

CURRENT EVENTS AND OPINIONS.

THE debate on the Pacific Railway resolution was, as it was sure to be, a faction fight. Had the two parties in this "deliberative assembly" deliberated with their fists, nothing would have been lost in wisdom, while something perhaps would have been gained in justice. Apart from the general expediency of the enterprise, there were points which might have been discussed with great advantage to the country. It might have been considered whether the increase of speed in construction, which forms the special ground of the demand for further assistance, was worth the increased cost. It might also have been considered whether the opportunity should be taken of stipulating, in the public interest, for any modifications of the original agreement. But nothing connected with the public interest was considered or discussed; nothing connected with the public interest really weighed a feather in the wavering scale. The magnanimous patriotism of Quebec had embraced the opportunity of levying a handsome tribute on the confederation, and whether the Government would be able to make a bargain with Quebec was the only practical question. The situation must have been edifying to devotees of party government when the Prime Minister was seen sitting anxiously expectant in the House while the Ministerial contractor for Section Q was higgling in the name of the Cabinet behind the scenes. It is due to the Prime Minister to say that he seems to have held out to the last extremity. A point of melodramatic interest was reached when Mr. Costigan, by suddenly decamping, showed, or was supposed to show, that to a well-informed and careful observer the Ministerial ship appeared in a sinking condition. At last, however, it transpired that the price had been settled. Quebec filed in as *per contract*, and the fate of twenty-two millions and a-half of the earnings of Canadian labour was settled by a straight party division. It seems that fees are to be paid to Nova Scotia and New Brunswick also. Such is Confederation! Such are the elements which, if we are to believe (and who does not believe?) Professor Foster, a railway is to weld into a nation. That Mr. Blake also made a corrupt offer to Quebec it would be difficult as well as disagreeable to suppose, though everything is possible in the delirium of these frays; a flag was certainly waved by the principal organs of Mr. Blake's party. But the indignation of Mr. Ouimet is hardly intelligible, unless it is intended as a blind. Why should it be dishonourable to entertain from one side a proposal which it was not dishonourable to embrace when it came from the other? Was it that the bribe offered by Mr. Blake was comparatively paltry and such as it would have been derogatory to so high a power even to consider? What remains of the honour of Quebec protests through the lips of Mr. Joly, but the sound is that of a death-rattle.

The Opposition was in every way weak, because the ground on which it fought was false. Fatally trammelled by its own past acts, as well as led by generals who are not over fond of broad issues, it declined the main question and made safe though unjust attacks upon the Company. The chiefs of the Company are no more responsible for the treaty with British Columbia, or any of the consequences in which it has involved the nation, than they are for the Treaty of Berlin. They are merely national contractors on a vast scale, and in the opinion of all impartial judges they have done their work well. If the work proves far more costly than was expected, that is no fault of theirs, any more than it was their fault that Parliament in the first instance deluded the people by assuring them that the road would be built without any addition to taxation. Conceived in recklessness, the undertaking shows its character as it advances. In the struggle with the Grand Trunk for an Eastern continuation, there have no doubt been minings and counterminings of the kind with which the railway market and the stock-exchange are familiar, but which would not adorn the pages of the moralist or the poet. If the politicians wanted to prevent this, they ought themselves to have secured the Transcontinental character of their line by assuring to it a communication with the sea, instead of leaving its eastern end in the air. That which they omitted to do the Company has had to do with its own resources, by hard fighting; and what are denounced as speculations outside the contract are virtually as much within the contract as anything between Nipissing and the Pacific. Mr. Blake in his censures of the Syndicate kept himself within bounds and dealt more in insinuation than in statement, but his delicacy was not imitated by his lieutenants, who flung upon some of the most honourable names of Canadian commerce imputations which there is nothing whatever to sustain. The strongest point of the Opposition leader was the relation between the Pacific Railway Company and that somewhat mysterious body, the Construction company, which as he put the matter certainly wore a questionable aspect. But he is mistaken if he thinks that the Construction company consisted of the directors and their friends. If he will look more closely into the facts he will find, it is believed

that every shareholder in the Pacific Railway Company had a proportionate share in the Construction company, and would have participated in any profit that might have been made by the contract. It seems to have been the aim of the Company to build the road with the proceeds of common stock, without mortgaging; in other words, to build it without debt. To induce the public to take shares, it was deemed absolutely necessary to afford assurance that the road could be built for the sum stated in the President's official circular of December, 1882; and this could be done only by making such a contract as that which was made and by which the construction of the road was secured, the cost being the subsidy still to be received from the Government, the balance of the money to come from the land grant bonds and \$45,000,000 of common stock. There had at that time been no survey of the line through the mountains, nor any close estimate of the cost of the Lake Superior division, so that nobody could tell whether the bargain would prove a good or bad one for the contracting Company. Financial difficulties arising out of a failure to sell the land bonds intervened, but the arrangement, when correctly stated, though complicated, presents nothing sinister. The whole responsibility rests on the shoulders of the politicians who without a proper survey or estimates plunged the country into the undertaking, and not least upon the shoulders of those who seeing the true interest of the country wanted the courage to uphold it. Vituperation of the Company is impolitic as well as unjust. Already the one great advantage which the country promised itself in assenting to the agreement has been lost. The connection between the Government and the Railway has been renewed, perhaps in a more dangerous form than ever. To assail the Company is to drive it still more completely into the arms of the Government, and to establish an alliance which, especially if any compact should be made with the Grand Trunk, may become truly formidable to the State.

An eloquent speaker to whom reference has already been made exhibited his classical learning in the debate by alluding to Cassandra as a false prophetess. According to the common version of the story she was a true prophetess who failed to obtain credence. Her warning voice was raised in non-political circles at the time when Parliament promised that the road should be built without taxation; it has been raised at each stage of the expanding outlay. But it has not been nor was it likely to be heard. The die was cast and expostulation became useless when the Mackenzie Government accepted and practically ratified, though with evident misgiving, the policy of its predecessor. Nature apparently has dedicated this Continent to popular government, to a unity which is perfectly consistent with local freedom of self-development and to peace. Imperialism inspired by aristocracy is determined by the creation of an anti-continental empire to set bounds to the growth of democracy, to introduce division and to establish a balance of power with the possibility of eventual war. Nature has placed the commercial outlet of each of the territories in the Dominion to the south; the policy of Imperialism requires that the outlet should in each case be wrenched round to the east and west. The Canadian Pacific Railway in the west, like the Intercolonial in the east, is the force by which Imperialism hopes to vanquish nature. Which of the antagonists is the stronger, experience alone can show. Thanks to the energy of the Pacific Railway Company the decision is not likely to be long delayed.

THOUGH the Government majority voted solid at last, a rift was distinctly seen in it, and through the rift a glimpse was caught into a troubled and chaotic future. Sir John Macdonald may be the Prince of Darkness; with some of its imps he is certainly far too familiar. But an angel of light would perhaps not have been so successful in holding together the motley and discordant elements, local, ethnological, religious, social and personal, on a combination of which the Dominion government has been based; or if he had, it would not have been without detriment to his seraphic purity. Not Cavour or Bismarck was more singularly fitted for his special part than Sir John. The means which he has used, it is true, have savoured and do still savour strongly of corruption and intrigue. But if he has employed Walpole's arts, he has been able to plead Walpole's excuse. He has had always to deal with what have been happily called sinister interests, and with men of whom the shrewdest of his compeers used to say that it was not difficult to buy them, but the worst of it was that they would not stay bought. Could he have appealed to the disinterested patriotism of the politicians of Quebec? When this man is gone, who will there be to take his place? What shepherd is there who knows the sheep or whose voice the sheep know? Who else could make Orangemen vote for Papists, and induce half the members for Ontario to help in levying on their own Province the necessary blackmail for Quebec? Yet this is the work which will have to be done if a general