

"First.—The questions in respect to the fur-seals in Behring Sea and the waters of the North Pacific Ocean."

The Joint High Commission formally opened at Quebec on the 23rd August, 1898, and after many sittings there and at Washington, adjourned on the 20th February, 1899, to reassemble at Quebec on the 2nd August next.

As the Behring Sea question is one of those receiving the consideration of the Joint High Commission, it has passed, for the time being, out of the ordinary channel of correspondence between the different Governments, hence the past year has been marked by an absence of proposals and arrangements hitherto obtaining each season in the prosecution of the sealing industry and the application of the legislation under which it is conducted.

By the terms of the Paris Award, the regulations for the government of the seal fishery in Behring Sea and the North Pacific Ocean, were to be subjected to a new examination every five years, so as to enable both interested Governments to consider whether, in the light of the past experience, there was occasion for any modification thereof.

The representations made to the Canadian Government by those engaged in the sealing industry in British Columbia, were to the effect that no modifications of these regulations should be agreed to in the nature of further limitations to the business, but that, on the contrary, the successful prosecution of the industry demanded that the existing restrictions should be curtailed alike as to the close season and as to the protective zone around the Pribylov Islands.

As the United States Government would not entertain any proposals in either of these directions, and it did not seem to the Canadian Government possible for them, having due regard to the interests of those engaged in the sealing industry, to consent to any further limitations upon the operations of the sealers, it was found impossible to agree upon any change in the Paris Award regulations.

THE BEHRING SEA CLAIMS COMMISSION.

The awards of this commission, in respect of Canadian sealing schooners seized and otherwise interfered with, and of persons damnified through personal arrest and imprisonment by the United States authorities prior to the findings of the Paris Arbitration, were published in detail in last year's report.

The total award, \$473,151.26 was paid over to Canada, and, after much research and inquiry, was divided on an equitable basis between the parties entitled thereto as owners, masters, hunters, &c., in the case of some 23 vessels, and between the 14 participants in the personal claims for detention and imprisonment. One hundred and sixteen cheques have already been issued and placed in the hands of the Collector of Customs at Victoria for delivery to the parties entitled to receive the amounts allotted them.

Owing to the great lapse of time between the seizures, which began in 1886, and the final adjustment of the claims in 1898, it is obvious that difficulties were to be expected in reaching everybody entitled to participate in the recompense. Some few claimants have been lost sight of, and others have died, and their heirs not yet been found. There are, therefore, some isolated cases in which cheques have not yet issued, while in one or two other instances further information is to be obtained before final payment is made to claimants.

A sum of between \$14,000 and \$15,000, allotted to Indian hunters on board the seized sealing schooners is yet undistributed, as the major portion of the sum is payable to such of the west coast Indians as were engaged as hunters on board the vessels seized as far back as 1886, 1887 and 1889. All possible information is being collected on the subject, and it is expected that the department will be in a position to distribute this portion of the award at an early date.

The co-operation of the Indian Department has been obtained, with a view to facilitate this end.