

Current Comment.

The Selkirk Centennial.

The committee in charge of the exhibition report favorable progress. It is becoming that everybody in Western Canada should join hands in furthering the project. The occupation of the Red River Valley by the early Scotch settlers is worthy of remembrance. It will do us good to see what a hundred years has meant for the West and for the world. Perhaps the contrast is brought out in the most forcible manner by recalling to mind the social conditions in Great Britain one hundred years ago.

The population was then about fourteen millions. About one million were at war, for war was a common condition in all European states. The wages of unskilled laborers were 11 to 15 shillings a week and of skilled laborers from 22 to 25 shillings. The power loom was just taking the place of the hand loom, thus reducing the earnings of weavers by one-half. There was a high protection tariff in force, so that landlords and farmers were growing wealthy. Wheat had risen from 47 shillings a quarter in 1792 to 180 shillings in 1801. The law-makers were the land-owners and the working-classes had no power in legislation. All laws were made for the benefit of the grower rather than to help the consumer. Many lived on short allowance. Many died from starvation. Bread in Glasgow was not sold until it was twenty-four hours out of the oven. This was to save crumbs. The annual expenditure in 1800 was 20 million pounds, and in 1815 was 107 million pounds. So much for war. Everything was taxed. As an illustration the tax on salt was 40 times the value of the article. The hanging of criminals was common. Over 200 offences were punishable by death. The doctrine preached and practised by the judges was that a felon cannot reform. The heads of decapitated criminals were publicly exposed. The prisons were loathsome. The jailors were inhuman. No provision was made for separation of sexes and those of different ages. London had a population of a million. There was no gas, but only occasional lamps. There was no sufficient standing army and navy, but press-gangs were to be found in every port. Disease was frightfully common and the practice of medicine was very crude. Only 2600 were killed by bullets in the Crimean war,

but 18,500 died in the hospital or from wounds. Slavery was common throughout Europe, and it was not yet forbidden in the English colonies. Women and children worked in the coal pits and in the factories, and there were no laws to govern hours of labor. Many children worked from 13 to 15 hours daily and were then flogged for going to sleep at their work or at their Sunday devotions. Travel was by stage coach and by sailing vessels. There was no common language but a series of dialects. Laborers were forced to accept a fixed wage and combinations were forbidden. Intoxication among the better classes was common. The proof of manliness was ability to drink companions dead drunk. Profanity was common. Even preachers swore in order to be emphatic. Forty per cent. of the men and sixty per cent. of the women were unable to write their own names. Sanitary conditions were frightful. The streets were filthy. In 1800 one in forty-eight of the people died. In 1820 the rate was one in fifty-seven.

These facts and figures give some indication of life a hundred years ago. When the world makes its showing in 1912 and the West puts forth its best effort what a change there will be! Yet we must be honest. The world has been growing better but there are many wrongs yet to be righted. If we are in earnest, however, we can present in 1912 such results that by comparison with 1812 we need not be ashamed.

A Time of Change.

It seems to be a time when all the nations are wanting a change of leadership. Germany has just changed Buelow for Bethmann-Hallweg, a close personal friend of the Emperor, and a comparatively unknown quality in politics; Clemenceau, the able leader of the French Chamber of Deputies, has for a time at least resigned the office; the new Sultan is now fairly seated in his chair and is planning for such a tour as will make him known to other European powers; the Nationalists of Persia have deposed the Shah, who will seek refuge in a Russian Palace; in Britain it is just a question whether the government will carry through its policy; and in the United States although it

is known which party controls the affairs of the nation, it is not absolutely certain who controls or truly represents that party. In our own country it is resting time for those in political control, but there are evidences of unrest. Probably Mr. Pugsley expresses the sentiments of the government as to a naval policy, but it is more than likely he is speaking his own views, and that other members of the cabinet are not of like mind.

With regard to the changes in Turkey and Persia there will be but one opinion entertained by Canadians. Anything that looks to democratic government,—government by those really and vitally concerned with the country's welfare—will be endorsed by our people. Whether the Young Turks and the Nationalists of Persia are wise or unwise they will at least have the good wishes of Canadians in their attempts to establish constitutional government. The new German chancellor will be watched with unusual interest because he will probably represent more truly than his predecessor the mind of the Emperor. As for France, no one need feel alarmed. The change is one of men, not of policies.

Somewhat Inconsistent.

One of the most sensible utterances of late has been that of President Taft at the Champlain Tercentenary when he said, speaking of Canada: "They cannot have a prosperity that we cannot and must not share, and we cannot have a prosperity that they will not derive benefit from. Therefore each may look to the growth of the other with entire complacency and an earnest desire that the ideals and ambitions they have formed may be carried to fruition. I am glad to feel that these celebrations are a permanent step forward in bringing about that union of feeling, sentiment and neighborhood that ought to be encouraged between these two great powers on the North American continent." Yet it is strange that in face of this declaration, Mr. Taft's government is doing its best to erect a barrier between the two nations that interferes with the progress of both and that tends to do anything but develop the spirit of unity. Nor is our own government much better, but such is life.

THE PHILOSOPHER.

Lord Strathcona's Visit.

In regard to the holding of the seventy-ninth meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, in Winnipeg, it is difficult, indeed, to write anything new, after the multitudinous things that have been written about it on both sides of the Atlantic. One of the most striking things in connection with that great assemblage of scientists was the presence of Lord Strathcona, who crossed the Atlantic to be present at so notable a congress in what is now one of the world's important cities, but which he knew, in mature middle life, as the site of a trading post with a vast wilderness stretching away from it, tenanted only by the Indians and buffaloes. A land which he knew when it was the Great Lone Land, which the traveller traversed by means of the canoe in summer and the dog train in winter, he has revisited in his vigorous old age, blest as he is with the length of days beyond what is usually granted to mankind, to find it covered with an ever-growing network of railways and fields of waving grain. Few pages of romance contain anything to match the life-story of the poor Scotch boy, Donald Smith, who is today Lord Strathcona. We can imagine with what thoughts he gazed last week at that relic of the past, Fort Garry gate, standing in its little park in Winnipeg, where, two score years ago, at a crisis in the Empire's history as well as in his own, he stood for hours in the open air, one winter day, negotiating with the head men of the Riel rebellion until his feet were frozen! What a satisfaction it must be to him to look back over the part he played in the history and development of Western Canada and to see fulfilled the forecast he made so many years ago!

Western Canada's Northland.

A well-illustrated report for public distribution has just been issued by the Railway Lands Branch of the Department of the Interior at Ottawa, giving an interesting account of exploration work being done in Western Canada's

northland during the season of 1908. The territory covered by the explorers is a part of the Dominion in regard to which information has hitherto been difficult to obtain. It includes that portion of Saskatchewan north of Prince Albert as far as Churchill River and extending from Montreal Lake and Lake La Ronge on the east to Green Lake and connecting waters as far north as Portage La Loche on the west. Recent finds of gold and other minerals at Lake La Ronge and northward make this report of special interest and value to those who prefer treasure-hunting to the surer work of developing the fertility of the soil. The report shows that much of the land is suitable for mixed farming, as soon as it is made accessible by roads, and the area of available fertile land can be immensely increased by an inexpensive system of drainage. In a prominent place in the report is given the opinion of Professor John Macoun, the eminent naturalist of the Dominion Geological Survey, who is an unquestioned authority. He declares that there can be no question of the value of the land north of the Saskatchewan, and he is convinced that settlers going in there are assured of three essentials—food, water and hay for cattle. The low altitude and the long days are fixed conditions. More will be heard of Western Canada's northland.

Mr. Hill and Mr. Patten.

That notable Canadian by birth, Mr. James J. Hill, had the people of this Dominion no less than his fellow-citizens of the United States in mind when he said recently: "The price of meat is going up, and the wage-earner will have to turn to breadstuffs for his food." Advice proffered with sage and benevolent paternalism! Coincident with this benign counsel from the owner of all the trunk lines in the United States west of the Mississippi, Mr. Patten had this to say: "My personal property, eh? Well, you can put it down at double what it was last year, and never mind the figures." In this glib fashion did the Wheat King shadow forth his huge pro-

fits from his successful cornering of the market, "not to affect the consumer," as he undertook to explain, "because that would be sinful, and I am a member of the church, but to make money only at the expense of the other speculators"—though, of course, the consumer has had to pay, as the flour mills of the continent had to raise their prices. Mr. Patten has the grace not to say, like Mr. Hill, that "now is a good time to begin practising economy." This advice of the railway magnate, coming from one of the richest men in the world, who has but to rub his Aladdin's lamp to have his genie do his will, rings with audacious sarcasm, in its assertion of the principle that the poor must accommodate their way of living to the exactions of the rich.

British Rule in India.

There is no doubt that the whole people of India have benefited to an enormous degree by the British rule of the past few decades. Even the corruption of the old company, a century ago, was as nothing compared to the corruption of the native rulers. No unbiased observer can escape the conviction that the withdrawal or expulsion of England from India would be the greatest possible disaster to the people of India.—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

The Motor Speed Craze.

About all society can do is to assert its right to self-preservation. Men will take risks with their own lives, but they have no right to endanger the lives of others. There are those who drive in motor cars and whose tendency seems to be to take an ell where they are allowed an inch. These are enemies of the community, their pleasure a menace to the lives of pedestrians, and especially of children. The motor car affords its owner new opportunity to obtain the enjoyment that comes from the control of power, but it does not place him above the law. If he gets the idea that it does he ought to be summarily set right. It would be good for his health.—Montreal Herald.