

Future of the Fur Seals.

From the London Spectator.

A modern Aristophanes would find congenial material for poking fun at international tribunals in the judicial assembly now gathered at Paris to decide on the great seal case between Great Britain and the United States. Instead of the dog and her puppies, the seal and her "pups" might appear to modify the too rigid application of the unbending principles of international law, and plead for the introduction of a little human feeling into a case in which, however the verdict may be cast, the welfare and continuance of an humble and innocent race of great antiquity and historic interest trembles in the balance.

We write not without feeling, for it is the hard fate of the seals to have a good cause and bad advocates. The case for the seals is as good as a case could be, yet their counsel too often abandon argument to abuse the plaintiff's attorney. American diplomatists, in defending their clients, seem often to forget the duty of international courtesy while urging points of international law; and though the published matter bearing on the subject in hand already fills many thousands of pages, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that even now, between the sober covers of a Blue book, the counsel retained on behalf of the persecuted animals have continued to raise questions of personal voracity and national good faith with a persistency and ineptitude sufficient to ruffle the feelings of the least interested diplomatist on the other side. This is the more to be regretted because in the last documents published by the United States authorities on the sealing question, a summary of the case to be presented on their behalf before the arbitrators sitting at Paris, the claim to consider the whole of Behring Sea private waters owned by the United States, and liable to closed at will against the world, which was so hotly urged by the late Secretary Blaine, has been for the moment abandoned. The "main object of the Government" is stated to be "the protection and preservation of the seal herd which has its home in the Pribilof Islands, and to save the seals from extermination." Such an object must command sympathy if urged in the proper spirit and with due regard to any interests which may have accrued to others in the fishery, from previous neglect to consider the chances of such a result in the past.

In the quaint language of international law, it is urged that to encourage practices which must destroy a useful and valuable industry is *contra bonos mores*; that the profit made by killing female seals before the birth of the young, on the way to the islands which have from time beyond memory been their nurseries, is an act of international unfairness, analogous to the destruction of the shoals of fish by Americans off the Canadian shore by poison in order to gain a small profit—such destruction of fish off the Cornish coast, by dynamite, being illegal by English law. Perhaps a closer instance would be the wholesale capture of female salmon on their way to spawn in English rivers, when out at sea, supposing that the habits of salmon made such an enterprise possible to Dutch or Norwegian fishermen. The précis of the case, now being urged by the United States counsel at Paris, is too condensed to contain the flowers of rhetoric which adorned the despatches of Mr. Blaine; for instance, we no longer find the necessary but unpleasant business of knocking the seals on the head with clubs, and then skinning them, described as a "peaceful and secluded field of industry," and the like. But the gross allegations of dishonesty and chicanery, then made in public despatches against Lord Salisbury, are now repeated with a curttness and sordid insistence against the English Commissioners who spent some three months among the seal islands and in the Behring sea in order to report their impressions gathered on the spot, which oversteps all the

decencies of international controversy. This is the more to be regretted, because the report of the Commission lends itself readily to criticism without such allegations. The claim to close the Behring Sea was one which Great Britain was competent to hold with on the evidence of existing documents and national usage. But the statements as to the permanent damage inflicted by seal catching in the open sea demanded some investigation on the spot, either to controvert or confirm the angry protests of the American Government.

The British commissioners spent some three months in cruising in the Northern Pacific and Behring Sea. They visited the islands and took much evidence, admittedly of an interested character, from the captains of vessels and others engaged in the "pelagic," or, as the Americans would prefer to call it, the "poaching" seal fishery; and the result is a report which puts the case of the Canadian and Victorian sealers in a rather better position to go to arbitration, but which, based as it is on surmises as to the habits of the seal, unsupported by sound observation, and contrary to the natural instinct of animals, which is asserted with such uniform predominance in the care of their young, invites criticism, and is repellant to the *bonos mores* which in such matters may be credited to seals equally with man. The report is, in fact an apology for the practices of our colonists at sea, and endeavors to show that the proportion of female seals destroyed on their way to the "rookeries" to give birth to their young, is not large; that the "pups," as the infant seals are called by the traders, do not die of starvation when the mother seals are killed, when at sea seeking food, by the sealers who prowl round the islands outside the three-mile limit; and that the decrease of the herd is due to the over-killing of male seals by the American company on the islands themselves, and to the mismanagement in details of the seal preserve. Here is certainly ample ground for comment and confutation without calling names. Taking the conclusions of the Commission in the reverse order to that in which they are enumerated, it may be assumed that, in managing so extremely valuable a property, the American Company may be trusted to look after their own interests. The Commissioners admit that the management is "transcendentally perfect," whatever that may mean. As to the conjecture that the diminution of the herd is due to the over-killing of the young male seals, the American counsel argues fairly enough that the seal is a highly polygamous creature, the strong old males or "rock-masters" appropriating as many as thirty or forty females to their own establishment, and keeping all others at a distance. Photographs were produced of the scene on the rocks, in which groups of disconsolate bachelor seals were gathered outside the married quarters, unable to obtain the society of a single "eligible female." Against this we have the assertion of the British Commissioners that the numbers in the seal "harems" have increased from four to eightfold. We do not find any evidence in proof of this view; but as Henry E. Hoit stated that in 1874 the number in each "harem" averaged from five to twenty, and that in "many instances forty-five to fifty females were in charge of one male"—an increase of "eightfold" in such an existing disparity of the sexes must be matter of common knowledge, if it exists. But even in some small part of the decrease in the seals is due to the system in force on the islands, it can hardly be contended that the wholesale killing of the pregnant seals on their way to the shore, and the slaughter of the nursing females in the water; round the islands, is not replete with cruelty and waste. No more wanton crime can be perpetrated by man against the brute creation than the killing of a mother with unweaned young. Even if due to accident, it would be matter for deep regret. In the case of the fur seals, the act is deliberate, and its object profit. Many of the ships engaged in this odious traffic are owned by American subjects, who share the blame

equally with Canadian and Victorian sealers. It is not without regret that we find the British commissioners alleging an excuse, and a poor one at best, for such practices.

They have persuaded themselves that when a mother seal is destroyed, the orphan is adopted by others in the herd, and that the shocking mortality among the "pups," whose bodies were counted by the hundred, must be due to an "epidemic." All the bottles of these dead "pups" which were examined were found to be terribly emaciated, and without food in the stomach, —they had, in fact, been starved; and we agree with the remark of the American Commissioners, that it "seems an extraordinary circumstance that all the young seals destroyed by stampedes, epidemics, or raids, if any of these were the cause, should be starvelings." The evidence which has convinced the Commissioners that the shooting of the migrating females does not cause a large percentage of loss is hardly more convincing; while the cruelty involved needs no demonstration. We hope that the result of the Paris Arbitration will be the total cessation of "pelagic" sealing in Behring Sea. The "industry" is self-destructive, and must cease, even if continued for a few more years, owing to the destruction of the seals. Common sense and common humanity alike suggest the obvious remedy.

Montreal Iron and Hardware Market.

In shelf hardware, etc., business has been good in a sorting up way for gardening tools, fishing tackle, sporting goods, etc., and cutlery. For heavy hardware, however, the same dull market is to report, while in pig iron no round transactions of any moment ex-wharf have transpired.

Bar iron is quiet and unchanged, jobbers having nothing special to report.

There is no change in the price of tin plates, nor any large business to mention, but an offer for a round lot would likely lead to shading in prices.

Galvanized iron has been moved at former prices, and copper, lead and other metals are easy and unchanged. Advances from primary markets on everything from pig iron downwards are easy and buyers have nothing to induce them into any urgency about purchasing. We quote: Summerize, \$18.50; Eglington, \$17.25; Canbro, \$17; Slemens, No. 1, \$18; Langlois, \$19; wrought scrap, No. 1, \$15 to \$16; bar, \$1.90 to \$1.95. Tin plates, coke, \$3.15 to \$3.20; I. C. charcoal, \$3.75 to \$4.25; Canada plates, \$2.50 to \$2.60; terrace plates, \$7.25 to \$7.75. Orford copper, 11½ to 12½; ingot tin, 21½ to 22c.

Lead and Oils.—There has been no marked change in the lead market, but so new that more business has been doing. Values are unchanged on the old basis of \$4.75 to \$5. Government standard.

Glass is quiet and steady at \$1.35 and putty at \$1.85 in bulk.

Linseed oil in round lots has sold at 60c for raw and 63c for boiled, but the market is quiet on the whole.—*Gazette*, June 2.

Canned Salmon.

About two months ago considerable sales were made of British Columbian salmon at \$4.40 to 4.50 for favorite leading brands for July and August delivery, and at \$4.20 to 4.30 for second brands, at which prices nearly every one filled up. Now, however, canners are offering at quite a decline on those figures, offers being made at \$4.00 to 4.15 as to brand, which is very annoying to all those who bought at the higher range of quotations, more especially as no deliveries have yet been made. The low prices which have recently been quoted at the Coast are probably due to prospects of a large run of salmon.—*Montreal Trade Bulletin*.