

The Commercial

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BEHRING SEA.

The return of the Canadian sealers from Behring Sea will again draw attention to the question in dispute concerning these northern waters. The sealing season for 1890 is now about over, and no further seizures of Canadian vessels have been made. This is satisfactory in itself, but it does not settle the question for the future. What the policy of the United States may be hereafter is a matter for conjecture. It is hardly likely that the Washington authorities have decided to abandon their pretensions as to the virtual ownership of this vast sea, and it may be expected that the question will come up again in some form or other, unless in the meantime an agreement should be arrived at between the governments interested. The question has assumed a broader aspect from the fact that this season a German schooner was engaged in the sealing industry in Behring Sea. The rights of sealers in the sea is therefore not now a question solely between the British Empire and the United States. This new aspect of the case must be taken into account. Any agreement between Britain and the United States as to the conditions under which the sealing industry should be carried on in Behring Sea, would not be binding upon other nations, any more than would the proclamation of the president declaring the sea closed, be considered binding upon British subjects, and could only be enforced on the principle that might is right. But even in the event that the Washington Government has decided to abandon its absurd claims, there is still the question of compensation for the outrages committed upon Canadian sealers in past years. The Behring Sea question can never be considered settled until these claims are satisfied, either in connection with or independent of the question of jurisdiction in Behring Sea.

It is satisfactory we say that the present season has gone by without further aggressive action on the part of the United States. The situation was certainly serious a short time ago, and the Washington policy of inaction in Behring Sea, carried out this season has prevented the matter from having been brought to a very undesirable crisis ere this. In this matter the aggression has all been on the part of the United States. The British Government has been very moderate in dealing with the question, especially when we consider the extreme measures so boldly carried out by the United States. But though great moderation and caution has characterized every action of the British Government, British rights have been quietly but firmly maintained. The controversy has gone on for years, and though the bold policy adopted by the United States has failed to bring about any hasty action from Great Britain, it has also failed to bring about any yielding up of our just rights in Behring Sea. The action of the two Governments has from the first been widely different. On the one hand there was reckless aggressiveness,

while on the other, moderation was carried almost to the point of weakness.

The matter, however, could not remain indefinitely in that shape. The action of the United States was such as to either compel the British Government to yield to its claims, or to take a firm stand on the defensive and say, "thus far and no farther." Gradually but slowly the British Government was forced, in maintaining its rights, to take this stand. This came at last in the note from Lord Salisbury last spring, which gave a formal protest against further seizures, and intimated that "the United States would be held responsible for the consequences." This note was drawn forth by the declaration that the Washington Government would continue to pursue the policy of making seizures this season. In order to prepare for the "consequences," a fleet of British war ships was gathered at Esquimaux naval station, but happily their services were not required. The United States authorities hastily countermanded orders to the officers of revenue cutters, and the season has passed over without any further aggressive action. Thus a very dangerous situation has for the time been passed, and it is to be hoped that before another sealing season comes around the question will be amicably settled.

It would have been a sad blot upon nineteenth century civilization if this matter had led to hostilities between the two foremost nations of the world. The responsibility for such a deplorable result would certainly have rested upon the United States, which has been the aggressor all along in this matter; but when it came to the point of provoking hostilities happily that country shrunk from the result.

In Canada, and also throughout the Empire, there is no question as to the justice of our cause, and to the injustice of the claims of the United States. At the same time, every disposition has been shown on this side, to enter into a reasonable agreement for the protection of seals. This in itself would be yielding a point on our side. On the other hand, there is not in the United States a unanimous belief in the justice of the claims put forth by that country. A portion of the press and people, including some prominent journals and leading men, declare the claims of their own Government as untenable. When leading men in the United States will stand up and say that their country is wrong, as some of them have been honest enough to do, it goes a long way to show that public opinion in that country would not sanction further extreme measures on the part of their Government. There is no doubt a limited class of population about the great cities who would even push the matter to the point of hostilities. Such people are enemies of humanity, and because they are such they would welcome a disturbance on general principles. We cannot but believe, however, that the common sense of the United States is desirous of an amicable settlement of the question in a manner fair to all concerned. We further believe that the common sense of the United States is friendly to this country and to the great race whence it derived its origin, notwithstanding that indications on the surface sometimes point to the contrary. Unhappily for the friendly feelings which should exist be-

tween the two great nations of the English-speaking world, what is termed "twisting the lion's tail," is a factor in United States politics. A writer in *Harper's Magazine*, of New York, recently admitted this fact. But for the part this factor plays in United States politics, it is certain to conclude that the Behring Sea question would have been settled long ago. If this feature could be stamped out of politics in that country, things would go more smoothly between the Empire and the Republic. Wherever British and United States interests come together, outside of this political aspect of the case, the most friendly feeling is shown to exist. When Canadians or other British subjects visit the United States, they are, as a rule, received with marked feelings of favor, and the same is true of United States citizens visiting Canada or other portions of the Empire. If matters of an official nature between the respective governments could be considered in the same way, and devoid the "tail twisting feature" there would be no two governments in the world in greater accord than that of the British Empire and the United States. For instance, if instead of boldly taking the law in its own hands, and in a hostile and unfriendly manner seizing Canadian vessels on the high seas, the United States had asked the British Government to co-operate in the protection of seal life, it would have received a most cordial assent to the proposition. Such a policy would have been honorable to a great nation, but it would not have served certain miserable political ends, hence it was not adopted.

The last published correspondence of an official nature on the Behring Sea question contained a proposal from Lord Salisbury to submit the matter to arbitration. This seems the only fair way in which the question can be settled, short of the United States abandoning its pretensions entirely and allowing the sealing interest to take care of itself. It is to be hoped the good sense of the people will force the Government into accepting a proposition of this nature, so as to prevent a possible recurrence of the dangerous situation which existed a short time ago. Any disputes as to the Atlantic fisheries could be considered at the same time. Canada might even yield a point or two in regard to the Atlantic fisheries, such for instance as the according of commercial rights to United States fishing schooners. If this would secure the settlement of existing disputes, and the friendship of the Republic, it could not be done too quickly. The people of Canada and the United States are of the same race, language and civilization, and it should be the aim of each country to remove any cause for unfriendliness now existing, or which may come up in the future. Canadians, or at least a very large majority of them, are very friendly toward the United States, but the harsh treatment we have received in this Behring Sea matter, has been anything but what we should expect in return from the big Republic, and it has certainly caused a feeling of resentment in quarters where it did not exist before. So long as such a policy is pursued toward this country, the sentiment of annexation, which some people in the United States like to talk about, is not likely to make much progress in this country. In fact there are indications that the unfriendly action of the