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## THE WEEK:

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### CURRENT TOPICS.

It now appears that the announcement made some time since that Russia would cease deporting political and other convicts to Siberia does not mean that she is about to adopt a more merciful mode of dealing with them, but the reverse. A place has been found within the Russian dominions which is a more terrible abode for human beings than the Siberian steppes ever were. This is the island of Saghalien, or Tarakai, a long, narrow island in the Sea of Okhotsk, directly north of Japan. This island, which in view of its climate and the general conditions of life which prevail there has been named by Siberians the "Hell of Saghalien," has hitherto been used as a place of exile for a few convicts of the worst class. The Government is now substituting the

horrors of this region for those of Siberia as it was, hoping, it is said, to take away the reproach of being a penal settlement from Siberia and to develop the latter by railroads into a habitable and prosperous land. With regard to Saghalien, a recent writer says that the poor men who are sent there are continually found ready to take any risk of death in trying any plan which gives the slightest hope of escape. A confirmation of this statement was lately given by the arrival in San Francisco of a whaling ship, the captain of which reported that he had picked up in the Okhotsk Sea an open boat containing ten men who had taken the narrow chance of escaping in this way rather than remain in the new penal settlement. One can readily understand how few must be the chances of meeting a vessel in this sea, which is in about the same latitude as that between Labrador and Greenland. It is difficult to conceive of anything surpassing in horrible cruelty the system which condemns human beings to a life of hopeless privation and suffering in such a land of desolation.

The conviction and sentencing of Thomas McGreevy and N. K. Connolly, severe though the punishment must be under the circumstances, seem to be generally accepted by the public as just. The fact that the prosecution was instituted and carried on by the Government of which both have been supporters leaves no opportunity for any one to arouse sympathy for them by claiming that they are political martyrs. There is, however, great force in another view which is being urged by the Opposition press in connection with the affair. The presiding judge, in charging the jury, thought it necessary to point out very clearly that the fact, if such it were, that the money of which the Government was defrauded was not kept for personal gain but was used in corrupting the electors, was really an aggravation rather than a palliation of the crime. If, as the judge clearly implied, the bribing of constituencies is a worse crime than even that of defrauding the revenue, it follows, on a well-known juridical principle, that those who received the money for that purpose were equally guilty with those who bestowed it from their ill-gotten gains. Hence it must be felt by all who love righteousness in either party that there is a failure of justice so long as the receivers and distributors are not only allowed to go free but retained in positions of honour and emolument, while the

givers are serving a term in prison as convicted felons. It is a pity that the indictment could not have been so framed as to require the court to inquire into the distribution of the funds by those to whom they were handed over for election purposes, as well as their procurement by fraud. If such an inquiry was inadmissible by reason of a time-limit prescribed in the election law, it is to be regretted that such a time-limit should be permitted to interfere with the course of justice. There is reason to hope that the somewhat unexpected result of this trial may have a good effect in warning "boodlers" to desist from attempts to defraud the Government in the interests of the party. If only the investigation had been so complete as to have likewise afforded a warning to all of either party, that the receipt of large sums of money by members of the Government, and the use of such money for election purposes would no longer be tolerated, the affair would have been doubly advantageous to all concerned.

In a paper read before the Social Problems Conference the other day, Mrs. Harvie made a strong plea for the industrial training of girls in the public schools. The proposal is worthy of very thoughtful consideration. It ought not to be dismissed with a joke or a sneer, or an impatient comment deprecating the introduction of another "ology" into the already overcrowded school programmes. Unless we are prepared to claim that the present school system has been brought to perfection, it is surely legitimate, and not only legitimate but obligatory, to consider how it may be still further improved. The true end of school training, all will admit, is the production of good citizens, that is, of men and women prepared to discharge the duties of life in the best manner. No person who has given any thought to social questions can doubt that the character of the home is among the most potent of all factors in the production of the sum total of happiness and misery in the nation. Were it possible, by the exercise of some magic influence, to transform every mother and daughter in the land, to-morrow, into a competent and efficient house-keeper, the improvement in domestic comfort, and the social and moral uplifting of large classes of the people which would follow, would be almost incalculable. Is it not time, then, that those who have control of our educational methods should cease to be governed by abstract theories in regard to the sphere of the schools, the na-