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THE SITUATION.

Mr. Sidney Webster, who passes for an authority on the Behring Sea question, when interviewed by the *New York Herald*, at Cadenosbid, Lago di Como, states positively, as on the authority of the blue book, that Lord Salisbury frequently sought to obtain a judicial decision of the points in issue, but that Canada refused to assent. This puts the matter in a new light. It is difficult to believe that Lord Salisbury would have been willing to accept the decision of the Supreme Court of the United States as final, if it were adverse to Great Britain. Such a decision would be the easiest way out of the difficulty for the American executive if it should be adverse to the pretensions of Mr. Blaine, as it probably would be. As a political move, it is difficult for Mr. Blaine to retrace the false step he has taken; but if the Supreme Court told him that he was standing on untenable ground, he would be relieved from all embarrassment. The discovery is alleged to have been recently made that the law relating to Alaska does not provide for an appeal to the Supreme Court; and this appears to be the case, for there is a bill before Congress to remedy this defect. The Canadian authorities are said to have seen this difficulty, even the Attorney-General at Washington was assuming that an appeal was possible. On the understanding that it is not to bind Canada, what objection can there be to a reference to the Supreme Court of the United States?

Recent advices state that the prospect of the Irish potato crop is not so dismal as it was some time ago, fine weather having improved the chances. But there will be a serious shortage in some parts of the country. The Government has looked forward to providing employment by railway construction, and it is asking one of the companies, on the authority of legislation of last session, to begin work. The remedy of the Irish Nationalists, if Dillon and O'Brien speak for them, is the old advice of "no rent," a little modified so as to read no more rent than the payer thinks he can afford to pay; advice which has

caused the arrest of these two orators for conspiracy to prevent tenants paying rent. Tenants who depend upon the potato, that failing, will have neither food nor money; but those who have other crops will not be in so bad a condition. An appeal to America for aid for those in want will be made. It is not impossible that the arrest of Dillon and O'Brien may cut both ways: while it may intimidate some who would be glad of any excuse not to pay rent, it may unite the Nationalists who were getting at loggerheads among themselves, at the very moment when the support of the Church of their cause was falling away.

The collector of Customs at Buffalo has been in the habit of charging duty on the tools and household goods of persons who went from Canada to that port, to work for a season and then return. He assumed that these persons were evading the pre-contract labor law, and took this means of inflicting a fine upon them. But the plan, when brought to the test, is found not to work. The Treasury Department at Washington decides, very properly, that the Customs Act cannot be used to supplement the contract labor law, and such things as the Buffalo collector has been charging duty upon will have to go free in future. The decision informs the collector that the law exempts from duty the professional books, instruments, and tools of trade, occupation and employment of persons arriving in the United States, without reference to the fact that they may or may not be *bona fide* emigrants. What means had the collector of finding out that the persons seeking temporary employment in the States did not intend to remain there? It would not be easy for him to ascertain the fact, and if ascertained, it had no significance for the purpose for which it was sought.

Many attempts have been made, without success, to turn peat beds in Canada to account. The latest experiment is being made in the county of Dundas, where the beds are reported to be so extensive as to be practically inexhaustible. Pressed peat, with a fine glossy texture, is reported to be selling at \$1 a ton. If these statements be true, Ontario possesses the best possible substitute for coal. No other fuel, not even coal, is nearly so cheap as pressed peat at \$1 a ton. We are not aware of its relative calorific power, which would depend largely on the depth of the peat bed. A bed thirty-six feet deep should produce fuel having nearly five-sixths the calorific power of soft coal. If such fuel could reach the consumer for \$3 a ton, in sufficient quantities, it would displace all other kinds of fuel. The trouble with many of our peat beds is that they are too shallow to have thoroughly solidified, and that they cannot be drained. The latter defect can be overcome by dredging machinery, to a certain depth, but not beyond, and in great depth lies the one essential thing. We shall be glad to hear more particulars about this peat enterprise, and the prospect it holds out. The duty on coal, that folly of follies, can be made comparatively harmless if the

promises of the new peat venture be realized.

Once more the American mackerel fishery shows a serious decline, so serious that, unless a revival should take place, the practical extinction of this fishery may be looked for. Last year the decline was very marked, the total product being reduced to 6,281 barrels; this year it has fallen to the little more than nominal amount of 2,659 barrels. And these few barrels were obtained, as usual, by the payment of a bounty. In this state of the supply, there is a strong demand in the United States for Canadian mackerel, not less than 5,552 barrels having been shipped hence to Boston during the year, nearly twice as much as was sent there last year, 2,659 barrels. The reason why our fishermen have been so much more successful than the American is the mackerel ran near the shore, within the three-mile limit. These facts show that the Americans require our mackerel, and that if they do not obtain the right to catch it in Canadian waters, they must buy it from our fishermen. There must be something faulty in the American mode of taking the mackerel, or their own shore fisheries would not be exhausted. The mackerel fishery has received more attention from the American Government than any other, it being the only one to which a bounty is given. The bounty has not saved the fish from threatened extinction, but by putting a premium on their capture has tended to bring about the present deplorable condition of that fishery. The pretence that access to our fishery is not valued by Americans, because it is not necessary for them, is disproved by the smallness of the mackerel catch.

The confession of Cain, Buet and Reid, the train wreckers, fills nearly seven columns of the *New York Sun*. They say that Master Workman Lee, of the Knights of Labor, gave them money with which to escape to Canada, a statement which he denies. In point of law probably three witnesses against one would not, in this case, be held to have the significance that it would if the evidence was not that of accomplices. Unless corroborated by independent testimony, this evidence cannot be accepted, as against third parties. It is improbable that such testimony can be got, and the wreckers are likely to escape, except perhaps those who have confessed their guilt. The *New York Bulletin*, in reviewing the confessions, finds "that the plotting was cold-blooded and complete; that the leaders were indifferent whether life was lost or not, and that murderous propositions were defeated by the protests of men in the league who were not equal to such desperate measures."

Little significance is attached to the decision of the Trades' Union Congress, at Liverpool, in favor of an eight hours law. The vote was very close, the majority being only 38 in a delegation of 350; the small trades were over-represented in the Congress, and the cotton interest, which comprises nearly a million of hands, declares