

## Our Contributors.

### The Alaska Arbitration.

Discussion of the award of the Alaska boundary arbitration has been very much in evidence during the past few weeks, and very vigorous writing has been done in support of the Canadian view, with occasional and regrettable outbursts of jingoism in some quarters. Lord Alverstone, the British commissioner, has been severely handled, not only by the Canadian press, but even by some of the leading journals of Great Britain, chiefly in consequence of his action respecting the Portland Channel boundary. The charge against him is that, after saying that Canada's contention respecting the Portland Channel was "unanswerable," he, without consulting the two Canadian commissioners, modified his view so far as to concede to the United States two of the islands claimed by Canada. These islands are not of much intrinsic value; it is the strategic position they occupy which renders them important. It is claimed that they command the outlet of the Portland Channel and the approaches to Port Simpson. This view, however, it is worth noting, is disputed by Sir Sanford Fleming of Ottawa and Bishop Ridley of Port Simpson. The latter contends—and his view is sustained by that of the former—that Wales and Pearce islands awarded to Canada, much larger than the two islands awarded to the United States, not only command the harbor of Port Simpson but are also of inestimable value from a strategic point of view. It will thus be seen that there are two sides to this phase of the question.

With regard to the boundary line laid down by a majority of the arbitration commission, two things are worthy of note: (1) That as regards the Portland Channel section of the boundary Canada has gained—two of the four islands held by the United States have been awarded to her. (2) That, as regards the boundary line from Portland Channel to Mount Fairweather, the United States has been awarded only about half the territory she claimed. Thus, it will be seen, that there is room for disappointment on both sides. Perhaps, when public excitement has cooled down, and all the facts and circumstances connected with the arbitration are known and calmly considered, the people of Canada may be able to conclude that the award of the arbitrators was on the whole a reasonably fair one.

Far beyond the value of the territory at stake—far beyond the loss or gain to either of the claimants, it is the important fact that two great Christian nations—Canada and Great Britain on the one side and the United States on the other—should be able to settle so intricate and complicated a question by arbitration, rather than by war. That such a result should have been achieved outweighs all the disappointment felt on either side, and should prove an example to other great powers. Perhaps out of it will come a permanent treaty of arbitration between Great Britain and the United States, on the lines of the treaty concluded a short time ago between Great Britain and France. Such a result will be a gain to both countries—a gain and blessing to humanity the world over.

It will not be disputed that Canada has just cause for objection to some matters connected with the Alaska arbitration treaty—

the arbitration tribunal without an umpire, the haste with which the Imperial government ratified the treaty practically ignoring Canada's protest, and the personnel of the United States side of the commission, in not being "eminent jurists." These and other points connected with the work of the arbitration are fair subjects of discussion and criticism; but such discussion and criticism should be calm and dignified. We are glad to say that for the most part Canada's press and public men, while speaking forcibly and plainly as they had a right to do, have maintained a calm and dignified tone and have avoided the use of offensive or irritating language towards the United States. The comparatively few who have indulged in hysterical and threatening jingoism will not be treated seriously by the people of Canada.

PRESBYTEROS.

### The Dream of Dante.\*

There is much energy spent, in these days, on the works of the great Italian poet; much of it is no doubt well spent, still there is danger, in this case as in others, of having the text overlaid by the commentary so as in fact to be buried beneath it. We do not make that remark, however, in view of the book before us; it is a simple, strong book with a clear purpose which the author keeps steadily in view. We can recommend it cordially to young people as an introduction to the study of Dante's *Inferno*. After reading this they will be prepared for other books, on the same line, of a slightly different character, and for the great book itself.

The author states his purpose in the following words: "In the following pages the author seeks to provide a key for unlocking the treasures contained in the great Mediaeval Allegory. He has set down in plain prose the first part of Dante's Dream, applying himself specially to the religious and ethical interpretation thereof; and he has done this in the hope that they may serve as an introduction to a direct acquaintance with the work of the master himself." And we can say that he has attained a fair measure of success. In some respects we prefer Mr. Wicksteed's small volume entitled *Six Sermons on Dante*, but there is room for both, and for young people who are not well versed in literary criticism the one before us is perhaps more suitable. It distinguishes clearly between the permanent truth and the temporary form and shows how the poet was struggling to advance the cause of righteousness. Where all is so good one is not disposed to criticise. But take the following sentence: Astrology as we know has been one of the most persistent of the occult sciences. Napoleon believed in his star; and with English speaking people, subjects are still considered, defeats are spoken of as *disastrous*, and prices are described on the market as *mercurial*." (P. 103.) Yes, but millions of English speaking people use these words without recognising that there is any reference to stars in them. However, there are many people silly enough to run after fortune-telling, spiritualism, and so on, proving the power of outworn superstition to

persist vigorously. "The whole inhabitants of the town," (Page 108) is surely a questionable phrase. However, the book as a whole is good. We wish heartily that our young people would feed on wholesome literature of this kind instead of wasting so much time on frivolities. Never were there so many opportunities of the highest culture open to our young men and women and yet we are afraid that the great classics are much neglected. Let us cultivate the Bible, Milton, Shakespeare, Bunyan and Dante a little more and good results will follow.

### "The Soul's Leap to God."

This is the title of one of the four chapters contained in a small, useful volume recently reviewed in these columns. The author, The Rev. John A. Hutton, M. A., seeks to give, "Guidance from Robert Browning in matters of faith"; in the chapter before us he expounds Browning's view of conversion, and opens his discussions with a striking illustration which we here produce:

"I read in the newspaper the other day of a wonderful invention to be used in war. It was a bomb, with such materials inside the shell, and so contrived as to explode at the touch of a ray of light. The bomb might be placed anywhere and do no harm; but let a ray of light fall upon it in particular, and the instant, at the summons of the light, the thing would awake and burst. Well, that is a very exact summary of Robert Browning's teaching on the conversion of the soul's discovery of God. His books teem with lines which tell of the tremendous forces that lie coiled up within the soul, ready to burst out and tear open a way of escape for that divine thing which, according to Browning, is the last analysis of a man. He loves to watch these explosions; to show a light coming towards a man until it shines upon his face. Suddenly there is a blaze and crash and dust and smoke; but when these days have passed you see the man sitting at the feet of God, "Clothed and in his right mind," while Browning chants the psalm. Browning makes these bombs of every degree and intensity. He is always indeed practising with this principle of his, that light can burst every bondage of the soul. He loads one man's soul with some small secret, some light sin, but still a secret and a sin; something that gnaws within him and brings clouds into his sky. Then he will turn a gentle light upon that man's face, which shakes the man but sets him free. Again, he will put more of the explosive material into a soul, deeper and more obstinate sinning and within a harder shell. Once more, he will turn the ray of light, the mild eye of God upon the man, and then you have a crash and a cry; but this man too comes out of the fire free and clean. At last he will construct a hideous soul as a final test for his theory and faith. He will load this soul to the neck with the stuff of hell; he will bind it round and round with bands of steel. As you look at the impenetrable case in which this foulness is sealed, with no chink or weakness in its brazenness, you wonder whether the quiet light will ever reach and stir that blackness into flame. The Great Chemist—the poet himself—seems to doubt. But once more he turns a light upon the black ball, until it glows. For a moment there is silence. And for another. The light seems to call in vain. But it still beats upon the encased iniquity, growing whiter with impatience, until the iron wrappings grow hot and the mass bursts like all others, and Guido, the infernal, rushes out of life with a cry which the good God may hear."

\*The Dream of Dante. An Interpretation of The *Inferno* by Henry F. Henderson, M.A., Author of "Erskine of Linlathen." 2s. 6d. Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, Edinburgh.