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THE SITUATION.

Conflicting statements regarding the progress and fate of the negotiations before the Fishery Commission, at Washington, continue to be made. According to one account the commission is about to close without agreeing upon anything; on the other side, a positive semi-official looking contradiction is given to this allegation. Practically nothing reliable about the course of the negotiations has reached the public. But if the commissioners had found themselves hopelessly at variance, on every point, it is extremely improbable that they would have continued together so long, trying to convince one another. They were four hours in session on Wednesday, and will meet again to-morrow. The interval almost looks as if time for reference to England and Canada had been taken; but this conjecture may not be the true one. It is now said that a number of Republican Senators would probably aid in ratifying a reasonable agreement, and if this be trustworthy news, an obstacle to settlement has been removed.

Intelligence of the final conclusion of the Quebec loan of three millions and a half of dollars has long been patiently waited for. But it has not come. As a previous loan had been negotiated in Paris, it seemed not impossible that the loan now authorized might be taken in New York. It was afterwards understood that the Paris loan was a round-about affair, the money really coming from England; and it was not a violent supposition that brokers might be found in New York to do what brokers in Paris had done, if Americans themselves should refuse to advance to the Province of Quebec. The time that has elapsed since the negotiation of the loan in New York was begun, four months, tells of something more than a hitch; the *Montreal Gazette* is probably correct in announcing definite failure. It seems that the Quebec government expected, at one time, that a deposit on account of the loan would be made in the Chemical National Bank, of New York, and that enquiry was made by it whether such deposit had been made there. Further than this, it is stated,

the Chemical Bank knows nothing of the loan. The sterility of the negotiations cannot fail to be embarrassing. A great deal of time has been wasted to no purpose; and if anything has been done towards placing the loan elsewhere, no announcement of the progress made, or even of the simple fact, has reached the public.

A European syndicate, having Paris for its headquarters, has been operating in tin, copper, spelter and lead. The corner in tin is temporarily successful, the price having reached the highest point ever known, £165, in London; and it is doubtful whether a break can be made till February. In the meantime, the monopolists will make large gains. Copper was next selected for attack, and the price forced up to £67 15. This operation was aided by a fire in the Calumet and Hecla mine, and lake ingots have advanced to 15 cents a lb., which is equal to fifty per cent. To raise the price of spelter, a combination of European miners to restrict production has been resorted to, the compact to begin on the 1st January and to last a year. This speculation is mainly in the future. A considerable advance in the price of lead has taken place, as a result of the purchases which are known to have taken place, presumably by the syndicate. The combination is on a colossal scale, and its object is to compel the public to pay artificially high prices for the benefit of the operators. The plan is to suspend the natural operation of the law of supply and demand; those by whom it was formed and is carried on may be ranked among the parasites of commerce, who in these days are becoming increasingly numerous. Society will probably some day find a rough means of protecting itself against their ravages.

This is the day of colossal rings and combinations. The Whiskey Trust, of the United States, is one of the latest. It is said to command a capital of forty millions of dollars. This appraisal is reached by combining the property of the distillers; it is then placed it under the trust for twenty-five years, and certificates given for it. The centre of the movement is in Kentucky, where eighty-five per cent. of the distilleries are located. The organization is not yet complete, five distilleries desiring other security than the certificates of the Trust. A few refractory ones may be bought up. Restriction of production is said to be the weapon used; production has certainly been excessive, and if some medium could be found, between over production and monopoly, a real want would have been met. A Sugar Trust is working on the same lines. The big refineries are buying out the small ones, as a means of establishing monopoly. All agree not to sell below a certain figure, and the public is asked to endure the restriction which is thus implied, and submit to the monopoly. These combinations will one day bring their own remedy; and we almost shudder to think of the form in which, other measures failing, it may possibly make its appearance.

The first annual Report of the Inter-State Commission has been made. That the commission is prejudiced in favor of the law under which it exists is probable; however this may be, it describes the general operation of the Inter-State law as being beneficial both to the railways and the public. The commission finds a striking proof of the recklessness of corporate management in the fact that 108 roads, with an aggregate mileage of 11,066 miles, are in the hands of receivers; a result due to bringing foolish or dishonest schemes into existence, getting public money for their support, and creating worthless evidences of debt. One result of this headlong recklessness is that several States have so altered their constitutions, as to prevent the State or municipalities aiding railways either by money or credit. And State laws have been passed to make compulsory the subscription of a *bona fide* capital, before a corporation shall be allowed to issue its "securities." Superfluous roads entered on destructive competition, with the view of finally getting the spoils of the conqueror, and bringing the public to their feet. Freights were carried at a loss, on secret terms, large dealers practically dictating what they shall pay, and small dealers were brought to ruin, through unequal competition. These evils the Commission was intended to cure; and it is believed that the principles on which the Interstate law is based will prove enduring. Some questions yet remain to be settled. One is whether express companies shall be brought under the law. The provision against the sudden raising of rate may be extended to joint rates. The right to regulate the publication of rates may be given to the Commission, as well as regulations for the publication of statistics. Other changes in the law may be found necessary, in future, and brought about as circumstances dictate.

Just now, when Manitoba is so anxious to secure railway connection with the United States, a disposition is evinced in the American press to cry down existing Canadian railway connections, in the States. These railways are, in fact, American, to all intents and purposes; they exist on American soil and were chartered by American legislatures; yet solely because they are connected with the Grand Trunk and the Canadian Pacific they are denounced. The *New York Sun* says: "'Tis our policy and duty to exclude them. The thieving, sucking antennæ of the Canadian devil fish railways stretching over our territory, must be cut short off. Our sufferance thus far of their repulsive piracy has been weak and unstatesmanlike." And in its commercial column, the same journal says of one of these railways: "Its piratical policy has called attention to the defect in the interstate law, in that it fails to protect American roads from foreign competitors like the Grand Trunk and Canadian Pacific." There is nothing foreign about these roads, in the United States, except their Canadian connections. How would it sound, if an influential Canadian journal should say, with respect to the Canada Southern Railway, an American concern on our territory, that Canada must be protected against its