

The Commercial

WINNIPEG, MAY 23, 1888.

THE COMING PROVINCIAL ELECTION.

The mutterings of a political character which usually precede an election are little by little becoming more distinct throughout this Province, and the lines on which the coming provincial struggle is to be fought, are becoming more clearly defined. Six months ago no one could have supposed, that a provincial election in Manitoba would be fought out so soon upon straight old party lines, but so the matter stands at present, and before our harvest is ripe the old fight of Grit and Tory, Conservative and Reformer, will be as in bygone days, as bitter as it is unnecessary and senseless. It might have been expected, that a province which had in the past suffered so much from party discord, and gained so much by a short term of unity, would have avoided if not abhorred the former, and endeavored to prolong the latter. It might also have been expected, and with greater confidence, that a Government which had been hoisted into power by the united efforts of men of all shades of political opinion, would have promptly checked any act of its followers, which would tend to prolong party ascendancy, or mar the growing spirit of political independence. No such influence has been exercised, however, and we find the convention or caucus of the party in power as hide-bound and as party-ridden as ever were such gatherings in the past. The ability lay in the hands of the Government now in power to crush out this spirit of old partyism, but they failed to take advantage of their opportunity. It was accounted dead, and soulless as a dog, its resurrection now feared. But, galvanized into motion and action as it now is, its curse to the Province will not be lighter than while it lived. When a party in power makes such a false step, we may expect the evil to be intensified by the action of a broken and demoralized opposition. As matters stand there can be no doubt about the results of the coming election, and indeed it is difficult to see how a man true to Manitoba can, under present circumstances, do otherwise than support the party now in power. In doing so, however, he may be simply choosing the least of two evils, and if he is one who severs old party ties to give

such support, he may with justice say, that provincial patriotism, and not the good faith so far of the Government on their late no party promises, prompts him to do so. Many such people, while supporting Mr. Greenway's candidates in the coming election, will regret that they must look upon that gentleman as a party figure head, instead of a leader of a united people. The several minor mistakes of the Government might well be looked upon as trifles, but in prolonging partyism they make a big blunder for which they themselves will yet suffer.

A sarcasm on Canadian politics says, that in the work of creation mankind were created male and female until Canada was reached, and there the distinction was changed to grit and tory, and the breeds have been distinct there ever since. Seemingly a Government cannot be found, even in Manitoba, with courage enough to attempt to mix them.

THE COMBINATIONS.

The Parliamentary committee appointed to investigate into the workings and effect of trade combinations, presented its report to the House, at Ottawa, lately. A large amount of evidence was taken before the committee relating to the combines and alleged combines, many days being consumed in examining witnesses, including persons interested in the combinations, as well as those opposed to such trade arrangements. The result has been that the committee unhesitatingly condemns the combines, and proposes stringent legislation against them. The subjects examined were: Sugar and groceries, coal, biscuits and confectionery, combinations against Canadian watch case manufacturers, barbed wire, binding twine, agricultural implements, stoves, coffin makers and undertakers, oatmeal millers, combination of egg dealers, barley, and the Canadian Fire Underwriters' association. This presents quite a formidable list of alleged combinations, several of which were hardly known to exist, outside of those immediately interested or affected thereby.

The watch case combination is an international one. It appears that there is a Canadian association of jobbers in United States watches, in affiliation with the association in the latter country. By its constitution any member violating the rules shall forfeit \$500, and may be expelled from the association. The effect of this association is to compel Canadian

watch case manufacturers to join the combination or be frozen out.

The sugar combine is perhaps the best understood of any of the alleged combinations, its having been extensively discussed in the press during the past year. The sugar combination grew out of the unbusinesslike practice of selling sugar at or less than cost. Among wholesale as well as retail dealers, it had long been the practice to make a leader of sugar. All sorts of illegitimate trading and scheming and cutting of prices has been indulged in, in connection with sugar, in order to gain some real or fancied advantage. Cutting sugar prices had been carried to such an extent, that the sugar trade simply meant a dead loss to those who were handling the commodity. The more sugar a house handled, the more it would be out of pocket. Wholesale grocers commenced to cast about for a remedy, and finally an arrangement was made between the wholesale dealers and refiners, which had the desired effect. The wholesale dealers agreed to sell sugar at an advance on refiners' prices of $\frac{3}{8}$ cent on small lots, and $\frac{1}{4}$ cent on lots of fifteen barrels or more. In order to enforce this arrangement, an understanding was arrived at with the refiners, whereby the latter were to charge $\frac{1}{8}$ cent per pound more to grocers who refused to enter the combination. In addition to this extra charge, grocers outside the combination, or Dominion Grocers' Guild, as it was called, were not allowed the $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. discount which was given by refiners to the guild grocers, for cash. Altogether the advantage received by the guild grocers amounted to about 30 cents per 100 pounds. The guild furnished refiners with a list of wholesale grocers who adhered to the combination prices, and all others were charged the $\frac{1}{8}$ cent extra, without discount. A number of grocers who did both a wholesale and retail business, and who were at first members of the guild, were subsequently dropped off the list. Members who refused to adhere to the fixed prices were also expelled. It will be admitted that the guild was formed to remedy a bad state of affairs, and that the $\frac{1}{8}$ cent advance is a very moderate profit on sugar, and, therefore, no injustice to the general public. Still the principle underlying the combination is not such as to be considered worthy of recommendation.

But the grocers' guild did not stop with its efforts to regulate prices of sugar.