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THE SITUATION.

A little storm of opposition to the Mining Bill of the Ontario Government, has caused some important modifications to be made in committee. The royalty clause is suspended for seven years, no doubt a wise change, and it would probably have been better if it had been excised instead of suspended; for it is not probable that, at the end of that time, its enforcement will be possible, and while it stands in reserve, there may be danger that it will act as a deterrent to enterprise. Nor has it been possible to raise the price of mining lands, as was intended. The hope of substituting a system of leasing mines for selling the mineral land is at present feeble. It was worth while to throw out feelers on these several points, and if success in the line sought has not been obtained, opinion has been elicited showing what it is at present possible and what it is not possible to do. The power of regulation over mines, in case a combine should be formed to enforce monopoly, should in all cases be retained. This may be difficult for a local government to do, as the sale of the product is an act of commerce, and restraints upon it are in the nature of interference with trade. But the granting power ought, in some way, to be enabled to interfere when necessary for the protection of the public interest.

By the irony of fate, a local Newfoundland law, the Bait Act, is the first to meet open resistance at the hands of Newfoundland fishermen. They insist on practical nullification by selling prohibited bait to their French rivals, whom they thus give the only available means of effective competition against themselves. The local Government has had to take measures for putting down the lawlessness of the island fishermen. If they must quarrel with somebody, it is better that they should quarrel among themselves. The Bait Act, if properly enforced, would be the most

effective weapon which the islanders could use against the rivals by whom they are most severely pressed, and it is one which they have a perfect right to employ. But if they throw it away, they give the French fishermen facilities for overbearing themselves which could not be got in any other way. From this point of view, the attempted nullification is serious, for it looks as if it would not be easy altogether to prevent its success. The French fishermen must be greatly elated at the turn affairs have taken, while the British war ships are on hand calmly surveying the fray, in the interest of police regulations. Discontent on the island has been systematically promoted by ranting politicians; but having sown the wind, they must not be surprised if they reap the whirlwind.

Abolition of the municipal ward system, or rather the reduction of the number of wards to one half, in Toronto, may possibly be sanctioned by the Legislature. The notion is that, as the result of large polling divisions, the excessive sectionism of municipal politics will disappear, and better men will come forward to do the work of aldermen. What is the ward system? It is the last word of democracy applied to the municipality. In a city there are different interests to be represented; these interests are sometimes aggressive, and merciless towards others, seeking only their own good at the expense of everything else. There are two ways of dealing with such elements; one by making such arrangements that one will overbear another, or leaving the victory to the strongest in a fair contest. But it is charged against the ward system that it engenders partial and corrupt action. To some extent this is true. It remains to be seen whether log-rolling would be any improvement. As to getting a different or a better class of men in the Council, it must be remembered that, under either plan of election, the arena in which they are to play their part must remain the same. The sacrifice demanded in the city of Toronto at the hands of aldermen who try to do their duty is onerous, and they get no thanks, but plenty of abuse. So long as this state of things remains, it is vain to look for practical improvement in the composition of the Council.

Where lies the power of granting municipalities the right to decide upon Local Option? This question, raised in the courts, must, of course, be fought out there. Mr. Mowat has a bill which contemplates a test case being made, and in the meanwhile, pending a decision, provides for the issue of temporary licenses to run for a few months. This is the only thing practicable in the meantime. Neither the Dominion nor the Provincial Legislature can assume to grant the power of local option, till it is finally decided which has the right to do so.

According to some of the political prophets of Washington, reciprocity between Canada and the United States is not looming up in brilliant perspective. Mr. Blaine is said to be disposed to hold out for as good terms as the Canadian Opposition say

they would offer if in power. But they are not in power, or in a position to offer anything, and if they were there is no certainty as to the extent to which they would go. M. Laurier has distinctly said that his plan would not involve discrimination against Great Britain. Mr. Blaine may, of course, prefer to wait to see what Providence and the Canadian Opposition, when it gets power, will do. But his hold on office is not certainly good for more than two years, during which he must act, if he would be certain to act at all. There is no present prospect of a change of government in Canada within that time.

As Lord Knutsford puts it, the treaty rights connected with Newfoundland constitute an Imperial obligation, which England could not vacate if she would. The object of what has been called the "Coercion Bill" is to secure the observance of the *modus vivendi* of 1891. The Colonial Secretary contends that it touches neither local questions in Newfoundland nor the independence of the local legislature. The second reading of the bill is postponed to the 15th May, in the hope that the legislature of Newfoundland may meanwhile pass an act which will make the pressing of the British bill unnecessary; otherwise the inference is, it is likely to be carried, though the promise is made that the minor points referred to arbitration will not be pressed till the colony has been fully consulted. The delegates have apparently accomplished nothing. The local Government has refused representation on the arbitration, and, in fact, to agree to anything except an arbitration of every point which it is possible to raise, and most of which France holds to be indisputable. The colonists refuse to see that the Imperial obligation is binding upon themselves, as well as the treaty-executing authority. We trust there may be some ground for the hope that the Imperial bill will not be required, but will be made unnecessary by the action of the legislature of Newfoundland.

There seems to be some reaction against the tendency lately manifested in France in favor of extreme Protection. High prices and the prospect of scarcity may prove temporarily fatal to the grain duties. This change happens just at the time when the customs committee of the Chamber of Deputies had prepared a scheme for a great increase of duties. The Free Traders are active and energetic, and a great battle is going on between them and the Protectionists on the new tariff project. The former favor a return to the *regime* of reciprocity treaties, and fear that if the proposed increase of duties took place, the French export trade would suffer severely. The contest in the Chamber, which is expected to last a fortnight, will bring out the relative strength of the two parties, the chances of the Protectionists being, meanwhile, perhaps, better than those of their opponents. In Russia the tendency is towards a more restrictive policy; the proportion of free imports is proposed to be reduced by the taxation of jute, sulphur and other raw products, while the duties