

CURRENT EVENTS AND OPINIONS.

A ROYAL funeral in England, with its midnight pomp, its draped in black chapel, its dead march, its lines of cuirassiers holding flambeaux, its solemn train of mourners, its chanted service, is as impressive as any pageantry of death can be. But the number of sincere mourners usually bears a small proportion to the display of woe. In the case of Prince Leopold the sincere mourners will not be few. The congenital malady which has been the cause of his early death and which always made his life precarious, brought with it a certain compensation, inasmuch as by debarring him from physical exertion and from field sports, it disposed him to intellectual pursuits. He had considerable literary culture, with a refined taste, and was a good musician. He also took a most intelligent interest in public affairs; and the wish which he expressed to become Governor-General of Canada, though it could not with propriety be gratified, was the earnest of his sense of duty and his desire to be no mere social fetish, but a man and a useful man in his generation. A more amiable disposition or pleasanter manners there could not be. Prince Leopold's life seemed likely to be a happy one. It had, at least the prime element of all happiness, union with a woman worthy of love. Claremont, the palace which was built by Clive out of the spoils of Indian conquest, in which his last dark years were passed, and where the wild story of his fierce and towering ambition came to its tragic close, had become, by a curious turn of destiny, the joyous home of the young Duke and Duchess, with their little domestic court. One large room had, according to tradition, been built by special order of the imperious proconsul to accommodate a carpet of vast dimensions, the gift of an Indian prince, which still covers the floor. In that room and on that carpet gathered round the piano the bright little circle which seemed to have the promise of many years of domestic happiness. But the gentle and gracious young wife, who was the centre of the circle, is a young widow. Perhaps, after all, as these are not good times for Royalty, the Prince who had such a high ideal of Royal duty may have been taken from evil to come. His aspirations might have been disappointed, and disappointment might have brought a cloud even upon the sunny life of Claremont.

In this affair of the Conspiracy Scandal we have seen what a hold party politics have got upon the minds, or, as it would be nearer the truth to say, on the passions of the people. What horse-racing and betting on horse-racing are to the Englishman, party politics are to the Canadian. It is understood that on the morning after the disclosure 45,000 copies of the *Globe* were sold. The air resounded with the exultation of the Grits, into whose clutches so inestimable a piece of political capital had fallen, and with the yells of anguish uttered by their discomfited opponents. Small was the number of those who followed in silent grief the funeral of public honour. A tornado ensued in which moral bearings were entirely lost. All regard or semblance of regard for justice gave way. Accused persons, one of them a foreigner and a stranger, before they had been committed for trial, before even the *prima facie* evidence against them had been formally taken, before anything had appeared except the statement of the head of the party interested in establishing their guilt, were held up to public execration as convicted criminals. On the other side the witnesses were vilified with not less fury. Where evidence failed suspicion took its place, and no suspicion was too extravagant for the credulity of party hatred. The party division which excites the people to such frenzy is itself absolutely baseless, and senseless; as baseless and as senseless as anything in the history of factions, as the feuds of the Blues and Greens at Constantinople or that of the Blacks and Whites at Florence. No Grit or Tory of Ontario can give any intelligible account of his political faith; he can only assert that his party is the party of purity and that the opposite party is the party of corruption; meaning by purity the appropriation of the spoils to himself and by corruption their appropriation to some one else. Provincial independence, of which the Grits just at present make a cry, is merely the accidental tendency, or rather the strategy, of the party which happens to be out of power at Ottawa. Yet the people are perfectly crazed with the excitement of this unwholesome game, nor does there seem to be any hope of weaning them from their master passion. Reason has no access to their minds upon the subject. They will not look at anything which is not narrowly and bitterly partisan. In point of fact they read very little but falsehood.

It is naturally asked by an anxious public whether this scandal stands alone, or whether it is merely the accidental appearance on the surface of that which has always been going on below. As there have not been in the Ontario Legislature many notable cases of ratting, we may dismiss

the suspicion that money has been spent, or corruption of any kind habitually employed, in buying over votes upon political questions. With regard to commercial questions and private bill legislation generally, the same assurance can hardly be felt. We remember the events connected with the name of Mr. Rykert. Some years ago the *Toronto Nation* published, under the title, "Down Brakes," an article on the railway legislation of the Province, showing how charters had been given in every direction to companies, all of which cannot have had a *bona fide* object, and how, to suit the convenience of their projectors, all the legislative safeguards against fraud had, one after another, been abandoned. It is difficult to believe that this was accomplished without a Lobby, or that the Lobby employed no means of persuasion but arguments drawn from a special theory of the public good. What can we expect? Under the party system the best men are pretty sure to stand aloof from politics. They care nothing for the prizes for which factions fight, and they shrink from the trouble, the annoyances and the humiliations of a campaign. They are not prepared to have their characters torn to pieces, in addition to incurring heavy expense, for the pleasure of being present at a series of futile party squabbles, and having the literary dainties in the shape of party editorials on which they have already fed to satiety at home, served up cold to them again at Toronto. They know that there is no issue between the parties great enough to make it worth their while to sacrifice their comfort and interest for the sake of putting either party into power. The wirepullers, therefore, are compelled to have recourse to men of another class, men whose objects are personal, perhaps to needy men who can ill afford the expense of an election, and go to the Legislature with pecuniary embarrassments round their necks. It would be almost miraculous if the result were a Parliament of incorruptibles.

ONCE more the devotees of party government ask us, what can be substituted for it if it is given up; and they seem to think that this question is unanswerable. It has been twenty times answered. The natural substitute for a system which makes the offices of government the prize of a perpetual faction fight is the regular election of the executive council by the legislature, for a term certain, with such a rotation of measures as may suffice to keep up the general harmony between the two bodies. Perhaps it might be also desirable to have a minority clause as a safeguard against sectionalism, at all events, till party had been fairly worked off. Neither this, nor any other political arrangement, will exclude human passions and infirmities; but this arrangement would put an end to the ceaseless battle of organized factions for place, which constitutes the present system, and which is dragging all free communities through discord and corruption to their ruin. And now, in turn, let us ask the advocates of the present system how the division of the community into parties can remain reasonable and moral when differences of principle on organic questions have ceased to exist? What can justify good citizens in permanently banding themselves together against their fellow-citizens, unless there is some great political object which can only be attained through such a combination? What, at this moment, justifies party divisions and party feeling in Ontario? The practical answer is being given in several of the legislative assemblies of Europe by the total disintegration of parties, which, where there is no other government, or basis for government, must end, sooner or later, in administrative chaos. Further, let the advocates of the present system tell us, if the existence of two parties is indispensable to the life of the State, why they are always vilifying and trying to destroy the party to which they do not happen to belong. Might not one of a man's legs as well vilify and try to destroy the other? Among other good effects of a change, our ablest political writers would be rescued from the most unhappy thralldom. No longer chained like galley-slaves to the oar of faction, they would be free to make the best use of their intellects to tell the truth and give honest advice to the country.

THAT there is no fundamental difference of character between our two political parties, whatever fond belief the self-esteem of either of them may cherish, is proved by the occasional coalitions. The sections of which the Confederation Government was made up had all their lives been waging war, in the name of indefeasible principle, on each other. Yet when Deadlock gave the word, they suddenly discovered that public morality sanctioned and even commanded their union, not only in the hall of the legislature, but in place. Mr. Cauchon's reputation "stank to heaven;" but Mr. Cauchon became indispensable, and deodorizing chemicals were found. The Ottawa correspondent of *THE WEEK*, in his last letter foreshadowed a coalition still more indicative of the fundamental harmony which underlies all the discord. Speculating on the succession to Sir John