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The Journal of Commerce

FINANCE AND INSURANCE REVIEW.

MONTREAL, JULY 27, 1877.

A DOMINION POLICE.

The calamitous results which have followed the late railway strike in the United States cannot fail to cause uneasiness to reflecting minds, and we earnestly hope that they will lead the Ministers of the Crown in the Dominion to consider seriously the best mode of securing the public peace. As to the strikes themselves, there can be no second opinion as to the guilt of the strikers. No one in the present day would wish to interfere with the right of employes of all classes to terminate existing engagements at their pleasure, provided they act in accordance with law. It is, however, essentially necessary in the interests of society at large, including all classes of labourers or operatives that there should be free competition, and that those who choose to leave their employments shall not be permitted to resort to violence to prevent others from accepting work at rates which they decline taking. Strikes on railroads, as has been found by late bitter experience, both in the United States and Canada, are not confined to one or two localities, but are almost sure to occur simultaneously along the whole

line of one, or perhaps of two or three railroads, and, if the outside populace elect to side with the strikers, there is great danger of civil war; indeed, it would be hard to characterize the late disturbances in the United States which have occurred simultaneously in several States, as anything short of civil war. With regard to the loss of property it is to be hoped that the law will enable the railroad companies to recover, either from the cities or from the State, and, the more local the liability, the better. It is evident that there is great uncertainty in the United States, as there was in Canada on the occasion of the Grand Trunk strike, on the subject of the responsibility for affording protection. It seems to us clear that the protective force, whatever it may be, ought to be under the control of the supreme authority, and that it ought to be a thoroughly well-drilled and efficient force, equal to the line regiments in the service of the Crown, and supported both by cavalry and artillery. The problem to be solved is, to secure such a force for the Dominion without incurring the expense of a standing army and keeping a large number of men in comparative idleness. Fortunately there is no occasion to try experiments at the risk of failure. There is a force in existence which, with modifications suitable for our own wants, is precisely what would meet all the requirements of the case—we refer to the Irish constabulary. Nearly six months ago, after the Grand Trunk strike had demonstrated the inefficiency of the means at the disposal of the local authorities to suppress tumults, we pointed out the expediency of establishing a Dominion police. We are not aware that we have any new arguments to offer, and, as we are not in possession of the objections which may occur to others to the establishment of such a force, we should hardly have thought it worth while to revert to the subject, were it not that there is some chance that the apprehensions of the public may be a little roused by the recent tumults in the United States, and that there may be a disposition to throw off that apathy which is the normal state of public opinion. Those, who advocate such a force, labour under a serious disadvantage, which indeed attends all proposals for important changes. If such a scheme should find favor with the government of the day, the press which ordinarily supports that government would no doubt be ready to recommend it to the public, but, as a rule, Ministerial papers are chary of committing themselves to projects which, if supported by them, might embarrass their friends in power unless

they decided on adopting them. On the other hand, an Opposition press is equally unwilling to commit itself on the subject of a measure not of a party character, when by so doing they might possibly be lending aid to the government. All these are difficulties in the way of bringing public opinion to bear on the government and parliament of the Dominion. We will venture under the circumstances, that we have stated, to repeat in substance the heads of the scheme that we suggested in February last. The Dominion Government has already a police force in its pay in the North-West, a portion of which is mounted. It has already artillery corps both at Kingston and Quebec, probably quite sufficient for that arm. We maintain that there should be a large Dominion constabulary or police force adequate to supply the requirements of all our large cities, towns and counties, and liable to serve at any point. We may remark here that, as it is desirable that as large a force as can be usefully employed should be maintained, the members of the constabulary might be entrusted with the performance of a great many duties such as the service of writs of processes, &c., which are now performed for pay without any public advantage. A considerable fee fund would accrue to the city, town or county, by performing such services through their constabulary. We may observe that we know, as a fact, that elsewhere such services have been performed with great success by police, and that a considerable revenue has been obtained thereby. To revert to the scheme: it would be essential that a reserve force should be maintained at a central point such as Kingston, where all the machinery exists at this moment. The force should be so arranged that every member of it should spend a certain time in the year, say a month, at head-quarters, and be subjected to drill and other military instruction. There can be no doubt that, with the means of recruiting at all principal points of the Dominion, an ample supply of good men could be obtained, on whom thorough reliance could be placed. In the event of internal tumult the force at head-quarters would be available, with our railway facilities, on very short notice, at any point; and, if it were found necessary to supplement it, the large cities would be able to send their force, or a considerable portion of it, and to employ temporarily extra men. The cost would, in all such cases, fall as it does at present on the disturbed district. The permanent cost to the Dominion would only be the force, kept at head-quarters, which might be estimated at one-twelfth or, perhaps, one-