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THE SITUATION.

Henceforth municipal exemptions in Ontario will take the form of a political issue, the leader of the Opposition having declared against them, with the exception of the small incomes of workingmen. This brings us visibly nearer to the end of ecclesiastical exemptions; how near, it is impossible to say, as it will not occur till a party resolution takes place, and Mr. Mowat sits pretty firmly in his seat. However, one fact is plain: the success of the Opposition in this province, whenever it takes place, means the abolition of exemptions. This is new. Till now, neither party would declare against exemptions. The example of Ontario is likely to become contagious, in one direction: Manitoba and the North-West are sure to walk in the same path, and things will not always go on as at present, even in Quebec. It seems to be forgotten that under the French Government, from which Quebec inherits its civil law, the clergy in France were heavily taxed before Canada came under the British Dominion. In Ontario, one powerful Church will defend the existing exemptions, and individuals in other Churches will sympathise with its efforts. For all that, exemptions are doomed: their disappearance is only a question of time.

Manitoba through its Government has asked the Customs Department at Ottawa to admit books for the Provincial library free of duty. But as the Customs Act does not invest the Ottawa authorities with the dispensing power, the request could not be granted. A much better thing than what was asked can be done by a slight alteration of the Customs Act. The example of the United States in exempting from duty all books that have been published twenty years could be followed here with advantage. Some years ago, an exemption was made of books published six years, but it was found to work injustice and was repealed. Six years is not long enough for book-sellers who pay the duty to clear out their stocks, and remission of the duty after that date created an unfair discrimination. The twenty years' date would work no such injustice. Libraries are made up largely

of books which have been printed more than twenty years and the present tax on knowledge is the least justifiable of almost all conceivable taxes. We trust the Government will see its way to make this change.

It is evident that Mr. Parnell will oppose the land purchase contemplated by the Government. In a speech at Nottingham, the other day, he is reported to have said that, under Home Rule, Ireland would become a manufacturing nation and the pressure on the land would be relieved. "Irishmen themselves," he said, "must promote Irish industries by building harbors and reclaiming waste lands, not at the expense of the English exchequer, but of the Irish exchequer, or best of all through the efforts of local and individual enterprise, and with private capital." This is an admission that the remedy for Ireland's difficulties is industrial, economical; and the allegation is that Home Rule is wanted to bring about industrial regeneration. No doubt the remedy required is industrial, economical; but in what way does the union prevent Irishmen applying private capital to making harbors, reclaiming waste lands, or setting up manufactures? The regeneration of Irish industries is not prevented by anything in the existing laws, yet if it comes not is it not largely because much of the energy of the nation is frittered away by being directed into the political sphere, where it is barren of paying results and chiefly fruitful in the production of mischief?

The territorial dispute between Great Britain and Portugal in Africa has been aggravated by the action of a subordinate Portuguese official in Africa taking upon himself to settle it by force. The immediate result of his action appears to have been to induce the belief among the natives that they were deserted by the English, and to cause them to give in to the Portuguese. It is evident that this is not the last of the business, and that it cannot be settled by taking snap judgment in a violent way when the case was on the point of going to arbitration.

Steam communication between St. John, N.B., and the West Indies is strongly advocated by the Board of Trade of that city. This claim has been presented to the Ottawa Government by Mr. George Robertson. The proposed communication, he contends, will enable Canada to capture a large part of the trade. Ever since the independence of the United States, the question which of the two countries, Canada or the United States, could best supply the wants of the West Indies, has been contested under widely varying circumstances. For a time the United States were cut off from this trade, with the result that thousands of negroes in Jamaica were starved to death. This exclusion can never occur again, and if it did the same disastrous results would not follow. Ever since Confederation we have been talking of cultivating more extensively the West India trade, but not much has so far been done. To carry fruit with safety, Mr. Robertson

points out, speedy means of transit is necessary. The United States has one undeniable advantage over us, in the fact that her vast population makes her so much larger a consumer of fruit, and a trade on one side tends to produce an exchange on the other. When the trade is equally open to all, the country which can buy most West India produce will sell most to the West Indies. But this is no reason why Canada cannot improve its position in this trade.

How to reduce the superabundant revenue without much interfering with the protective policy is said to be the puzzle of the United States House of Representatives Ways and Means Committee. There will be no hesitation in making reductions in the internal revenue, and the consumers of tobacco may have occasion to rejoice over the repeal of the internal tax on the smoke-giving plant. The Customs tariff will be touched with a lighter hand. The election of Mr. Harrison did not show that the manufacturers had lost their influence in the electorate, and it is likely to last at least as long in Congress as in the country. Congress can be manipulated more easily than the electorate. But after all there is likely to be some tariff revision. It is said that the New England iron manufacturers will press for free coal from Canada, but they will be stoutly opposed by their Pennsylvania rivals, reinforced by the new iron manufacturers of Alabama. It will be strange if Pennsylvania, which counts for much in popular elections, with its new backing, does not come off victorious. For our part, we certainly cannot wish it success, for its policy of taxing raw materials is vicious, and is besides, on the whole, a great hindrance to manufactures.

Congressman Butterworth has again introduced a bill providing for a general reciprocity of trade with Canada, which according to some accounts is not to be regarded with much favor in Congress. But predictions of what is going to happen must be received with caution. Unless a great change has come over the Washington Legislature within a year, Commercial Union with Canada is not likely to be received with disfavor by that body. As a matter of policy it may possibly be deemed wise not to show too much anxiety on the subject when it is uncertain whether Canada is prepared to give a favorable response to the proposal. Canada rejected, through the Dominion Parliament, a proposal of this kind last session, and it may be deemed impolitic to try to force the issue in this state of Canadian opinion. In fact Congress can do nothing at present that will advance Commercial Union with Canada, and a waiting policy may recommend itself to the majority as the true one. Congress has already indicated its views on this subject, the Parliament of Canada has replied declining the proposal, and we can well understand the attitude of those Congressmen who think that there is nothing more to be done till the opinion on the question of the Canadian electorate has been pronounced.

W. C. HARRIS.

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