

## CURRENT EVENTS AND OPINIONS.

THOUGH the Budget Speech of Sir Leonard Tilley was long, the upshot is that his surplus is reduced to two millions, which are likely to be drawn upon heavily for better terms, and that the only alterations of the tariff which he proposes are slight reductions on the materials of certain manufactures. Between him and Sir Richard Cartwright there was of course a tilting match; and while the Finance Minister saw prosperity smiling around him and ascribed it to the wisdom of his own policy, Sir Richard deplored the ruinous condition of the country, of which the errors, or worse than errors, of the Finance Minister had been the cause. The strongest point in Sir Leonard Tilley's case is the increase of deposits in the Savings Banks, a most certain sign of prosperity, and happily also of improved habits among the people. At the same time there can be no doubt that at the present moment commerce is depressed. It is also certain that there is a large amount of destitution and suffering in the cities. An indifferent harvest and a stagnation in the lumber trade are evils which the tariff did not cause, and which, as its author must admit, it is also powerless to cure. Ill-regulated immigration may have something to answer for, so far as the destitution in the cities is concerned. But responsibility also rests upon the Finance Minister who, by his promises of protection, has induced over-investment in manufactures, inevitably followed by over-production, dismissal of workmen, and distress. This would perhaps be more distinctly felt if workmen, when thrown out of employment here, remained upon the spot instead of going over the Line. Sir Richard Cartwright may lay too heavy a load of guilt upon Sir Leonard Tilley. But Sir Leonard Tilley will wrestle in vain against common sense which pronounces that the more the people are taxed the less wealthy they must be, that it is a disadvantage to be excluded from the best and cheapest market, and that labour forced away from its natural object always becomes less productive. There may be patriotic motives for putting up with commercial loss, but they do not convert the loss into gain. Some things on which the Finance Minister lays heavy taxes, cannot be made in such a country as Canada, and his impost upon mining machinery casts a heavy weight into the scale against mining enterprise in this country. Special interests are too constantly present to the mind of Sir Leonard Tilley. The main test of every economical system is its effect in producing plenty among the people. The cost of living in Canada must now, taking all things together, be very nearly as great as it is in the United States, especially if the quality of food is brought into account as well as the price. A reform of the American tariff would turn the balance completely against us; and it can hardly be doubted that this reversal of the economical position would be followed by consequences of other kinds. An exodus would almost certainly ensue. About that monstrous piece of fiscal folly and iniquity, the coal-tax, nothing is said, though the sufferings of the poor from want of fuel during this hard winter have been great. The Opposition, fearing to offend Nova Scotia, is as silent as the Government, and by its silence it becomes almost equally responsible for the tax.

Not all those who voted against the by-law in Toronto depriving the grocers of their liquor licenses were friends of the existing system; much less were they all enemies of temperance. Some were voting against what they deemed to be injustice. If temperance is good for the State so is righteousness; perhaps righteousness is even the more important of the two. The trade which the grocers were carrying on might be desirable or undesirable; but at all events it had been sanctioned and not only sanctioned but specially licensed by the State which, in accepting the license fee, morally bound itself to an equitable performance of its contract. To abolish the trade with so short a notice that the larger stores could not possibly dispose of their stock, and thereby to inflict on the proprietors a heavy loss, was as barefaced an act of tyrannical iniquity as ever was committed by Stuart or Turk. Mr. Bright, who is himself a total abstainer and commenced his public life as a temperance orator, felt called upon the other day to raise his voice of wise and manly protest against the measures of confiscating violence into which extreme Prohibitionists wished to hurry the Legislature against a trade which, as he truly said, was perfectly legitimate, though he would personally desire to see it cease. It is a heavy set-off against the benefit of these philanthropic crusades that enthusiasm almost always perverts not only the judgment but in some degree the moral sense. How can equity, any more than reason, be expected at the hands of a crusader who has persuaded himself that a man like the late Mr. James Michie, not less deservedly respected in the church than in the community at large, because he sold wines, was "the agent of a demon against whom the best weapon would be prayer." There are other people who have per-

sueded themselves that Christ and His apostles were sinners because they instituted the eucharist with wine. Liquor-selling under a State license is surely not more criminal than slave owning; and when England abolished slavery she gave full compensation to the slave-owner. The old-fashioned teetotallers were worthy of entire respect; they sought a moral end by purely moral means, and to them, to the Bands of Hope in England, and other voluntary associations is probably due most of the good that has been done, otherwise than by the natural progress of moral principle and sanitary enlightenment. The success of legislative repression, after all the agitation, strife, suspicion and bitterness which it has cost society, appears to have been most questionable even in the judgment of the Prohibitionists themselves, who in a recent manifesto spoke of drinking as still constituting a national peril of the most awful kind. They may, perhaps, say with truth that the root of the evil has not yet been plucked up. Not only has it not been plucked up, but it has not been touched. The root of the evil in this country is the production of whiskey. Whiskey is the real poison, and if produced will infallibly find its way, by one channel or another, to the lips of the consumer; so that the only consequence of harassing the respectable retail trade will be here, as everybody says that it has been in Maine, the multiplication of disreputable and clandestine taverns. If we want to kill the monster and to do a noble thing at the same time, let us sacrifice the excise and, having paid due compensation to the distillers, whose trade has been not only recognized but made a source of revenue by the State, shut up the distilleries. But there are more reasons than one for not expecting this decisive course to be taken. The movement has now become thoroughly entangled with politics. Here, as in England, the temperance vote is like any other vote; it is courted and manipulated by political adventurers who clamber into Parliament on its back. In the pirate fleets of Borneo, which were encountered by Rajah Brooke, the crews consisted of Dyaks, religious fanatics who collected heads, while the captains were sharp Arabs, free from fanaticism, who collected plunder. This is the image of a moral reform movement which has become political, and as the Arab captains in Borneo would not have been anxious to destroy the sources of plunder, we can hardly expect that the political adventurers who have secured the leadership of the temperance movement will be very eager to close the game.

It is curious to see how invariably doomed institutions resist reform till it is too late. Up to 1828, or thereabouts, the Rotten-borough Parliament of England might have compromised with fate, for a time at least, on easy terms. But it refused even to let a seat be transferred from East Retford to Birmingham, and then the Flood of 1831 came upon it and destroyed it. In the halcyon days of Palmerston, who was as great a Tory at home as he was a disturber of the peace abroad, the House of Lords was offered the chance of arresting a more drastic reformation by the admission of a few life peers; but it refused to allow any infraction of the strict hereditary principle. The consequence is that the hereditary principle is now likely to go by the board. Lord Dunraven, feeling that the fatal hour draws near, proposes, in the *Fortnightly*, a partial reform. His plan is to reduce the number of the House to a hundred, of whom some are to be life peers nominated by the Crown, while the rest are to be elected by the whole order. It occurs to him that the result of the election, as in the case of the representative peers of Scotland and Ireland, will be the exclusion of all but Tories. To obviate this he proposes three expedients, the first of which involves the permanent division of the House into three political parties—Conservatives, Liberals and Independents. This is stereotyping the party system with a vengeance, and people must have minds of a very accommodating structure to be able so to regulate their convictions as always to supply the necessary quota of each political brand. A standing party of Independents is a conception even slightly Hibernian. The shears of Destiny will soon cut these knots. Lord Dunraven is not alone in treating the House of Lords as a Second Chamber or Senate. But it is not, nor has it ever been, anything of the kind. It is a feudal estate of the Realm, consisting of the great landowners, and its action has been always in accordance with its nature. A strong Conservative, who follows Lord Dunraven in the *Fortnightly*, pleads for the retention of the institution on the ground that the landed aristocracy, while packed into the House of Lords, are restrained from the free indulgence of their reactionary propensities by the precariousness of their position, while, if they were turned loose upon the Commons they would give free play to their natural tendencies, and at the same time become practically much more powerful than they are. This argument, though somewhat jesuitical in the mouth of a Tory, would not be baseless, if the aristocracy were to retain their great estates with the influence attached to them. But the feudal land laws which hold those estates together are sure to fall with the