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## THE WEEK:

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### CONTENTS.

	PAGE
CURRENT TOPICS.....	1083
THE VALUE OF LIFE.....	1085
MONTREAL LETTER.....	A. J. F. 1087
THE CHURCH OF ST. URSLA IN COLOGNE.....	1087
<i>Professor Walter M. Patton, B.D.</i>	
DEMOS TYRANNUS (Poem).....	C. Mair. 1088
SCIENTISTS, COOKS AND PUNSTERS IN POETRY.....	1088
<i>I. Allen Jack, D.C.L.</i>	
A LOTTERY TICKET.....	Florence Agar. 1089
THE YORK PIONEERS' LOG CABIN, 1794-1894 (Poem).....	S. A. C. 1093
PARIS LETTER.....	Z. 1093
GLIMPSES AT THINGS.....	F. Blake Crofton. 1094
THE RISE AND THE FALL OF THE "THREE DECKER".....	1095
<i>Pastor Felix.</i>	
ROBIN (Poem).....	1096
ART NOTES.....	1096
MUSIC AND THE DRAMA.....	1097
LIBRARY TABLE.....	1097
PERIODICALS.....	1098
LITERARY AND PERSONAL.....	1098
READINGS FROM CURRENT LITERATURE.....	1099
PUBLIC OPINION.....	1100
SCIENTIFIC AND SANITARY.....	1101
MISCELLANEOUS.....	1102
QUIPS AND CRANKS.....	1103

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### CURRENT TOPICS.

Among the many signs of a tendency to the upbreak of the old political parties and a reconstruction upon new lines may be mentioned the secession of the sugar-planters of Louisiana from the Democratic party. A large number of these planters have formally declared their determination to forsake the party with which they have been so long identified, and to go over in a body to the Republicans. The argument by which this radical change of political convictions has been wrought is with them a very substantial one—the loss of the sugar bounty. The fact may bode no good for the Democrats in the coming elections, but it indicates the tendency which has long been observable, to drop all the old issues

and form virtually new parties on tariff lines. The effect of this secession may be considerable in more than one direction. The *Outlook* comments upon its probable bearing upon the relations of the respective parties to the Negro vote. The planters, having once cast in their fortunes with the Republicans, will naturally soon become as anxious to bring out, as they have hitherto been to suppress, the Negro vote. Once let this vote be divided and sought for by both parties, ranged against each other on a new issue, and the effect upon the status of the freedmen cannot fail to be salutary. Their best friends could hardly wish for anything better than that the men who have hitherto been bent only upon the suppression of their vote and influence may now be placed under conditions which will lead them to court both. Then, indeed, will time begin to bring its revenges for the injuries of the dark past.

The death of Oliver Wendell Holmes, at a ripe old age, removes from the field of American literature one who has long been among its chief figures. The writer can well remember with what keen relish some of his fellow students at college, more than thirty years ago, used to linger over the periodical repasts of wit and humour served up to them in the columns of the *Atlantic Monthly*. These qualities as shown in the discussions and dissertations of the Autocrat and the Professor at the breakfast table, were all the more delightful in that they were subordinated to their proper place and purpose, as the mere seasoning of dishes of sound and sometimes not unprofound philosophy. Distinguished as a student and professor of anatomy, Dr. Holmes carried his skill in dissection into the literary realm in which he most delighted, and laid bare with a keen blade, yet with rare gentleness, the structure and workings of the human soul. The place he has since won for himself as a writer of occasional poems and lyrics, and also as a novelist, is well-nigh abreast of the foremost of his countrymen, but it is as a humorist of high and rare quality that he will longest be remembered. One can hardly recall the keenness and delicacy which were characteristic of his wit, without feeling tempted to moralize upon the degeneracy of that quality as exemplified in the productions of most of the humorists of his country at the present day. But that would lead to dangerous ground, and might well suggest the difficult question whether the degeneracy may not be

quite as much in the taste of readers as in the genius of writers. May it not be that the demand influences the quality of the supply quite as quickly as the supply that of the demand? Be that as it may, we could hardly venture better advice to both readers and writers of the humorous in American literature than to turn over the works of Holmes and Lowell and others of the humorists of a former generation, as Horace would say, "with daily and with nightly hand."

Is it an omen of evil or of good that in so many cities on this continent investigations are being held for the purpose of laying bare suspected corruption among civic officials of all classes, from aldermen downwards? In New York City, for instance, the Lexow Committee is again at work, and is from day to day unmasking a system of organized corruption among the police such as excites astonishment as well as indignation. Montreal is about entering upon an investigation of charges of a somewhat different character preferred against members of the police force of that city. And now Toronto's turn has come, it seems. True, the charge here is against some of the aldermen themselves rather than their appointees. We are inclined to regard the movement as prophetic of good. It seems at the least to indicate an awakening of citizens from a lethargy in which they have too long been wrapt. In regard to the proposed investigation in this city, it would be very unfair to take for granted the existence of the flagrant offences charged or suspected. But the hint on which the charge or suspicion is based, coming so directly from such a source, could not have been passed over. The determination of some of the most highly respected Councillors to have the thing probed to the bottom, while only what was to be expected of them, and, in fact, only what was absolutely necessary in order to save their own individual reputations from the general smutch which would, in the absence of such investigation, have been left upon the body indiscriminately, is at the same time a reassuring fact and one that will redound to their credit, whatever may be the result of the inquiry.

The appointment of W. R. Meredith, Esq., Q.C., to be Chief Justice of the Court of Common Pleas for the Province of Ontario, or perhaps we should rather say, Mr. Meredith's acceptance of that position, has been received with some surprise, perhaps,