

ESTABLISHED 1866

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TORONTO, FRIDAY, DECEMBER 31, 1897.

### THE SITUATION.

Messrs. Petersen & Tate have made the second deposit required of them for the due fulfillment of their contract in connection with a swift Atlantic line of steamers. If they had definitely failed to do their part, as so often announced by irresponsible persons, they would not have made deposits which failure would forfeit. Whether this brightening of the prospect will be followed by entire success a little time may serve to show. Mr. Dobell claims that the new vessels will be superior to any now on the Atlantic, which is saying a great deal.

Mr. Sifton, the Canadian Minister of the Interior, has been discussing and arranging, at Washington, to facilitate the relief expedition to the Klondyke. It is understood that Mr. Sifton went to Washington because Mr. Alger, the United States Secretary, is ill and unable to come to Ottawa. Most of those in need of succor will be found north of the Canadian line, but the relief expedition will have to pass through Canadian territory on its way to the objective points. A representative of the Canadian Government will accompany the expedition and serve as a guide. Mr. Sifton who has personal experience of part of the route, fully understands the difficulty of the undertaking. He is, no doubt, right in the belief that great difficulty will be encountered in passing the narrow defile with a large number of reindeer. To what extent these passes will be incumbered with snow is not known; on the Peace River, where the climate is much milder, snow in the defile shas sometimes been found twenty feet deep. Whether the snow, if found to be deep, will be solid enough to carry the animals is not known. Russian experience in Central Asia, is that the camels sometimes sank in the snowy defiles, in large numbers, never to rise again. A pass may, in this way, become incumbered with dead and dying animals. Such things have happened as that expeditions, not unlike this, failed to get through. Mr. Sifton seems to be not entirely free from the fear that something of this kind may happen to the Klondyke expedition. The Canadian Government has not been able to get through twenty-five tons of provisions sent on some time ago. To feed 600 reindeer a great deal of food will have to be found, and what cannot cer-

tainly be picked up on the way, will have to be carried. As a compensation for this the reindeer would, if necessary, serve for food, either at the end of the journey, if it were completed, or on the way in case of a breakdown. The expedition itself is not likely to perish. That it may be successful is the fervent wish of three countries.

Lord Salisbury, with whom rests the decisive word, declines consent to the proposal of the United States to suspend for one year the capture of seals at sea. The ground of his decision is the attitude of Canada, which is that of objection; her interest in sealing being larger than that of England, determines the issue. Before the decision of the English Premier was formally given, the United States, knowing that the refusal of Canada would be decisive, took steps to close the American market to the skins of seals caught at sea. Congress passed an Act authorizing the prohibition of what are known as pelagic seal skins: skins of seals taken at sea, sent to England to be cured, and some of them thence exported. Confiscation is the penalty for infraction of this law. How are such skins to be distinguished from those taken on the Pribyloff islands? They are assumed to be all branded, being caught when young for that purpose. The branding injures the fur to some extent; and as the seals become the property of their captors, the injury done is to unknown persons. Under what rule of international law the mutilation could be justified, no one has taken the trouble to show; the right of exclusion in the United States, or in any other government, is clear; the wanton branding of animals that do not belong to the branders but become the property of their captors when they swim off a prescribed distance in the ocean, remains equally without defence or justification. The bill of seal exclusion with its penalty of confiscation has not yet been signed by the President; interested parties have asked him to delay that act just a few days to allow them to get into their possession the soon-to-be-forbidden skins, and when they have got what they want, to close down on rivals with the best pace executive speed can attain. The President is said to incline to meet the wishes of these enterprising open-and-shut petitioners, and to be likely to time the signing to their fervent desire. That is evidently one of the things presidents are made for. This measure will somewhat restrict the purchasers of Alaska seal furs, though perhaps not much, for American buyers may be trusted to find some means of getting what they want on the best terms.

One of the deputation who waited on President McKinley to induce him to sign the pelagic sealing prohibition bill, on a particular day, and not before, Mr. Hugo Jaeckel, does not like the clause which threatens confiscation of all pelagic sealskins, whether raw, dressed, or manufactured. The manufacturers do not give up the hope of being able to disguise these skins in made-up garments, and so evade the penalty. But this clause, Mr. Jaeckel thinks, may prove a menace to the American fur trade, in that particular. Importers will have to prove that their skins come from the seal islands. All the skins have to be sent to England to be prepared, including those of the Alaska Company, and it will be necessary to keep the two kinds separate there, and to present documentary evidence to the American custom house that the animals were not caught at sea. It suits Congress to try to secure a monopoly of the American market for that company. To this we, as outsiders, have nothing to say, though we regard it as bad policy from the American point of view. Another thing which Congress proposes to do almost deserves our thanks. Our neighbors