

# THE WEEK.

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## THE WEEK:

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## CURRENT TOPICS.

If President Cleveland in his inaugural address failed to honour the traditions of the country in the matter of boastfulness, no such charge can be laid at the door of Vice-President Stevenson. He evidently believes that to exalt the office is a good way to exalt the man chosen to fill it. Thus, when he pronounces the Senate over which he is called to preside "the most august deliberative assembly known to men," who can fail to be impressed with a due sense of the greatness of the man chosen by the nation to preside over such an assembly? The United States Senate has undoubtedly from time to time numbered many able and eminent men among its members. It undoubtedly contains such at the present time. But comparisons are invidious, and in view of the numerous lapses

from dignity and sweet reasonableness which have from time to time marred its career and of the brevity of that career in comparison with that of such a deliberative assembly as e.g., the British Commons, the term "august," in the superlative, is a pretty brave one to apply to it; not to refer to the further fact that filthy lucre is even now more potent than wealth of brain as a passport to the chamber.

However deeply we may sympathize with some of Dr. Weldon's objections to the Nova Scotia coal deal, we cannot but think that the doctrine of Provincial rights, so clearly enunciated by Sir John Thompson, is clear and unassailable. No injury that could possibly result to the Dominion from the worst abuse by the coal syndicate of the too great powers granted to it by the Provincial Government, could compare with the evil that would ensue to the Confederation from such an invasion of the rights of a Province as that advocated by Dr. Weldon. The right of each Province to do what it pleases with its own property and to legislate as it pleases within its own sphere is the very corner stone of the federal system. Let the General Government or Parliament attempt to deprive a Province of that right and the whole structure would be undermined and in danger of toppling to the ground like a house of cards. Dr. Weldon must surely have strong predilections in favour of an impossible legislative union, or he could not have failed to see what mischievous consequences would follow from the adoption of his motion. No Province would submit to such an infringement upon its constitutional rights. The principle at stake is precisely the same that was involved in the Jesuits' Estates Act, and substantially the same that is involved in the Manitoba school difficulty. The Premier's assertion of the doctrine of Provincial Rights was admirably clear and emphatic. Let us hope that he will not fail to be guided by it in the case of the Prairie Province as well as in that of his own.

The second discussion of the question of Church Union, in the Toronto Ministerial Association, seems scarcely to have advanced the project to any perceptible extent. Principal Caven's paper on "Points of Agreement, etc.," was, as was to be expected, able in substance and admirable in spirit. But unfortunately the points of agreement seem to be largely those which belong rather to the invisible than to the tangible side of union. This is indeed implied in the fact

that they already exist without union, save in the invisible or spiritual form in which many would find its essential characteristics. It is at least evident that no degree of unanimity in regard to doctrinal and ethical tenets can make possible a formal union, such as that under discussion, in the absence of agreement on such externals as forms of government, modes and subjects of rites and ordinances, source and grades of official authority, &c. Is it not certain that no committee that can be constituted, representing the different views enunciated in the Conference, can have the least hope of reaching agreement by compromise, or otherwise? If we were sure that it would not be deemed presumption in a layman to say so, we should be disposed to ask whether the circumstances do not clearly point to one or other of two methods as affording the only ground of hope. Must union not come, either in the way suggested, if we mistake not, by one or two members of the Association, through the labours of a competent mixed commission, appointed to examine the whole subject of Scripture doctrine, orders and ordinances, de novo, or in the more promising shape of a federal instead of a legislative union? Why not try the latter as a first experiment?

We are not at all surprised to learn, as we do from Mr. Foster's statement of the result of the interview had by Sir John Abbott and himself with Lord Rosebery, that the proposal to have a representative of the Dominion Government attached in some capacity to the British Embassy at Washington meets with little encouragement from the British Minister. There is a good deal of force in Mr. Laurier's charge that the Ottawa Government have failed in duty in that they have had no written and formal communication with the Foreign Office, and consequently have nothing definite to lay before Parliament as the answer to its resolution. It is, to say the least, very undesirable that the practice of making verbal reports to Parliament of important transactions, such reports depending for their accuracy upon the memory of a Cabinet Minister, should be encouraged. It seems neither respectful to the people's representatives nor consistent with the dignity of Parliament. Moreover a glance at the history of Canadian self-government will make it clear that important concessions have not usually been gained in the past as the result of informal chats with a British Minister. If the Canadian Parliament is in downright earnest in