

perhaps will have a smaller number of vessels there than any other power represented, the fact that among them are first-class warships in excellent trim will make up the deficiency.

The completion of the canal which will connect the North Sea with the Baltic is an event regarded with pride and satisfaction in Germany, both from a military and a commercial point of view. The antagonists of Germany, particularly Russia, have not felt pleased over the undertaking by the empire, but as it is in German territory they could not interpose any obstacles. The work was pushed with great vigor from the first. At the outset it was estimated that at least eight years would be necessary to complete it, and through the energy which has been applied by Emperor William it will be finished within the time allotted. It is a triumph of engineering skill, is a waterway of great commercial value to the Baltic ports, and from the standpoint of the naval power of Germany is of incalculable importance.

The canal reaches from the mouth of the Elbe to near Kiel, a distance of sixty-one miles, each end terminating in a mighty lock. Kiel is the principal city of the Schleswig-Holstein province, and is the German chief naval station. It possesses a magnificent harbor, docks, shipbuilding yards, etc., and affords a most suitable location for Germany's fleet. But in the winter it is ice-blocked, for the reason that the passage from the Baltic around Denmark to the North Sea is frozen at that time. Besides this obstacle to navigation north of Denmark in winter, in the summer that route is regarded as the most dangerous in European waters, and it is said that an average of two hundred vessels are lost on those rocky and shoal shores annually. With the new canal opened the German fleet has ready means of egress from and ingress to Kiel harbor at all seasons of the year. By this means a long stride is taken towards Germany's advance to the position of an important naval power in Europe. The canal being wholly in German territory makes it easy to protect; and the voyage from Kiel to the nearest German port on the North Sea is changed from a comparatively long and dangerous one to but a few hours' safe and easy steaming.

Commercially, its value may be reasonably understood from the statement that ships plying between the Baltic and points south of Hull, England, will save 298 miles by the canal; Bremen vessels will save 392 miles, and Hamburg ships 424 miles. It thus brings the north and east Prussian and the Russian Baltic ports into much closer communication with the American and western Europe trade. As might be expected, Hamburg anticipates a falling off in some particulars as a result of the canal opening, as now much of the traffic for east Prussia goes to that city by water and then by railway communication. As an offset to this, however, it is urged that Hamburg's water traffic will be largely increased by her ability to enter into successful competition for the Baltic trade which is held by Denmark, England and others. Aside from any local prospects of commerce, there is no question but the canal will be of in-

estimable value to the German empire, in enabling the German fleet to pass from one sea to the other without entering foreign waters, in making easy a concentration on the north or west coast in a brief space of time, and in affording a safe and direct waterway between the ports on the North Sea and the Baltic. It is anticipated that the fête at the canal opening will be of the most elaborate character.

CHANCE FOR A COLLISION.

Timorous people hardly get fairly over one scare as to the immediate ending of the world on a day absolutely figured out by "science," the stars or some other agency, when along comes another prediction, from which, we are told in the most wise and solemn manner, there is no possibility of escape, and in the accuracy of which the author tells us there can be no particle of doubt. The very latest of these dreadful calculations emanates from Prof. Falb, of Vienna; and according to the *Literary Digest*, he stakes a reputation already well established, through having startled the world with correct predictions of various earthquakes, cyclones and other dire events, upon the declaration that the destruction of the earth by fire, as the prophecies of old have foretold it, will surely take place November 13, 1899. This great conflagration and winding-up, the Austrian professor says, will be kindled by the collision of our earth with a comet; and the scientists appear to agree that while there is possibility of such collision, the greatness of the danger is scarcely such as to frighten the timid. To this class Dr. Klein, a German savant, offers reasoning that will be much more comforting than that of his scientific neighbor. He says:

If we suppose the nucleus of a comet to be a quarter of the size of our earth, there is only one chance in 281 millions that we will run against one of these bodies. The number of comets which pass through our solar system varies between ten and twenty. Under these circumstances the earth should collide with a comet about once in two million years. If the earth collided with a comet 10,000 years ago, it is, of course, not very likely that a similar accident will take place within the next million years. But this does not remove the possibility, as the inhabitants of Jupiter must have learned in 1896, when a comet bumped up against their planet. The comet got the worst of it, for it was torn to pieces.

Taken for granted that the nucleus of a comet is solid, then a collision would be followed by consequences so awful that our fancy could not assist us to realize it. Laplace drew attention to the fact that a collision would change the position of the earth and the length of time necessary for its rotation. The sea would then rush towards the new equator, and every living being would perish. Laplace, however, was unacquainted with an important physical law—he did not know that the force expended in moving ponderous masses is, upon cessation of the movement, converted into heat. According to this law, the collision of our earth with a comet the size of our moon would convert both bodies into vapor.

The question: Are the comets solid? is therefore of some importance. Many astronomers do not believe that they are solid at all; but granted that they are, the addition of a mass of carbonic acid

gas, such as they undoubtedly contain, would necessarily destroy all organic life upon our planet. The tail of a comet, however, is composed of such small particles of matter that our atmosphere undoubtedly is much more densely laden. The earth has passed more than once through the tail of a comet without the slightest atmospheric changes. When the earth approaches the head of a comet, the event is generally marked by a shower of meteors—a very beautiful but harmless phenomenon.

He concludes that those theories which assign to the earth in its present form an almost eternal existence, are contrary to the known laws of nature, and ridiculous. But he classes as equally ridiculous the assertion that the earth will be destroyed by a comet Nov. 13, 1899; for, even if all the foregoing dangers be admitted, the path of the known comets have not yet been determined with sufficient accuracy to warrant such a prediction.

MANITOBA AND CATHOLICS.

The attitude assumed by the Catholic officials in the Manitoba school question is that the support of Catholic parochial schools from the public funds is constitutional, and therefore the province should be compelled to proceed as the Dominion government has directed it to do. It is pointed out that when Manitoba became a province most of the denominational schools were Catholic and were supported by the public; that this latter condition was continued by express provision in the constitution; that the immigration of Orangemen brought the agitation for a change, and that the Orangemen are the same in principle as the A. P. As. in the United States.

It may be true, probably is, that the school support referred to is constitutional in the Dominion—a fact which bears witness of the astuteness of Catholic leadership in politics; otherwise its enforcement would not be sought or resisted except through the agency of the courts. But though constitutional it still is unjust, even from the Catholic statement of the question, which appears in the despatch; and this places the officials of that denomination in the attitude of insisting on the perpetuation of an injustice in order to reap financial advantage. It is admitted that by immigration the sentiment in Manitoba is obnoxious to one opposed to denominational support from the public treasury. Hence, while the support which the Catholics demand is constitutional, they surely must recognize that the enforcement of that demand is the speediest way to effect a radical change in the constitution; for, hedged about as it may be, even in Canada the powers of government rest upon the consent of the governed, and when the majority of the people of Manitoba want to do away with the objectionable feature, as they seem to do at present, it will not take many years to effect the constitutional reform. Ultimately such a proceeding must result in the discomfiture of those who insist on the odious provision, unless they are successful in regaining the political power which they seem to have lost in the province.

Looking at the situation as it now presents itself, there is every prospect of a change in the Manitoban system.