

THE WEEK:

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TOPICS OF THE WEEK.

WITHOUT exception the French press of Quebec is in a state of violent excitement over the execution of Riel. There runs through all the complaints an admission that the crime of the hanging consisted of the fact that the culprit had French blood in his veins. The national *amour-propre* is offended. One journal makes a representative French-Canadian say that to him it is a matter of indifference whether or not Riel was a criminal or a madman: "what drives me mad is the thought that one of our race has been taken." The journal which reports this remarkable confession, though among the most moderate, cannot bring itself to say that the utterance is wrong. But it makes some amends by counselling its excited countrymen not to compromise their future by violent action; but rather to aim to repair by the victory of to-morrow the defeat of yesterday. And yet this journal says it is obliged to respect the sentiment embodied in the words, *il faut se venger, il faut se battre, il faut détruire*. Another journal says, on its own account, that the principal question is not whether Riel was guilty or not, whether he was insane or not: the hanging of one of the French race, which is magnified into an unjust discrimination, is the real cause of the offence with which the Executive authority is charged. "When," asks a more rabid writer, "will the day of retribution come?" This journalist, who is the oracle of the extreme Church party, adds that "the time for words has passed." But the sound of the Marseillaise is not to his taste any more than the sight of the tricolor flag. For the time reason has almost entirely lost her empire over the French-Canadians. The execution is denounced, almost without pretence of reason, as a judicial murder, resorted to to satisfy the thirst of the Orangemen for vengeance. And yet one of the more candid of these journalists admits that the plea of insanity was put forward because no other was available. The administration of the sacrament to the culprit by Father André before the execution assumes the perfect mental sanity of the recipient. It is impossible to reason with excited people who frankly take the ground that Riel, if both guilty and

sane, ought to have been saved by the mere fact that he was a French-Canadian. Perhaps this excitement is too feverish to be very deep or lasting. When measured by the money test the love for Riel shrinks to very diminutive proportions. When subscriptions were asked for to defray the cost of his defence before the Privy Council, less than two thousand dollars was subscribed. The demand that the whole French delegation in the House of Commons should resign, though liberally repeated, fails to bring a single resignation. Twenty-three Conservative members of the Quebec Assembly protested against the execution. We are told that henceforth the political conditions are changed; but not a Minister from Quebec resigns. The reason given for their retention of office is that at the present moment they keep cool enough to be able to exercise their reason. This is a bad compliment to the excited majority. Demands for a union of all the French-Canadians are made; but between the Bleus and the Castors the kiss of peace has not yet passed; if their mutual recriminations are less frequent, they are still audible. The divergences in the French press, which had dwindled almost to nothing, are now increasing; the clamour of the majority, which caused the courage to ooze out of the hearts of the writers who would have tried to stem the current of fanaticism if they dared, is already losing its power. The press in allowing itself to be overborne, not by public opinion, but by the race feeling worked up to frenzy, deserted its post of sentinel at a time when moderate counsels were especially necessary. But the aspect of the popular fury changes almost every hour; and the tendency is to reveal divisions of which enthusiasts are most emphatic in denying the existence. If the effervescence of the young blood of the cities has contented itself with a street parade, the singing of the Marseillaise, the display of the tricolor flag, the burning of the effigies of obnoxious members of the Ministry, no credit is due to the French press. But here again, as in the isolation of small-pox, thanks are due to Mayor Beau-grand, by whom a possible collision of the two races has been prevented. The question now is whether Riel's remains are to be allowed to repose under the monument erected to the "martyrs" of 1837-38. A committee will be appointed to examine the evidence to ascertain whether he was worthy of canonization; and it may safely be predicted that he will be declared to have nobly earned the honour.

THE threatened formation of a new party in Quebec on race lines, as a consequence of Riel's execution, will meet obstacles which are likely to prevent the enterprise getting beyond the initial stage. The old jealousies and the old rivalries could not be smothered. They are visible, even now, in the hour of supreme frenzy. The Castors and the Ultramontanes are as ready as they ever have been to fly at the throats of the Bleus, and the Bleus, if subdued for the moment, have no idea of surrendering to a minority whom it has been the business of their lives to keep down. An Irish journalist in Montreal even takes upon himself the mission of uniting the Irish and the French. But Father O'Dowd, of St. Patrick's Church, peremptorily forbids the banns. Riel, he says, was fairly tried and deservedly hanged. The two races are competitors for employment, and between them no love is lost. But a declaration of party war by the French race would put the English on the defensive, and, however much against their will, they would have to accept the challenge. The arts of the party managers would be of no avail to prevent the contest taking the most deplorable of all forms, in which race would be pitted against race and creed against creed. If there be a grain of patriotism left among French-Canadian politicians, they will decline to enter on so disastrous a career. The choice does not lay with the other side; if it did, there would be no danger; and, as it is, we do not think the danger is real, much less serious. During the last forty years French-Canadian politicians have shown that they are not lacking in prudence of the kind that can save them from the folly of constructing a political party on race lines. The strongest motive for the exercise of prudence on their part is the certainty, which they cannot hide from themselves, that such a policy must fail. And failure would mean all that is implied by the defeat of a faction constructed on the lines of a race which, though respectable in numbers, forms not more than a third of the population. *La Minerve* has regained