

ever be able to redeem, or proclaim his readiness to redeem, his legal tenders?

The gold market is in a very dangerous position. There is no reason why gold should be higher now than in March last, when it sold at 124. The present premium is artificially maintained, and, as the laws of trade vindicate themselves, a fall of ten to twenty per cent. would not be an extraordinary event.

THE PRESENT CONDITION OF SMALL-ARMS AMONG THE LEADING POWERS OF BOTH HEMISPHERES.

It is one of the curious facts in the history of arms that improvements upon established forms and systems of construction have always been very cautiously received, and a long time has invariably elapsed before they have superseded those which have previously been in use. The enormous expense involved in changing the arms of a nation may account for the reluctance with which the work is undertaken; but the vital importance of the questions at issue constitute the chief motive for delay, and at the same time the necessity for prompt action when the superiority of the improvement is clearly proved.

More than a century elapsed after the invention of gunpowder before the bow was superseded by the musket in England. It was nearly as long after the invention of the flint-lock before it took the place of the match-lock, and, to come down to a period within our own recollection, the percussion-lock was long regarded as an invention of doubtful value, and, even after it was universally used by sportsmen, the idea of its ever being adopted in military service was regarded as preposterous.

The civilized world is now in the midst of a revolution of this kind which many persons suppose to be the result of recent and previously unthought-of discoveries. In truth, however, the history of the introduction of breech-loading fire-arms serves but to confirm the fact we have stated. More than one hundred years ago Benjamin Robins (a man whose researches into the principles of gunnery have never been surpassed in sagacious elucidation), after describing a clumsy contrivance for loading a rifle at the breech, goes on to say, "Somewhat of this kind, though not in the manner now practised, would be, of all others, the most perfect method of constructing this sort of barrels."

An awkward and unwieldy breech-loader, known as Hall's, was tried to some extent in our service some thirty years ago, and since that time many different patterns have been tested to a greater or less extent. All of these, however, till within a few years, have been adapted to the use of a paper cartridge, except Maynard's, the ammunition for which was contained in a brass cartridge having a vent in the base, through which the fire from the cap communicated with the powder. This form of ammunition, which was patented in 1856, and is in extensive use by sportsmen, is exceedingly simple and ingenious in its construction and mode of loading, the cartridges being used over and over for an indefinite length of time, and loaded by the sportsman for his own use by a contrivance which ensures a perfectly true entry and delivery of the bullet, and a degree of accuracy which no other breech-loader has so invariably attained.

The demand created by our recent war for arms of the greatest possible destructive power led to the speedy production of a great variety of breech-loaders, and the copper cartridge having the fulminate in its base, which was introduced at an early stage of the war, was found to possess such obvious advantages in its being water-proof, and in doing away with the necessity of capping, that all recent inventions of breech-loaders have been adapted to its use. The most successful arm of this description, and the one which has been most extensively used in our service, is the Spencer repeating-rifle. This weapon has a magazine in the stock capable of containing seven cartridges, which may be discharged in very rapid succession, and by a recent improvement, patented by Edward Stabler, of Maryland, the gun may be used as a single loader, and the cartridges in the magazine reserved for the critical moment when it may be most desirable to pour in a continuous fire.

The Henry repeating-rifle is another and entirely different form of the same kind of gun, the magazine being under the barrel, and capable of containing fifteen cartridges. This gun has some decided points of superiority over the Spencer, and some objectionable features, which existed in the form in which it was at first constructed, have been obviated. In its present form it is, probably, unsurpassed in simplicity and efficiency by any repeating-gun yet produced. The Henry and Spencer repeaters, and several patterns of single-loading breech-loaders, have been used to a greater or less extent during our recent war, and the testimony of officers and men has invariably

been, that no opponents armed with muzzle-loaders could stand before them. The incalculable value of breech-loaders on the field of battle, and the absurdity of postponing their introduction, has been urged by able writers with all the force of argument based upon self-evident theory and backed by repeated experience. The same facts and the same experience have been brought forward and urged with equal energy, by equally able advocates in England, and yet it was not till the Prussian army, equipped throughout with breech-loaders, had swept the troops of Austria before it, as if they were a band of savages armed with bows and lances, that the world seemed to awake to the fact that the weapons we had heretofore relied upon were henceforth to be of no avail.

Prussia had shown her sagacity in being the first to adopt breech-loaders throughout all branches of her service, and she has reaped the benefit of her decision, and stands to-day among the first-class powers of Europe. Fifty years hence the needle-gun, which has secured for her this position, will be found only in museums, and the wonder will be that such results could ever have been achieved with so clumsy a weapon. We have a dozen breech-loaders as far superior to the needle-gun as the needle-gun is to the Austrian musket. It was brought here for trial years ago and was not deemed worthy even of serious criticism. It is said to be a cheap gun, and this is certainly a merit; but our people will not be likely to look with respect or apprehension upon a breech-loader which leaks so badly that it has to be cleaned after fifty or sixty rounds—which boasts of 800 yards as its greatest range—must be set at full cock in order to load it, and kept so till the time of firing, uses paper cartridges, the fragments of which are blown back into a chamber provided for their reception, and is heavier than the Springfield musket. Such a gun would be dear as a gift. Yet nothing superior to this has yet been seen here, the production of Continental Europe!

In England there seems to be some just appreciation beginning to be felt of the metallic cartridge which is used in the several modifications of the solid-hinged breech-block system of Snider, Berdan, and a host of others, all of which are covered in their vital parts by patents obtained in the United States, England, and elsewhere in 1860, by Edward Maynard. On the Continent, however, the military authorities seem to be groping in that ignorance of mechanical science which was so long the impediment here to any advance beyond the old paper-cartridge arms. Even within a few weeks we received information of the revival, as a new and great invention, of the first revolver shown at Washington, that of Cochran, which, after creating a great newspaper sensation, died ignominiously some thirty years ago.

What France is doing is of course unknown, for Napoleon keeps his own secrets in such matters; but the fact that he has recently purchased a large quantity of gun machinery in this country indicates (if any one needed such evidence) that he is not asleep. Russia, and even Turkey, have sent us within a year for samples of our breech-loaders. The officers of the Russian frigates which visited us two years since searched our gunshops for new inventions in this line, and finding in one of them a sample of the Peabody rifle (great improvements in which have since been effected) pronounced it the best specimen of a military arm they had seen, and invited the inventor on board to exhibit it to the admiral.

The Snider alteration of the Enfield rifle seems to be the best form yet reached in England, as it is pronounced to be not only the best mode of altering the old style of guns, but superior to any new pattern of breech-loaders. It consists simply of a solid breech-block turning sideways in front of the hammer, and then sliding back on its hinge to withdraw the empty cartridge. The ammunition is contained in a metallic cartridge, resembling Maynard's, except that the cap is placed upon the cartridge itself, and fired by a sliding pin which is struck by the hammer. One hundred thousand Enfield rifles are now in process of alteration on this principle in the English armories.

In fact, however, the whole civilized world is at this moment in a state of doubt and uncertainty, convinced only of the absolute necessity of a speedy change, and not a little perplexed to decide what it shall be. A board of officers have for a year past been examining arms for the purpose of selecting the best for our own service, but as yet no decision has been arrived at conclusively. The multitude of apparently trifling details which have to be considered individually and relatively render the task exceedingly difficult, and the vast importance of the question forbids a hasty solution. New inventions also are continually appearing, and no one can say that the best weapon of to-day may not be surpassed by a better to-morrow.

From information which we have recently obtained we have reason to believe that a rifle will soon be produced in this country which will be even cheaper than the needle-gun is claimed to be, yet as a military arm will be in advance, especially in its ammunition, of anything yet known. The am-

munition we have examined and can pronounce upon with confidence. Of the gun we have only seen drawings, but these give such assurance of simplicity, strength, and economy as to warrant a prediction of its success. At all events, a comparison of American inventions in this line with the best that have appeared abroad, is sufficient to relieve us of any apprehension of being left in the background, and if, as some have confidently predicted, the tendency of improvements in the destructive power of arms is to put a stop to all wars by making manifest the absurdity of resorting to such arbitrament, it would seem as if that much-to-be-desired day could not be far distant.

EX-POST-FACTO PROPHECIES.

SEVERAL years ago we heard a sermon in the South on the exclusive topic that railways were plainly prophesied in the Old Testament; and now we have in the papers of the day an article, by another clergyman, in which the author thinks he proves that the Atlantic Cable, or all submarine telegraphs, are prophesied in the same portion of the Bible.

The supposed prophecies of modern events form a very extensive chapter of the long history of misapplications of the Bible, which have caused to our species immeasurable contest and woe; and every man earnestly devoted to religion must deplore this trifling with the sacred Book, however sincerely these discoverers of prophecies after the fact may be wedded to their extravagances. They seem to consider a prophet of the Old Testament nothing more than what the ancients believed their presaging oracles to be—mere foretellers of events. He who believes in a God, omniscient as well as almighty, need not be told that God could have given foreknowledge of historic or other events, if His wisdom had ordained it thus; but the whole course of history also tells us that Providence has abstained from giving to man information of threatening errors outside of the sphere of religion. All the great errors which have swept like plagues over the earth—the witch trials, the fearful errors in medicine, in navigation, in economy, in criminal trials, in government, in philosophy, indeed, in every sphere of action—might have been prevented, or certainly mitigated, had Providence seen fit to give man a distinct warning or distinct prohibition. And here we find men who, in the full honesty of their heart, think they can show us that thousands of years ago an event now taking place, and which appears to them exceedingly wonderful, simply because novel, was prophesied; but prophesied how?—in language which no one understood, or could understand, to mean the particular event, and which could not, therefore, have any influence, either moral or mental, upon mankind. It is a prophecy which is discovered after the event predicted has taken place. Harsh as it may sound, it is nevertheless true that these puerilities reduce the Maker, and Knower, and Guider of all things to a being who says, when something is done which appears to puny man very great, Did I not tell you so?

The object of these persons surely cannot be to prove the inspired character of the Bible from these supposed foretellings. There are more remarkable cases on record than the prayer of Habakkuk applied to the under-sea telegraph, which nevertheless have induced no one, as far as we know, to consider the author of the prophecy to have been inspired.

What prediction was there ever heralded a great event more clearly than the passages in the "Medea" of Seneca foretelling the discovery of a great western land? Columbus entered it in his manuscript, "Libro de las Profecias," in which he collected all passages which seemed to him to indicate that there was in the west an Atlantis, and that, by sailing westward, he might reach the eastern end of Asia. This remarkable book of prophecies is given in "Navarrete's Collection," Vol. II., No. 114, p. 272. Columbus, though a devout Roman Catholic, made this collection in spite of the fact that some of the fathers of the Church had declared it impious to believe in an Atlantis or western continent, because, said they, the Bible does not mention anything regarding it—a very striking illustration of that kind of Biblical argument which we might call *argumentum a non monito*—in other words, founded on the non-mention in the Bible; as indeed one of the arguments in favor of slavery by an American bishop was that the Bible denounces slavery nowhere as a sin, although it existed everywhere when Christianity was founded. So did torture exist everywhere, so did gladiatorial brutalities, so did suicide exist in the Roman empire everywhere; but there is no passage in the whole Bible, from beginning to end, directly forbidding any one of them.

Seneca makes the Chorus in Act II. of his "Medea" say the following words, which, we frankly confess, amaze us anew every time we bring them back to our mind:

"Venient annis sæcula seris
Quibus Oceanus vincula rerum
Laxet, et ingens pateat tellus,

Tethysque novos detegat orbes,
Nec sit terris ultima Thule."

This may be rendered somewhat in this way:

"In the late years shall come at length an age
In which Oceanus shall close us in
No more, but a vast land shall be revealed
And Tethys shall a continent unveil,
Nor Thule longer be our utmost bound."

How did Seneca come to write these lines? There may be hundreds of causes, but all will agree that they do not prove any inspiration; for if, indeed, Seneca was inspired in writing this passage of his "Medea," then it would prove that books were inspired which nevertheless are of no ethical or religious value to us.

The simple truth is, that if you choose you may interpret anything whatever from an ancient and mysterious book. There would probably be little difficulty to prove the foretelling of the rebels being beaten, and rising again nigh a year after, from the "Veda" or any other Sanscrit lore.

Mainly truthfulness is the first ethical requisite of all interpretation. Neither ingenuity nor worship of some favorite theory can stand in lieu of rectitude of mind, of devout reverence, of truth, or of common sense.

PARIS GOSSIP.

PARIS, August 10, 1866.

THE rain and wind of this disagreeable month are cheating us both of our fruit and our summer. The unhappy mortals condemned to remain during the season of *villeggiatura* within the noisy precincts of the "metropolis of Europe" have found what the Parisians call their "*pique-niques*" sadly interfered with by the unpropitious state of the atmosphere, while the visitors to the fashionable spas and the favorite points of the coast are loud in their lamentations over the loss of their accustomed pleasures. The rain came down so persistently at Vichy from the time the Emperor arrived there that his Majesty, tired out by the hopeless soaking, suddenly gave the order to depart; and, leaving the imperial villa by an early train, had quit- ted the town and returned to St. Cloud before any one out of the villa knew that he was going. Great was the consternation of that spoiled minion of imperial favor. The *maire* had been planning no end of splendors for the coming fête-day of the Napoleons; the *curé* had been negotiating with his episcopal superior for a grand *Te Deum* on that glorious 15th. The *impresario* who presides over things theatrical and operatic had engaged several of the first *artistes* of Paris, in view of the imperial presence; various balls were being got up at the Salle du Prince Imperial; Alberti, the great conjuror, was getting ready all his most notable wonders for the especial delectation of his little highness, who, fully recovered from the effects of his fall, was looking forward to this display with a full share of boyish eagerness, but who has been whisked away with his "august" papa; M. de Caston, whose feats of calculation and divination so far surpass all that the most skilful conjurors have hitherto attempted, was to have done his utmost in the Emperor's presence on the evening of the day on which he departed; and M. Lemerrier de Neuville was to have given a grand show-off of his wonderful marionettes at the Villa Napoléon on the following day. Everybody is "desolated" at this downfall of the programme of amusements, based on the presence of the Emperor and his household, even to the wives and daughters of prefects, senators, etc., who had brought with them a stock of their best smiles and toilettes, whose brilliance they are now forced to expend on less illustrious optics.

Every little detail in the life and doings of the Emperor being gravely discussed by the public, a controversy has been going on between two of the most popular journals of this city, as to whether, when the Emperor takes his daily bath at Vichy, anybody is present in the imperial cabinet save the imperial personage himself and his valet? One of the journals in question affirmed that, on these occasions, a physician was always present, the other declared the presence of the doctor to be a creation of the imagination of its respectable *confrère*. Happily for the peace of mind of those who seek for the "truth of facts" in its minuter developments, the declaration of the physician whose co-operation in the imperial rejuvenation was thus alternately asserted and denied, has authoritatively settled the question in the affirmative, and the world is now informed that whenever the Emperor takes his bath, Monsieur le Docteur Alquié, inspector of the waters of Vichy, and physician to his Majesty when the latter is at Vichy, remains in the imperial bathroom from the time his imperial patient enters his bath until he quits it.

The numerous educational establishments of Paris have been busy with the annual competitions which bring so many medals, "purses," and other rewards to the lucky "firsts." The colleges, lyceums, etc., in the dependence of the university have seen the appropriate distinctions bestowed on their

Copyright of Nation is the property of Nation Company, L. P.. The copyright in an individual article may be maintained by the author in certain cases. Content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.