

# THE WEEK:

A CANADIAN JOURNAL OF POLITICS, SOCIETY, AND LITERATURE.

Second Year.  
Vol. II., No. 49.

Toronto, Thursday, November 5th, 1885.

\$3.00 per Annum.  
Single Copies, 10 cents.

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AN INDEPENDENT JOURNAL OF POLITICS, SOCIETY AND LITERATURE  
Edited by W. PHILIP ROBINSON.

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## TOPICS OF THE WEEK.

ONCE more there is a report of the retirement of Mr. Blake from the leadership, and this time there are indications that the report is not groundless. If Mr. Blake's health has given way, as nobody would be surprised if it did, to overwork and mortification, or if his income is suffering fatally by his devotion to public duties, retire of course he must. But another change of leader would do the party no good. Mr. Blake is their best man. Sir Richard Cartwright is a vigorous speaker and particularly strong on the financial and commercial questions which just now are chiefly before the country; but he has not Mr. Blake's position, and other qualities are wanting in him. The Premier of Ontario has skilfully trimmed for many years the sails of his little barque; but his little barque is not a three-decker, nor is the lake in which it swims a political ocean. To the Maritime Provinces and the North-West he must be almost unknown. Mr. Blake, notwithstanding his prolixity, can present a case as well as any man in the Dominion if there were only a case to present; but there is none. The Opposition has no policy; that, once more, is the cause of its weakness, a weakness which will be incurable till a policy is found. For the present the political machine will have to go with only one wheel, and we shall have an experience of the working of the party system without an effective Opposition. In the mind of the community at large a policy is shaping itself which in time will find expression and championship in Parliament. But it is one which as yet the politicians are afraid to touch. During the interregnum a nucleus and a rallying-point will be supplied by that portion of the press which is the exponent of the growing opinion. This state of things is unsatisfactory, no doubt, as well as anomalous; but within the last few months, and especially since the strong development of antagonism between the British and the French of Quebec, the progress of opinion has been wonderfully quickened, and the turning-point can hardly be far off.

The greater part of the deficit which Sir Leonard Tilley had to face at the end of the last fiscal year may be qualified as unforeseen. When the

estimates for 1884-5 were formed, no one supposed that an insurrection would break out in the North-West before the year was over. To that event, equally untoward and unexpected, an extra expenditure of \$1,700,000 is due. The balance of \$657,469.80, by which the total deficit is brought up to \$2,357,469.80, was within the range of estimate, and to that extent Sir Leonard miscalculated. To that extent the high pressure tariff failed to respond to his expectations. The event suggests the enquiry whether, at some points, the revenue limit has not been crossed; and this enquiry it behooves the Minister of Finance, whoever he may be, to make. Sir Leonard had predicted a continuation of the annual surplus for a series of years, at a time when the additions to the duties subsequently made were not contemplated. Last year the prediction failed, and now, apart from the expenditure caused by the North-West insurrection, there is a substantial deficit, which the increase of duties proved ineffectual to prevent. The expedient of increasing revenue by raising duties does not open up an unlimited source on which the Minister of Finance can draw: there is a point at which higher duties means a decrease of revenue, and when this point has been reached the last drop which it is possible to squeeze out of the tariff has been got. There have been occasions on which Sir Leonard Tilley deliberately sacrificed revenue for the sake of granting protection to plausible claimants for the bounty of the state. It is possible that the deficit may awaken in his mind a sense of the perils of this course of proceeding, though such a warning ought not to have been required. But his career as Minister of Finance is determined by a cause which everyone regrets and which is foreign to the result of his policy. Whether his errors are to be renounced in the immediate future, or persevered in, will depend upon the sagacity of his successor, so far as he will be free to modify the existing tariff policy. The discretion of his successor will be limited to a very narrow range. The expenditure has reached the enormous sum, for a population of less than five millions, of \$35,327,936.36, which will necessitate adherence to a high tariff. One thing is evident: the time draws nigh when additions to the public debt must cease. Nothing but the improved terms on which of late it has been possible to borrow makes the present burden tolerable, and it would be neither prudent nor safe to make any considerable additions to them.

LORD LANDSDOWNE'S passage over the Rocky Mountains was made too soon to enable him to be present at the driving of the last spike in the Canadian Pacific Railway, though that achievement would take place a few days or weeks after he left. With the political necessity of the railway, not less than the magnitude and thoroughness of the work, he was impressed; going so far as to say, on the first point, that without the road the Confederation Act would not have been worth the paper on which it was written. This is the political view of the necessity for the railway expenditure which from the inception of the undertaking has found expression. It is a half-truth that requires to be supplemented by the economic considerations which the cost of the work presents. This is the serious aspect of a political enterprise, over which it is easy to be jubilant so long as we confine ourselves to an imaginative presentation of the political view. The wisdom of undertaking so costly a work has yet to be demonstrated. But it is too late for misgivings or regrets; the venture has been made and the rational thing to do is to make the best of the road now that it has been built. Whatever advantages are to be derived from a railway connection with the remotest parts of the Dominion are now within reach. With British Columbia the rest of the country can have very little trade until an increase in the population of the Pacific Province takes place. From the benefits of Chinese labour, which have been very great on the Pacific coast of the United States, the Columbians have voluntarily debarred themselves. One result will be that the labour by which mines of moderate richness might have been worked and in which it might not be possible to employ white labour at all, will be wanting. As a link between Europe and China, the East Indies and Japan, the value of the road can only be determined by experience. Speculation on