

CURRENT EVENTS AND OPINIONS.

THE "Bystander Papers" are not editorial, but the opinions, expressed without reserve, of an individual writer. Those who hold the opposite opinions are equally at liberty to advocate their views in the columns of this journal. It was the special object of the founders of THE WEEK to provide a perfectly free court for Canadian discussion.—EDITOR.

THE Pacific Railway was to have been built without any addition to taxation: such is the recorded promise of Parliament to the country. Irrespective of land grants and sops to British Columbia, the appropriations already approach sixty millions, and the Government now asks Parliament for help, by way of loan, to the extent of twenty-two millions and a-half more. Those (not many it must be owned, if more than one) who from the beginning frankly opposed the enterprise, having satisfied themselves as to its character and prospects, receive the announcement of its progressive exigencies without surprise or exasperation. They are prepared not only for the present loan of twenty-two millions and a-half, but for subsidies, when the road shall have been completed, to pay for the working, which, as regards the sections east and west of the Prairie territory, cannot be remunerative, unless the hope of diverting the Pacific traffic from San Francisco to British Columbia should be realized, and the main outlet of the Prairie should prove to be not to the south, but to the east. The expense of working the railway, however, if it fall on any government, may, perhaps, not fall on that of Canada; for it was manifest from the beginning that should the attempt to incorporate the far western territories fail, instead of consolidating the Canadian Dominion, it would assuredly precipitate annexation. The position of the "Bystander" on this question, however heterodox, has at least been definite, and consistent, as he hopes, with that patriotism which takes a broad view of the public interests, as well as with justice to the opposite side. He has always regarded the Pacific Railway as a political and military rather than a commercial undertaking, and predicted that its real character would appear. He has never denied that commercial sacrifices, even very great commercial sacrifices, may be rightly made for political and military objects, provided the objects be attainable and good. But he has always denied, and must continue to deny, that the formation of an anti-continental empire out of the provinces scattered along the northern belt of this continent is an attainable object, or, if attainable, would, so far as the interest of the mass of the people is concerned, be good. The country, however, has been committed to the enterprise, nor can either of the two political parties escape its share of the responsibility. What the Conservatives initiated, the Liberals accepted and ratified; indeed no one advocated the policy more decidedly than did the proprietor of their leading journal, who was also the virtual head of their party. If Mr. Mackenzie and the members of his government had their misgivings, this does not mend their case. To stay the construction of the unremunerative sections of the road and leave the twenty-two millions and a-half in the pockets of the people, would, of course, now be the policy for which the "Bystander" would vote. But it is equally a matter of course that those who have staked their reputation on the success of a great imperial enterprise, should be resolved to push the enterprise to completion; and the enterprise can be pushed to completion only by this additional effort on the part of the nation. The leader of the Opposition is fatally trammelled by his own antecedents as a member of the Mackenzie government, though he made it apparent enough at the time that he was an unwilling passenger in that train. That he should frankly own an error and make his way back at last to firm ground is more than can be expected of him, or perhaps of any party leader. So he swerves from the enemy in his front, and falls upon the company, which can be attacked without apparent inconsistency or apparent disloyalty to the grand national undertaking. He never has gained much, nor is he likely to gain much, by that strategy. If Canadian statesmen fail in the vast work to which they have committed the nation, the failure will be their own; their contractors have served them well. The company has had to contend with desperate opposition in the money markets both of England and of the United States; in those of England it was encountered by the hostility of the Grand Trunk, on the side of which, as a company mainly British and the supposed victim of Canadian spoliation, English sympathy is largely arrayed; in those of the United States it had to meet not only the jealous rivalry of the other transcontinental lines, but the political feeling aroused against an enterprise which has been always blazoned as one of antagonism to the United States. In fighting the Grand Trunk for eastern communications, money has probably been lost; at all events the resources of the Pacific Railway Company have been for the time absorbed; but this could not have been helped, unless the nation had been prepared to step in and control the hostility of the Grand Trunk. There can be little doubt that after an elaborate, volumi-

ous and remarkably able indictment of the Company by Mr. Blake, unwillingness to stop short in the middle of the vaunted enterprise will prevail, and the twenty-two millions and a-half will follow the millions already expended or pledged, as tributes to an Imperial policy, which, like all other policies, will be approved or condemned by the result.

THE drama now opens on a grander scene. That country which is the mother of our institutions as well as of our race, and the central hearth of our civilization, is approaching a political crisis of no common gravity. It seems certain that the Radical section of the government has prevailed and that Extension of the Franchise is to precede Local Government. The full importance of a measure of this kind is not clearly seen by most of us, because we are still deluded by the lingering forms and phrases of the monarchy, and, fancying that government is still vested in the crown, we fail to see that the electorate is now in reality the sovereign power and that upon its character and intelligence everything depends. If in the electorate ignorance and passion prevail, there is nothing to save the country from misgovernment or from political ruin. The Reform Act of 1832 swept away the oligarchy of borough-mongers, with all its attendant train of abuses, and restored the rights of the nation. The classes on which it bestowed political power were fully on a level in every qualification with those who were already enfranchised, and their exercise of the suffrage was followed by reform and improvement in every department of the State. Though carried by agitation necessarily violent in proportion to the tenacity of the corrupt interest, and attended by some of the evils of revolution, the measure was not demagogic; the paramount motive of its authors was patriotic and its effects on government could hardly have failed to be good. Of the Reform Bill brought forward by Lord John Russell and the Whigs a quarter of a century later the same thing could scarcely be said. The chief motive probably on this occasion was the desire of raising a wind which might fill once more the flagging sail of Whiggery, though there were public reasons for extending the franchise to a large body of intelligent artisans and bringing them within the pale of the constitution. The majority of the nation at the time desired no change; the Bill was the work of the politicians and in this respect again presented a strong contrast to the Reform Bill of 1832. The Tory Bill of 1867 was wholly a party move. The avowed object of its framers was to "dish the Whigs," and Lord Derby himself did not want the effrontery to proclaim that a measure fraught with the most momentous consequences to the country was on his part a leap in the dark. Of the Tories, by whose votes the Bill was carried, almost all had placed on record their disapproval of any further extension of the franchise, and they had loudly applauded Disraeli when he called the author of a far more moderate measure "a Jack Cade." The cynical aim of these reactionary strategists was to swamp intelligence, which was assumed to be on the side of progress, and this was compassed by enfranchising the populace of the cities, the worst political element in the nation. The masses to which political power was thus imparted, being ignorant and inert, or easily led by personal influence and the beer-cup, the natural effects of the measure were not at first visible, but as the populace becomes conscious of its power, they are now beginning to appear. A County Franchise Bill, such as is now expected, extending household suffrage from the cities to the counties, and thus enfranchising the peasantry, may be regarded, perhaps, as the necessary countermove of Liberalism to the Tory enfranchisement of the populace in the cities; and as the Tories speculated on an electoral insurrection of the small householders against the higher artisans and the middle class, so the Liberals now speculate on an electoral insurrection of the peasantry against the landlords. The peasant, if not a more intelligent, is unquestionably a worthier man than the inhabitant of the low suburb. County suffrage will therefore be no degradation of the franchise. But it comes at a moment of social and agrarian agitation, when, as terrible experience shows, political change is most hazardous, and that member of the government who is the most prominent advocate of the measure, and evidently hopes by means of it to mount to power, is sounding, in every speech that he makes, the tocsin of class war. With regard to the extension of the franchise in Ireland especially, there exists a danger which no amount of sentimental or hypocritical declamation can conceal. In ordinary times, though the Irish Roman Catholic is politically a very different being from the Protestant, policy on the whole manifestly requires that the treatment of Ulster and Connaught, with respect to the franchise, should be the same. But this is not an ordinary time. The Roman Catholic provinces are in a state of moral rebellion which, avowedly, would become actual rebellion if it had the force. The only sound reason for calling any man to the exercise of political power is a reasonable expectation that he will use it for the benefit of the State. In this case there is not only a reasonable expectation, but a moral certainty that the power, instead of being used for the benefit of the State, will be at once used for its destruc-