

PROMINENT TOPICS.

It is a remarkable coincidence that the Imperial Parliament, Westminster, and the Federal Parliament, Ottawa, are each in a high state of excitement over Free Trade and Protection issues. The pivot on which the debate in the British House of Commons turned was, or is, the intention of the Government to abolish the duty on wheat and flour, which was imposed as a war tax by Sir Michael Hicks-Beach when Chancellor of the Exchequer. The proposal to abolish this impost has met with his vehement opposition as he regarded the imposition of this duty to have been most successful and financially salutary. He argued that, abolishing the grain duty would put a barrier in the way of any new preferential policy, and that it was foolish to abandon a source of revenue which had not added anything to the public burden, directly or indirectly as bread had not advanced a fraction in price owing to the duty of foreign wheat and flour.

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As the debate was on Mr. Chaplin's motion condemning the abolition of the grain tax, it was, from our standpoint, most irregular for such outside questions as preferential tariffs, free trade versus protection, to have been raised by the speakers and dilated upon freely. The speaker did rule against this irrelevancy, but as the House was charged with political electricity it was given an opportunity to escape.

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The debate elicited some very emphatic declarations from several Ministers against the proposal to change the tariff policy of England as foreshadowed and suggested by the Hon. Mr. Chamberlain. These utterances created a lively sensation; they gave rise to all manner of rumours as to coming changes, in regard to which speculation usually runs riot until there is a new phase in the situation. Sufficient, however, was said in the Imperial House of Commons to show that the Chamberlain policy will be strenuously opposed by leading members of his own party, the Unionists, as well as by the Liberals. The Chaplin motion was voted down by an overwhelming majority.

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A Royal Commission will be appointed to enquire into the question of Imperial trade. This will postpone any action for a year at least, but the Report of that Commission will be extremely valuable, as was the one on the Tariff fifty years ago, the report of which gave the old system its death blow.

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The question of protection to the iron and steel industries of Canada was brought before the House at Ottawa, on 9th inst., by the Hon. Mr. Borden,

leader of the opposition. As both the Premier and Mr. Fielding, Finance Minister, declined to discuss the matter, it has been inferred that the Government's intention is to accede to the demand for protection to iron and steel enterprises. This, as we have said before, is not a party question, it is essentially a national one in the broadest sense, it is certainly one in regard to which large sections of both parties are in absolute harmony. The question is, Are our iron and steel industrial resources worth developing? If so the policy necessary for their development must be adopted; if, however, they are not worth any fiscal considerations, any protection, the matter is at end and Canada must be content to see her vast national mineral wealth left in the ground as valueless.

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The murder of the King and Queen of Serbia, the Queen's sister and brother, the Premier, several Ministers of State, and members of the Royal Guard is one of the most appalling tragedies of the revolutionary class on record. It is too early to have a reliable narrative of this event, or of its causes and probable consequences. We fear there is trouble brewing in eastern Europe that will endanger peace. The conditions existing in Turkey, Bulgaria, Serbia, and other States cannot continue, but how those half-civilized countries are to be brought to a higher standard of civilization is the gravest political problem of modern times.

**THE UNITED STATES BOARD OF UNDERWRITERS
ON ACETYLENE GENERATORS.**

At the 37th Annual Meeting of the National Board of Fire Underwriters held at New York on 14th inst., the President's address included the following passage: "The destruction of life and property during the year, resulting from explosions of mixtures of acetylene gas and air, serves to again emphasize the importance of placing acetylene generating apparatus outside of and detached from buildings, the necessity of using properly designed and safeguarded generators, and the folly of using an open light when attempting to adjust or repair a gas machine. A review of the reports which we have compiled, covering acetylene losses, indicates that over 95 per cent. of the fire waste due to acetylene might have been avoided if the first precaution had been universally observed. Over 85 per cent. of the losses were occasioned in installations, using machines which had either never been examined under our direction, or which had been dropped for cause from our list of permitted devices of this character, and over 50 per cent. by persons deliberately opening generating chambers or gas holders in the presence of a flame. We have now complete and detailed records of the design and construction, action under test and performance in field service of 382 acetylene generators, 65 of which, we believe, to be at present sufficiently well safeguarded to include in the permitted list. Those retained on this list are re-examined at stated intervals by visits to the factories and tests on samples taken from stock. So long as the inventive ability of the