

# THE WEEK.

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## CONTENTS OF CURRENT NUMBER.

	PAGE.
TOPICS OF THE WEEK .....	65
Australian Federation.—The Mormons.—The Family Quarrel in Quebec.—Pauperism in Toronto.—Dynamite for Canada.	
CONTRIBUTED ARTICLES .....	66
Current Events and Opinions .....	A Bystander.
A Side-Light on Acadian History .....	F. Blake Crofton.
The School Readers .....	G. M. A.
CORRESPONDENCE .....	70
New Brunswick Letter .....	Jay.
LITERATURE .....	70
Ballad of a Summer Hour .....	Jane E. G. Roberts.
Sonnet .....	Seranus.
The Adventures of a Widow .....	Edgar Faucett.
A Detective Story, by Police Captain Howard .....	H.D.
READINGS FROM NEW BOOKS .....	73
To My Grandmother.—A Garden Idyll .....	From "Poems" by Frederick Locker.
THE PERIODICALS .....	73
BOOK NOTICES .....	76
Thibault's "Sir Charles Tupper."—O'Reil's "John Bull and His Island."—Stoddard's "Wrecked?"	
MUSIC AND THE DRAMA .....	77
The Toronto Choral Society.	
LITERARY GOSSIP .....	77
CHRONICLE OF THE WEEK .....	76

## The Week,

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### TOPICS OF THE WEEK.

THE characteristics of our Australian fellow-colonists are very different from our own. The difference is strikingly illustrated by the plan of federation which has been drawn up by the delegates of the Australian provinces. This plan is as follows:—

"A Federal Council is to be formed, composed of two representatives and one Crown nominee from each colony. In other words, the Federal Council will be composed of twenty-four members, the numbers increasing as new colonies are constituted on the Australian mainland. The Crown will be in a perpetual minority, should the representative members act in harmony. But the royal assent is needed before any act of the Federal Council becomes effective, and in every instance the decision of the Council, so approved, must be given through the Governor of the colony where the Council may be sitting. The right of revision by the Crown is also preserved. The legislative functions of the Federal Council include, first of all, the relations of the colonies toward the various islands in the Western Pacific. In matters of common interest to the colonies, in which uniformity of practice is desirable, the Federal Council is also to have legislative authority. The subjects are marriage, divorce, naturalization, enforcement of criminal processes, extradition, colonial defences, quarantine regulations, patents, copyright, and bills of exchange."

After the vigorous way in which the Australians have asserted themselves in the matter of annexing New Guinea, a course which inclined some of us to think that they were ahead of Canadians in independent spirit, that they were going to show us the way in self-reliant and resolute action, it is disappointing to find them hampering themselves with forms and institutions not unlike those which Canada, after strenuous effort, sloughed off some decades ago. The appointment of one Crown nominee for every two representative members of the Federal Council is tolerably safe to secure to the Australians such a select assortment of evils as Canadians were only delivered from by the overthrow of Family Compact domination. It is an antiquated expedient which our brethren of the Antipodes would adopt; and, unless we quite mistake their real character, they will soon discover that this method of constituting a federal legislature was intended by them to be merely temporary and experimental, and will devise something more agreeable with the tenor of modern ideas. They flatter themselves that in the Council thus constituted "the Crown will be in a perpetual minority," if—observe the contingency—"the representative members act in harmony." In the case, perhaps a not impossible one, of the represent-

atives differing slightly in their views, after the ancient manner of representatives, then the solid Crown minority would hold the balance of power; and it is in the very matters of most vital importance to the colonies that diversity of opinion would surely arise among the representative members, and that unanimity would be most perfect among the nominees of the Crown. The present movement toward confederation appears to have been precipitated by external considerations, above all by the desire to secure themselves, by annexation of surrounding islands, from the possibility of dangerous neighbours in the future, rather than by any internal need of more intimate relationship. The movement is accompanied also by a good deal of mutual suspicion, as might be expected to exist between provinces holding commercial creeds so antagonistic as those of Victoria and New South Wales. There is nothing in what we have quoted above that permits us to infer that these differing creeds will be reconciled under the proposed scheme. When each province is to be left to work out its own salvation in its own way, with every opportunity preserved to it of developing the finest quality of provincial selfishness, which is usually short-sighted, it is improbable that Australia will have any advantage of Canada in attaining the unity of feeling and aim, the complete amalgamation, the broadly patriotic spirit essential to the permanent greatness of a nation. Without at least a uniform fiscal policy, the provinces may come at last to resemble the states of ancient Greece, which stood together, generally, in the face of the barbarian outsider, but were promptly at each other's throats when the objectionable presence was removed. The comparison is less extravagant than it at first appears, because the populations of the states of Greece were so largely dwellers in cities. National jealousies, which are almost synonymous with trade jealousies, have their origin and existence in the cities, the trade-centres. And in the Australian provinces we are not surprised to find more tenacious inter-provincial distrust than even differences of religion and race have been able to create in our own confederation, because in Australia the proportion borne by the urban to the rural population is so vastly greater than it is in Canada. We should be slightly skeptical with regard to the efficiency of a federal government established with the defence of the country as one of its most important functions, yet with no means absolutely at its disposal wherewith to provide for this defence. An omelette may be spoiled by breaking too many eggs; but it may be spoiled much more readily by not breaking eggs enough. As for the danger of over-centralization, it is obvious that such danger exists; but for any confederation of states or provinces aiming to become a homogeneous nation, we believe that quite in an opposite direction lies the greater peril.

At a recent dinner in Brooklyn, there was some discussion of the Mormon problem, and Mr. Beecher spoke of the folly of supposing that Mormonism could be suppressed by the sword. "Every man," he said, "that wants to extirpate any form of mistaken belief in politics or religion, by law and stricture and force, is a Puritan pure and simple." The Rev. Dr. Newman, on the other hand, contended in fact that polygamy should be legislated against, on the ground that it is a fraud; because if one man takes unto himself twenty-five wives he thereby defrauds twenty-four men of their natural rights. This view of the question, thus forcibly advanced, will probably strike the Mormons with sudden shame. They are a scrupulously honest people, and the large wife-owners will doubtless at once begin to deliver up in favour of the many needy bachelors.

THERE is a great deal of matter published respecting the state of political affairs in Quebec, but no one who is desirous of seeing a family brawl among the *Bleus* ought to take any comfort in the prospect of a quarrel between Sir Hector Langevin and Mr. Chapleau. These are shrewd, cool men, with a capacity almost equal to that possessed by Sir John himself of calming angry water; and they will swallow more vexations and mutual dislikes than the brain of the most imaginative "special correspondent" can dream of rather than permit any such break in the party as their opponents surmise.

TORONTO seems in a fair way to be made to pay pretty dearly for the reputation she has so long enjoyed of being a very charitable city. Since the early autumn numbers of destitute, and in many cases worthless, Irish immigrants have been pouring in, and all these she has had to house, clothe,