

THE WEEK.

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Current Topics.

The appointment of Dr. George R. Parkin as headmaster of Upper Canada College is a felicitous one, and one too, we venture to predict, that will go a long way towards restoring to the institution its ancient prestige, the uncalled-for pessimistic forebodings and prophesies of Mr. Goldwin Smith notwithstanding. Dr. Parkin was for several years head master of the college at Fredericton, New Brunswick, in which Province he was born, and is consequently a native Canadian; and his past successful career justifies a belief in his capabilities for filling the position conferred upon him acceptably. We learn that Dr. Parkin will sail for Canada on the 22nd of August.

"Nothing comes out more distinctly from the results of the general election," says *The Spectator*, "than the need of having some better machinery than that of a general election for discriminating the special points on which it really turned." This remark is caused by the fact that some of the defeated Gladstonians say that the late election did not really turn on the question of Home Rule at all. Whether this is or is not the fact we do not now inquire. No doubt the Unionists did all in their power to make Home Rule the very pivot on which the voting should turn. No doubt, as *The Spectator* says, it was the issue which had been uppermost between the two parties for the last ten years. But it is not so clear that the Gladstonians did themselves, at the last, "accept that as the main issue." To onlookers at a distance they, or some of them at least, seemed to try rather hard to substitute several other issues. But to return to the point. *The Spectator* says, "We ought undoubtedly to have the means of referring separately all the greater questions to the arbitration of the people, and then we should know what the people do care about and what they do not care about." Two ways suggest themselves in which this might possibly be done. Each voter at the general election might, in addition to the names of the rival candidates, be supplied with a card of questions to be answered, in regard to the most important issues at the time before Parliament and the country, and the answers to these might be tabulated for the

guidance of Parliament. Or each question recognized as great might from time to time be submitted separately for the approval or the contrary of the electors.

What is a Member of Parliament?

Each of these proposals suggests at once half-a-dozen difficulties, each of which in turn seems almost insuperable. If the elector is to vote on each question separately, how is he to know which candidate may be relied on to carry out his wishes? Shall each candidate be required to announce, and have printed on the voting card, his opinion on each of the test subjects, leaving it for each voter to choose the man who agrees with the larger number of his own views? Or, in the case of the plebiscite on one distinct question, shall Parliament be bound to legislate in accordance with the decision of the majority, or give place to one which will? What a perpetual series of upsets and elections we should have, to be sure. And then where would the sphere of the statesman come in, if the business of Government and Parliament is but to record on the statute-book the decisions of the majority? Shall his ability be used simply on the platform and through the press in shaping the opinions of the electorate to correspond with his own? The case may seem somewhat simpler when we suppose the single issue to be submitted to the arbitrament of the people, as it arises. But think of the turmoil and the expense! The latter, however, when we come to think of it, might be in a large degree counterbalanced by the saving effected through the curtailment of the long debates which are now carried on at the cost of thousands of dollars daily to the people who pay the bills. There would be little use in debating at length in Parliament a question which was to be decided by the people, not the members. The whole subject is beset with so many difficulties that we shall probably have to content ourselves for a good while to come with the present method, however unsatisfactory and inaccurate. As a matter of fact, it seems pretty clear that under this method the political fortunes of the late and the present Ministries were really decided by the aggregate results of an electoral campaign in which the decisive votes were those of masses of electors each one of whom voted in view of his own special interest or hobby; this one for or against Home Rule, his neighbour for or against Local Option, a third for or against Disestablishment, a fourth for or against abolition of the Lords' power of veto and so on to the end of the chapter. The one thing certain is that the *againsts* greatly outnumbered the *fors*.

Toronto's Water Supply.

Once more the question of the city's water supply is prominently before the City Council, this time let us hope for final and efficient action. Most thoughtful citizens must be now pretty well convinced that the tunnel scheme is really the only practicable and sure method by which the city can be permanently supplied with water of the best quality and in ample quantity, for all time to come, or at least so long as the waters of the Great Lakes shall hold out. The arguments in favour of the scheme recommended by the Engineer have seemed to us in the past to be practically unanswerable. Their force is now greatly increased in view of the double danger which undoubtedly threatens us, from the rapid fall-