the paper; and after exercising due care as to what is to appear in our columns, we shall leave the rest to their intelligent judgment.

## EDITORIAL NOTES.

Mr. Erastus Wiman has lately been credited with several utterances peculiarly unpleasant to the people of Canada. It is only fair to give publicity to a report (if it may be accepted as true) that Mr. Wiman recently stated to a reporter that the Associated Press Despatches upon which the general reader is obliged to rely are utterly incorrect and misleading. He then, it is said, instanced five or six statements of considerable importance which had been ascribed to him, and declares that he not only did not say what he is thus reported to have said, but that what he did actually say was radically different. If this report be not as incorrect as the others, Mr. Wiman's own emphatic declaration is not only probably true, but is entitled to its full weight.

The Chamber of Commerce and the Board of Trade might with advantage to the business community devote some attention to the carrying of "dead weight." There are here as elsewhere a member of "ne'er do weels" who fail and compromise and only resume to repeat the process as soon and as often as they get the chance to do so. Business circles require weeding out. In most, if not in all lines, too many people are competing for the trade that is to be done. The increase of consumers is not at all commensurate with the augmentation of those who are engaged in the supply. Under existing circumstances it is only reasonable to demand that those who cannot survive the test of ordinary competition should be forced to go under. They form a dead weight upon business that no community should be called upon to carry.

"The whirligig of time" brings many curious changes. It is not very long since our Newfoundland friends were determined to keep French fishermen away altogether from their coast. Just now it is the French who are claiming exclusive rights, and even, apparently, getting them under the protection of British men-of-war. Grave trouble threatens on the Newfoundland coast unless the French rights are bought up or in some other way acquired. The inhabitants of Newfoundland realise that their island is not fertile enough to enable them to live by agriculture in this age, and that the fish taken off their coasts form the natural complement to the grain, fruit and animal foods of other countries. Their fisheries being thus a necessity to them, we may confidently expect that they will some day get possession of them through a resort to force if peaceful measures fail.