

To the Editor of THE WEEK :

SIR,—I apprehend that the Fisheries Question cannot properly be classed as one of "moral heroism" where modifications of the law are discussed; but rather one of *international law and right of enforcing treaties, once made*, until such are abrogated. This does not hinder its being looked at from the point of view of common sense and the relations of economy.

Now the Maritime Provinces claim, with apparent justice, that if you concede the transshipment as a question of practice, not of right, you concede all the United States fishermen could desire; for, giving them this base of operations, the power to trade is practically included—that means to buy bait and supplies—and having the supplies on board, to fish in *our waters*. It may be said we could look after them. We do look after them, as far as we are able, but we do not want the duty to be made any heavier than need be. To avoid this, we must not fall into the error of giving to lawless men a base of operations for lawless conduct.

INTERNATIONAL COMITY.

## READINGS FROM CURRENT LITERATURE.

### DE LESSEPS AND THE PANAMA CANAL.

THERE is probably no more picturesque figure in the whole world than M. de Lesseps. At an age when most men would be either chair-ridden, or bed-ridden—for he is now in his eighty-fifth year—this old-young Frenchman is as light of step and heart as a boy. "Time has forgotten me," is one of his favourite expressions. But the other day he stood before the people of Lyons and declared to them that the Panama Canal would be opened for business in July, 1890. In this opinion, undoubtedly honest and sincere to its very fullest, no other engineer shares, still less those engineers who have gone over the ground and looked into the entire field of probabilities and possibilities narrowly. The outlook to some of the more cautious or conservative of these is more than gloomy—it is appalling. True, they have spoken of it but very little, but still that little has been enough to reveal a state of affairs entirely different from M. de Lesseps' Utopian state. The Panama Canal is there as far as there is any Panama Canal, but its *couleur de rose* has all been extinguished. The French people have already put into that enterprise a little over \$200,000,000, virtually thrown away unless such enterprise is completed. At the rate of progress hitherto made in cutting the canal, it is estimated that it will require twenty years more of time and \$500,000,000 more of money to finish it. These estimates appear as if they might well be incredible, and yet they have been made and insisted upon, and are still being made and insisted upon. Others regard it as the old Mississippi bubble over again, and just as certain to end in a like series of almost overwhelming disasters. Over one hundred and fifty years ago somewhat, John Law went to Paris and laid before the people a visionary project of colonizing and cultivating the country watered by the Mississippi River. He sold shares in the scheme by the million, and organized the Bank of France. Paris went mad. All France rushed in a sort of frenzied delirium to buy stock at fabulous prices. Gigantic fortunes were made on paper in a single day. The bubble lasted a year, burst, and then to almost every household there came cruel suffering and untold misery. Law escaped barely with his life. It would be a perverted use of terms certainly to call the Panama Canal enterprise a bubble, and yet it is difficult to see how it can ever be made successful, the way it is being conducted. It is charitable at least to suppose that M. De Lesseps is himself ignorant of the real situation on the isthmus. He has been there but once, and to remain only a few days. His agents have all been at odds and ends, and now his sole remaining financial resource is a public lottery. It appears to be scarcely anything more than a makeshift, and an extremely poor one at that. The money from it comes in slowly and grudgingly.—*Kansas City Times*.

### CONFESSING BY TELEPHONE.

FROM time to time one may notice events that bring out, with unusual force and clearness, the fact that great inventions are chief among the conditions that shape modern life. This is recognized in regard to civilizing elements with which people have long been familiar, such as the railroad and the telegraph, but is not so commonly accepted with respect to an innovation like the telephone. Yet that little instrument is most remarkable for the new relations into which it brings men and their affairs, and it incessantly calls for novel adjustments of our ideas and actions. The legality of contracts by telephone has been an issue for the courts, and but recently we mentioned a case in which a defendant submitted himself for judgment by telephone and received sentence in the same way. More lately, again, the point has arisen whether gambling carried on by telephone can be lawfully and effectively stopped. In medicine numerous instances have occurred wherein it is unnecessary for the doctor to see his patient, the prescription or advice being such as the telephone shows to be desirable. And now the Catholic Church is troubled to decide as to the efficacy of a confession by telephone. The question has been referred to Rome by the French bishops, and among the Italian priests also the subject is an unsettled one. Some authorities hold that the telephone can be used for censure, but not for absolution; while others consider that as the telephone annihilates distance, the confessor and the penitent are actually together. Evidently the question goes far deeper than the disputes of mere casuistry, and touches all that serves to surround a solemn act with sentiments of awe. And how solemn itself, after all, is the thought that the telephone is this among the instrumentalities that release us from the clogs and bonds of physical sense and lift us to a realm where mind and soul, as if clarified and disembodied, can have freest communion.—*Electrical World*.

### CHINESE STREETS.

STREETS from six to twelve feet wide, filled from morning to night with a ceaseless throng. Every man is black-haired, the fore-part of his head is shaven, while behind him hangs the long queue imposed by the Manchu conquerors. Here come the coolies, in blue jackets and blue knickerbockers, bare-footed or straw-sandalled, with a bamboo across the shoulders, carrying heavy weights, and singing, "Eh ho, ah ho, ay ho-li!" like all the brethren of their craft east of the Mediterranean. This man with long flowing robe, wide sleeves, huge horn-rimmed spectacles, slow swaggering gait, languid-fluttering fan, evidently a very important person indeed, is in fact a Confucianist scholar. Here totters along a woman on her tiny three-inch feet, clad in gay embroidered jacket and delicate silk skirt, perhaps a small silver-mounted tobacco-pipe in her hand, her head adorned with strange hirsute structures like a carving-knife, a trencher, a flying swallow, or what not, a touch of rouge to cheeks and lips, while white powder gives mistiness to full-fleshed facial charms. Here a small boy, if it be winter, gaily dressed in brilliant colours, a perfect ball of many wrappings—if it be summer, equally gaily dressed in the not unbecoming garb of his yellow skin alone. For vehicles look at yon sedan chair, borne by two or three men. In it sits a gentleman, elegantly clad in white or flowered silk or in costly furs, according to the season. If there be four or even eight bearers you will have timely warning, for this is a mandarin; before him runs a motley crowd of retainers beating gongs, carrying tablets inscribed, "Be silent," "Make way." Villainous-looking fellows, with steeple-crowned Guy Fawkes hats, armed with whips, mouthing out uncouth cries, are the lictors of the great man. Others carry the great silk umbrella, the badge of office, meant for the official, should he ever wish to move his heavy well-fed body, with its impassive self-content, from his chair. This is an event which rarely occurs; in fact, it is an awful thought to an Englishman that sitting in a chair and scolding are the most violent forms of exercise in which a mandarin ever indulges. On the breast of his handsome silk robe he bears embroidered some strange bird or beast, which marks his rank; on his hat a button, blue, red, crystal, or gold, according to his dignity, and, if he be distinguished, a one-eyed or even two eyed peacock's feather. Occasionally some disturber of the peace, spied *flagrante delicto* from the chair, is promptly thrown down in the street, stripped, and beaten. Here comes clattering and jingling along a small pony, which bears a military official; none but one accustomed to the rough life of camps would use so fatiguing a mode of locomotion. This miserable unkempt being, howling a dismal ditty, and rattling together two bamboo slips, is a beggar. It is as well to give him the microscopic dole he claims, for he will stay there, inert but vocal, till he gains his point. Such a one has been known to commit suicide in a determinately parsimonious shop in order to bring its owner into trouble with the authorities. Avoid this man carrying odorous buckets through the crowd; his burden is liquid manure, which will shortly fertilise the gardens outside the city; so hold your nose and look at the stalls—for, narrow as are the streets, there are numerous stalls, fixed or moving.—*Quiver*.

### THE HEIGHT OF OCEAN WAVES.

A WRITER in the *Liverpool Mercury*—a captain of the mercantile marine—has taken great pains to take what are probably the most careful observations as to the height of ocean waves in a gale which have ever been recorded. He made them during a voyage round Cape Horn, and to do it, he went up in the main rigging, to get, if possible, the top of the wave coming up astern in a line of sight from the mast to the horizon at the back. The reason he selected the mainmast was this, that, as a rule, it is nearly amidships, and when the sea is running, the sea ahead and from aft lifts the two ends, forming a hollow amidships (the actual foot of the wave below the mean draught, equal to the slight elevation), and the observer necessarily is above the true height. It was a difficult operation, but the captain obtained some good observations, marking the height of the waves on the mast. On measuring the distance from these to the mean draught, he found them to be as follows: 64, 61, 58, and 65 feet respectively, varying in length from 750 to 800 feet.—*Iron*.

### GEORGE ELIOT AS A TALKER.

IN the course of a recent article in the *New York Tribune* on "The Influence of Women on Conversation," Mr. Smalley gives the following account of George Eliot's talk: "That women are the best letter-writers in the world has long been agreed, and exceptions like George Eliot may prove the rule. But 'on dit les choses encore plus finement qu'on ne peut les écrire;' and if women write the best letters why should they not talk best? It was once the fashion to praise George Eliot's talk, and there have been, I believe, people who could read her letters. They were not letters, those pompous, pretentious, pedantic compositions, each one plainly composed with an eye to future publicity. But they were curiously like her talk. Woman of genius as she was, she had no more genuine gift of talk than of poetry. In any case, she had no place in society, and her talk could never have been the fashion if she had. Her remarkable gifts were of use to her in the company of the devout, who gathered weekly to listen to the oracle, but that was not society, it was a form of public worship, and we do not go to church or chapel to talk, or at least we ought not. If George Eliot had chosen so to arrange her life as to bring herself within the pale of society, she might have been the female Macaulay of her time. That is to say, she had a full mind, and she discoursed on many subjects for a long time without stopping, and without missing a date or mis-stating a fact."