

THE WEEK:

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TOPICS OF THE WEEK.

LORD LANSDOWNE has not followed the example of his two predecessors, both of whom were much on the stump and showed their estimate of our intelligence by perpetually plying us with the flattery of which one was a consummate and the other a less finished master. His position being assured, he has no motive for running after popularity, and such speeches as he does make have the stamp of a serious purpose. He has thought it necessary to intimate that he does not believe in the practicability of Imperial Federation. The fiscal part of the scheme, he plainly sees, would be rendered impossible by divergency and incompatibility of interests. It is natural and perhaps right that he should present in its fairest aspect the existing system as the one which it is his duty to administer. We cannot help taking exception, however, to the summary account of the history of British opinion respecting the Colonies which Lord Lansdowne borrows from Lord Derby. An era of selfishness was followed, we are told, by one of indifference, which again has given place to a desire for closer union. If it is meant that England was ever peculiarly selfish in her treatment of her Colonies, we submit that the indictment is unfounded. Protectionist theories at that time possessed the world; nor were they more thoroughly accepted by the people of the Imperial country than by the Colonists themselves, whose idol was the man who said that he would never allow the Colonies to manufacture a nail for a horseshoe. It was because the Colonists of England enjoyed a large measure of freedom that they rebelled; had they been governed despotically, like the Colonists of France and Spain, they would never have thought of taking up arms against a small duty on tea. The evidence is overwhelming that up to the moment of the quarrel, and beyond it, the connection with the Mother Country was, by the great mass of the Americans, strongly cherished and felt to be highly beneficial. Nor was the second period one of indifference to the possession of Colonies, but only of indifference, or comparative indifference, to the possession of Dependencies. Lord Beaconsfield's reason for vilipending the Colonies and calling them a stone about England's neck was that they had become in large measure, and were likely to become wholly, independent, while the only thing about which he cared was Empire. The Liberals of that day, though they promoted Colonial self-government and desired to terminate the military occupation, valued the Colonies just as highly as any Imperial Federationist does now; they valued them not as Dependencies, but as daughter nations. The fallacy of confounding Colony with Dependency appears palpable enough, and yet it is always recurring. As to the third and last of the alleged phases of national sentiment, it is really not national at all. Imperial Federation has not yet even found a voice in the House of Commons. "It is not necessary," says Mr. Martin Griffin, "for the purposes of those who favour the Federation of the Empire that there should be any undue haste." This is true; but events march, and, so far as anything practical or even definite is concerned, Imperial Federation stands still.

THE report that a Senatorship had been offered to a Grit has been positively contradicted by the *Mail*. We never thought it likely that the report was true. An impartial use of patronage of any kind is not in the soul of Sir John Macdonald. But the appointment of a single Grit would have been of no value or importance: it would have merely been one more cypher added to a row. Three-fourths of the Senators would still have been Sir John Macdonald's nominees, and the faint tinge of impartiality would only have served to mystify the public and stave off the coming reform. The nomination system is radically and inherently evil. The House of Lords, if it is irresponsible, is at least independent; its members as a rule can be candidates for no favours and are above the influence of a Minister. The Senate is legally more irresponsible than the House of Lords, which in the last extremity can be forced to bow to the national will by the creation of any needful number of Peers; but it is not independent. In the case of European Senates, wholly or partly nominative, the object has been to introduce into the legislature and into the councils of the nation some elements other than party politics, by giving a representation to the great interests, institutions and professions. It is needless to say that in the case of the Canadian Senate not a step has been taken toward the realization of any such ideal. Perhaps it is as well that Sir John Macdonald has not made a more liberal and generous use of his power. The abuse now stands in its naked deformity and challenges not only the reason but the self-respect of the nation. The very last to uphold it ought to be Conservatives, since it is a reduction to impotence of the Conservative element in the Constitution; as, if any real strain were laid upon its powers of control by the violence of the Lower House, or by popular agitation, would at once appear. We are reminded that there is no way of reforming the Senate without its own consent. This is true, to the great discredit of the knot of politicians by whom the scheme of Confederation was framed and imposed upon the people. But a vote of the House of Commons, manifestly expressing the national will, could scarcely fail to produce compliance without recourse to any more Cromwellian remedy. There would be found even in the body itself a few friends of Reform. This question of the Senate, however, with all other secondary questions, is now receding into the background. The Opposition at Ottawa is weak, and seems from the results of elections to be every day growing weaker, because its leaders, having no policy, are irresolute. But outside Parliament the great forces, economical and social, act of themselves; and the whole edifice of a sinister statecraft begins to quake and betray signs of its approaching fall.

THOUGH we did not presume to give an opinion upon the law points raised on behalf of Riel, our private conviction was that they were little better than quibbles. Little better than quibbles they prove to have been; for the Privy Council has dismissed the appeal without thinking it necessary even to hear the other side. The sentence of the law therefore stands, and the Executive has no right to interfere with it except for good reason shown. Is the judge who tried the case dissatisfied with the verdict? Has any new evidence or any extenuating circumstance come to light? We can conceive no other reason for interference with the execution of a legal sentence. But if the French have a practical veto and think fit to use it, let the Government yield, as all governments must yield, to political necessity. Only let this be frankly avowed. Let us have no subterfuges and no tampering with the general rights of society and the principles of criminal law. That the organizer and leader of the rebellion was insane in such a sense as to be irresponsible for his actions is believed by no human being, least of all by the French, whose reason for taking so much interest in his fate manifestly is that they regard him as the sane and able champion of their national cause. That the offence was political is a plea totally inconsistent with the plea of insanity, and which, if admitted, would place society and civilization at the mercy of any brigand who might choose to say that his object in filling the community with slaughter and havoc was not plunder but anarchy or usurpation. It would make the world a Mexico.