

Prominent Topics.

Senate Reform. The Hon. Senator Scott has given notice of a motion in favour of a radical reorganization of the Senate. He proposes to make the Upper House largely elective, the various provinces for that purpose being divided into large electoral districts. His idea is to bring the Senate into closer touch with the people. The resolution is not a government measure, and probably is in no immediate danger of acceptance. Our first impression is, that it is a move in the wrong direction. An elective Canadian Senate might become as big an anomaly, and as big a nuisance as the United States Senate. The idea of having one elective chamber to check another one is illogical. The Senate ought to be a better and more useful legislative body than any that the people would elect. There is room for improvement, no doubt, in the system of appointment, and the most practical improvement we can imagine would be to diminish rather than to increase the pernicious local and sectional influences which prevent the appointment of the best men in the nation. Senatorial appointments should be the personal prerogative of the Premier, without reference to the patronage of the minister from the district. The very idea of nominating a man to represent any particular constituency is repulsive to common sense. That the French Canadian minority should have proportionate "representation" is logical and reasonable enough; but anything like territorial representation in a nominative body is an absurdity.

The Earthquakes. A destructive earthquake was reported from Spain this week, only to be contradicted or modified into insignificance. All earthquake reports must be received with caution just now; not because they are inherently improbable, but because they have become so common of late, that everybody is in an anticipatory frame of mind on the subject. This is a mental condition which tends to encourage wild rumours and exaggerated reports. That Montreal had a slight touch this week of Mother Earth's general complaint, is the opinion of most Montrealers, but if so, it was so slight as under ordinary circumstances to call for hardly a second thought. The long continuance, and the wide area covered by the earth tremors of the last two years, give much strength to the theory of one general, rather than many local causes of disturbance, but it is comforting to note that the troubles seem to be confined to the well-recognized earthquake areas—at least, it is comforting to those who do not live near them. In every case these seem to be near the sea; and while Mount Royal's geographical formation is manifestly of eruptive origin, there is every reason to believe that the convulsions which attended its birth took place before the sea was driven back to its present limits. Nothing appeals so strongly to human imagination as the earthquake, because nothing appeals so strongly to man's terrors. Two of the synoptic gospels record the saying of the Master on this subject in practically identical terms: "And ye shall hear of wars, and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and Kingdom against Kingdom, and there

shall be famines and pestilences and earthquakes in divers places." But according to the same pre-eminent authority, until the sun be darkened, the moon cease to give her light, the stars fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shaken, "the end is not yet."

Winnipeg Tax Exemptions. The Winnipeg Tax Commission recommends that taxes should be levied on the land used for church purposes, but not on church buildings, which would increase the city revenue by about \$15,000 a year. The value of church property is assessed at \$2,304,840 of which \$1,354,300 is for buildings and \$950,540 for land. This is following the lines recommended in THE CHRONICLE from time to time; namely, that the church edifices themselves, together with the land upon which they stand (within a reasonable area) should be free from taxation, but all the rest of the land should be taxed. It is ridiculous in this city that large areas of land should be free from taxation because they belong to religious bodies. The lands are improved by the taxes paid by the rest of the community. We are referring now more especially to the lands held for speculative purposes and which are sold from time to time.

Dominion Estimates for Year 1909-10. The main estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 1910, were brought down in the Commons on Monday last. Expenditure amounting to \$110,489,774 is provided for, as against main and supplementary grants of \$129,788,173 in the current fiscal year. The Government hopes supplementaries may be avoided for the coming year, so that a considerable saving is thus reckoned upon. Decreased customs revenue naturally calls for careful spending.

For the redemption of the public debt \$50,823,262 is asked and takes in the reduced 4 per cent. loan, payable January, 1910, and the 4 per cent. loan of 1885, payable January 1, 1910-35.

Toronto Street. The annual report of the Toronto Street Railway shows an increase of \$103,264 in net earnings for the year. At Wednesday's meeting the directors congratulated the shareholders on securing control of the Electrical Development Company.

The railway carried 3,564,783 more passengers last year than in 1907. The percentage of operating expenses to gross earnings decreased one per cent. to 52.9 per cent.

The promise of a seven per cent. dividend at the next declaration has naturally resulted in a sharp advance in the stock.

Japan's Finances. Japan's budget shows that the victory over Russia was almost as costly for the victors as for the vanquished. The people have been taxed almost up to the limit of their taxation capacity and still there is need for more revenue. But in peace as in war the Japs are showing heroic disposition, and the government has brought down a budget in which revenue and expenditure approximately balance each other. The government's declared policy is "no loan" until it can be obtained upon terms that will not injure the country's credit.