

CURRENT EVENTS AND OPINIONS.

It is excusable, in a notice of the Session, to have totally overlooked the Senate. The Senate can scarcely be conscious of its own existence. In the early part of the Session its sittings were suspended for want of business, nothing having come up to it from the Commons; a conclusive answer to the allegation that it exercises a useful initiative in any special class of questions. By extinguishing the last spark of life in Mr. Charlton's luckless Bill it provided itself, as it is careful to do each session, with formal proof of a lingering trace of vitality in itself. Otherwise, it hardly did anything which might not have been done equally well and far more cheaply by means of a stamp affixed by a clerk to the legislative acts of the Commons. Its debates are seldom reported unless they happen to be personal. If we did not know from constant experience how the most inane titles are coveted, it might seem strange that there should be so many applicants for a position of conspicuous nonentity. Yet nonentity would be respectable compared with the servility which the nominees of the Minister in the Senate are compelled to display in registering the decrees of a master who does not condescend even to make a show of acknowledging their legislative authority. The theory that independence would be the result of nomination for life, plausible as it might seem, has received a decisive confutation. Independent of national opinion the Senate is with a vengeance, but it is entirely dependent on its patron. We have in this institution the misleading show of a conservative safeguard without any conservative influence either in the way of initiative, or in that of control. The analogy of the House of Lords, a body of territorial magnates, few of whom can be at any one time the nominees of the Minister, if it were attractive in itself, would be wholly inapplicable. Never did the work of a constitution-builder more signally break down. The only assignable reason for allowing a minister, under the name of a *faineant* Governor-General, to nominate a whole branch of the legislature was that the power, if generously, or even sagaciously, used, might produce a more comprehensive representation of national worth and distinction than was likely to be produced by any political election, especially under the party system. The Senate of the Bonapartes, though not morally august, was at least an attempt to bring together the eminence and influence of France. The Senate of Sir John Macdonald is nothing but a political infirmary and a bribery fund, nor is it possible to conceive any case in which a body so destitute of moral weight could render real service to the nation. Any freshet of popular passion would, in a moment, sweep away such a dam. In appointments to judgeships, Sir John Macdonald has not risen to the magnanimity of the British Ministers, who generally disregard party altogether; yet he has always kept the greediness of party at bay, and shown his regard for the interests of public justice. It is reasonable, as well as charitable, to suppose that in this he has shown his real inclination; and that if he misuses, as he has misused, his power of nominating to the Senate, it is because the government which he is set to administer can exist only by purchasing support, the price of which he is unable to withhold. So we shall go on, however, till greater changes come. Yet, if there is a waste of public money at which we have a right to be indignant, it surely is the maintenance of such an institution as the nominee Senate by taxes levied on agricultural implements and coal.

It is to be feared that the conceit of the arrogant Britisher will be pampered by the nervous anxiety with which Americans look for the criticisms which they assume to be coming from Mr. Matthew Arnold. Chicago, betrayed by the credulity of her fear, into belief in a ridiculous hoax, has been already writhing and bellowing under the phantom shaft like the Python struck from the bow of Apollo. In the new number of the *North American Review* is a criticism on Matthew Arnold, the author of which at once discloses his motive: "It is doubtless to be supposed that Mr. Arnold's estimate of our civilization will not be flattering to our national vanity or national pride. A writer who has repeatedly told his own countrymen that their higher classes are materialized, their middle classes vulgarized, and their lower classes brutalized, cannot be expected to proclaim after a few months' residence in this country, that the conduct, politics, society, science and literature of the United States come up to the high ideal standards which he is accustomed to apply to other nations as well as his own." Mr. Arnold is conjured above all things not to be condescending. Any thing may be endured except condescension. Then follow some pages of elaborate disparagement, the object of which manifestly is to blunt, beforehand, the point of the arrow which is supposed to be already quivering on the string. In vain. The arrow will come, painless at first, but dipped in a subtle venom which

will, by degrees, produce intolerable pain, and make Chicago writhe and bellow to some purpose. There will ensue a violent fit of Anglo-phobia, a great increase of sympathy with Irish dynamite, and a call for more iron-clads to punish the arrogance of a nation which produces such insufferable *persiflage*. Suppose, after all, Mr. Arnold were to say nothing; might not his silence be harder to bear even than his condescension? Joking apart, the "English tramp," as the *Chicago Current* calls him, has far too much in common with other English tramps of the same class to requite hospitality by rude or malicious criticism; and there is every reason to believe that anything Mr. Arnold may write about the United States will be animated by the same friendly feeling, and the same sense of kindness received, which he expressed to those who conversed with him at the close of his tour. That he will flatter is not likely. Flattery, in the estimation of all people of sense, is an insult more intolerable even than condescension.

At Washington, the doom of the Tariff Bill appears to be sealed. Its friends admit that even if it passes the House by a small majority, it will be killed in the Senate. The free people of the United States will thus be condemned still to bear, at the bidding of a ring, a load of unnecessary and arbitrary taxation, such as no despot or aristocrat would venture to impose. The debate on the Bill is hardly serious. Upon it, as upon every other discussion and interest, has now fallen the deadly shadow of the coming Presidential election. To put himself and his party in a good position for that contest, not to settle the fiscal and commercial question before him, is the real object of each speaker in the interminable series. This interruption, during one year at least in every four, of the current of legislation on all questions of practical importance is not the least of the evils which attend the elective Presidency. As a ventilation of theories, however, the debate is not without interest. Some of the views propounded are curiosities of the human understanding, considering that the propounders are living more than a century after Adam Smith. The policy of the thorough-going Protectionist amounts to nothing less than the construction of a Chinese wall around a people which boasts itself the most progressive in the world. Immigration as well as importation is to be excluded; the nation is to consume its own produce and to produce just enough of everything for its own consumption. It is to be perfectly isolated, and it would soon become stationary, like that Celestial Empire from which its policy would be borrowed. But reasoning has very little to do with this matter. The strong hand of the Ring is upon the throat of the nation. The despoiled are an unorganized multitude; the spoilers are an organized army, and the organized army prevails. Protectionism has, of late, received some accession of strength from the rising manufactures of the South. Yet Free Trade, or to speak more properly, the principle of a Revenue Tariff, is decidedly gaining ground, and has developed in the battle over the present Bill more strength than it has ever shown before. The patent evidences of overtaxation could not fail to tell on the mind of an intelligent people. The artisan is not the gainer by Protection: his wages, nominally high, are not really so, because everything purchased with them is dear. The sole gainer is the master manufacturer. When this truth dawns upon the mind of the artisan, the end of Protectionism will be at hand; and it appears that recent reductions of wages have, at all events, drawn the attention of the working classes to the point. Many there are who see, or at least suspect, the fallacy of taxation for the purpose of Protection, yet are afraid to knock away the artificial props upon which the manufacturing industries of the United States are supposed to rest. They believe the orator who tells them that a reduction of twenty per cent. would be fatal to the existence of some of the greatest branches of manufactures. Admitting, or half admitting, the system to be wrong, they cling to it from fear of falling into some commercial abyss. A too zealous revenue officer, as the story goes, once fell into the hands of smugglers, who, to revenge themselves, blindfolded him, suspended him over a precipice with a rope in his hands, and there left him, as they told him, to hang on as long as he could, then fall and be dashed to pieces. He hung on till his sinews cracked: then having commended his soul to Heaven he let go, and found that he had been hanging only six inches from the ground. If those who nervously cling to the Protectionist system in the United States would, like the revenue officer, commend their souls to Heaven and let go, they would find that in five years the emancipated industries of the United States would not only hold its own market, but compete with the foreigner in the markets of the world. At present the United States export little except raw material, while an artificial stimulus often entails on them the evils of over-production at home. Great Britain has far less interest in the abrogation of American Protection than is commonly supposed. The American market,