

CURRENT EVENTS AND OPINIONS.

SIR RICHARD CARTWRIGHT'S speech was a vigorous effort, and it has told. The people begin to feel that they are overtaxed, and for the benefit of sinister interests. Ontario, too, suspects that she is the milch-cow. Sir Richard dwelt again, and more impressively, because more calmly than before, on the demoralizing character of the present system of Government. That the present system of Government is demoralizing no impartial observer has denied; but what is the real source of the evil? It is natural that the Opposition should ascribe it to the personal wickedness of the head of the Government, whose figure they invest with Satanic gloom, and at the same time with Satanic interest. Still a philosophic curiosity may enquire what produced Sir John Macdonald. He did not come up from the realms below through a trap door. The fact is that he and his system are mainly the offspring of a necessity created by the want of unity, and of common interests among the Members of the Confederation, who can be held together so as to form a basis for a government only by such means as are now employed. There is no reason to believe that this necessity would be removed by a mere change of ministers; indeed we have had the strongest indications that the practice of capturing special interests and votes would go on just as it does now, if the Opposition were in power. To supersede intrigue and corruption a policy must be found which will unite and inspire. This, Sir Richard Cartwright seems to feel, and it leads him to touch the chord of Independence.

HAD Sir Richard Cartwright touched the chord of Independence fifteen years ago he would have been excommunicated by the old leaders of his party, and branded as a traitor by their journals. Even commercial independence was denounced in those days by the *Globe* because it might bring political independence in its train. On the other hand, in the heart of many a young Canadian the chord would have responded to the touch. Then was the accepted time if ever Canada was to be made a nation and to enter on an experiment in democracy, independent of that carried on by the United States. The feeling aroused by Confederation was fresh. The financial situation presented a happy contrast to the debt of the United States after the war. The federal territory though not compact was still within a ring fence, and not unmanageably stretched out or disjointed. The statesmen of the Mother Country were by no means unfavourable to the measure; in fact some of them certainly regarded Confederation as a step towards Independence. On the side of the United States there would have been no sort of hostility; the most thoughtful Americans, knowing the defects of their own system, have always been in favour of the double experiment. Yet Independence can hardly be said to have ever been more than a possibility. The stars did not fight for it in their courses as they did for German unity and Italian nationality. The question was one of those in which the secondary forces and even personal influences might turn the scale. The wielder of the *Globe* in those days wanted accommodation in England; Lord Dufferin (of whom Mr. Collins has spoken with profane freedom) had a game of his own to play; and their efforts were practically combined to quell the rising spirit of nationality. The situation is now no longer the same: financially it is reversed, for the American debt is considerably less per head than ours, and it is being rapidly reduced while ours is being not less rapidly increased. But the great change is the enormous extension westward, the influence of which on the destinies of Canada cannot yet be fully foreseen. Our territory has lost every vestige of compactness; it is no longer really within a ring fence, for Lake Superior divides as effectually as the salt sea; it is completely interlaced and bound up in all its parts, commercially as well as geographically, with the territory of our neighbours. If the Confederation holds together and the North-West prospers there will, at any rate, be a complete displacement of the centre of power. In any event, however, Sir Richard Cartwright's words are significant. Nothing can be treason which is countenanced by a knight. We have now the highest assurance that unabated attachment to the Mother Country, just pride in our connection with her, the heartiest feeling of interest in her fortunes and a determination to take no step without her consent, are compatible with a conviction that dependence, at all events when the colony is adult, becomes a false relation and injurious to both parties. A few years ago men who held this opinion and had the honesty to avow it were being hunted down like wild beasts by loyalists whose loyalty was in their pockets. It is notable that even the Tory papers have been cautious and rather backward in attacking this part of Sir Richard Cartwright's speech; they evidently feel that abuse of national aspirations would no longer meet with a general response. Their own leaders have asserted fiscal independence.

MR. COLLINS is at all events a lively writer, and when he deals with party politics it is in a style which does not fail to excite sensibilities on all sides and produce a general brandishing of shillelagns. The title of his present work, "Canada Under the Administration of Lord Lorne," is a tribute to the sacredness of constitutional fiction. Everybody knows that no Governor-General now takes any part in the administration, or does anything in the way of government which might not be just as well done by a stamp. If he retains any real influence it is on the stump, to which like the rest of the world he has now taken, and on which he speaks, naturally enough, in the interest of his Order. To make up for him any semblance of a history, it becomes necessary to insert detailed accounts of his journeys, with descriptions of the scenery and records of his dinner parties, while the pen of his devout historiographer is always trembling on the verge of the burlesque. The event which stripped him of the last shred of power is recounted by Mr. Collins in this book. Lord Lorne's conduct in the Letellier case was no doubt correct, and it was not to be expected that he should do anything but submit, as the Colonial Office instructed him, to the dictation of his nominal servants. Yet it is possible to conceive a man who in such a case would have said that while on all questions of policy he was willing to be guided by his constitutional advisers, even against his clear conviction, on a question of justice, and especially when his own representative was the person arraigned, he must consult his own conscience, and that if he was to be told that unless he would consent to injustice he must go home, home with unsullied honour he would go. It is at least a tenable position that in resisting, Lord Lorne would have the express provision of the law upon his side. Letellier was dismissed by the vote of the two Houses of Parliament: no cause other than their vote was assigned; for the allegation that "his usefulness had ceased," inserted to satisfy the requirement of the Act, was obviously a mere verbal subterfuge. But the two Houses of Parliament had no such power, the power of dismissing a Lieutenant-Governor being expressly reserved to the Governor in Council, who is unquestionably directed to exercise it only for a specific breach of duty such as could be distinctly set forth in the instrument of dismissal. Governor Letellier may have acted improperly and under sinister inspiration: probably he did; still he was within the legal limits of his prerogative, so that it would have been impossible for the Governor-General without impeaching his own prerogative to assign a specific reason of dismissal. Thus the requirement of the Act was not satisfied, and the instrument of dismissal was void. Moreover, if the two Houses of Parliament had possessed the power which they claimed, they ought to have exercised it by joint resolution, whereas the resolutions of the Senate and the House of Commons were passed not only in different sessions but in different Parliaments. The vote of the Commons on the first occasion was in effect the defeat of the joint resolution, and it ought to have been held final, particularly when the motion was of a penal character. The proceeding was a lawless act of party vengeance which, we may be sure, Sir John Macdonald disapproved as thoroughly as any one, though he was compelled to give way to the vindictive fury of the Bleus.

FROM the Letellier case, as it is recalled to our minds by Mr. Collins, two inferences may be drawn. The first is that a community like ours ought to have a written constitution strictly defining the limits of every one's authority, and really operative in all its parts. It will not do to have questions of prerogative or jurisdiction open, and trust to their being settled as they may arise by "the well understood principles of the British Constitution." The principles of the British Constitution may be well understood in Great Britain. They are there indelibly stamped by the practice of centuries on the minds of all public men. They have, moreover, been in the keeping of a hierarchy of great political families with an unbroken tradition, and bound by the strongest considerations to respect the integrity of a polity which was their own particular heritage. In this country the case is different. The French, to begin with, who were the chief actors in the Letellier affair, though they have received the British Constitution, can hardly be supposed to have perfectly imbibed its spirit, nor can they be trusted on doubtful points, especially when the possession of power or patronage is involved, to be, like the heirs of Somers and Burke, an unerring law to themselves. But even our politicians of British race are not controlled by tradition anything like so thoroughly as their kinsmen in the Old Country. Canada has nothing answering to the hierarchy of great families; nor is even the public life of individuals so continuous as it is in England, where men of property and rank once elected to Parliament commonly remain there for their lives, leaving the House of Commons, in many cases, only to pass into the House of Lords. Here in a fierce party struggle there will always be a