

VARIOUS

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There was a very disquieting rumor last week to the effect that England had refused to take part in the Seal Conference.

The reason given for her refusal was that she could not join in the discussion if Russia and Japan were admitted to it.

At the British Foreign Office, which is the department of the Government that has the charge of such matters, the officials refused to say positively whether Great Britain had declined to take part in the conference, but they let it be understood that Canada was at the bottom of the trouble.

The Canadian Government was most unwilling to have Great Britain join in the conference, and asked that the mother country should withdraw, and leave the settlement of the matter to the colony that was most interested in it.

It was thought that Canada feared that Japan and Russia might look at the sealing question from the same point of view that we do, and so persuaded England to object to them, and thus draw out of the conference.

That England should say she would not join because of Russia and Japan, was a great surprise to the officials in Washington.

When Mr. Foster was in London last July, he told the British officials that he had just returned from St. Petersburg, having obtained the consent of the Czar to send a representative to the meeting. England consenting to join the conference soon after this, it was thought that the consent of the two other countries had influenced her to come to a like decision.

In the same month of July, our ambassador in England wrote to Lord Salisbury, told him of the arrangements that had been made, and asked whether Great Britain would surely be represented.

The Prime Minister kept this note unanswered until September, and then said he could not possibly take part in any discussion to which Japan and Russia were also to be admitted.

Every one wondered what this refusal could mean, and it caused a very bad impression, as it came right after the publication by the Foreign Office of a book in which the letters and despatches which had passed between the two countries in the seal dispute had been printed.

This book contained some very unfriendly remarks about the United States. Among other things it was said that we ought not to be making such a fuss about the kind of sealing that is now being carried on, because in 1832 we practised the same methods ourselves in the South Atlantic Ocean.

This accusation is absolutely true, but Mr. Chamberlain, in his book, did not add that bitter experience in the south had taught us our lesson, and that it is because of the destruction we had worked to the southern herd that we are so anxious to take better care of the northern.

So important does the protection of the seals seem to our Government, that when the news came that England might not join in the conference if Japan and Russia were represented there, it was decided to hold the meeting, whether Great Britain joined or not. But, being anxious to keep on the best of terms with our English cousins, the Government sent a most pressing invitation to England, begging her to attend the conference, and hear what the scientists had to say about the seal herd, even if she would not take any part in the discussion.

In view of this, England has consented to attend the meetings, but will not say whether she will take any part in the proceedings.

The English papers say they cannot see what interest the Russians and Japanese have in the Bering Sea dispute. The United States is, however, extremely anxious that these two countries should be at the meeting to give their opinion about the proper manner and season in which to hunt seals.

It is intended that several scientists who have studied the habits of the seals shall appear before the members of the conference, and give their views about the condition of the herd. Professor D'Arcy Thompson for England, and Professor David Starr Jordan for America, will be among the number.

Russian and Japanese experts are also to make statements on the subject; but a report from Canada says that the Canadian representative intends to ask that these gentlemen shall not be allowed to speak, as she does not think they are sufficiently well acquainted with the life and habits of the seals to be able to offer an expert opinion.

Up to the moment of receiving Great Britain's refusal to treat with us, every one supposed that it was only necessary to explain to England the damage that was being done to the herd, for her to join us in making arrangements to protect them.

Now every one is feeling uncertain what the result of the conference will be.

We told you the cause of this difference of opinion between the two countries was the careless and wasteful way in which the hunters have killed the seals.

Instead of waiting till the animals have reached their feeding-grounds, they have killed many in the open sea; this is called pelagic sealing, and is against the law. In addition to this they have killed them in an unlawful way at their feeding-grounds. Instead of separating and killing the young bachelor seals, who are tiresome fellows, and hang round the colonies annoying and fighting the father seals who are trying to bring up their families, the sealers have entered the colonies or rookeries themselves, and slaughtered the mothers, leaving hundreds and thousands of motherless puppies behind to die for want of proper care (see p. 736).

Because of this the seal herd has been decreasing so rapidly that fear has arisen that it will disappear if the seals are not properly cared for.

The object of the conference is to decide whether the seal herd is really decreasing, and if so, to make strict laws to protect the mother seals and their poor helpless little puppies.

A British war-ship, the *Wild Swan*, which is stationed in the Bering Sea to protect the sealing interests of Great Britain, has just arrived at Victoria, British Columbia.

The officers state that the seal herd is undoubtedly very much smaller this year; so small indeed that there is the gravest reason to fear that the seals are really dying out.

The Englishmen lay the blame of the smallness of the herd on the shoulders of Professor Jordan, and declare that it is due to the branding of the seals.

They insist that the seals who were branded last year were so badly frightened that they will not venture into the same waters again. Instead of coming to the Pribylov Islands, the officers say that they have made their way to some other islands north of Japan, and that the Japanese are reaping the benefit of Professor Jordan's experiment.

The British officers also say that the electric apparatus which Dr. Jordan took with him this year has proved to be a failure, and that the branding has had to be done with hot irons as usual. Trouble with the apparatus caused considerable delay, and according to the story told by the officers of the *Wild Swan*, only a few pups have been branded.

This news makes the conference all the more necessary. If there are no means of marking the female seals without frightening the herd away from their feeding-grounds, the different countries interested in the sealing trade should lose no time in coming to an understanding, that the herd may be preserved.

The Japanese and Russian representatives are already on their way here, but the meeting cannot be held until the beginning of November, as Sir Julian Pauncefote, who will attend the conference on behalf of England, cannot arrive here before that time.

We shall, in all probability, gain much interesting information about seals and seal life from this convention.

Several fresh meetings have been held in Athens to protest against the treaty of peace with Turkey. It is said that the people are becoming more violent, and are calling upon the King of Greece to continue the war.

At one of the meetings the other day, angry things were said about the King and the Crown Prince, the people blaming them for the unfortunate results of the war.

The cabinet ministers and the more thoughtful people in Greece are, however, of opinion that the best thing to be done is to bear, as best they may, the burdens which it puts on the country.

The Russian Minister in Athens has laid the treaty officially before the Greek minister of foreign affairs, and now all the necessary formalities have been gone through, and it only remains for the Greek parliament to accept or refuse the terms offered.

The Russian minister sent a note with the treaty, saying that the Sultan considered the Powers had done all that they could to restore peace, and he now waited for Greece to send her ministers to Constantinople to arrange the final document which will bind the two countries. The Russian minister also stated that the Powers offered to assist at the meetings, in case any fresh difficulties should arise.

You must not imagine from this that there are to be two treaties of peace. There will of course be but one; however, lest you should be confused as to how it is that the Powers, having arranged a treaty which was signed by Turkey, are now conveying a message to Greece asking her to send her ministers to arrange another treaty, it is best to explain the matter to you.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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