

THE WEEK:

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The Week,

AN INDEPENDENT JOURNAL OF POLITICS, SOCIETY AND LITERATURE.

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TOPICS OF THE WEEK.

RIEL's execution, now a thing of the past, was from the first inevitable. He received a fair trial, and both at Regina and before the Privy Council everything that could be done was done on his behalf. There were no grounds on which mercy could interfere to stay the hand of Justice. The petitioners for a commutation of his sentence were moved to action by national sympathy. There were people who argued that Riel's life ought to be spared because he had French blood in his veins. If the doctrine were once accepted that a man's nationality, if of the right kind, may save him from the consequences of his crimes, society would soon be in a state of dissolution and neither property nor life would be secure. It is for his crime and not for his nationality that Riel has suffered. If an Englishman had done what he did, not one of his countrymen would have thought of asking for his reprieve on the ground of his nationality. The law knows no distinction of nationalities. If Jackson was incarcerated in a lunatic asylum instead of being hanged, the reason was that his insanity was not a matter of doubt; and if Riel had been in the same mental condition that Jackson was, he would, in spite of anything that had occurred in his previous career, have received the same treatment. The plea that Riel is insane does not negative the fact that he was well aware of what he was doing when he induced the Half-breeds to take up arms and incited the Indians to murder unoffending persons, priests as well as laymen. We are told, and the fact cannot be denied, that the Half-breeds had substantial grievances, which two Administrations had failed to redress; and the question is asked how far endurance was to go, and at what point resistance would become justifiable. As pleas in and at what point resistance would become justifiable. The grievance-justification of the insurrection, the interrogations must fail. The grievances under which the Half-breeds were suffering were as nothing in comparison with the sufferings which they would have to undergo as the inevitable consequences of their measuring forces with the Government. The redress of the grievances would have come, if there had been no

insurrection, in the same way and almost as soon as it did come. Before a shot was fired a commission to deal with the complaints of the Half-breeds had been decided upon. It is quite safe to say that the time had not come when a resort to arms was justifiable. One of the bishops of the North-West is credited with saying that Riel, dead or alive, would be a source of danger. That his name will be a name to conjure by may be true, in a certain sense. But the ignorant of one race only can be bewitched by the appeal, and as the full truth becomes known the force of the spell, gradually weakening, will at last be broken. Among the victims of Riel's own race in the North-West the sympathy that was once so active in his favour has turned to gall. In the Province of Quebec it is difficult to gauge the extent of the genuine feeling for him. Both parties are willing to utilize the hangman's rope to serve their purposes: while one tries to climb upon it hand-over-hand to power, the other, put on the defensive, concludes that the best use that can be made of it is to bar out the enemy. The sympathies of the politicians are his own, and he is free to expend them as he will; and if the genuine article be wanting it can be counterfeited without incurring the penalties of forgery. Sympathy for Riel among Quebec politicians is both real and counterfeit. Neither party has a monopoly of the article. The game of politics played over a dead man's grave is not an edifying spectacle; but in proportion to the extent to which sympathy is simulated the dismal contest will be harmless. If Riel's execution were a judicial murder, there would be reason to fear the avenging spirit that would rise from his grave; but if ever sentence were just and execution warranted they were in Riel's case. If his life had been spared, the arm of justice would have been paralyzed: not one of the Indian murderers, who were his victims and his dupes, could have been hanged; the murdered men and women and the volunteers who were shot while putting down the insurrection would alone have suffered.

OCCASIONALLY may be heard in Ontario utterances on the fate of Riel to which calm reason can lend no sanction. But they are the exception, and must not be taken as the voice of Ontario. Riel was not hanged for the murder of Scott, nor had vengeance any part in his execution. That he was an old offender and justly deemed dangerous to the public peace are facts which, if the question had come up, might fairly have stood in the way of the exercise of clemency. Of the crimes of his first insurrection Riel had been purged by the exercise of Executive clemency, which took a form that does not recommend it as a precedent. Revenge has no part in the feeling with which the news of the execution is received. The people of Quebec have no cause of complaint at the attitude of Ontario on the subject. And we receive with incredulity the predictions of a political revolution, as the result of the event. No member of the Cabinet from Quebec has resigned or ever had an intention to resign, as a result of Riel's meeting his fate at the hands of justice. Conservative representatives, as well as Grit, petitioned and protested; but that the supporters of the Government in Quebec will go over to the Opposition in a body because Riel was not pardoned is utterly incredible.

PROTECTIONISTS are in the habit of saying, when their stock of arguments falls short, that all the theorists are on one side but all the practical men on the other. Political economy is a curious and a very unfortunate subject if all the results of scientific inquiry respecting it point the opposite way to the facts. Were William Pitt and Turgot mere theorists? Were Huskisson, Lord Russell, Peel and Cavour? Are Gladstone's Budgets the work of a speculative dreamer? Did the Anti-Corn Law League consist of university professors or of Lancashire and Yorkshire manufacturers? Did Bright and Cobden themselves imbibe their opinions in academic lecture-rooms or form them in centres of trade? Is the enormous growth of British commerce and wealth since the repeal of the Corn Laws a vision or a practical fact? The same question might be asked respecting the annihilation under a Protective tariff of the mercantile marine of the United States. Say that all disinterested inquirers, whether students or statesmen, are on one side, while all who are personally interested in Protection are on the other, and you will not be far from the mark.