

NORTH OF ENGLAND LETTER.

Canadians have been vigorously assured that "combines" in England are just as prevalent as in the Dominion. It may not be inapposite to give some brief account of the position here. First, in the repugnance of the public are our shipping rings or conferences, and these are not strictly combines, according to our use of the term. They are associations of ship-owners linked together by ties of heavy forfeits, who maintain steamship rates, sometimes at very high levels. That is not so objectionable in itself as their special favoring of continental and American manufacturers at the expense of national rivals. The merchant shipping body is tied to the rings by virtue of agreements, as to rebates which accumulate for eighteen months before becoming payable, and may be estreated if the customer patronizes a rival line. Apart from rebates, the members of the conference are able to harass the unruly by delays and short shipments, while carrying competitors' goods with all proper despatch.

In more trades, great and small, than one can mention, there are associations aiming with more or less effect to curtail production or maintain prices. Some of these are almost wholly beneficent, and none approaches in its tyranny the shipping rings. Then we have our combines proper, or trusts, which, after buying up the preponderant half or whole of existing businesses, in some one line, proceed to administer all as one. Except the wallpaper concern, substantially all of these are in some branch of the textile trade. And every single one of them affords some ground for grievance. If the shareholder is satisfied, the customer, the competitor, or the supply houses, are not; and most of the combines have succeeded perfectly in dissatisfying everybody. The financially weak, with inflated capital, small cash resources and a leaky monopoly, are least disliked by those who have business to do with them. The stronger may have conferred some new benefits on their trade, but hardly in the way of price, and not without some accompaniment of new mischief. Indeed, it needs no argument to show that either Peter or Paul must be ground down and oppressed to provide dividends upon the purely fanciful prices paid for businesses which were well enough in their own earlier way.

One happens to have been shown the inside of various workings of the English combines. I am able to point to one engineering firm broken because it dared to supply machinery to a rival of a great combine, and to the ruin of the competitor so supplied by a disastrous course of cutting prices beneath cost. Also to point to instances of trade "driven out of the country," or at least of imports let in by the stubbornness of another. Again I can speak of the humiliation by threats of most important merchant houses who have been obliged to buy worse articles from one combine than they could from another combine, obliquely competitive with the first. Or again, one could show how a powerful combine keeps its competitors small and poor by incessant sapping and mining to filch away their large accounts. Small ones are heeded less; let the combine have all the large ones, and it can rule the roost.

Happily, we are not likely soon to see any increase in the number of industrial combines. Their results have not been so satisfactory as to encourage a multiplication of them. Looser federations of manufacturers are more manageable, and there is little complaint about such. But we do need to find a means of mastering the shipping monopolists and any action of Canada in the same direction will be noted with interest. Still, it is apparent that, while men are content to sign their natural rights away, and to enter into privy bargains with the monopolizers, the chances of interfering successfully between parties are made small.

There is another notable instance of profit-sharing, or industrial co-partnership, than that detailed by Mr. T. C. Taylor, M.P., on his appearance at the Canadian Club in Toronto. It also is in the woollen trade, and in Yorkshire, and its name is Wm. Thomson & Co., Limited, of Woodhouse Mills, Huddersfield. Manufacturers that are interested in "welfare work" may obtain much that is infor-

mative from my friend, Mr. George Thomson. His system has survived the shock of 19 years, and still works well. A singularity is that no piece-work exists, formerly there was payment by piece, but workers are now paid on a basis calculated from their earnings at that time. No married women are employed, but on leaving to be married, women receive a small dowry from the insurance fund. Women at 60 and men at 65 qualify for pensions, and in sickness or at death for after benefits. A minimum wage, based on the cost of living in the district obtains, and no person receives less than this, while most receive more. Capital receives 5 per cent. interest, and the profits in excess of standing charges are divided and added to the capital account of each worker. After a brief probation, designed to demonstrate his desirability as a member of the mill community, each worker must acquire at least one £ share. At Woodhouse Mills the master gets a fair livelihood, a decent return for his investment, and has about him a happy and contented set of partners who do their best to get the work done well and expeditiously. And in some senses that position is perhaps preferable to amassing vast riches.

Before these lines see print, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman will doubtless bear a peer's title. If not a mercantile man himself, the new premier is of a commercial family. His father, a founder of the J. & W. Campbell & Co. merchant house of Glasgow, and his maternal uncle, one of the Bannerman Mills Company family, of Manchester, have made Sir Henry one of the wealthiest of Scots-Englishmen. With C.-B.'s elevation to office, and the formation of the uncouthly named "Free Importation of Canadian Cattle Association of Great Britain," the perennial question will be revived. The future is quite inscrutable, for the only parties who bandy words about the embargo are those interested in its removal or retainment. As Liberal candidates in the agricultural districts are always disposed to show themselves the "farmers' friend," a number may be expected to pledge themselves to uphold the existing condition.

Approving note is made in the Manchester papers of the tendency of Winnipeg dry goods buyers to come here, and to Bradford, to make their purchases. It is observed that they, as well as buyers in the Maritime Provinces, exhibit a greater degree of enterprise than is common among customers for similar quantities elsewhere. Their advantage is not limited to price, the endless variety and the prospect of making some unique discovery, are attractions. Our own drapers are regular enough in their pilgrimages, but it is relatively seldom that retailers come from overseas.

NORTH COUNTRY.

Manchester, December 8th.

A NEW YEAR THOUGHT.

A prominent Canadian has expressed the opinion and the fervent hope that as the nineteenth century belonged to the United States, so the twentieth is Canada's. He meant to draw a parallel between the marvellous development of the Republic in the century just past, and the surely equal progress on the eve of being made by the Dominion. There are few who do not believe the parallel was a just one. Half a decade of that new century has gone, and even this short period has already done much to show that if immediate indications count, the working out of the resources of this half of the continent will surpass in rapidity the way in which even those of the United States were exploited, wonderful as that was.

The extraordinary influx of new settlers, and the consequent quick doubling and trebling of the wheat and other grain crops in the West; the enormous increase in the country's aggregate trade; the multiplication of industrial establishments; the increase of bank deposits and clearings; lastly, the general high state of prosperity of all classes; all these serve to show how speedily the Dominion of Canada is making its position as a coming great world-nation. And all likewise accentuate the parallel so aptly drawn by Sir Wilfrid Laurier between it and our neighbors.