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## THE WEEK:

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### CURRENT TOPICS.

Those who have read the evidence which has been given from day to day before the Lachine Bridge Commission must by this time be pretty well convinced that Canadians have no need to turn to the United States, or France, or any other foreign country, when they wish to study striking examples or object lessons, showing the way in which popular governments, that is, the tax-payers, who happen in this case to be themselves, are made, through "political influence," the prey of the dishonest. We have no wish to anticipate the report of the Commission. It is to the credit of the Government, or of the Public Works Department of it, that this investigation is being made at its own instance, and not under pressure from a keen-eyed Opposition, though it is not greatly to its credit that abuses of confidence so flagrant and so glaring and unscrupulous, should have gone so long undetected, with the result of robbing the public funds to an amount which, it seems likely, must be

counted by hundreds of thousands. The report of the commissioners, who seem to be doing their work very thoroughly, will, no doubt, be an interesting document. Whether the punishment of the dishonest servants will be as inadequate, not to say farcical, as it has been in the case of most of those whose frauds were brought to light by the Parliamentary investigation two years ago, remains to be seen.

The situation created by the overbearing course of France in the Siam affair is, at the time of this writing, decidedly threatening. The result of interviews between Lord Dufferin and the French Minister of War is awaited with interest not unmixed with anxiety. So far as the question at issue relates to the alleged outrages committed upon French by Siamese officials, or even to legitimate questions of territorial delimitation, the British Government is not likely to feel called on to interfere, however they may disapprove of the arbitrary course of the French Ministry. But it seems impossible that England can permit a wholesale seizure of Siamese territory by France, especially when such seizure would have the effect of bringing the French into dangerous proximity to her own Indian territory. The readiness of strong nations to bully the weak is not a pleasing characteristic of the times. Germany, France, the United States, even Great Britain herself, all in turn show themselves ready to take an attitude with weaker peoples, incapable of defending themselves, which is in strange contrast to the patience and deference they show to each other. But, so far as can be judged from the imperfect information yet to hand, it is doubtful whether any other modern power has taken a weak people so unceremoniously and ruthlessly by the throat, as is now being done by France in the case of Siam. A little while ago there seemed some reason to hope that the bitter national humiliation caused by the Panama scandal might have a salutary effect and lead to a great purgation in Parisian public life. But the incident has passed without serious change, and it is now painfully evident that the spirit of demagogery and national jealousy is still in the ascendant.

According to late reports, Mr. Tarte says that he has accepted the invitation of Mr. Laurier to accompany him in his Ontario tour. Mr. Laurier must be a brave politician, indeed, if he is not afraid to have Mr. Tarte as his companion in travel and oratory. We know not what Mr. Laurier's

idea may be in the matter, but it seems strange that after having been so eloquently non-committal in regard to the burning question of the Manitoba schools, he should be willing to have his freedom compromised by his fiery lieutenant, Mr. Laurier, who is constantly declaring from the same platform, not only that the Catholic minority have a right to their separate schools, but that the Dominion Government has the power to act in the premises and restore those schools. The hope of the leaders of both parties, no doubt, is that the Supreme Court will dispose of the troublesome question, by deciding that the Federal Government cannot now interfere, but should the decision be the opposite, and should the Liberals come into power through the tariff-reform agitation, Mr. Tarte's present utterances would make the situation very uncomfortable for Mr. Laurier. We assume, of course, that the latter understands the situation too well to suppose that the permanent imposition of either a separate school or a dual language system upon the new communities of the North West is out of the question, and that the attempt to interfere with the self-rule of these communities, in that respect would wreck any Government that could be formed by either party. The net result of Mr. Tarte's controversy with Archbishop Tache seems to be to make clear what everyone pretty well understood before, viz., that Mr. Chapleau gave "solemn pledges to the Archbishop, but took care to say that he was doing so in his individual capacity, not as a member of the Government." Whether a member of a responsible Government can properly make such a distinction is a question for political casuists.

"In armour plate we are in the van, while in projectiles we certainly lead the world," exclaims a New York paper at the close of an account of a contest between projectiles and armour plate which was made a week or two since, and which is declared to be such as never before was witnessed in that or any other country. We have not sufficient knowledge of the exact character and results of all the experiments of a similar kind which have been made by other nations and especially by Great Britain to be able to judge as to the correctness of the boast, though very similar experiments are being continually made by other nations, with varying results, the victory being now with the plates, again with the projectiles. The contest was be-