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Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

OPPRESSIVE RESTRICTIONS. THE question of the Manitoba railways, which has of late been the occasion of a good deal of angry discussion, involves a case of extreme hardship to the province concerned. The interests of the settlers have been subordinated to those of the Canadian Pacific line which enjoys a complete monopoly, and whose tariff is so high as to shut out the Manitoba farmers from a market where they may obtain anything like paying prices for their produce. As things are, for example, the carriage of wheat from Winnipeg to Montreal costs 16s a quarter, whereas the communication with the American railways which the Manitobans are demanding would open an easy way to a port at the head of Lake Superior whence carriage could be had for 1s 6d per quarter. The pretence urged against this rational desire of the settlers concerned is that by the construction of the line they demand they would not be benefited since the markets of the States are already glutted, and that means would only be afforded to the manufacturing monopolists and greater producers of the Republic to take possession of the Canadian markets. This objection, however, seems sufficiently answered by the fact that an immense export of wheat and flour takes place from the American portion of the Red River Valley—in consequence of which, moreover, Manitoban farmers are persuaded that with the facilities they seek for a great development of their agricultural resources must occur. The law, however, is altogether opposed to their desires. It is certainly illegal for the province to construct any line of railway reaching beyond its boundaries—and whether it can legally construct any line reaching as far as them seems very doubtful. In any case, the "disallowance," as it is called, of the Dominion Government makes it illegal for land to be taken against the will of the owners for the construction of any railway—and, as the company that owns the Canadian Pacific owns also a tract of country that the Manitoban line must cross an insuperable difficulty might seem to intervene. To secure the observance of the law, nevertheless, an injunction must be served, and, accordingly, the Pacific company directed one to the Hon. John Norquay, Premier of Manitoba. But this Minister kept out of the way and during his absence the contractors made good their time and had the line carried across the barrier. The matter will now be tried in the law courts, but the Manitobans express their determination, come what will, to abide by what they have done and what they still intend to do, and to have their railway in spite of all opposition. A serious aspect of the matter is, meantime, that they are threatened by the Dominion Government with forcible prevention, and, even, if necessary, with the interference of British troops. The case, as we said, seems a particularly hard one, presenting features of oppression that are altogether out of keeping with the spirit of the times. The forcible prevention, in fact, of such an enterprise, intended to benefit a whole community, in the interests of a company or monopoly, hardly seems to have had any parallel since the destruction of Irish industries in favour of those of Great Britain. The sympathies of all lovers of freedom and fair-play will naturally be with the Manitobans in their struggle and the Government of the Dominion will be rightly judged to have brought upon themselves whatever consequences may ensue.

STRANGE GENEBROSITY. THE depth of John Bull's sympathies is one that it is most difficult to fathom: Honest John is terrified at the idea of constructing a passage under the sea by which a French force, marching in single file, could surprise and carry his ocean fortress some night while he was asleep—and ever afterwards compel him to substitute for his accustomed good and plentiful meal of roast-beef and plum-pudding an occasional snack on the hind legs of a frog or some unsubstantial rubbish of the kind. Honest John, meantime, forwards with all the ardour of his heart what may rationally seem even a more serious danger. In these colonies we are probably alive to the risks attendant on a close neighbourhood to China. We know how great a danger must exist were the seas that separate us from it to be bridged in any effectual way so that all our precautionary measures might be set at defiance, and the immigration now necessarily limited might

become unrestricted. The consequences to the colonies would be direful, and all our hopes of prosperity and national pre-eminence would be destroyed. It is hardly necessary for us to enter on a prediction in detail of all the ills that must follow. We all know what a Chinese population is, and, from what we have seen of it in a repressed and limited form, we can easily judge of what it must become were an opening afforded to the countless thousands of the Empire so that they might expand themselves and enter upon the fresh woods and pastures new that are so much needed by them, and evidently so much appreciated by those of them who do manage to rove abroad. The sea, however, protects us, and not only interposes a natural barrier, but enables the colonies to take protective measures. What, then, shall we say of any step adopted to do away with this advantage? England, nevertheless, who so greatly fears the construction of the Channel tunnel, a passage capable of being obstructed at any moment, and even of doubtful risk were it left open in the very middle of warfare—does not hesitate to lay the foundations for the acquisition by China of an efficient and powerful navy. We find, for example, a full and minute description of a fleet of five vessels which have left Spithead under the command of an English naval officer to reinforce the navy of the Emperor of China. Three of the vessels, two protected cruisers and a torpedo boat, were built in England, and the other two in Germany—and we are told that everything was done to make the English-built vessels especially as perfect of their kind as human skill and labour could make them. The squadron, says the *Times*, is commanded by Admiral Lang, a captain in the Royal Navy, lent by the Admiralty to the Chinese Government "And nothing," it is added, "could demonstrate more clearly the desire of the British Government that China should have a strong and efficient navy than the loan of an officer so able, so energetic and intelligent." But why should the British Government so particularly desire to make China a naval power deserving of consideration? What guarantees have they that China will always be of friendly disposition towards them, or ready, if the necessity arises, to serve their interests in the Pacific rather than those of other powers who may chance to be opposed to them? If, as a military and naval power China were certainly destined always to remain the ally of England, or if it were a question only of enabling her to hold her own without assistance against aggression, the matter might take a different aspect. But when the question of the future control of the Pacific is undecided—when it seems possible that it may be contested by various powers—and, above all, when there is a chance, however remote, of raising up for these colonies a neighbouring power of far more dangerous influences than those to flow from any settlement in the Pacific of French recidivists—the matter seems to assume something of a doubtful hue. In any case, China, possessed of a powerful fleet and efficient navy might appear quite as much to threaten the safety of these colonies as France would that of England were the Channel tunnel an accomplished fact.

If we are to judge by the high spirit of the Liberal "TORYINE" leaders, the cause of Home Rule must indeed be in the ascendant. Sir William Harcourt, for example, speaking lately at Dartford gaol gave a most pleasant description of the situation, and very effectively ridiculed the position of the Liberal-Unionists. The speaker likened the party in possession of their Coercion Act to a man who, having everything prepared for torture, could not find anyone to serve as a victim. Ireland, he said, furnished them with no one and nothing on which they could bring it to bear, and they were afraid of the English people to use it without full cause to do so. Fear, indeed, he went on to show, was one of their chief characteristics, and their great organ, the *London Times*, had even gone so far as to thank God that there would not be another election for five years, a confidence that Sir William, however, did not share, and which he said put him in mind of a man who, having lived an irregular life, gave God thanks that he could not die for five years. But as to what that man's thankfulness must rest upon we can easily decide. The happiest point in Sir William Harcourt's speech was probably that in which he gave Liberal-Unionism a new name. He recalled the recent measures taken in Parliament to prevent the selling of a certain spurious and deleterious imitation of butter, under the name of butterine. "If" he said, "they choose to adopt this second hand Toryism, I think they may well take for themselves and their