

that their defeat of a popular measure in the legislature would be speedily reversed by the vote of the people. To this argument it has been answered that the "Referendum" would be of use only to enable people to pronounce upon laws that have been passed or approved by the House, whereas the chief activity of the lobbyist is usually directed to prevent the passing of bills which militate against the interest of those whom he represents. The "Referendum" would be of no avail in the case of bills which the lobbyists had prevented from passing. To this the friends of the innovation reply by saying: "Let us then agitate for the whole system, the 'Initiative' as well as the 'Referendum.' Let the people demand the right not only to reject measures which they disapprove, but to introduce and submit to popular vote, after discussion, those which they desire to see passed." The agitation has grown so strong that the opponents of direct popular government are afraid that a bill for introducing the "Referendum" may pass the present legislature.

#### The New Substance.

When, at the meeting of the British Association at Oxford, last August, the announcement was made by a distinguished scientific savant that he had discovered a hitherto unknown substance in atmospheric air, the announcement caused great surprise, not unmixed with incredulity. Students of chemical science thought that if they knew anything, they knew the constituents of atmospheric air. Now, however, it seems to have been established that the alleged discovery is real. Professor Ramsay recently read a paper before a crowded meeting of the Royal Society, in the theatre of the London University, which was accepted by the large number of prominent men of science present as affording satisfactory proof that a new gas has actually been discovered. Professor Ramsay and Lord Rayleigh, who was formerly Professor of Experimental Physics at Cambridge, had, it appeared, been carrying on experiments with a view to eliminating and identifying the new substance, and had almost simultaneously been successful. The new substance—whether it is an element or a compound gas has not yet been determined—differs entirely from both oxygen and nitrogen in that so far it has been found to refuse to enter into combination with any other element. For this reason it has been named *argon* (not working, idle). It is, like oxygen and nitrogen, colourless, but is denser than either, in the proportion of twenty to sixteen and fourteen, respectively. Its solubility in water is about the same as that of oxygen. Its spectrum is quite distinct from that of nitrogen. What will be the practical advantage, if any, of the discovery, remains to be seen.

#### Hawaii and the United States.

There is some ground for believing that the *de facto* government of the Hawaiian islands has brought, or will soon bring, itself into trouble with the United States. One United States citizen was deported without form of trial on a charge of being implicated in the late uprising, and two others are under sentence of death. It is reported from Washington that despatches have been sent to United States Minister Willis at Honolulu, censuring him for allowing a prisoner to be exiled without proper trial, and urging him to "take every means in his power to prevent the execution of the two who have been condemned to capital punishment." As there is a United States cruiser at Honolulu these instructions will, no doubt, be enforced in a peremptory manner. It is too near the end of the nineteenth century for any usurpa-

tion government to deal in so reckless a manner with rights of citizenship that have long been internationally recognized.

#### The British America Assurance Company.

This company, established in 1833, is one of the oldest existing fire and marine insurance associations in America. During the two generations of its existence it has paid out to those whom it had insured the large sum of \$14,000,000, and it enters on a new year of business with assets amounting to nearly a million and a half, a cash capital of three-quarters of a million, and a total reserve fund of over half a million. Toward the close of 1892 some important changes were made in the management of the Company, which may tersely be described by saying that it was modernized. As one result of this process a change for the better, as compared with the experience of the then previous few years, has been brought about, in spite of the fact that the period which has since elapsed has been one of very discouraging depression. The British America is peculiarly fortunate in an exceptionally strong directorate, and in having for President, Mr. Geo. A. Cox, and for Vice-President and Managing Director, Mr. J. J. Kenny. There is good reason to believe that under such management, and with its financial position strengthened by an issue of \$250,000 of new stock taken up by the shareholders, a new career of prosperity is opened up for this pioneer insurance company.

\* \* \*

#### Multi-Partyism in Politics.

THE chief novelty that presents itself in the new Ontario Legislature is the presence of a third party of considerable strength on the floor of the House. We shall have to wait for developments in order to have the means of forming a judgment in regard to the effect which the presence of the Patrons is likely to have upon the course of legislation. It may be that, in this particular instance, the Government having a majority, however slender, of all the members as its avowed supporters, the Patrons cannot really decide the fate of the Administration. But suppose, as we readily may without violence to probability, that the case were different; that instead of a majority of two or three, the Government had returned with a band of pledged supporters slightly smaller than the total number of the other two parties, what would have been its position and prospects? It would then have been obliged to carry on the work of the session with the possibility ever before it that at any moment a coalition of the other two parties might lead to its defeat. Would a defeat, under such circumstances, have placed it under obligation to resign? If it took the affirmative view and acted upon it, upon whom could the Lieutenant-Governor call to construct a cabinet? No other possible leader would, by hypothesis, have so strong a following in the House as that of the defeated one, and any one who might be entrusted with the Premiership would be still more liable to defeat at any moment. A stable Administration would seem to be an impossibility under such circumstances. The situation would become still more complicated and precarious, should it happen, as is quite supposable, that instead of three, there were four or half-a-dozen distinct parties in the House. It is evident that, under such circumstances, our local parliament would be reduced to a position somewhat similar to that of the French Assembly, with a possible change of Government every few weeks or months. Reduced to general terms, the problem may be stated thus: Is responsible Government, in the form in which we have it, practicable in a parliament composed of more than two distinctly defined parties?

To one who sees and contemns the weakness and wrong-