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## THE WEEK:

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### CURRENT TOPICS.

The retirement of Sir William Dawson from the position of honour, influence, and usefulness, which he has so long occupied as President of McGill University, is an event of more than local importance. Sir William is one of a galaxy of Nova Scotians, some dead, some still living, who have by their talents and attainments won distinction, not only for their own Province, but for the whole Dominion. That his career, alike as an enthusiastic student of modern science and as an educator, has been eminently successful, is witnessed by the many marks of distinction he has received from learned societies at home and abroad. We do not know whether any other man has had the double honour of the Presidency of both the British and American Associations for the Advancement of Science. Geography and nationality no doubt combined to make

him eligible for this two-fold distinction, yet the compliment to his scholarship and scientific achievements implied in either case was none the less genuine. As a geologist Sir William stands in the front rank, and his name will go down to the future beside that of such men as Sir Charles Lyell. In the estimation of those to whom science means much more than a mere cataloguing and classifying of observed phenomena, Sir William's claims to remembrance are vastly greater because he has striven to make it auxiliary to the study of those higher truths of philosophy, which connect themselves with the great problems of human origin and duty and destiny. Of his great services to the cause of higher education in Quebec and in Canada during nearly forty years' presidency of McGill we need not speak particularly. His name is almost a household word in connection with the splendid growth and development of that institution. He has nobly earned the rest which we hope may be the means of his restoration to health and of his enjoyment of many years of a happy and fruitful old age.

With wheat quoted at sixty-five cents a bushel in Chicago, as it was one day last week, the outlook for farmers in the North-West, whose products have to be carried a long way over land to find a market, becomes rather discouraging. It is no wonder that they are growing impatient of the taxes which are believed to increase the cost of machinery, of living, and of production generally; that they are holding international conferences for the discussion of reciprocity; and that they are beginning to cry out for cheaper railway carriage. It is evident that upon the possibility of solving the two great problems of cheaper living and production, and cheaper railway freights, depends very largely the progress of settlement in the Territories. The former of these questions may be said to be just now prominently before the country in the tariff discussions, but it is surprising that so little attention has as yet been given to the latter. Had, for instance, the enormous subsidies which were given in money and land to the Canadian Pacific Railway been bestowed on such conditions as would have secured their repayment, when the Company could afford it, in the shape of reduced rates of carriage for farmers' products, what a boon it would now be to the struggling settlers and to the whole country. If it is good statesmanship, as few will dispute, to build canals at vast expense and open them to the public on terms which

it is not even attempted to make remunerative, why is it that something of the same kind has not been considered necessary in regard to the land carriage, which is so much more expensive? Here is something for our "rising statesmen" to think about.

The meagre and unreliable reports which reach us by cable of the great events which are now taking place in various parts of Europe, such as the Home Rule debate in the British Commons, the sittings of the Council of Arbitration in France, and the great electoral struggle in Germany, should bring home to all intelligent students of current history the fact that we are losing, through inadequate press reports, the greater part of the boon which the trans-oceanic telegraph might reasonably be expected to bring. All Canadians, for instance, are intensely interested in the proceedings before the Court of Arbitration in Paris. Yet, not only are we obliged to content ourselves with a paltry half-dozen lines describing its proceedings from day to day, but very often even these lines bear upon their face unmistakable evidence of colouring, if not of distortion. The same thing is true, though perhaps in a less degree, of the reports of the Home Rule debate. To be able to read day by day the great speeches on these two questions, by some of the ablest living statesmen and publicists, would be almost a liberal education in itself. This being the case, it is not a little exasperating to find dozens or hundreds of lines cabled concerning affairs of comparatively trivial or merely personal interest, for one devoted to these great history-making debates. If the general tenor of the Associated Press and special correspondence despatches correctly hit the popular taste, the fact does not say much for us as a people of education and intelligence. Surely the great Canadian dailies, if they would but manage to pull together, might do vastly better for their readers in the matter of trans-Atlantic news, without incurring any very heavy increase of expense. There is clearly wanted, at the other end of the cable, a man with a judicial mind, and a due sense of political proportion.

It is scarcely likely, we should think, that the rather startling proposal advocated by Captain Gambier, R.N., in the May number of the Fortnightly, for the cession of Gibraltar to Spain in return for the Canary Islands, will meet with sufficient favour in either England or Spain to make it a question of practical politics at any early