

The Commercial

WINNIPEG, JUNE 10, 1888.

THE BEHRING SEA DIFFICULTY.

There is evidently some anxiety both at London and Washington at present over the troubles which are likely to arise out of the question of the right of subjects of Great Britain to participate in the seal fishings of the Behring Sea, and if any confidence can be placed in rumors, there is a desire on the part of both the British and United States Governments that an amicable and reasonable settlement of the whole matter should be reached before the question becomes any more tangled, as it very likely would by results of another season's fishing operations there.

For several years back the opinion was general on this side of the international boundary line and in Great Britain that the whole difficulty over the Behring Sea fishings was based upon the unwarranted claim of the United States to the sole right of fishing in these waters, to the exclusion of citizens of all other nations from participating therein. This claim too is based upon an Imperial Russian decree, issued years before that empire ceded their American possessions to the United States, but never acknowledged by any other nation. So that in the popular belief here the United States Government base all their action in excluding Canadian sealers from the Behring Sea fisheries upon a bogus claim made by another nation, which never dared to enforce it; and on the strength of such a claim also, the monopoly of these seal fisheries have been leased to a commercial corporation in the United States.

The above may be taken as the accepted view of the Behring Sea difficulty in Great Britain and Canada, and it is only recently that the opposite side of the question has reached the ears of people in both countries, and it now seems that the United States Government, (according to a large and influential section of the press there), is more anxious about the preservation of these seals from wanton destruction, than about the enforcement of a fishing monopoly. How much honesty there is in this contention it is premature to decide just now. But admitting that it is true, the Government of the United

States are to be commended and not condemned for their efforts at protection from wanton destruction, and every reasonable man here must feel hopeful that by some joint arrangement the power of Great Britain and Canada will be added in maintaining such protection.

It seems that the practice of killing or capturing the female seals when they are attending to their young, thus leaving the young brood to perish for want of their attention, is the greatest cause for complaint against Canadian sealers, and people who can remember the sealing business of past years in Arctic Seas north of the Atlantic, can also remember how the seal gradually disappeared under this wanton system, until now sealing in these seas is unprofitable. That the practice was never stopped or checked in those seas, is no reason why it should not be in the Behring Sea. The seal fisheries there are of most value to the people of the United States, and it is but natural that the Government of that country should take the initiative in their protection. The Governments of Great Britain and Canada, if they secure for their citizens equal rights in sealing with those of the United States, would certainly be following a wiser course in assisting to protect these fisheries, than in using their prestige and power to protect a fleet of nautical poachers, who are entitled to no consideration from any high minded nation.

But Canadians have had some experience in connection with fishing poachers, and the cry against the fish destroying practices of United States fishermen along the shores of the Maritime provinces during and since the days when they possessed treaty privileges there, can be well remembered. The common remark by our people on this subject was, that New England fishermen had destroyed the fishing along their own coasts, and now sought to destroy it along ours. When we take for granted that protection and not prohibition is the policy of the United States in the Behring Sea; and look back over the wanton slaughter and almost extinction of the seal in other northern waters; we could not be accused of being too candid, if we admitted that British sealers have exterminated the seal around the coasts of their own territory, and now seek to do the same around the coast of Alaska. If the admission is too strong for our people to make, it is certainly a very natural

assertion for people in the United States to make, and would contain some truth.

It seems to a plain business mind that the only great difficulty that can arise in connection with the settlement of this Behring Sea misunderstanding, for such we hope it is, will be if the Government of the United States seek to enforce the exclusive right claim, and attempt to drive our fishermen out of a sea that is as much an ocean highway as the Mexican Gulf. There is but one course open in such a contingency for Great Britain and Canada, namely, resistance to the claim, and measure the resistance just in proportion to the attempts made to enforce it, even if the most extreme measures have to be adopted.

PRIVATE LETTER DELIVERIES.

THE unjust and bungled up postal act passed at the last session of the Dominion Parliament, and which is now in force, is seemingly likely to bear quickly some of the fruit, which might be expected from such a piece of legislation. A firm in Hamilton, Ontario has decided to start business in the line of local circular and letter delivery, and no doubt calculate on being able to serve the public of that city at a cheaper rate than the two cents a letter postage, as has been fixed by the new postal law. They have no doubt made careful inquiry, as they state they have, into the legal aspect of their undertaking, and are satisfied that they have a perfect right to engage in such a business. From other sources it is learned that the Minister of Finance is equally certain, that no private party, company or corporation has any legal right to engage in the carrying and delivery of letters in opposition to the post office, so that the firm referred to, will very likely enter upon their new undertaking with a legal fight, that will prove very interesting to the business public of Canada.

It would be difficult to find a stronger proof of the burdensomeness as well as the injustice of the new postal act, than is furnished in the proposed action of this Hamilton firm. Postal laws and regulations in every well governed country are framed not as a source of revenue, even when the service rendered to the public is supplied cheaper than private enterprise can supply it. But when the Govern-