

ESTABLISHED 1866

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### THE SITUATION.

The re-election of seven members of the Government by acclamation gives the Laurier Ministry a fair start, and one to which they were fairly entitled. It is pure waste of effort and resources for an Opposition to fight for the sake of fighting, when there is no chance of success. On the other hand, to insist on the rule that Ministers, when they go back to their constituents for election, have a right to immunity from Opposition, must fail; and when to this is added the attempt to create the impression that not only is this a constitutional rule but that it is generally applied, justice is not done to the facts. The seven Ministers who secured re-election without opposition are left at liberty to at once enter on the duties of their offices, where, as new men, they have much to learn; and though nothing is to be one during the coming session beyond passing the estimates, it is desirable that the heads of departments should be in a position to show some familiarity with the items with which parliament will have to deal. Even if the new Government should accept, substantially, the estimates prepared under their predecessors, it does not follow that the several Ministers might not be called upon for explanations upon points which may provoke independent criticism. Any members of the Government whose time is taken up in fighting for re-election would have some excuse for not been able to give explanations off-hand, as an old hand like Sir Richard Cartwright might have been ready to do, had he been Minister of Finance.

Occasion is afforded by the re-election for Ministers to throw out hints as to the line of policy which the Government will follow on questions on which they have left themselves some choice of action. Sir Richard Cartwright gave it to be understood, when before his constituents for re-election, that the length of the term of office which he and his colleagues would enjoy would depend upon the redemption of the pledges which the party gave to the country when in Opposition. Within proper limits, this assertion may prove true; but it is not likely that Sir Richard himself would care to go back, for this purpose, beyond the date of the Ottawa platform. It is evident that he has no great faith in the realization, in the near future, of a Zollverein of the British Empire at large, and that he does cherish hopes of

obtaining some form of reciprocity with the United States. It is evident, however, that the bent of public opinion would compel the Government to stop far short of unrestricted reciprocity. So extensive a scheme as this received no countenance either from the Ottawa platform of 1893, or the election pledges of 1896. And no one expects that even Sir Richard Cartwright will propose anything of the kind.

Mr. Laurier advanced one stage, in point of time, when in his St. John's speech, he pledged himself to settle the Manitoba School Question in six months. But this voluntary stipulation has no significance beyond the time engagement; we learn from it nothing about the method of procedure, or the substance of the proposed measure. We know from another statement, that no settlement is to be attempted in the approaching session. The six months would be reached before the end of January; and unless the second session should begin before that month the shortness of the time named would require the greatest expedition after the measure was laid before Parliament. Will the measure find acceptance from the great opponents of remedial legislation, so that it can pass virtually without opposition? The short time mentioned raises this question, unless Manitoba be prepared to do what Mr. Greenway has pledged himself not to do—to establish by local authority separate schools in the province, will the Roman Catholic authorities of Manitoba abate anything of their demands in respect to these schools? Archbishop Langevin has gone to Rome, and before he left he is reported to have appointed three trusty priests to attend to his interests before the promised commission. If the Pope be willing to agree to have done in Manitoba what Bishop Ireland induced him to consent to for the United States, Mr. Laurier may be able to redeem his promise. The leader of the Opposition has frankly promised his aid to secure remedial legislation.

A set-back to the Zollverein, patronized by Mr. Chamberlain, has come from the blow levelled at it by Mr. Reid, Premier of New South Wales. Mr. Reid thinks the idea impracticable, and that it would be dangerous to the Empire if it could be realized. His fear is that such a compact would unite the rest of the world against Great Britain. Of the fact that France practically does the same thing, Mr. Reid evidently takes no account; and, to tell the truth, the cases are not quite parallel, the "real estate" and commercial transactions of France being on a less extensive scale than those of England. It is difficult to believe the assertion that the criticism of Mr. Reid has proved wholly fatal to the Zollverein idea, as is alleged in some quarters; but as the hope which the scheme inspired was always somewhat lowered by the responsibility which it implied, it is easy to understand that the blow has been felt to be serious.

A modification of all pre-existing methods of ministerial communication with the public has been made by the adventurous M. Tarte. In a newspaper published by him and bearing his name, he has undertaken to supply the world with items of ministerial policy. The practice has at least the merit of novelty. It is neither British, nor French, nor American. A member of Mr. Cleveland's Cabinet is supposed to go far when, as proprietor of the *Atlanta Journal*, he permits it to be known in its columns what course he intends personally to take regarding the Chicago platform and ticket. When Mr. Hincks entered the Cabinet of Lord Sydenham he sold his *Examiner* to Mr. Lesslie; when Mr. Brown entered into a coalition with Sir John Macdonald he thought it proper to make a transfer of the *Globe*; and even if the act was merely