

# THE WEEK:

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## TOPICS OF THE WEEK.

SIR LEONARD TILLEY'S health is not in that promising state which would warrant the belief that he will ever again consent to resume the active duties of the office of Minister of Finance. The probability against his doing so amounts almost to an absolute certainty. Meanwhile only a perfunctory discharge of the duties can be expected from Mr. Mackenzie Bowell, who has on his hands, in addition, his own department of the Customs. Never was there a time when the public finances so imperatively required the undivided attention of a strong directing hand as at present. There is heavy work for a Minister of Finance to do, and it is work that will not wait. Some sixty millions of dollars will have to be raised by loan almost immediately; twenty-five millions is a renewal loan, payment of which is only made necessary at present by the fact of notice having been given that payment would be offered in June. This notice was given, it seems, on the advice of the English financial agents of the Government. When the notice was given it was probably not foreseen that so large an additional amount as will be necessary would have to be asked for. However this may be, there can be no doubt that sixty millions will be looked upon by English financiers as too large a sum for Canada to ask so short a time after the last loan was contracted, and that the country is increasing its debt at a rate which is greatly disproportionate to the growth of its resources. The money can be got; but the concomitants of the subscription to the loan may be expected to convey an admonition that it is not wise to increase the debt at so rapid a rate, and that safety requires that the brakes be at once put on. But the debt accumulation has received a momentum which makes a sudden and immediate pause impossible. The country has in progress the construction of a great railway, in the prosecution and the completion of which it is too late to pause; the trouble in the North-West will occasion an expenditure of millions which must be provided. To whatever extent the necessities of the situation may, in these particulars, compel extraordinary drafts on the Treasury to be made, to that extent the further increase of the debt will be unavoidable; to that extent the increase of the debt is practically uncontrollable. In national undertakings of unusual extent, it generally happens that first estimates are too low; and from this error the country is now suffering. By whomsoever the duties of Finance Minister may be undertaken, the task before him will be onerous and the responsibility great. Additional revenue he will before long find it necessary to raise; this duty, always disagreeable, will be made the more difficult from the adoption of a policy by his predecessor which, to put one dollar into the Treasury, requires two to be taken from the taxpayers. In the office of Minister of Finance there is now required a man with a firm grasp of the subjects with which he will have to deal, fertile in expedients of a rational and legitimate kind, and able to keep at arm's-length the crowd of men who have been encour-

aged to besiege the Treasury for promises of special legislation in favour of their personal enterprises. But among the actual aspirants and possible selections such a man has not yet appeared.

RELIEF for the Canadian Pacific Railway, which has been looked for since the opening of the session, has come at last. The obligation to provide some measure of relief belongs to the class of unwelcome duties which it was impossible to evade; the sacrifice it involves is made as a means of escape from a greater evil. The road, and not only the road but the railway system of which it is a part, called for further expenditure, and the necessary means could be secured only by a further Government advance. It is the first step, in enterprises of this magnitude, which involves all that follows; a road which had been carried to the heart of the Rockies must go on to the Pacific. Through miscalculations of various kinds, the contract with the Syndicate led to the loan of last session, and that loan became the father of the present. At each step the responsibility of the public is increased, and it is well if its security is not diminished. So far as Government and Parliament were concerned there was only one thing to be done; an increase of the Government advance to the company was indispensable. The way in which the aid should be granted presented some choice, but that aid should be granted was inevitable. For the first time the connections of the Pacific Railway proper are recognized as having the right to have expended on them money advanced by the Government. Hitherto every dollar of the amount advanced was required to be expended on the main line. The change opens up a prospect which is not altogether pleasant. A large additional amount must be spent on the eastern connections of the Pacific line proper, beyond what is provided; and in view of the fact that a temporary loan of five millions of dollars, which forms part of the present plan of relief, may be applied to work on the connections, done or to be done, the connections and branches for which heavy financing will yet be required, if they are not to drag, acquire a new if not an agreeable interest. But it is obvious that when the main line is completed the Government will not be in a position to make further advances; if it were, no doubt there would be a present temptation to assist in building a North-West branch into the district where the insurrection has broken out. For political railways the nation must pay in the end, whatever the machinery of construction employed; a fact which, after a somewhat varied experience, we are now realizing.

IN the North-West, on Sunday, Col. Otter, with a flying column of three hundred men, had an engagement with Indians on Poundmaker's Reserve, in which his loss was seven killed and twenty wounded, that of the enemy being fifty killed. The battle lasted seven hours. Otter's column marched seventy miles, fought the battle, and returned to their lines within thirty hours. This is the sort of dash which Indians and Half-breeds are supposed to be liable to make. The result of the contest, morally and from a military standpoint, must be good. Edmonton has been relieved without a fight. From General Middleton, who had been waiting for supplies, a report of an engagement may arrive at any moment. The Body Guard is being entrenched at Humboldt. Another priest, stationed at Batouch, and who had refused to confess for insurrection, has been murdered. There is said to be some danger that a considerable body of Indians who have stolen large supplies of cattle and horses may move northwards in the direction of Peace River, where it would be difficult if not impossible to follow them through woods at so great a distance from the base of supplies.

It may or may not have been inevitable that when the forces of civilization came into contact with savage life in the North-West, a collision would occur. But the actual contest was not begun by the savage raising his tomahawk; the first shot was fired by the Half-breeds, who occupy an intermediate position between the civilized man and the savage, and who partake of the qualities of both, though of the latter in the larger degree. More hunters than herdsmen or tillers of the soil, they suffer in common with their Indian ancestors from whatever tends to lessen the supply of game, which has hitherto been the chief reliance of both. The vast herds of bison, as well as other kinds of game, disappear before the advancing farmer, by whom the soil is applied to a more