

LATE POLITICAL DISCUSSIONS.

Whatever may be the merits or demerits of Mr. Dalton McCarthy's policy, or the validity or otherwise of his reasons for separating himself from the party with which he was long and closely associated, he certainly deserves the thanks of the country for forcing the political leaders to discuss public affairs in public. Such addresses as those which were given the other day in Orangeville by the Minister of Finance and some of his colleagues, as well as those which have been made by Mr. McCarthy and his admirers, all help to develop political intelligence, and so promote good government. It will be the beginning of better days in Canadian politics when Cabinet Ministers and their opponents shall find themselves compelled to rely less upon party loyalty, Government influence, local appropriations, and even more objectionable means for success in elections, and more upon their ability to convince honest and intelligent citizens, by dint of fair and frank argument, that the best interests of the country are safer in their hands than they would be in those of their opponents. To this end it is probably better that there should be three parties in the field than but two. The more discussion of the right kind and the greater the variety in the standpoints of the speakers, the more powerful will be the educational influence exerted. And the more thoroughly aroused the people become to the national importance of the questions under discussion, the less danger will there be of their being dominated by blind prejudices, or tempted by sordid considerations. We have for some time past had hope that the country is about entering upon an era of purer politics. Such utterances as the strong and apparently sincere declaration of the Finance Minister at Orangeville, in favour of more intelligent interest in public affairs and more incorruptibility on the part of the electorate, strengthen that hope. It may be said that such protestations are cheap. Granted, yet they are vastly better than sneers at the alleged hypocrisy of those who may, from time to time, profess to be striving to purify Canadian politics.

When the Finance Minister and his colleagues commenced their promised investigations into the workings of the National Policy, it seemed to us, as to many others, not a little ominous that the investigation should have been confined for a time so largely to the classes for the protection of whose interests the tariff was framed, and we did not hesitate to express our opinion that such an investigation would fail to satisfy the country. Whatever may have been the original intention, the Government has now evidently come to the conclusion that the consumers of the protected goods must be consulted as well as the producers. At Orangeville, Mr. Foster declared that the Government is listening to farmers' delega-

tions, to the representatives of the labour associations, and to the manufacturers of the country; in a word, to the consumers as well as to the producers, and that it proposes to balance the information gained and to embody the result in a revision of the tariff at the next session of Parliament. That is so far satisfactory. If and in so far as the new policy to be presented accords with the views of the majority of the people, it will be sure of popular support. The method is, it must be admitted, somewhat new, and approaches more nearly to the principle of the plebiscite than its authors would perhaps be willing to admit. We presume, however, that Mr. Foster would say that it is facts, not opinions, which he is seeking to elicit, and that the Government will still act upon its own judgment and not upon the mere balance of popular opinions in framing its policy, thus preserving the cherished principle of responsible government.

Whatever importance the Ministers may attach to the statements of the Patrons of Industry who addressed them at Orangeville with reference to the tariff, there is one point to which the Patrons called attention, which is worthy of more attention than it has yet received. We refer to the strong representations which were made touching the practice of accepting free passes from the railways, which is said to be that of the great majority of the members of Parliament. It is obviously always possible, as Mr. Johnson pointed out, that the member using the pass, and thus placing himself under a pecuniary compliment to the railway authorities, may be called upon any day to vote upon some bill submitted on behalf of that railway, or involving a considerable sum from the public funds in aid of some enterprise in which the managers of that railway are interested. It is certainly strange that Parliament, which has enacted so many stringent measures to guard the independence of its members, should hesitate to purge itself from suspicion in this respect. When some prominent members thought it worth while last session to declare on the floor of the House that they individually accepted no passes, the wonder is that every other member, seeing what was implied in such denial and such refusal, did not feel called upon either to make a similar declaration, or to defend the acceptance of passes against the aspersion, or to profess penitence and promise reform.

To our thinking, there is, however, another aspect of the railway-pass question, not touched upon by the representatives of the Patrons of Industry, which is worthy of the attention of the Members of Parliament in their capacity of guardians of the rights and interests of the people whose representatives they are. This aspect is suggested by the proposal which Mr. McLean touched upon at the meeting in Bolton, and which he had before advocated from his place in the Commons. We refer to the

question whether the prevailing fares for railway travelling in the Dominion are not too high, especially in view of the fact that the railroads have been so liberally aided from municipal and public funds, and whether Parliament should not interfere to compel a reduction. If it be true, as is surely beyond question, that the people, through their representatives in Parliament, have a moral right to a voice in determining the policy of the railroads, it follows that they have a similar right to forbid favouritism in their management, and to insist that no class of citizens shall be carried free of charge, seeing that it inevitably follows that the roads showing such favouritism must save themselves from loss by charging higher rates to other travellers than would be otherwise necessary. We refer to the whole system of free passes, not simply to those granted to legislators. Touching the general question of public control of railways, which is evidently coming to the front at no very distant day, some facts stated by Professor Cohn, of Gottingen, in the current number of the "Journal of Political Economy," published under the auspices of Chicago University, with regard to the working of the Prussian system, are of great interest and importance. In Prussia the railways were purchased by the State in 1879, or rather in that year the system of public management was commenced by the passage of the first bill empowering such purchase. Although very liberal prices were paid for roads, Professor Cohn sums up the results of twelve or fourteen years of State management as follows:—

"Each year the railways not only paid in full the interest on the railway debt, but that on the entire State debt. In addition they yielded a very substantial surplus, which in the fiscal year from April 1st, 1889, to March 31st, 1890, reached the maximum amount of \$35,000,000. Moreover, more than \$135,000,000 of the railway debt has been extinguished. It is further to be observed that the surplus in the Prussian railway system is not the consequence of a narrow policy as to rates. In Prussia and Germany no practical man thinks of returning to the private corporation system."

Of course Canada is not Prussia, and the conditions of railway construction and service are no doubt so different as to make it necessary to reason from the one to the other very cautiously. But the question of Parliamentary control of rates is, or ought to be, even now within the realm of practical politics in Canada.

THE ANNEXATION OF CANADA.

At a time when New York newspapers are sending emissaries to Canada in search of Annexation sentiment, and dismissals are being made in the public service in Canada of those who have spoken too freely on the subject, it can scarcely be denied that Annexation is a prominent question of the day. Indeed it would be very singular if two countries having so much in common, as have the United States and