

FRIDAY, JUNE 1, 1883.

*TOO MUCH RED TAPE.*

THE relief of the party now at the international polar station at Lady Franklin Bay is attracting the attention of those interested in arctic matters. In this connection, Dr. C. H. Merriam has written a pungent but timely letter, printed in the *New York tribune* of May 5. The expedition of 1882 was prevented by ice from reaching a latitude where any effective aid might have been rendered, — a fact which made the alleged drunkenness and incompetency of the person in charge of the relief party of little practical consequence, except to his associates in the service. That they were not disturbed by it is evident from the fact that his despatch on similar service this summer has only been averted by remonstrances similar to and including Dr. Merriam's. Fortunately for the credit of the country and for Lieut. Greely's party, the plans have been changed, and it is probable that a person rendered competent for the position by experience and intelligence will be put in charge, and possibly accompanied by one or two qualified arctic experts in an advisory capacity.

It is well known, that, within the limits of the United States, the possession of a naval or military commission and a congressional appropriation fully qualify the holder for any scientific, technical, or moral undertaking. Some, however, have been audacious enough to doubt whether this law holds good in any foreign jurisdiction, and whether the flocks of Baffin's Bay are sufficiently under its influence to recoil more readily before brass than before horn buttons. One thing is certain, the service concerned will be held to a rigid responsibility by geographers and the public; and if military prepossessions result in the rejection of any practicable (if unmilitary) means of succor, physical or mental, the condemnation of any ensuing failure or disaster will fall where by common sense and military rules alike it belongs.

It is well known to those acquainted with the subject, that good arctic navigators, masters,

and seamen, good ships for encountering the ice, and every article necessary for equipping a properly fitted expedition, can, by paying for it, be got at St. Johns from the sealing-fleet and its equippers; that the bad ice-navigation of 1882, from all indications, is likely to be duplicated this season; that, to be more than a contemptible pretence, the relief-party must be composed, rank and file, of men who know their business, and have the grit to do it; that the advice and unbought assistance of all arctic investigators within reach may be had freely by the responsible head of the Signal-service.

Knowing this, and believing that officer willing and ready to do the best and most reasonable thing in the premises, we await final action in the confident belief that past mistakes are not to be repeated, and that the results of cutting red tape will be creditable alike to the service and to the country.

*THE ALPHABET AND SPELLING-REFORM.*

THE letters of the alphabet are so variously sounded in different countries that they could not be internationally employed, with phonetic consistency, without altering the whole orthography of the different languages. French and English, for example, could not, by any adaptation of Roman letters, be made phonetically intelligible equally to French and English readers. Try to write such phrases as '*la langue française*,' 'the English tongue,' so as to show the actual pronunciation of the words, and the utter hopelessness of the task will be apparent.

The letters *n* and *g* have three distinct sounds — different from their alphabetic sounds — in the three words in which they occur in the above illustrations. In the word '*langue*,' the *n* is used merely as a sign that the preceding vowel is nasal, and the *g* has the second of its two regular 'soft' and 'hard' sounds. In the word 'English,' the *n* has a separate sound, which is not that normally associated with the letter, and the *g* has the same sound as in '*langue*.' In the word 'tongue,' neither the *n* nor the *g* is separately pronounced; but the combination has a distinctive sound, which is not represented by any letter in the alphabet. This sound of the combined letters *ng* is the same as that of the *n* alone in the word 'English.' In 'hanger' and 'anger,' 'longer'