

THE
CANADIAN MONTHLY
AND NATIONAL REVIEW.

VOL. 4.]

DECEMBER, 1873.

[No. 6.

THE CANADIAN PACIFIC AND ITS RAILWAY RIVALS.

BY JAMES DOUGLAS, JR.

LATE events at home and abroad warn us to think twice before embarking rashly in this enterprise. The faith of the Dominion is certainly pledged to British Columbia for the construction of a Pacific Railway, but should it, after mature consideration, seem to Parliament that the road, if built from end to end in four years, would, for a generation or more, be to the country a costly superfluity, surely British Columbia could be appeased with a less ruinous sacrifice. The change in the *personnel* of an executive does not warrant a breach of promise; but altered financial circumstances, and the discovery of various engineering difficulties in the way of a desirable route, entitle Parliament to re-consider its decision. Its success as a trans-continental road must depend on advantages it may possess over its southern rivals. Its influences on the future of Canada will depend mainly on

the character of country through which it will run,—the adaptability of some parts for agricultural settlement, the value of others in mineral wealth.

Its southern rivals, built and building, are four. The first road, which united the Atlantic with the Pacific, was that across the Isthmus of Panama, where the high mountain chain of the Andes sinks to a low ridge, 268 feet high, and the wide Continents of North and South America contract to a narrow neck of land, only 37 miles across. The engineering problem was here, not how to surmount a towering mountain range, but how to build a road through the reeking lagoons which stretch for 13 miles inland from the Atlantic. A line, starting from Navy Bay on the Carribean Sea, running along the east bank of the Chagres River for 23½ miles to Barbacoas, and thence for 24 miles further over the