

SURELY if the gods take any interest in Canadian affairs they must find abundant occasion for laughter or for tears, according to their point of view, in the capers which our politicians cut before the face of heaven. Take, for instance, the position of the government with reference to the proposed Atlantic and Pacific Steamship lines, which are now receiving so much attention. Steamship lines, ocean cables, and other aids to international trade must ever be welcome to free traders, or to those who believe in a moderate tariff for revenue purposes only. The aim of each of these classes is to stimulate international trade in both exports and imports—exports of what we can most easily produce and imports of what we can less easily produce. Not national independence, but national interdependence is regarded as the proper ideal; hence the desire for free and direct intercourse. But it puzzles one to discover what a protectionist can find to admire in the development of international trade facilities, unless, perhaps, as merely fashionable and ornamental fringes for the national skirts. And, indeed, if we take note of the way in which the politicians refer to these things, this latter idea becomes rather more than a suspicion. The government way of explaining the situation in the concrete language of fact may be condensed thus. We are bound to establish new and fast lines of steamers on the Atlantic and Pacific. At the same time protection to home industries, both actual and prospective, must be firmly maintained. The ideal sought is as complete a discouragement as possible of most imports. This of course, so far as successful, will discourage exports too, by preventing a natural return for them, and by causing the shipping companies to charge higher freights when there is so little for them to carry, especially on the incoming trips. But as we anticipate very considerable success in our restriction of foreign trade, it must be obvious that, even charging the highest rates practicable, the companies will require very large annual subsidies. These we propose to pay out of the fine, which we shall collect from those who still persist in using the steamer to import foreign wares. So, you see, even if we gave up the protective idea—which God forbid—we should still have to collect these fines in order to make up the subsidies which are themselves made necessary by reason of collecting the fines. Quite so we say. And what about those other steamship lines which are already serving the country, and which have to charge higher than normal freight rates on account of your successful restriction of trade? That, says the government, we are just about to attend to. We propose to regulate and reduce their rates by law, for the benefit of exporters. Remarkable country this, we say; and the gods laugh or weep according as the humour or pathos of the situation strikes them.

A. S.