

OUR REPORTER'S XMAS RAMBLINGS.

"Let us take a walk down Fleet Street" said Dr. Johnson, and every one can imagine how enjoyable a stroll in such excellent company must have proved. With such an illustrious example before him a reporter of THE CRITIC, while debarred from witnessing the sights and scenes of the world's great metropolis, determined, in a more humble way, to take a stroll through the principal business streets of Halifax, and to record for the benefit of THE CRITIC's thousands of country subscribers the preparations made by our leading wholesale and retail merchants to meet the demands for holiday goods.

It was a bright, clear afternoon, with no prospects of the thaw that has since, like the plague, come upon us. The sleighing was excellent, and as the reporter slipped into Hollis Street and started south at a brisk pace he felt that glow of health and that exuberance of spirits always imparted by cool, bracing air and bright skies.

Entering the establishment of Mr. W. H. Johnson the well-known dealer in pianos and organs, he found that it was being well patronized, and that Mr. Johnson and his obliging clerks were busy in explaining the merits of a very large stock of the finest instruments in the market. A well known amateur was seated before a Knabe playing some brilliant selections, and the nobility and power of tone of the instrument, its elasticity and security of touch were fully demonstrated. The reporter was here guilty of an unheard-of act, one for which he is deserving of grave censure. Notwithstanding that he had no intention of investing, and regardless of the fact that a number of *bona fide* customers were waiting, he managed to monopolize the attention of one of the clerks for some ten minutes. He asked the price of a Chickering, and thumbed away at its keys till it groaned in protest. A Wheelock, a Hallet and Davis, and a Stevenson were all priced and tortured in turn. Then he upset and nearly ruined a piano stool, at the same time giving an ugly dent to the case of a handsome Bell organ, and then, without apology, he took his departure, saying he would "Call again next week." (Chestnut). Was the like ever heard of before?

North on Hollis Street past Harrington's long window, with its tempting display of Christmas edibles, he hurried, but fast as he was going a young city belle, with rosy cheeks and flashing eyes and countenance all aglow with health and happiness, passed him like a flash. Her jaunty sealskin cap, her sealskin cloak, her little, (no, we can't write that, Halifax girls are not noted for their little feet), her well proportioned feet cased in fur-topped boots, proved that she combined that most desirable requisite—wealth—with beauty. On she went, but there was a sudden halt in her pace, she came down to a dignified and stately walk, and a few seconds afterward bowed most charmingly to some one across the street. Glancing across, the reporter noticed half a dozen officers grouped around the club steps, and found that she had been undergoing military inspection.

The reporter had been so engrossed in watching this little scene that he had passed Smith's and Egar's drug establishments, with their large assortments of Christmas cards, fine perfumes, rare toilet articles and nauseating medicines, without notice, and only recovered himself in time to turn into Freeman Elliott's. Here he feasted his eyes on an array of cosy dressing gowns, Turkish smoking caps, stunning neckties and gentlemen's requisites of every description. But he only feasted his eyes, as he carried the proverbially empty wallet of the reporter. Leaving temptation behind he still continued north. The sidewalks were crowded with pedestrians, sleighs with merry jingling bells dashed past, their bobbed and befurred occupants beaming with good-natured enjoyment. All was life, gaiety, excitement, and a horse car dragging slowly by with its four toiling horses, seemed decidedly out of place.

On went the reporter, just pausing to glance into Sievert's window with its array of smokers' requisites, Indian goods, snow shoes and shining skates, passed Mylius' drug store and the great wholesale establishment of Burns & Murray, until George Street was reached, where a turn was made and a visit paid to the business premises of Messrs. W. & C. Silver. Space forbids him from more than mentioning the great stock of dry goods and clothing to be seen in this establishment. There the richest and poorest meet, the one, it may be, to purchase silks and satins, the other, good cheap prints, warm blankets and comfortable woollen goods, but the same courtesy is extended to all.

What a surging crowd pours down George Street, and how many pause at Mitchell's. The reporter was struck by the total absorption of one little fellow who, with nose pressed against the window pane, was taking in with great wondrous eyes the fruit, the toys, the rich confectionery and luscious fruits displayed within. It reminded him of the happy days when Santa Claus was a reality to him, when a copper was a fortune and a ten cent piece a bonanza.

From Mitchell's to Sarre's is but a step, and here the reporter met a few would-be dudes, who puffed fragrant cigarettes and imagined that every pretty girl who went by was "clean gone" on them. Sarre has his usual well selected stock of smokers' requisites, snow shoes, skates, &c., &c., but doesn't know where to advertise them to the best advantage.

But the reporter had special friends of THE CRITIC's to see, to whom he was bound to give a Christmas greeting, and so he hurried around Knowles' corner into Granville Street. Gossip's book store and Albrow's lured him in, but he passed on to Macgregor & Knight's, pausing at Anderson, Billing & Co.'s, to heave a sigh of regret that the kindly head of that establishment had been taken from us. It seemed but yesterday that he had been walking in our streets. His bright smile, his gentle courtesy, his neat attire, all so well remembered, and yet he has gone forever. Truly, "in the midst of life we are in death." How many of our old merchants are leaving us! Will the new and pushing generation be able to acceptably fill their places? The young and enterprising stationers and booksellers, Messrs. Macgregor

& Knight, have rapidly risen to favor and the reporter found that they were being awarded a liberal patronage. With a large selection of books to suit every taste, grave and gay, learned and unlearned, heavy treatises and bright works of fiction, works of travel, beautifully bound and finely illustrated editions, bibles, prayer books, church literature, in fact everything in this line that could tempt the Christmas purchaser is to be found on their tables and shelves. Fancy goods of all descriptions are here, and the reporter lingered so long over the literary feast spread before him that twilight had deepened into darkness before he left.

The shops had been lighted up, the brilliant glow from the electric lamps dazzled the eye as it was reflected from the snowy streets, the air had taken on an icier edge and pedestrians were hurrying along with bowed heads, and above the jingle of the sleigh bells the shrieking of the runners of the sleighs was distinctly audible. Nothing more was to be seen that night, so the reporter hurried home, but will continue his rambles on another occasion.

One morning in October, between eleven and twelve, while running his train over the Delaware division at a high rate of speed, about two miles this side of Parker's Glen (New York), engineer Merritt Turner saw a handsome buck deer on the track about a quarter of a mile ahead of him. The track at this point runs for miles along the side of the mountain, its precipitous sides being on the south side and the Delaware River on the north, 30 feet below the level of the track. The deer could not climb the mountain, and evidently did not relish the idea of making the 30-foot jump; so it increased its speed, and bounded away down the track ahead of the approaching train. Engineer Turner took in the situation, and, throwing his engine wide open, started after the affrighted animal. It was lungs and wind against steam and axle-grease, and the latter won. The deer was overtaken, and the locomotive threw the poor creature with great force against the rocks, fatally injuring it. The trainmen cut the animal's throat, threw the carcass on the pilot of the locomotive, and brought it Port Jervis. The trainmen feasted on venison for a week.—Iron.

COMMERCIAL.

The volume of trade being considerably checked by bad roads and unseasonable weather, has been somewhat restricted. There is little change to note in the general condition of wholesale business. The demand for fancy and holiday goods has been good, and considerable trade has been done in those lines.

The general feeling is one of confidence in the future and trade manifests healthy symptoms. Payments are perhaps a little less prompt than might be desirable, but, on the whole, they have been satisfactory.

Our remarks in the last issue of THE CRITIC on the sad mismanagement of postal matters has, we are happy to say, attracted the attention of the persons to whom the people have intrusted the conduct of this important branch of the public service, and we have been assured that every effort will be made to grant the reforms asked for. The remarks that we felt impelled by the circumstances to make were not intended to impute any blame to the local postal authorities—who always do all that they can under their instructions to meet the desires of the public—but were written in view of the fact that the Dominion Government is bound to give the business portion of the community every facility of inter-communication. That government is about to negotiate a new contract with some steamship company to carry the mails between Canada and Europe, and the rights of business people should be duly weighed, as well as those of the contracting company, in arranging the details of the agreement. It appears to us that this is a matter in which the Board of Trade should move for the general interest. A representation from that body would, doubtless, have its due effect, and a reform in postal matters might, and probably would, be attained through them.

While treating of postal matters it is not out of place to note that the postal system of the United States is far more liberal than that of Canada. In the neighboring nation two cents will carry a one-ounce package not only through their own territories but also to any place in Canada. A Canadian desiring to send a letter has to pay three cents for every half-ounce. The Americans also propose to reduce their rate of postage to one cent per ounce, and the proposition is likely to receive the approval of Congress. Why does Canada stick to the old ruts? This country cannot afford to be behind the age. The ancient idea that the postal department should be a direct source of revenue was exploded long ago; and all nations except Canada have recognized the fact, and have adopted their laws in accordance therewith. The indirect revenue derived by any government through other channels more than counter-balances any apparent loss by the postal department. The time is not far distant when the mails will be like public highways—absolutely free.

BREADSTUFFS.—Markets are firm with a marked tendency to advance. Wheat in grain centres has gone up from 6 to 8 cents within the last month, and flour from 10 to 25 cents per barrel. Still the local supply being fully equal to the demand it has been difficult for city dealers to push prices up and we do not materially alter our quotations. As stated in previous issues we do not think that any permanent advance may be confidently counted upon. The present rise seems to be purely speculative and does not appear to have any real basis, so that a collapse may be looked for before long.

DRY GOODS.—Retailers complain that trade is very dull, but impartial opinion is that a fair volume of business is doing for this season of the year. Commercial travellers are preparing to go out again, and wholesale men are in receipt of as many orders as they can conveniently fill. Cottons and woollens continue to be very firm and all advances made are held.