

# The Commercial

WINNIPEG, DECEMBER 9, 1884

## BRANCH RAILWAYS.

There are few people in the Northwest who are not beginning to despair about the construction of branch railways throughout the province of Manitoba. Until the summer of 1882 there were few outside of the settlers in Southern Manitoba, and other districts where railways were so much wanted, who could see, much less feel the great drawback to settlement and progress which their want occasioned. Now there is no one outside of interested parties, but can clearly foresee that unless during the coming summer of 1885 the work of constructing branch railways is not only commenced but pushed with vigor, the work of depopulating instead of settling-up the Northwest will be commenced in earnest. How much is likely to be done in this direction, and in fact if anything is to be done, no one in this province knows, at least so far as Southern Manitoba is concerned. As visit after visit is made by prominent members of the C.P.R. Company to Europe we are entertained with accounts of success in securing funds for the completion of the C.P.R. main line, and since the visit of Sir John Macdonald we have been hearing of English capitalists starting a line of trans-Pacific steamships to complete the route from Europe to Asia through Canada. But we cannot hear of a dollar being secured for the construction of branch lines through Southern Manitoba, the richest portion of all Canada, where a country sufficiently settled to furnish a paying business for any railway is now to be found. This is in the minds of the C.P.R. magnates a matter for future consideration, or at least a matter to make promises about, which they have not the slightest intention of fulfilling.

Two years ago, when wheat was worth over a dollar a bushel in the city of Winnipeg, farmers might haul grain fifty or sixty miles to a railway station, for they then received something tangible for a load of wheat. But as prices now stand there are in Southern Manitoba at present half a million of bushels of wheat which it would scarcely pay to haul to market. It is folly to expect that men will remain in such a country as that,

and next summer when hundreds of settlers will be proving up upon their homesteads and securing their patents we may expect that many a farm will be left to grow weeds instead of grain, as it will be more profitable for their owners to pay the taxes on their lands and seek a living elsewhere than to longer submit to the starvation policy they have been subjected to.

There may be a few people in other portions of Manitoba who are inclined to content themselves with the selfish satisfaction that they are not in any way suffering through want of railways. But such people are not aware of how much other interests are affected by the state of affairs we describe. In the first place there should be a profitable trade in that country tributary to the wholesale traders of Winnipeg, while smaller towns south and west of this should also profit from the purchases of the agriculturist. But as matters now stand wholesale merchants have no desire to do business in Southern Manitoba, and the retail merchants are unable to collect from their customers, as the latter are literally without money or the means of getting it. Such is the present state of affairs in a section of country which should be the most prosperous in the whole Northwest, and through which the construction of two hundred miles of railway would change in a very short time poverty into plenty, and discontent into contentment. But the chances of securing that 200 miles are very slim indeed. Branch railways through Southern Manitoba are not now included in the schemes and dreams of Ottawa politicians and C.P.R. magnates, and until they have a little less scheming and dreaming to do than they have at present the cry from Southern Manitoba will be unheeded. They know that a policy of disallowance holds the field clear of competition until the C.P.R. is ready to occupy it, and the interests of the few starving settlers are not worthy of consideration under such circumstances.

## RECIPROCITY.

The subject of reciprocity between Canada and the United States has been discussed much during the past two years, and with many of its Canadian advocates reciprocity on any terms has been advocated, while from the United States the reciprocity advocated has been the

swallowing up commercially of Canada, and its inclusion in that ironclad system of practically prohibitory tariffs which our neighbors have maintained for some twenty years. The most rabid anti-protectionist in Canada could hardly accept reciprocity on such terms and retain one particle of Canadian patriotism, not to mention the fact that on free trade principles such a move would only be a step from the frying-pan into the fire.

It must now be admitted on all sides that the election of Grover Cleveland as President of the United States, and the accession of the Democratic party to power in that country, opens up new hopes for reciprocity between the two countries on terms which will be honorable to all concerned. The Republican party with its policy of protection, amounting to extreme commercial exclusiveness, has been rejected by the vote of the people of the United States, and a party among whose traditions are free trade and direct taxation chosen in its stead, and on that account we may safely assume that during the next four years steps will be taken which will tend in the direction of strengthening the trade relations of the two countries, supposing no actual reciprocity treaty be entered into.

Some people in Canada may be foolish enough to believe that the question of anxiety for reciprocity will be completely reversed under the rule of the Democratic party, and that a policy of rapid advance towards free trade will be adopted, which will render any efforts in that direction unnecessary on the part of Canada. Such an expectation will be doomed to disappointment of the worst kind. Political affairs are so evenly balanced now in the United States, that no party in power can afford to adopt an extreme policy and hope to retain office. We believe that the defeat of James G. Blaine in the Presidential contest was due more than to any other cause to the fact that, although he was one of, if not the most brilliant light of United States politics, he was a man of extreme tendencies, and in the advance-guard of his party, while his less gifted but successful opponent represented the moderate section of Democracy. It cannot be expected, therefore, that President Cleveland and his followers will follow a radically reactionary policy even in the time honored Democratic doctrine of free trade. The