

two authorities, the road should be about ready to be opened the whole distance a year from to-day. The rapidity of construction, since the contract was made with the Syndicate, is perhaps unparalleled. And all authorities agree that the work is well done. Meantime, the Company is bestirring itself with the view of securing steamboat connection between the Pacific terminus and China and Japan. And arrangements have been completed for building elevators for the use of the Company at Montreal. The six months which the Legislature allowed to ascertain whether the Canadian Pacific Company would acquire the North Shore Railway have about expired; and if no arrangement has been come to, a third line between Montreal and Quebec is to be built. Nothing has been said about negotiations looking to the acquisition of the North Shore Railway; and presumably the alternative of building a new road will be acted upon. The construction of branch lines north of the main Pacific has recently received encouragement from the Government. Several companies chartered to build such lines will receive grants of public lands practically free, the only cost to them being a charge of ten cents an acre for surveys. Some of the promoters are in England trying to make financial arrangements to enable them to commence construction; and on the success they may meet the present fortunes of these enterprises depend.

"BYSTANDER" ON CURRENT EVENTS AND OPINIONS.

THE immediate prospect of a municipal expenditure of something like \$600,000 has turned the thoughts of Toronto ratepayers to the question of municipal government, and it seems likely that a special effort will be made to return good men, irrespective of Party politics, to the Council at the next election. This, besides meeting the exigency of the moment, might be the first step towards a more permanent reform. Our system of municipal government generally both in England and on this continent is a survival from the Middle Ages. Since the era which gave it birth circumstances have entirely changed. In those days the city was a political community by itself, asserting its franchises now against the lords of the neighbouring country, now against the crown, exercising through its officers the functions of general legislation and government over those within its pale, and forming, fully as much as the nation at large, the object of allegiance and patriotism to its citizens. Its chief men all dwelt within its walls and took personally the leading part in its affairs. Election was then the natural system, though practically the people at large had, as a rule, not much to do with the government, which was usually in the hands of a burgher oligarchy or of a dominant guild. The city walls have now fallen down, and the population of the city is blended in one political community with that of the country. What was once a little industrial republic beset by the jealous and encroaching powers of feudalism is at present little more than a densely peopled district, requiring, particularly in sanitary matters, a special and thoroughly skilled administration. By far the most important function of its government consists in levying and expending an annual fund. But the constitution is still political, while the burgher oligarchies of former days have been abolished, and the chiefs of commerce have for the most part ceased to reside within the precincts or to hold municipal offices; even the office of Lord Mayor of London, so exalted in former days, and still so grand in the imagination of Frenchmen, being disdained by the merchant princes of London, and left to traders of the second rank. Cities have thus fallen into the hands of the ward politicians, whose unbeneficent activity is aggravated by the influence of Party politics, which have now thoroughly instilled their virus into municipal elections and affairs. The results all over the continent have been maladministration and debt. Nor have the classes from which the money is chiefly taken suffered more than the poor. In New York and other cities, where demagogism has been most rampant and the plundering of the property holder by the demagogue most unbounded, the quarters of the poorer classes are most wretched and their interests are most neglected. There can be no doubt that the administration of the fund under the effective control of those who contribute it would be not only the most economical but the best for all sections of the population. Actual corruption we may hope is now not common; jobbery, perhaps, is more so, nor is its existence very wonderful when onerous offices are unpaid. But apart from either, an administration elected annually on the political system is almost inevitably an administration without skill and without plan, both of which deficiencies lead to waste as well as to miscarriage. The same street will be taken up three times in five years to do what a stable and forecasting administration would do at once. Scarcely is the election over when re-election comes in view and begins to influence the policy of each alderman; popularity must be kept up, and for that purpose the present

must be preferred to the future, and the showy to the substantial. It is not to be expected that the people will consent at once to a radical change; but they may consent to important improvements, such as election for longer terms, and overlapping, so as to give more continuity and steadiness to the administration. A council willing to co-operate in such reforms and to promote the necessary legislation is the first requisite, and this by an effort may be obtained.

THE death of Sir R. R. Torrens has closed the career of a man who in an unobtrusive way was no small benefactor of society, and whose work, it may be confidently said, will live. It was the sight of a friend drawn into what he calls the maelstrom of Chancery that led him, as he says, to turn his attention to the reform of the law concerning the title to, and the transfer of, real property. The law of personal property is the rational offspring of civilized times; but that of real property is or was, when Sir R. R. Torrens commenced his beneficent efforts, the dark progeny of the feudal ages. In the Saxon period the tenure of land was simple, and the mode of transfer, by open sale in the local assembly before neighbours whose memory served as the register, was reasonable and convenient for an unlettered age. But the Conquest brought the system of feudal tenures; and further complications without limit were superadded in consequence of the Statute of Mortmain and the Statute of Uses by the rival ingenuity of conveyancers, ecclesiastical and lay; till, what with Fines, Recoveries, Leases and Releases, and other tortuous inventions of secret conveyancing, the system which even by the time of James I. had become "manifold, intricate, chargeable, tedious and uncertain," was by Blackstone described as a wonderful tissue of "metaphysical subtleties, serving no other purpose than to show the vast powers of the human intellect however vainly and preposterously applied." "My Lords," said Sergeant Manning, "I must not trust myself to touch the subject of Contingent Remainders, for on that flowery field I should expatiate for hours." The practical result to suitors was that a Chancery suit lasted before Lord Eldon for twenty years. Cromwell attempted law reform in regard to the transfer of land, as well as in regard to Chancery procedure and other departments; but "the sons of Zeruah were too strong for him," and all that he could do was to use Ireland "as a white paper" for the trial of some of his reforms. Sir R. R. Torrens would have found the sons of Zeruah too strong had he been compelled to adopt England as the scene of his efforts. But colonization is an exodus from the traditions and prejudices of the Old Country. Moreover, grievances affecting land in the Old Country touch only a class: in a colony they touch the people. In Australia, Sir R. R. Torrens was able without much resistance from rooted custom to introduce a system of land registration and transfer under which dealings with land are as simple as dealings with shipping, on the analogy of which his plan is based, and thus to fulfil the aspiration of Mill, who said that to "make land as easily transferable as stocks would be one of the greatest economical improvements which could be bestowed upon the country." In the Australian colonies the Torrens system has thoroughly taken root, and, in the case of small lots especially, a Torrens title is an essential part of an advertisement for the market. It is needless by facility of dealing with it, while the manifold and gross injustice arising from uncertainty of title, and from the discovery of flaws in the titles of innocent purchasers, is avoided. Everywhere the principle, in one form or another, is making way, as its benefits are felt. "In the Canton Vaud," says a recent writer, "the system of land transfer is an example of the successful working of the record of title system. The ownership of every parcel of land and all charges affecting it are matters of public record. The owner's title is not, as in the United Kingdom, doubtfully inferred from a mass of deeds, of which the meaning can only be explained by the united labours of counsel and solicitor, but is entered as a fact in the public records of the State, and is always ascertainable without delay and at trifling expense." In Canada, the improvement is still struggling for recognition, and here it is still possible for a mechanic who borrows a small sum on his lot to have nearly half the loan swallowed up by the cost of investigating the title. But reason will prevail; and the lawyers, if they feel any professional misgivings, will perceive that their interest cannot be much affected by a change which will come into operation very gradually and the introduction of which will, itself, give a good deal of employment. A simple land law is to be desired on political as well as on economical grounds: the best antidote to agrarian Socialism is facility of purchase.

THE growth of the Sons-of-England Benevolent Society is a fact interesting to all, and perhaps not least to the politicians. It has been said that in the United States all the immigrant nationalities go into the hop-