

THE WEEK.

Third Year.
Vol. III., No. 13.

Toronto, Thursday, February 25th, 1886.

\$3 00 per Annum.
Single Copies, 10 Cents.

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THE OPENING OF THE SESSION.

IN the Session which is just opening, the Government will have three serious questions to face: that of the execution of Riel, that of the causes of the Rebellion, and that of Finance. With regard to the first question the difficulty is not likely to be great. In the time which has been judiciously allowed to elapse before the meeting of Parliament a sufficient number of the indignant and insurgent Bleus have, no doubt, been conciliated to give the Government once more a respectable majority: to conciliate the whole body would have been unnecessary and somewhat inartistic. It is useful to the Government to be able to point to the hostility of a few Bleus as a proof of its independence. The Leader of the Opposition, for his part, has declared with equal rectitude and prudence that he will not make a platform out of the planks of a scaffold or unlock the political future with the blood-rusted key of the past. The feeling of the French for Riel, as the champion of their nationality in the North-West, is respectable, because it is natural and sincere. Nothing can be less respectable than the pretence of sympathy put on for the purpose of a political intrigue. No man except a French-Canadian doubts, and no honest man pretends to doubt, that the execution of this man, who had for the second time got up a rebellion and filled the community with blood and havoc, was an inevitable measure of public justice. To say that Sir John Macdonald put Riel to death is ridiculous. Sir John Macdonald had no right whatever to interfere with the course of the law in this case any more than in a case of murder or robbery except upon specific grounds, which, on this occasion, did not exist. By the law of Canada and the verdict of a jury which had the whole case, including the plea of insanity, fully before it, Riel was sent to the scaffold. The responsibility rests upon the whole body of Canadian citizens, who, through their representatives, make the law, and out of whose number the jury is taken. It is to be hoped that on this wretched corpse the vulture of Party will prey no more.

It is quite otherwise with regard to the causes of the rebellion. The fate of a motion of censure was certain, even had the Ministerial majority been less docile than that which follows Sir John Macdonald. Every Ministerialist would naturally ask himself what Party meant if he was not to stand by his leaders when they were in the wrong. But a motion for inquiry, properly supported by presumptive evidence and pressed at once with force and temper, is what even the most docile of majorities finds it very difficult to resist, especially when a general election is at hand. After all that the nation has paid and suffered it has an indisputable right to know the whole truth. The sudden appointment by the Government, as soon as the rebellion broke out, of a Commission to examine and settle Half-breed claims, in itself affords a strong presumption of previous injustice or neglect. The deliverance of Archbishop Taché also furnishes material for the indictment. It is evident that there is a body of other witnesses ready to testify that warnings were given and disregarded. People are apt, it is true, after a catastrophe to exaggerate the clearness

of their foresight and the exactness of their predictions; but if any of the warnings were given in writing, about these there can be no mistake; the fact, at all events, will be winnowed from the fancy when the witnesses are brought before a competent tribunal. Inquiry is necessary, especially with regard to the treatment of the Indians, not only to fix responsibility for what has happened but to avert danger for the future; and upon inquiry it is to be hoped the country will have the spirit to insist. The difficulty is to find a trustworthy tribunal. A Parliamentary Committee is a reproduction of the faction fight on a small scale. A Commission appointed by the inculcated Ministers themselves, as in the case of the Pacific Railway scandal, is a jury nominated by the accused. Were the Senate what it ought to be, and presumably was intended to be, it might serve for the conduct of such investigations as this, as well as for the trial of political offences; but we all know what the Senate is. If the Governor-General has any reserved power to be used on a constitutional emergency in which interests above those of Party require protection, here is an occasion for its exercise: he might personally appoint a Commission of inquiry; for surely the country must be able to furnish three or even five men in whose integrity and impartiality general confidence would be felt. The Government did not increase the presumption in favour of its innocence by so palpable a self-whitewashing as the bestowal of knighthood on one of its own members for alleged services in the suppression of the rebellion. In moving four or five thousand men to a point within Canadian territory, the Minister of Militia performed no wonderful feat, while the management of the commissariat and the transportation appears to have been extremely wasteful.

What is the amount of the deficit will not be known till the Minister of Finance makes his statement, perhaps not even then. It is idle to add to a series of guesses ranging from two millions to seven. That there is a considerable deficit over and above the rebellion expenditure, however, seems certain; and this will put in issue the financial policy of the Government. Economy and finance are not the strong points of the Leader of the Opposition, whose utterances on the subject of the National Policy have always betrayed a weakness of grasp; but Sir Richard Cartwright will, no doubt, improve the occasion with energy, and, so far as argument is concerned, with success. He will not be able to prove that the Government did wrong either in resorting to increased taxation rather than loans, or in proclaiming Commercial Independence and adapting the tariff to the special circumstances of the country; but he will not have much difficulty in proving that it did wrong when, in dealing with such a country as Canada, it embraced the principle of Protection. That this was done under political pressure, and with a view of securing the manufacturers' vote, is a fact of which we have been positively assured by one who was a leading agent in the secret negotiations, and which without any revelation we might have divined. If the Prime Minister and his principal colleagues had been before identified with any commercial principle it was Free Trade. They do not seem, in eagerly hoisting the flag which was to attract the manufacturing interest to their side, even to have reflected that Protection and Revenue were incompatible objects, and that when they had forced production in this country, imports and receipts from import duty must decline. A new scene, however, appears to be opening in the fiscal region. Opinion is certainly growing in favour of the total abolition of the Customs Line, and the National Policy may soon sink into a minor issue and be absorbed in that of Commercial Union. Not only the fiscal system, but the expenditures of the Government, will of course be arraigned by the Opposition. It is, to say the least, ambitious. The country is probably paying about a million a year for the great force of Mounted Police rendered necessary by the policy which, by constructing the Pacific Railway at once through the entire North-Western Territory, has scattered the settlers over a breadth of eight hundred miles, and thus exposed them to the danger from the Indians.

By the energy which has so rapidly completed the Pacific Railway, and for which, whatever may be thought about the policy of the Government, praise is due to the Company, that subject is withdrawn from the field of Parliamentary battle, so far as the construction is concerned. Instead of asking for subventions in the coming session, the Minister may perhaps have to perform the more popular duty of announcing their repayment. But the question is not yet at an end; nor is it likely to be at an end so long as a vestige of the Monopoly Clauses remains to interfere with free