

WHAT can we say of Ontario's local politics? Here the wordy war has suddenly waxed very hot indeed. If the orators of both parties are to be believed, the province is in a woeful case. Neither leaders nor supporters amongst the candidates on either side are fit to be entrusted with the management of provincial affairs. From Messrs. Mowat and Meredith down through all the rank and file they are all alike incapable and untrustworthy. The two leaders themselves, though ordinarily regarded as tolerably honest and clever, are for the nonce hypocrites, self-seekers and imbeciles. We are taking, just now, the view given us through the party papers. We suppose such things as appear in these from day to day must please and influence at least some of the readers or they would not be printed. But would it not be worth while to ask ourselves whether such writing and speaking as a good deal of that which is just now current serves any purpose other than to make us all appear somewhat ridiculous for the time being? Why not try a week of manly, respectful and dignified argument, for a change? We do not suppose any intelligent elector, no matter how ardent he may be in the contest, really believes in his heart that the salvation of the province from untold ills depends upon retaining the present Premier in office, or that the victory of Mr. Meredith and his party would mean bankruptcy, disgrace and ruin. Nor can any such elector really believe the direct opposite. What, then, is the use of talking as if they did believe the one thing or the other? It would puzzle the most skilful political microscopist to discover any important political principle, or any broad principle of any kind, marking the plane of division between the two parties. Neither of the leaders is either a thorough-going Liberal, or a thorough-going Tory, and it would be hard to say which of the two is most advanced in his Liberalism, or most pronounced in his Conservatism. What great change of policy, what great deliverance for any oppressed and down-trodden class, will Mr. Meredith be able to effect if he should come into power? What great iniquity will be frustrated, what great calamity averted should Mr. Mowat succeed in retaining the reins? The main question is evidently one of men, not of principles, and if every elector should vote for the candidate whom he conscientiously believes to be first the most upright, and secondly the most able and intelligent man, the country would be tolerably safe whether Mowat or Meredith should get the majority.

MR. MOWAT'S long record is unquestionably a good one, on the whole. As we have said before, we see no reason to believe that any change now possible would be for the better, while there are many chances that a transfer of the business of Government to new and untried hands might prove for the worse. Probably so many of the electors throughout the Province are of the same opinion that the prospects of an immediate change are exceedingly dim. At the same time we are persuaded that it is desirable that the hands of Mr. Meredith should be greatly strengthened in order to enable the party he leads more effectually to discharge the functions of an Opposition under our system of administration. As our readers well know, we are no admirers of the party system *per se*. To the impartial observer it can scarcely appear otherwise than as a most awkward political device, and one which wastes a large portion of the time, talent and resources available for the public service, to say nothing of the corruption it almost surely engenders. But so long as we are shut up to the use of the party system it is evidently desirable that parties should be much more evenly balanced than they have of late been in the Ontario Legislature. There is unquestionably a good work for an able and patriotic Opposition to do, even in the Ontario Legislature. Nothing but the blindest partisanship can maintain that the Mowat administration has been free from serious faults and blunders, to use no stronger term, during the last few years. Its transfer of the direction of the great work of public education from the hands of an independent scholar and educator, to those of a party politician was a huge blunder in policy. The manipulation of this department on political principles has, as we had previous occasion to show, been marked, and is still marked by a series of mischievous blunders in administration. The system which requires to be bolstered up by such devices as that of the so-called arbitration which was held a year or two since in reference to the price of school books—an arbitration in which no provision was made for taking the evidence of disinterested experts as to the cost of materials and workmanship, the very question at issue is not such a

system as ought to be sustained or permitted by the intelligent tax-payers of Ontario. The interests of the Province demand an Opposition strong enough to force all transactions in regard to matters in which the people are so vitally interested to be carried on openly, in the light of day. With a strong Opposition such incidents as some of those on record with regard to the relations of certain license commissioners with license holders, and such communications as that in which a prominent official in that department expressed his solicitude lest a certain straightforward course might injure the Government, would, we might hope, be no longer possible. Had such an Opposition been in existence it is altogether unlikely that such questionable acts as the Premier's appointment of his own son to a very lucrative office, and the unnecessary division of a Registrarship in order to reward a supporter out of the proceeds of fees, the greater portion of which should have been saved, or returned to the public, would scarcely have taken place. Had the Opposition been able to discharge its true functions the Government certainly would not have dared to pursue the high-handed course it has taken in respect to the new Parliament buildings. Its unfair discrimination in that matter against Canadian architects is a transaction which we have never seen satisfactorily explained or defended, and the motives of which it seems impossible to conjecture. These and similar shortcomings of the present Administration should serve to remind the electors of the weakness of political human nature, even at its best, and of the need of imposing suitable constitutional checks upon the arrogance that is apt to be engendered by too secure a tenure of office.

THE shocking disaster at Longue Pointe the other day—a disaster, the full measure of whose tragical results is not yet and probably never will be known—should not be allowed to fade from the public mind until the lessons which it is adapted to teach have been well conned. Perhaps the first and most obvious suggestion is one of doubt as to the propriety of shutting up human beings, destitute of judgment and incapable of rational control, by the thousand in a single immense structure, no matter how perfect the arrangements and management might be. The danger of such a catastrophe must always be present in a greater or less degree. The fact that a similar horror, on a smaller scale, took place during the same week in a neighbouring state, sadly strengthens the suggestion. Then it seems exceedingly doubtful to common reason, and, if we mistake not, expert scientific opinion tends in the same direction, whether such massing together of those thus afflicted, may not be placing them under the worst possible conditions for curative treatment. If constant association with the insane tends to unsettle even well balanced minds, its effect in retarding the cure in what might otherwise be hopeful cases of insanity cannot be inconsiderable. Certainly before the erection of another building at enormous expense is permitted the best medical advice should be had with regard to the possibility and desirability of adopting the cottage system or some modification of it. Another point that should not escape the attention of both the Government and the public concerns the mode and management of the institution itself. Little argument is needed to show that there are radical and glaring objections to letting out the maintenance of these unfortunates to any private parties, at so much a head. Such a method affords no guarantee whatever that the best appliances and the most skilful treatment and *regime* will be used in each case. It is no disparagement of the well-known kindness of heart of many of the nuns to say that they cannot be assumed to possess the qualifications needed for the proper treatment of the insane. Nor do we insinuate anything against any one when we say that the method of payment at so much per head is not the method best adapted to secure the maximum of comfort and healthful diet, while it is a method which holds out a direct inducement to receive doubtful and retain convalescent patients. It is to be hoped that Parliament will not dissolve without taking measures to secure, if possible, the best and most modern methods for the care and curative treatment of these most unhappy of our fellow-creatures.

SAVE in a single particular we do not find much to object to in the reply of the President of the Single-Tax Association to our note in a previous issue. We recognize the moderation with which Mr. Wood defends the views of the school of political-economists his Society represents. We are quite ready to admit that as there has been much progress in the direction of sounder methods of taxation in the past, so there still is room for progress in the same

direction in the future. The one point at which we must take issue with our correspondent is that contained in the following statement: "As a question of ethics, there would be no injustice in taking from this day forward the rental value of land for public uses." This we cannot for a moment admit. The illustration of the counterfeit note lacks the essential element of parallelism. It fails to distinguish between the results of the fraudulent act of an individual, and the (assuming his premises) erroneous but legal act of organized civil society, in other words of the State. Admit, for argument's sake again, that the members of a given community, or nation, have been wrong through all their history as a self-governing people, in assuming and recognizing a right of personal property in land, and have but to-day discovered their error. Could anything be more glaringly unjust and morally indefensible than for the majority of the constituent members of that civil society to turn suddenly around and say to those individuals who have in good faith invested their honestly earned money in that kind of property, "We have made a mistake in guaranteeing you a personal right in this property under forms of law, but you as individuals, not we as a state, must pay the penalty." The science of ethics must surely take cognizance of implied contracts between the State and the individual, as well as of abstract theories, in determining what is right and wrong in a given case. The State must be morally bound by conditions which it has itself created. The advocates of the Single Tax are forced to admit that as a question of practical politics the change for which they are working must be effected by degrees. Why? Is it not mainly because the moral sense of the whole community would revolt at a proposal to confiscate at a stroke the lawfully acquired possessions of large numbers of citizens, simply on the ground that it has at length been discovered that the people as an organized whole have through many generations been acting on a wrong principle in the matter? The injustice of visiting the errors or sins of the whole people on a few innocent victims is too monstrous to be thought of for a moment. We confess to a good deal of sympathy with the abstract views in which the Single Tax agitation had its origin, but its ethical principle, as enunciated by Mr. Wood, is utterly inadmissible. And to divide the injustice into minute parts and distribute it over a series of years, as the Association proposes, cannot change one whit its ethical character. The Single Tax Association should face this question fairly, and propose a solution which will commend itself to the moral sense of the public before it can reasonably expect to see the triumph of its principles.

THE London *Spectator*, which will hardly be suspected of any undue admiration for Mr. Parnell, pays a high tribute to the marvellous astuteness of the Irish leader's alternative to the Government's Land-Purchase Bill. Mr. Parnell, it will be remembered, astonished everybody, his own Irish followers and his English allies included, not so much by refusing Mr. Balfour's Bill, which he argued would only enable one-ninth or one-tenth of the owners of land in Ireland, and those the larger and absentee owners, to get out at exorbitant prices, and leave their smaller resident brethren in the lurch, whilst, so far as the tenants were concerned, it would only make one in four of the five or six hundred thousand Irish tenant-farmers owners of their holdings, as by offering a substitute tending to confirm and perpetuate the much-abused landlordism. No one, we suppose, expected Mr. Parnell to accept Mr. Balfour's Bill, though that Bill offers to one-fourth of the Irish tenantry not only an immediate thirty per cent. reduction in rents on their farms, but the possession of the farms themselves in freehold, after payment of that reduced rent for forty-nine years, and though Mr. Parnell's avowed principle has always been to take as he goes along whatever instalments of his full demands he may be able to obtain from either party, the Irish leader cares for the abolition of landlordism only as a secondary matter, his chief aim being Home Rule for Ireland. Mr. Parnell knows that to the large section of the Irish people immediately affected the Government's offer is a most tempting one, and that their acceptance of that offer would go far towards quenching their aspirations for the autonomy which is the prime object of desire with himself and the other Irish leaders. But whatever tends to moderate the clamour of the Irish tenantry for Home Rule tends in like degree to lessen the zeal of the English Radicals, without whose alliance success is impossible. Hence, when Mr. Parnell arose he was seemingly in an awkward dilemma.