

HARBOUR BOARD AFFAIRS.

It is much to be regretted that a controversy has broken out over the constitution and management of the Harbour Board of this city. It is a new illustration of the old saying that, when two ride the same horse one must ride behind. So long as one of the equestrians is content to be merely a passenger this dual occupancy gives no trouble, but, when both desire to hold the reins—there is a disturbance. The Harbour Board and the Government of the day are liable to be put in conflict by their being a lack of harmony between them as to the policy to be pursued in regard to Harbour business. The Government, which, in this matter, is represented by the Minister of Public Works for the time being, has no power to initiate any policy respecting the Harbour, but its power to retard the progress of business initiated by the Commissioners, and to prevent their policy being carried out, is absolute. This form of dual authority over Harbours, though in some respects anomalous and liable to create friction, is general in most maritime countries, as governments claim jurisdiction over water-ways and coast lines, which, naturally, implies some authority over public works constructed for the convenience of shipping. Governments also naturally return this power, inasmuch as they control the revenue of a country out of which they are expected to spend the nation's money in providing facilities for maritime commerce. In the latter respect the Harbour of Montreal differs from other ports, for the Harbour works here were not constructed by money drawn from and charged to the national revenue. The Government's financial relation to the Harbour of this city is that of a lender; it has advanced money on the security of debentures issued by the Harbour Commissioners, for the principal of which they are responsible, and the interest on which they have regularly paid. The Government, therefore, under such circumstances, cannot in equity claim to exercise that supreme control over the Harbour which is justifiable in cases where the works of a harbour, or port, have been constructed wholly out of funds provided by the national revenue. It seems more in accord with sound business ideas for the administration of a harbour like that of this city to be controlled by representatives of those interests for the promotion of which the Harbour was built and is being maintained. They, being vitally concerned in its efficiency, are surely its natural guardians, and they, having, as it were, their fingers on the pulse of the shipping trade, must be the most competent to judge of its present and future requirements in harbour accommodation. They also may be relied upon to promote the interest of the Harbour

steadily year after year by a continuous policy on the same lines. A government is not a permanency; this season it may be most friendly to a port, its temporary policy in this respect may indeed outrun in zeal that of the local authorities, but, next season, or at an early date, a change of government may occur, or, the Minister in charge of Harbour works may be changed, with the result of an entire alteration in the policy of the government respecting some particular port. Montreal has never had such "a friend at Court" in this respect as some other places. Quebec, for instance, has been lent millions for which no interest has ever been paid. We freely and gladly credit the Hon. Mr. Tarte with greater desire to do Montreal justice than his predecessors showed. He has the wisdom to recognise, as "La Patrie" so justly says, that "Montreal, on account of its geographical position, is essentially a national port. The country possesses interests there of the first importance. The commerce which does not pass by Montreal by the St. Lawrence route will go to the United States."

THE CHRONICLE, on several occasions, has made the same declaration. The question is not, Montreal or Quebec, or some other port in Canada, the alternative is, Montreal or Portland, or Boston or New York. This port has a location as the head ocean navigation and the terminus of inland, that cannot be duplicated or rivalled. Defective judgment, local jealousies, political interests may seek to check the development of the shipping interests of Montreal, but, to the extent this is done the loss will be Canada's, for the development of the commerce of the Dominion is contingent, to a great extent, upon the equipment of the Harbour of this city with facilities essential to the growth of the nations trade. In relation to the affairs of the Harbour, now under discussion, the following questions need careful consideration.

1. What would be the best mode of organizing a Board of Harbour Commissioners?

2. Should not the commercial element, including of course, shipping representatives, be the controlling influence in the members of the Harbour Board?

3. If the government assumes the Harbour debt, instead of occupying its present position as a lender secured by Harbour bonds, would it be desirable for the City to hand over the control of its Harbour without having such representation in the management as would safeguard the interests of the Harbour, and protect those interests from being jeopardized by political exigences and changes?

Upon a wise solution of the above questions and the adoption of a policy based thereon depend, to a large extent, the future interests of this port. In con-