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THE SITUATION.

The picking up of odds and ends of several appropriations, made for other purposes, and applying them to the construction of the Yukon telegraph, is the latest reminder that Governments are loth to relinquish the occasional practice of making such irregular transfers. Nearly a century ago, Lord Melville (Dundas), came under censure of the Imperial Parliament for this sort of dealing, and yet the rebuke did not prevent new crops of the same irregularity, even in Canada. It would have been better if it had been possible to bring this telegraph expenditure under the rule which permits of exceptional expenditure, in advance of appropriation, when some unforeseen contingency arises to justify the license. A case in which a charter was granted, the year before, can scarcely be said to have been unforeseen; if anything was unforeseen it was the assumed necessity for the Government expenditure, and the question is whether that can be made to adjust itself to the legal provision.

"Hug the machine for me!" Such is the form of congratulation in which a machine politician indulged telegraphically, when the result of the West Elgin election became known. In his admiration of the result of the action of the machine, he became ecstatic over his own handiwork. The glimpses which we get through the election court, of the operations of the machine, create quite different feelings in the minds of the sober-minded people of, let us hope, both political parties. It is well that the deadly hand of the machine has been detected at its dastardly work of making the appeal to the ballot a farce. There has been too much covering-up of wrong-doing, in the form of sawing off; balancing the wrong-doing of one party, in one place, against the wrong-doing of the other party, in another place. Short of actual fraud, the machine has by far too free play in elections. A returning officer ought not to be asked to appoint deputies on the suggestion or request of either candidate. His duties should be impartially performed; but in these days the machine

aims to make him its slave. In this particular, both parties are to blame; their methods are similar, if not identical; the difference is that only the party that happens to be in power, at the time, has the chance to make the most of the machine. We have reached a point, when a reform is necessary, if we are to preserve anything more than the mere husk of free institutions.

Hitherto the omnipotence of the Eastern Extension Telegraph Company, in its opposition to the Canada-Australian cable project, has been confidently asserted. If this was true, at one time, it is true no longer. The company came out into the open, as it were, when it sent a deputation to wait on Mr. Chamberlain, and Sir Michael Hicks Beach, to present its views on the question. The result, the cable informs us, in general terms, was total failure. The English press, so far as we are aware, is unanimous in their view; the case is one in which private interests must be subordinated to the public interest, since in the event of war, the fate of the empire might depend upon an all-British cable line.

The charter of the Royal Niger Company, granted in 1886, when the name was changed from that of National African Company, has been revoked, the British Government taking over the company's territories, which extend along the coast from the Benin river, where it joins the boundary of Lagos, to the mouth of Rio del Rey, 9° longitude. Inland the territories include the whole basin of the Lower Niger from Binue to beyond the rapids of Bonsa or the Rio del Rey. This transfer is a not unusual step in the process of British colonization. The terms appear to be liberal to the company; £865,000 and half the proceeds of royalties on minerals. The day may come when the British colonies, in Africa, may form one or two federations. Already there is a proposal to unite them, and with them Egypt, by rail. This nation-building will be attended by occasional wars. We must not expect that Omdurman, decisive as the result was, will ensure perpetual peace. In Algeria, France, after seventeen years of incessant war, had not got as far into the interior as the Romans and the Turks had, in former times, extended. By the aid of railways, England may make much more rapid progress in Africa.

In Newfoundland, the game of cross-purposes is still being played. Aggression has hitherto been on the side of the French. Now their fishery is being starved by the colonists refusing them bait. The French, on their part, are removing the nets of the local fishermen, under cover of that provision of the treaty which guarantees French fishermen against interference. This mutual antagonism cannot, in the nature of things, go on for ever. Fortunately, as we must consider it under the circumstances, the French fishery on the coast of the island is about played out.

After it had become certain that the Hague Congress would not agree to a reduction of armaments, the question what it would do in the article of arbitration was still doubtful. The doubt has been removed by a decision against obligatory arbitration, unless under special conventions. In other words, if two countries have a standing or make a special agreement to arbitrate their differences, there will be arbitration; if not, not.