

## Is it Rich or Not?

WHEN spies are sent to look out a land of promise, and they disagree in their reports, what is to be done about it? Are we to take the favorable or the unfavorable verdict? That is the question now confronting Canada, and the land in doubt is the Peace River country, in Athabasca. The spies who have heretofore gone up to examine that country, some of whom have been settlers, have given glowing reports of its fertility and industrial possibilities, and some parts of it have been supposed to be among the richest in Canada. But another spy, under Government orders, went north last year to more carefully explore the region, and instead of confirming the general impression he brings back a report of quite another color. Mr. Macoun says it is not a fertile country, and will never attract a tide of settlement such as that in Manitoba and the southern territories.

To have a nation's great expectations thus rudely shaken was, of course, unpleasant, and a lively discussion in Parliament followed the recent publication of the report. The question now is, which is right—the *pro* or the *con*? Canada evidently prefers to believe the former. Honesty and sincerity must be granted to Mr. Macoun, but it is claimed that his investigations could not have been sufficiently thorough, for some portions of the country, notably the Peace River Valley, are already settled and others are known to be fertile. The real facts probably lie, as usual, midway. Its northern situation will very likely limit the capabilities of the region, yet there certainly are areas highly suitable for settlement and at least fairly profitable cultivation. Indeed, Mr. Macoun admits as much.

The question is of importance because the Peace River country is one of the regions which will be opened up by the new transcontinental railway. There is another side to it, too—what effect this report and its subsequent discussion will have upon further immigration, particularly from the western states. It is feared by some that

intending settlers will be discouraged from coming. But there does not seem to be any reason for believing this. The tide of settlement has as yet hardly turned toward the "farther north country," and there are meanwhile immense areas in Saskatchewan and Alberta awaiting the newcomers. And even when these are filled up, prospective immigrants to the Peace River country will examine the ground for themselves and will not take Government reports as final. Mr. Macoun's remarks need not at all be taken as a dose of national bitters.

## Less Money for Our Tickets

IF cheap rates on the railroads were permanent instead of only occasional attractions, twice as many people would travel. That is one of the claims made by the agitators for reduced railway fares; and another is that with the railway traffic as fully developed as it now is, the people who already travel should be given the benefit of a cheaper rate. This question has been freshly brought to notice by a demand made in the House of Commons that one of the roads asking for new legislation be required, as a condition, to give a two-cent passenger rate.

A reduction from three to two cents a mile on all Canadian roads would no doubt be as much welcomed as two-cent postage was; and as Parliament has the matter of railway rates under its control, the change could easily be made. But it will not be made just yet. Some of the lines operating in Canada are prosperous enough to justify a reduction, but there are many other lines running through comparatively new country, on which traffic is necessarily light, and it cannot reasonably be asked of these lines that they make the same sacrifices as the former. A standard applicable to all would perhaps be difficult to decide upon. The State of Michigan has a law that a two-cent rate shall be given by all roads which have earnings of \$3,000 a mile, or more. Some such principle as this might well be adapted to the Canadian roads. The two-cent rate through southern Ontario, for example, is as reasonable as in New York or Michigan,