

THE WEEK:

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TOPICS OF THE WEEK.

THE particular events of the Session which has closed in a harmonious vote of increased indemnities have been treated as they came. In its general course it has afforded fresh proof of the fact that a party government with a weak opposition is of all governments about the most irresponsible. Which party is in power matters not; an overwhelming majority of people who call themselves Liberals will be just as despotic and as uncontrolled as an overwhelming majority of people who call themselves Tories. That in the case of the trouble in the North-West there was some reason at least for suspecting neglect on the part of Ministers at Ottawa and misconduct on the part of subordinates, no unprejudiced man can deny. Equally clear was it that the nation, which had suffered so much by the rebellion, was entitled to a fair inquiry. Yet nobody was such a simpleton as to suppose that with the Government in a majority of two to one a fair inquiry could possibly be obtained. Under an administrative despotism, while the chiefs of the administration would of course acquit themselves, subordinates like Lieutenant-Governor Dewdney would at all events be called to account; but secure beneath the shield of his party, the Lieutenant-Governor snaps his fingers at national wrath. Public money has been voted by tens of millions for political railways and other objects, and the pile of national debt has been increased with apparently greater recklessness than ever; certainly without affording to the people the full explanations which they had a right to expect; nor does it seem that economy is likely to be enforced by anything short of the prospect of bankruptcy. The Franchise Bill contained provisions to which strong objections were felt on Constitutional grounds by impartial men; such was the case notably with regard to the clause giving the appointment of all the revising officers to the head of the party now in power; yet its passage was, like that of its precursor, the Gerrymandering Bill, a foregone conclusion; and its ratification by the Senate, the supposed guardian of principle and modera-

tor of party excesses, was felt to be a mere form. The present political situation is, we are bound to hope, a temporary state through which we are making our way to better things beyond. Otherwise such of us as take no part in the game of politics and desire only to be well-governed would hardly have gained much by the Revolution of 1837. A Royal Governor amenable to authority at home, controlled by opinion here, personally answerable for his acts and upheld in wrong-doing by the complicity of no faction, was at least as responsible as any head of a party government with a great and obsequious majority at its beck. His rule could produce none of the bad effects which are produced by this perpetual faction fight, with all its intrigue, mutual calumny and corruption, on the political character of the people; nor in expenditure could it approach the lavishness of the present system. But, as we have said, our present state must be regarded as a transition: we shall be taught by experience, perhaps by bitter experience, that democracy needs organization, and, having learned that lesson, we shall begin to advance towards a system better than either Royal government or the government of a party.

THE majority, in spite of its somewhat unwieldy bulk, having held together, the leader of the Opposition could not be expected to do much with the small force under his command. With regard to the Pacific Railway question he was placed at a special disadvantage by the entanglement of his party with a North-Western policy not substantially distinguishable from that of the Government. Had he been a consistent opponent of the whole enterprise, his basis for attack would have been very strong. To impress his views upon the mind of the nation by his speeches was the only thing open to him. This he has tried to do, and as statements of important cases his speeches, especially that on the North-Western question, will form a valuable part of our political archives, and be consulted as often as the debate is renewed upon subjects which are as yet by no means dead. But they have called forth, like his previous efforts, and even in an increased degree, the criticisms that they are too long and go too much into detail for popular effect. In the legal forum every point must be taken, and the decision is often as likely to turn on a small point as on a great one; but in the political forum it is better to take the great points only. It is for this reason that the speeches of Sir Richard Cartwright, though somewhat marred by acrimony, are more effective as appeals to the people than those of his leader. Poverty in rising men cannot be predicated of Mr. Blake's side of the House alone: it is equally felt on the other side, as the difficulty of filling vacancies in the Cabinet shows. On both sides the party sieve is always employed in sifting partisanship clear of the independence; and with the independence, as a rule, go the brains. But the great need of the Opposition is a definite policy, without which mere criticism of the Government will seldom turn the scale; for such godsend to an Opposition as the Pacific Railway Scandal are rare. Sir John Macdonald has a definite policy. He aims not only at welding together the long and broken line of Provinces included in the Dominion among themselves, but at separating and estranging them as much as possible from the continent of which geographically and commercially they form a part. This undertaking, being a struggle against Nature, necessarily involves a great sacrifice of the material interests of the people, enormous expenditure, especially in political railways, and the employment on a large scale of influences which an Opposition naturally regards and stigmatizes as corruption. But it appeals to sentiment, has a large body of partisans, and is sustained by the singular ability and popularity of a leader who is thoroughly master of his machine. The opposite policy is one which would give to our people their full share of the commercial resources, vitality, and hopes of their own continent. It holds out to the people great and substantial benefits, promises a release from burdensome expenditure, and has, we are persuaded, a great number of friends who are silent and inactive only because they have no leader. On the day when Mr. Blake shall have sufficiently overcome his timidity to plant his foot firmly on that which is his natural ground, and to unfurl the flag of Commercial Union, he will, notwithstanding superficial appearances, find a strong and growing party at his back.