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VICTORIA, TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 1891.

A LONG SESSION.

The passage of the Provincial estimates through committee has, we observe, been the occasion of a trial, not of party strength, but of ability to stay, as between the Opposition and the Government. The former, it is stated, openly boasted—at least some of them are reported to have done so—that the estimates should not be allowed to pass until they had made a holy show of the Government, even if it should take all summer to do so. The Premier accepted their challenge and the House sat all through Friday night until close upon two o'clock on Saturday afternoon, making a twenty-four hours session. Needless to say the estimates passed, and though there was some pretty severe talking during the criticism and defence of the items on the whole, the sitting was a good humored one. There is, of course, the step of concurrence to be taken; but that is not likely to be a protracted one, and therefore it cannot be long before the Distribution Bill and a few other matters on the Ministerial programme will be disposed of. Then, from one end of British Columbia to the other, will be heard the parties' calls to arms, followed soon after by the general elections.

SEALING MATTERS.

The Supreme Court of Canada has, we are well satisfied to learn, allowed the appeal in the case of The Oscar and Hattie which had been declared to be forfeited for violation of the provisions of the *modus vivendi*. It was shown that she had not wilfully offended, nevertheless the Admiralty Court here took what were regarded as an unnecessarily harsh view of the case. However she has been set at liberty, which, we think, will be considered as the proper course to be pursued under the exceptional circumstances of the case.

With regard to the sealing schooner Henrietta which within the last few days has returned to Victoria after an absence of two years, it may be well to review the circumstances of her case. She had been seized in Bering Sea in September, 1892, by the steamer Yorktown, for violation of the *modus vivendi*. She had never been warned that the *modus vivendi* had been renewed. Later it was learned by officials that the Henrietta had transferred her spring catch of 152 skins to the schooner Kate, which came here disabled and she was next charged

with an infraction of customs regulations. After protracted official correspondence the U. S. secretary of state admitted that there was no grounds for seizure and that the naval officers had erred in not turning the vessel over to British war ships immediately after her seizure, as the *modus vivendi* act provided.

The schooner was then ordered to be turned over to the British authorities, but the nearest officials were at Victoria, thousands of miles away. Meantime her owner Mr. Charles Spring had failed, and an endeavor was made to induce his creditors to send for her; but this idea did not work, and finally she was given up to her former commander, Captain Pinckney, unconditionally, he having returned North. The vessel was, however, heavily in debt and was not in sailing condition. To pay her way and fit her out he pledged about 100 of the sealskins on board her and started for this city.

On her arrival Captain Pinckney and the crew attached the vessel for their wages, and now for her possession there is likely to be considerable litigation between the creditors of her owner and the people who now hold her. The creditors moreover, have put in a claim to \$26,000 on account of illegal seizure against the U. S. government. The prospect is that there will be "a monkey and a parrot" time before the matter is settled.

FIRE PROTECTION.

The Canadian Fire Underwriters' Association, which recently held its annual meeting in Toronto, made a new classification of towns or rather a redefinition of standards. A standard town, it is held, must be free from abnormal incendiary, and must not show an undue loss rate. It must not have more than 25 per cent. of wooden buildings in its business quarter, and must possess by laws restricting wooden buildings, etc. It is somewhat remarkable that the advantage possessed by a town using chemical engines is withdrawn. Experience was believed to have showed that where chemical engines were used not only were incipient fires more easily disposed of, but that the damage to the goods or other things contained in a building was much smaller than if they had been thoroughly drenched with water. It is understood that the changes in classification above referred to are sufficient to make municipal officers take due precautions as to the supply and quality of the appliances which they possess.

We observe that at the late convention of fire chiefs held at San Francisco, Chief Deasy, of Victoria, presented an instructive as well as interesting paper on "the importance of insurance companies discriminating in favor of all cities, large or small, having paid fire departments." He showed how that for lack of proper protection Seattle, Vancouver, Spokane, Ellensburg and other places had been wiped out; but, with their reappearance, there had been a changed condition of things. Trained men with modern appliances took the place of volunteer firemen with old-fashioned apparatus, the result having been a remarkable decrease in the amount

of loss. He added that during 1886, under the volunteer system, the loss by fire in Victoria, British Columbia, had amounted to \$126,000; that during 1887, under the paid system, the loss was reduced to \$12,000, a saving of \$114,000, while from 1887 to 1891, the average yearly loss amounted to \$17,000.

It was shown that wherever well paid fire departments exist the city is hopeful and the insurance companies do a good business, and that at rates much lower than where the reverse obtains. These reductions, combined with a profitable business, they are enabled to make because—to quote Mr. Deasy: "Trained men with horses and every appliance for fighting fire, are at all times ready to answer the electric alarm. Discipline is enforced, and fires are suppressed by men who have made this a profession. Approved protection is afforded by the construction of waterworks and the purchase of modern apparatus. Heads of fire departments and municipal authorities are constantly devising means for the prevention and suppression of fires. Ince diarism, the bane of insurance companies, and the cause of a majority of fires, is usually frustrated by the prompt work of the paid firemen."

"HARD TIMES."

The question is very properly asked by the *Insurance and Finance Chronicle* if this cry has not been somewhat overdone. We are inclined to think that it has, and that the process of cutting down has been carried to extreme lengths in directions where it should not have been attempted. It is well known that the higher the salary the less is its receiver injured by a percentage of reduction. However, a commencement has been made, where reductions have been attempted, among the people receiving low wages. These have had five, ten and twenty per cent. taken off earnings that were barely sufficient to support them while their superior officers have mostly been left alone.

The *Chronicle* says: "There is some danger of the cry of 'hard times' being overdone. How many people have curtailed their drink bill? How many have reduced the number of cigars they smoke or the quantity of tobacco they consume? After all, times are to a great extent what people make them. However hard they are, an Irving or a Patti can always extract thousands of dollars from the people's purses, wherever they go—to say nothing of such brutal exhibitions as the late prize fight."

May we not once more ask with our contemporary if this cry has not been overdone, and is it not time to resume the payment of the ordinary wages and salaries? In almost everything that the individual or the family consumes there has been no reduction in cost. Food and clothing still continue at the old prices, and though in some cities they have gone to the—what we consider in some cases the unjustifiable—length of reducing the salaries of officials and work people, the taxes remain the same and are almost, if not quite, as regularly collected. Rents, too, are well maintained. It is said, too, that in some quarters it is contemplated