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SELDOM has the annual opening of the Dominion Parliament been so quiet and uninteresting as that of last week. This unusual placidity is certainly not wholly due to the absence of questions of great public interest awaiting Parliamentary discussion and action. It cannot be said that the country is contented and restful in regard to either its political or its commercial state and relations, or that there is any lack of controversies of a somewhat exciting character engaging public attention. The speech from the throne did not, it is true, suggest many subjects in regard to which there is pressing need of Parliamentary attention; but it is often the case that the matters which occupy the largest place in the public mind are not those which are made prominent in the formal address with which the Government, through the mouth of the Governor-General, greets the members of Parliament on such occasions. The tameness of the opening proceedings was in this instance, no doubt, the result, in a large degree, of the thinness of the attendance. This, in its turn, was caused by the prevalence of the epidemic, which respects neither times nor persons. The congratulation on the prosperity of the country, which forms the opening paragraph of the Speech, drew forth expressions of opinion from the mover and seconder of the reply, on the one hand, and the leader of the Opposition, on the other, widely, and, at first thought, astonishingly diverse. The question of prosperity is one of facts, not very difficult to ascertain, in regard to which there could not, one might suppose, be much room for difference of opinion. The variance in this case arises evidently from the application of different tests, or standards. To those who are content with a state of things in which a small percentage of the population are steadily growing rich, while the toiling masses are, as a rule, able to find employment, and by steady industry to keep themselves and their families above actual want, the state of the Dominion is on the whole satisfactory. And such is, it must be admitted, the normal condition of the people in most countries which are considered fairly prosperous. To those who, having regard to the vast resources and possibilities of the country, think that it should be going forward by leaps and bounds in wealth and population, the rate of progress is too slow, the condition of the Provinces from year to year too nearly stationary, to be regarded with anything but deep dissatisfaction. In this connection, the legislation promised in regard to matters affecting

the well-being of the working classes, based on the report of the Labour Commission, will be looked for with some anxiety, especially by the large numbers of the people whose interests are directly involved. It seems to be becoming more and more the fashion to avoid serious discussion in connection with the formality of passing the address in reply to the Speech from the Throne; still, had the Premier been any other person than Sir John A. Macdonald, the people and their representatives would probably be disposed to resent the passing over of matters of serious importance with quips and cranks and jovial anecdotes.

THE promise of amendments to the Acts relating to the North-West Territories calls to mind the somewhat serious difficulties which have arisen in connection with the administration of Lieut.-Governor Royal. Whether the amendments will take the wise shape of enlarging the powers of self-government conferred by the Acts now in force, remains to be seen. The people of Canada have, it may be hoped, too vivid recollections of the miseries through which the older Provinces passed on their way to the goal of responsible government to permit their own legislative authorities to force a similar struggle upon the younger members of the Confederation. That the Ottawa Government was technically right in its recent disallowance of the Act by which the North-West Assembly undertook to appoint and hold responsible to itself the Governor's advisers, seems beyond question. At the same time it is impossible not to sympathize with the claim of the Assembly that the money set apart for use in the Territories should be disbursed under the direction of the people's representatives, or by persons directly responsible to them. Inasmuch as the subsidy in question constitutes by far the larger portion of the whole income of the Territories, it is obvious that apart from any power in regard to its expenditure the election of the Assembly itself is little better than a farce. A Governor empowered to choose his own advisers and to dispose of nearly all the Territorial revenue, without reference to the views or wishes of the representative Assembly, is a virtual autocrat so far as his relations to the country over which he rules are concerned. The people may be excused if they deem it scarcely worth while to elect representatives merely to register the financial decrees of an irresponsible junta. When the matter comes up for discussion at Ottawa the Government will have need either to amend the Act so as to meet the apparently reasonable demands of the Assembly in this respect, or to give very strong reasons why such concessions should not be made. The usual argument drawn from the alleged costliness of a responsible system has been shewn to be illusive. A very simple and inexpensive arrangement would, so far as appears, afford all the home-rule at present desired.

ALL things considered, the most important paragraph in the Speech is that which refers to the Behring Sea affair. In view of the length of time that has elapsed since the first seizures and confiscations of Canadian vessels, with their outfits and cargoes, by the cruisers of the United States Navy, it is not very satisfactory to be told that the Government "hopes to be enabled during the present session" to assure Parliament that all differences on this question are in course of satisfactory adjustment. This question has been so often treated of, and the right and reason in regard to it are so preponderantly on the one side, that the discussion has grown stale. An article in the January number of the *New England Magazine*, by Mr. William Franklin Dana, is, however, so peculiar in some of its reasonings and conclusions as to be worthy of a passing notice. Nearly all the United States writers of eminence who have discussed the subject have, to their honour be it said, frankly admitted the indefensibility of the position tacitly assumed by their Government. Mr. William Franklin Dana, if, indeed, he may be included in this class, forms an exception to the rule. His article sets in a glaring light the twists and subterfuges to which those must resort who, like him, undertake to defend the action of the United States' Government on its merits. The greater part of Mr. Dana's argument, fortified by numerous quotations from statutes and correspondence, is an attempt to show that the doctrine of *mare clausum*, so far as

Behring Sea proper is concerned, was fully maintained by Russia up to the date of the sale of Alaska to the United States, and became, therefore, the property of the latter country by right of purchase. The protest of Mr. Adams, as Secretary of State, against the claims of Russia in this respect, is held to have not been directed against Russia's claim to regard Behring Sea as a *mare clausum*, but meant simply as an assertion of the right of Americans to fish and trade on the northwest coast. This part of the argument is, to say the least, inconclusive, but it is immaterial, since the assertion of a claim of Russia could have no more effect than one by the United States to abrogate or override International Law. Mr. Dana proceeds to argue that the United States have always acted on the same doctrine of *mare clausum*, though his own quotations show that in March, 1889, a Conference Committee of Congress very materially changed the wording of a Bill in which this doctrine was openly declared, with the obvious purpose of avoiding such declaration. The Bill in its amended form, under which its provisions apply simply and with studied ambiguity to "all the Dominion of the United States in the waters of Behring Sea," was adopted by both Houses. But Mr. Dana caps the climax of his special pleading when he sums up his own conclusions by saying:—

"We ought not, in any event, to yield up the doctrine of *mare clausum*, even if an international agreement is effected, and indemnity is paid for seizures already made. The nations may not always work harmoniously together, and we do not want to compromise ourselves, so that we shall be estopped from acting in the future. The doctrine of *mare clausum* is not so very absurd, considering the position of the sea, and the necessity of the nations to have recourse to it; and without holding the sea as a *mare clausum*, we may argue for a right to resort to the waters beyond the three-mile limit for the necessary protection of rights within it."

"Not so very absurd!" Did ever laboured argument in a respectable magazine lead to a more lame and impotent conclusion?

WHATEVER may be one's view of the National Policy as a whole, it must be confessed that the position of the Finance Minister is not just now an enviable one. What with the ever-watchful Opposition ready to harass him with its unrestricted reciprocity panacea, on the one side, and the manufacturers' deputations, treading upon each other's heels in their eagerness to demand higher duties, on the other, his life bids fair to become a burden to him before the session is fairly entered upon. Of course, his clear policy is to treat each article on its merits, but to determine what the merits are in each particular case, and to decide just when a given impost will act protectively and stimulate home manufacture, and when it will act as a tax on raw material, and discourage home production, seeing that it usually happens that the raw material of one industry is the finished product of another, must require a wisdom not often vouchsafed to one or to thirteen individuals. In the article of flour this difficulty presents itself in the most perplexing form. The grievance of the millers is undeniable and great. The milling business should, in the nature of things, be one of Canada's chief industries. To impose a heavier tax upon the wheat, which is the millers' material, than upon the flour, which is his product, is clearly in violation of the fundamental principle of protectionism; but, on the other hand, to tax the people's bread and make it dearer thereby, is an outrage upon present-day notions which no government would perpetrate, and to which no free people would submit. That an increase of the flour tax would increase the cost of bread in the Atlantic and Pacific Provinces seems beyond question. The complication is unavoidable. It is an outcome of the difference in products of the widely separated provinces of the Dominion. One thing is tolerably clear: the government cannot, dare not increase the tax on flour to one dollar per barrel, as is said to be the demand of the millers. To do so would almost convulse the sea-side provinces, already not too well affected towards the Confederation. Whether by any other course the reasonable complaints of the millers can be met will appear in due time. To reduce the tax on wheat, or remove it altogether, would, perhaps, be the simplest way, but the farmers of Ontario and the North-West would probably have a strong word to say to that.