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THE MORNING GUARDIAN

TUESDAY, MARCH 24, 1903.
AFFAIRS OF RUSSIA.

It is now forty-two years since the Czar Alexander II issued the famous ukase setting free the twenty-three millions of serfs in his vast empire, and making them in some sort the proprietors of the lands they tilled. He did this in opposition to the majority of the powerful nobility and aristocracy of Russia, as well as that of the dignitaries of the church. It was a great measure of reform, a great advance in the direction of freedom, and yet, as in the case of the negro slaves in the Southern States of America the improvement in the condition of the serfs has since been but very slight and gradual. A people held in bondage for centuries become broken in spirit, servile and dependent by nature, and it is the work of several generations to regain the lost status of free manhood such as exists in the countries long dowered with the priceless boon of liberty.

In their stupid fashion the serfs were grateful for their emancipation, such as it was, but they were still incredibly poor and ignorant. Although made free of actual serfdom they had not yet tasted real freedom such as is known to the peasant proprietors of Anglo-Saxon countries. Poverty and ignorance are fetters in themselves, and to these were added the dominance of the national church, which wielded not only the terrors of the unseen world but powers of physical and financial punishment as well. For religious liberty did not exist in Russia and the national church was intolerant to a degree. All other than the orthodox were bitterly persecuted or barely tolerated. The Czar has therefore taken a great step forward in decreeing religious freedom, even although this does not mean the equality of all creeds before the law. It means freedom to worship according to the dictates of the individual conscience, but this freedom does not carry with it social or political equality.

In the latest decree the Czar has acted against the views and wishes of the powerful orthodox hierarchy, as did Alexander II when he freed the serfs, and his action is equally bold and commendable. Other reforms giving increased privileges of local self government are included in the decree. This also indicates an advance in the direction of larger freedom, but in a country where four-fifths of the people are illiterate, where elective representative bodies do not exist and where all power is centred in one man, where freedom of the press is denied, and where administration is controlled by irresponsible bureaus and enforced by the military and the police, it is only the shadow of freedom that can exist. Very probably the great mass of the Russian population, never having known what liberty is, do not feel the want of it as would a free people who had been despoiled of their freedom. But the small educated class do feel it, and hence it is from among the students and graduates of the universities that Nihilism recruits its members.

Alexander II was killed in 1881 by a dynamite bomb thrown at him by a Nihilist.

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list, after five previous attempts upon his life had failed. His successors Alexander III and the present Czar have been constantly pursued by assassins. Nicholas II signalled the anniversary of his grandfather's assassination by issuing the recent decree in favor of religious liberty, but it by no means follows that by this service to his country he will escape a like fate. Lincoln, whose proclamation freed the negro slaves of the United States, and Alexander who set free the many millions of serfs were both murdered as we have seen. The Nihilists will be satisfied with nothing less than a free constitution with a representative Parliament such as the nations of western Europe and America enjoy. Such large concessions cannot be made for years to come, and in the interim Russia will doubtless remain what it has been, "an absolute despotism, tempered by dynamite."

The weakness of the Ross Government's position in referring the Gamay charges to a royal commission lies mainly in the fact that the Liberal party has long been on record as opposed to this method of procedure. They condemned it in the days of the Pacific Scandal and on other occasions since, as a plan by which incriminated Governments sought to shut out damaging evidence. It is true that the commission to the judges appointed to investigate the Gamay charges is pretty broad in its scope, but none the less the appointment of a commission in the premises is a distinct departure from Liberal traditions. On the other hand the Conservatives who oppose the appointment of a royal commission are fairly met by the statement that their own party leaders introduced and perpetuated the system to which they are now objecting.

The death of Rev. James Rogers, D. D., first Roman Catholic Bishop of the diocese of Chatham, N. B., removes one of the most eminent dignitaries of that diocese. Bishop Rogers was born in Donegal, Ireland, in 1823, came to Nova Scotia with his parents in 1831, was educated at St. Mary's College and the Grand Seminary in Montreal, and was ordained priest in Halifax in 1851. On the erection of the diocese of Chatham in 1859 he was appointed its first bishop and was consecrated in St. Dunstan's Cathedral in this city. During forty-three years he served in that high office and saw great progress made in his diocese, educationally and otherwise. Bishop Rogers lent his powerful aid to the carrying of Confederation in New Brunswick at a time when a large majority of his countrymen in that Province were opposed to the measure. He was a man of strong convictions and great force of character.



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Signed in presence of **JOHN A. McMILLAN,** **W. MORLEY SELLER,** **GEO. WM. BAGGALL,** **BRON BROWN, J. P.**

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