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The Province of Shan-Si.

Considering the enormous and constantly increasing consumption of coal by the world's warships, its ocean greyhounds and freight and passenger steamers of all sorts, the immense demand made on the coal beds by the railways, the countless factories and mills, to say nothing of the demand for ordinary heating purposes, it is no wonder that thoughtful people sometimes ask how long this can go on and where the world is to find its supply of fuel in the centuries to come. It is not of course certain that the world will have to go on evolving power for its industries in the present cumbrous fashion. It may be that the inventive wit of man will discover means to operate the world's machinery with a far smaller expenditure of fuel than is required at present. But, however that may be, the bottom of the world's coal-bin is hardly in sight yet. Not to speak of the resources of Europe and America in respect to this source of power, there are in China immense coal fields which British enterprise and capital are about to develop. It is stated that the British Government has secured for a British syndicate a long-term concession for working the coal and other mines of the Chinese province of Shan-Si, building railroads there and in general developing the province. These coal fields of Shan-Si province are said to be among the richest in the world, covering an area of more than fourteen thousand square miles and estimated to contain enough coal to supply the entire world at the present rate of consumption for two thousand years or more. A large proportion of it is the best quality of anthracite, the quantity being estimated at six hundred and thirty billion tons. There is nearly as much bituminous coal of a fine quality for producing coke. In close connection with the coal is abundance of the best iron ore, and in many places petroleum also abounds. This Shan-Si country lies on the Yellow River and has suffered terrible disasters from floods. It is immensely rich in agricultural as well as mineral resources. When the resources of modern civilization are applied to the problems which the country presents, it is probable that means may be found of protecting the country from floods, and the development of its resources in connection with Chinese cheap labor which is abundant, will doubtless create an immense volume of trade.

The British Position in the Far East.

The Imperial Government has been recently subjected to some pretty sharp hostile criticism in reference to its policy in the far East. Lord Salisbury and Mr. George Curzon being both absent on sick leave, Mr. Arthur Balfour has had to meet the brunt of the attack on the Government in Parliament. Mr. Balfour's speech, in reply to Sir Vernon Harcourt's arraignment of the Government on its China policy, is described as spirited, able and in parts angry, but as failing to improve materially the position of the ministry. There is said to be a strong feeling in certain quarters, in the Government party as well as in the opposition, that Lord Salisbury has conceded too much to the demands of Russia, but it is quite possible that the Prime Minister understood better than his critics the merits of the situation, and that he is not so much of a bungler as some of them would make him out to be. The London correspondent of the New York Evening Post intimates that Great Britain's position in the far East is far from being a disadvantageous one. "England has many cards still to play. She has retained control of the Chinese customs. She has an absolute lien over the Yang-tse valley, into which the extended Burmah railway will run. Wei-Hai-Wei preserves her naval predominance in North Pacific waters. Her capitalists are holding the vast mineral lands of Shan-Si, which will give her great vantage ground in the coming commercial battle of the Pacific and she will soon have a rectification of her frontier opposite Hong Kong and all she wants in Chusan. She has moreover the friendship of China, which, if the Chinese Emperor's new Counsellor, Changchihtung, answers the expectations of those who know him, may mean much in the resistance of further Russian demands, and, above all else, she has the good will and hopes for the future active co-operation of both Germany and the United States in defence of the policy of an open door."

Unpopular Tonnage Dues.

Despite certain assertions to the contrary, there appears to be plenty of evidence that the sympathy of the people, as well as the Government of Great Britain, is quite strongly with the United States in the present conflict. But British sympathy in the case is probably not so strong as to create a desire on the part of either people or Government to assist in paying the American war taxes. The proposal now before Congress to increase the tonnage dues on foreign vessels does not therefore meet with favor in England and especially among English shipowners whose special representatives have protested against it strongly in the Imperial Parliament. It is stated that American bankers in London consider the increase of tonnage dues ill-advised legislation, which, if enacted, will have the effect of transferring shipping to Canadian ports and increasing the freight business of Canadian railways at the expense of United States lines. Besides it is said the increased tonnage dues will not only alienate the sympathies of the British commercial class, but will increase also the anti-American sentiment on the continent.

The Plebiscite.

The Plebiscite Bill passed the House of Commons on Tuesday with but little opposition. It is hardly to be inferred from this that the members of Parliament are very nearly unanimous in the opinion that the plebiscite is desirable, and we suppose that no one is likely to jump to the conclusion that the House of Commons is with practical unanimity in favor of a law prohibitive of the liquor traffic. The Government having pledged itself to a plebiscite, it was not judged to be good politics in those opposed to prohibition, whether on the Government or the Opposition side of the House, to offer any strenuous opposition to the bill. Mr. Foster pressed the Government to announce its intentions in the event of an affirmative vote being obtained as a result of the plebiscite. If the vote showed a majority throughout the Dominion favorable to prohibition, would the Government proceed forthwith to enact a prohibitory law? The Premier in reply spoke guardedly. He said that when the will of the people was affirmed the Government must be prepared to abide by the consequences, and that, with the will of the people before it, the Government would have to take such steps as to give effect to the popular will, but Sir Wilfrid declined to give any definite pledge as to what the Government would do if the result of the plebiscite showed a majority for prohibition. He considered that there were other questions—other difficulties—to be considered, constitutional, financial and otherwise. He intimated that the late Finance Minister had experienced a sudden revival of interest in prohibition, and charged that his present interest in the subject was that of a political partizan rather than that of a temperance reformer. What the Government intends to do or whether or not it has any definite intention, in the event of an affirmative vote on the plebiscite, is therefore not apparent. It is safe, however, to predict that the will of the people will be given effect if that will is made sufficiently clear and emphatic. In reference to the future action of the Government therefore much may be expected to depend on the size of the majority for prohibition which the plebiscite shall give.

The War.

On Monday morning of last week, news was received through Spanish sources, from which it appeared that Commodore Dewey, the American Commander, had inflicted a crushing defeat on the Spanish fleet at Manilla and was bombarding the city with destructive effect. Then telegraphic communication ceased and it was evident that the cable had been cut at Manilla. Under the circumstances, in order that despatches from Commodore Dewey should reach Washington, they must be carried by steamer to Hong Kong, a voyage of two or three days, and no surprise was felt that he was not heard from until that time had expired. But as the end of the week drew near, and no intelligence had been received at Washington from Commodore Dewey, it was natural that some anxiety should be felt concerning the result of the naval engagement and the bombardment of Manilla. This anxiety was heightened by despatches sent out from San Francisco, announcing that, according to alleged trustworthy intelligence received from Manilla via Hong Kong, two vessels of the American fleet had suffered serious injury in the engagement and some 200 men had been killed or wounded. Evidently these California despatches were fictitious, the United States Navy Department having received no word from Commodore Dewey at that time. On Saturday morning a New York paper, in a special edition, published a despatch from Hong Kong confirming the previous report of the American victory at Manilla and showing that it was even more complete than had been supposed. It is declared that the entire Spanish fleet of eleven vessels was destroyed, that 300 Spanish seamen were killed and 400 wounded, that not one American was killed and but six wounded and that none of the American ships were injured. These statements were in the main confirmed by intelligence given out by the Government at Washington later in the day. It is further stated that Commodore Dewey had completely silenced the Spanish batteries and is able to exercise complete control over the city and its fortifications, though it appears that he has not landed a force of occupation. It would appear that the Spanish forces are still in possession of some of the fortifications, but the city is said to be surrounded by insurgents and to be suffering for lack of food supplies.

Despatches state that on Friday two American war vessels, the Vicksburg and the Morrill found themselves in unpleasant proximity to the Santa Clara batteries of Havana. These vessels, it is stated, chased a schooner which is believed to have been sent out as a decoy by the Spaniards, and, very recklessly or in ignorance of the position of the Spanish batteries, permitted themselves to come within range of the enemy's guns. The Spaniards opened fire, several shots struck near the vessels—one of them actually grazing the Morrill—any of which would have sunk either vessel had it struck her fairly. Despatches differ as to whether the vessels returned the fire, but at all events they got out of range as soon as possible, and very fortunate they were to escape. There are rumors—which, however, lack confirmation—of the arrival of the Spanish fleet at Porto Rico. It is understood that Admiral Sampson's squadron is in that vicinity prepared to give battle to the Spanish fleet whenever it shall make its appearance. An engagement is expected early in the present week. If Admiral Samspson should succeed in inflicting a crushing defeat upon the Spanish fleet, it seems probable that it would virtually put an end to the war, as the futility of further resistance on the part of Spain would be manifest, and peace would be effected by the mediation of the European powers.