

CURRENT EVENTS AND OPINIONS.

THE Session which is just closing has not been very fruitful of legislation. Its only measure of first-rate importance has been the fresh grant in aid of our great political and military railway. The grant was necessary, and it is not likely to be lost. The line to the north of Lake Superior and that through the mountains, when completed, will probably require assistance in their operation: that through the mountains almost certainly will, unless the vision of a diversion of the Asiatic trade from San Francisco to British Columbia should be fulfilled. Conquering nature for political objects is a costly business, and the nation which embarks on such an enterprise must be prepared to pay. All impartial testimony goes to prove that the work is, at all events, being well done, and that the construction is solid as well as rapid. But the terms which the Government was compelled to make with Quebec and other Provinces, as the condition of their acquiescence in the grant, form, apart from the startling magnitude of the sum, an incident of the most profound significance. They at once make more manifest and wider a rift in the edifice of Confederation, which was too manifest and too wide before. It is evident that the several Provinces, and, above all, Quebec, instead of identifying themselves collectively with the interests of the Dominion, regard the Dominion as a separate, and almost as an adverse, interest, from which each of them is justified in exacting as much as it can. This is not union, nor does it promise union. It looks like a combination held together by a manager of vast experience and consummate address, whom it has no very assured prospect of surviving. If the original settlement between the Provinces had been made final, and no continuing claim of grants in aid, to the extent of eighty cents per head, had been introduced into the compact, a sinister element would no doubt have been excluded; but this would not have made New France British, nor would it have brought the Maritime Provinces close to the heart of Ontario, from which New France cuts them off. Great party struggles have been rendered impossible by the weakness of the Opposition. That the majority was not only overwhelming, but compact and unrestrained by scruples, was shown in the affair of Sir Charles Tupper. On the question of the Pacific Railway grant the Opposition was fatally crippled by the impossibility of directly refusing indispensable aid to an enterprise to which it was itself committed; while the policy of oblique attack to which it resorted failed, and deserved to fail, through the groundlessness of the charges against the Syndicate, the integrity of which in the fulfilment of its contract is really the strong point on the side of the Government. On the Tariff question nothing vigorous could be done by the Opposition, because the mind of its leader evidently wavers; his attitude is always that of a man standing on one foot, and uncertain where he shall put down the other. His financial lieutenant delivered himself of a fierce invective, but neither of them ventured to attack the coal tax, which embodies, in the most rampant form, the principle of Protection. Their abstention no doubt was dictated by their fear of losing the votes of Nova Scotia: but wrongdoing, or acquiescence in wrong, for the sake of votes is precisely the offence with which they are always upbraiding Sir John Macdonald. The Section B affair seems to have collapsed, though this is strange, after what appeared a virtual admission of the truth of the charge on the part of the accused. To raise great issues, such as that of the reform of the Senate, in face of an overpowering majority, may be bad tactics. But Mr. Blake has certainly failed to impress the country with any definite idea of the better policy which, if he were in power, he would pursue, and consequently he has failed to sustain public interest, once so intense, in his political fortunes. This is what people mean when they express disappointment at his leadership, for his speaking, without rising to eloquence in the highest sense, is uniformly good, though perhaps it somewhat exceeds in detail and lacks breadth. His great effort was his speech against Orange incorporation, and this was not a declaration of policy, but a stroke of strategy. Its character is marked, by its connection with his previous speech in favour of Home Rule, by the use which has been made of it as an appeal to the Roman Catholics, and by the significant exception from its general denunciation of secret societies of that not least questionable class which embraces the Terrorist Land League. This may be good generalship, and it may produce—what it is evidently intended to produce—a political friendship between the speaker and the Bleus. But it is not the Aurora speech.

“ See Mizriam's kingcraft, of its crown bereft,
Sink to nocturnal deeds of petty theft ”—

Sink at least from the ambition of founding a nation to that of manufacturing a majority by the ordinary acts of the unsentimental politician—those acts against which so much has been said, and with so much force, when they were employed in the service of the wicked.

“THE idolatry of the heathen is not greater than the idolatry of party politics to-day.” Principal Grant, who is reported to have said this in a sermon, is clear of all suspicion of sinister motives, *sans reproche* as well as *sans peur*, and behind the ample shelter of his mantle the “Bystander” takes refuge from the imputation of covertly disseminating toryism, under pretence of decrying party. But, in this Conspiracy case, that which withheld the “Bystander” from following the example of eminent writers in the Reform press and holding up the accused to public reprobation, has not been preference of independence to party; still less has it been indifference to political corruption: it has been simply regard for the first principles of justice. Every man is to be held innocent till he has been proved guilty, and no man is proved guilty till he has been convicted after a fair trial. Surely that is a maxim recognized by every one who holds British traditions, as well as by every minister of the law. Therefore, in the interval between arrest and trial the lips of all those who love justice are sealed; and they will refrain not only from presuming the guilt of the accused, but even from descanting upon the heinousness of the offence, which the illogical are apt to accept as a sufficient proof of guilt, or doing anything which may influence the minds of those who are to serve upon the jury. In a political case the duty of forbearance becomes trebly strong, and it is still further enhanced when one of the defendants is a foreigner. It was a questionable measure even to keep a parliamentary inquiry on foot when the case had been consigned to the hands of ordinary justice, because one process was liable to be, in some degree, affected by the other. But party feeling in its paroxysms bursts through all laws. Let a conviction ensue, and the “Bystander” promises to show, as he believes he has before, that independence of both parties is not sympathy with the corrupt acts of either. Meantime let him assure his more powerful brethren of the party press that he is as far as possible from laying claim to any breadth or elevation of view not equally possessed by them. He has no doubt whatever that in their own minds they see things exactly as he does, and scoff at the absurd idea that there is any essential difference between the parties. But their public task is that of party advocates. No doubt they perform it with daily groans. Their finer intelligence shares the fate of Ariel, stuck by Sycorax in the cleft oak. Unhappily there is not likely to be a Prospero in this generation to set them free.

WHY will the Episcopal Church in this country persist in marring the festivals of a religion of charity and at the same time playing into the hands of scepticism by reciting the Athanasian creed? No document can have a worse pedigree. It is needless to rehearse the well-known proofs, historical and philological, of its spurious character and its late origin. The defence made for it is that, though a fabrication, it contains a genuine expression of the dogmatic tendencies of the day: but the same defence might be made for the False Decretals and for all the fictions of the Middle Ages. The ostentation of paradox which not only provokes but justifies the ridicule of the scoffer is fully as objectionable as the uncharitableness of the Anathema. But the Anathema embraces in its sweep not only Arians and Unitarians of every shade, including Milton as well as Channing, but the whole of the Eastern Churches which reject the procession of the Third from the Second Person of the Trinity, though to form an alliance with the Eastern Churches against Rome has long been, and still is, the cherished aim of high Anglican diplomacy. It is difficult to see how even the author of the Fourth Gospel escapes: for the Greek words, chapter i. 14, can hardly be translated otherwise than “The Word (The Second Person of the Trinity) was converted into flesh.” Responsibility for the Anathema is scarcely evaded by closing the prayer book, or omitting to respond, as is the habit of many, or even by sitting down, as old George III., liberal in this singular instance, used to do. The only presentable ground for retaining the creed is the desire of conformity to the Mother Church. But the Established Church of England has long ceased to be, if ever she was, a living authority. She has been, for centuries, morally “lapped in lead,” her powers of self-government, of legislation, of self-adaptation to times and circumstances being suspended by her subjection to the State. Nor is it possible that, without disestablishment she should recover her liberty and her volition. Independence will never be conceded by Parliament to a body holding vast State endowments, while Parliament itself, swarming with those whom the church counts infidels and heretics, is wholly incapacitated for ecclesiastical legislation. What the Church of England would do on any question if her chains were struck off, it is impossible to say. A large section of her clergy, apparently would move in the direction of Ritualism, Sacerdotalism, and ultimately of union with Rome. The great mass of the educated laity and some of the ablest and most learned among the clergy would move in the very opposite direction. But, at all events, it is idle to plead the