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## THE WEEK:

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### CONTENTS.

	PAGE
CURRENT TOPICS.....	339
THE FUTURE OF CANADA.....	341
THE RELATION OF CHURCHES TO THEIR CREEDS. Rev. John Burton, B.D.	342
OLD LETTERS (Poem).....	343
PARIS LETTER Rev. Frederick George Scott, M.A.	343
VIEWS OF CANADIAN LITERATURE (J. Muir and J. M. LeMoine, F.R.S.C.) Prof. L. E. Horning.	344
A PARSON'S PONDERINGS: CONCERNING THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE Rev. Geo. J. Lov, M.A.	346
DOWN THE GULF AND BY THE SEA.—CHAP. I..... Nicholas Flood Davin, M.P.	347
HEIMWEH (Poem).....	347
THE FIRST LORDS OF THE MANOR IN CANADA. —III. S. A. Curzon.	348
SIR SAMUEL WHITE BAKER.....	349
QUATRAINS.....	350
THE QUEBEC ICE CARNIVAL..... J. M. LeMoine, F.R.S.C.	350
A NEW DICTIONARY.....	351
THE EARLIEST LIFE OF CHRIST.....	351
MOONSHINE (Poem).....	352
ART NOTES.....	352
MUSIC AND THE DRAMA.....	352
LIBRARY TABLE.....	353
PERIODICALS.....	354
LITERARY AND PERSONAL.....	354
READINGS FROM CURRENT LITERATURE.....	355
PUBLIC OPINION.....	356
SCIENTIFIC AND SANITARY.....	357
MISCELLANEOUS.....	358
QUIPS AND CRANES.....	359

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### CURRENT TOPICS.

It is not improbable that the Democratic majority in the United States House of Representatives may be forced to adopt the methods which they denounced as the grossest tyranny when used by the Republican Speaker Reed. Week after week is being wasted, in consequence of the inability of the House to put an end to "filibustering" tactics, in other words, in consequence of the refusal of representatives to vote on questions before the house. The situation would be ludicrous, were it not that the distress of the nation makes it painful, almost tragic. Acting on his power to compel the attendance of members, the Speaker has caused absentees to be arrested and brought to the House, only to see them refuse to join the recalcitrant members already present in refusing to answer to their names, thus preventing the finding of a

quorum. Speaker Reed, it will be remembered, untied the Gordian knot somewhat after the summary fashion of a famous warrior of old, by simply ordering that those who were visibly present should be counted as present, whether they chose to answer to their names or not. The Democrats denounced this course so fiercely that they are now deterred by the remembrance of their own bitter words from adopting the same tactics, as no doubt they would otherwise gladly do. Various methods of overcoming the difficulty, kindred in spirit, if differing in form, are proposed, such as deducting a large fine from the salary of every member for each day when he does not answer to his name. It is certainly not to the credit of a legislative body that it finds it so difficult to overcome a kind of obstruction which is almost childish in its simplicity.

While it would be presumptuous for us to express approval or disapproval of the pardoning of Messrs. McGreevy and Connolly, we may point out that the case suggests some curious reflections. It is, in the first place, a little singular that the effect of imprisonment should have been so precisely similar in the two cases that humanity demanded the release of both at the same moment. Was it not a little peculiar to have the learned doctors reporting upon the health of both at the same time and in the same words, as if they were a kind of Siamese twins, so closely united that when the one fell ill the other must follow suit. Another curious and perhaps more pertinent inquiry is, are our prisons so constructed, or is their regime such, that human life cannot be prolonged in them? We are not aware that either of the prisoners was particularly delicate when imprisoned. Perhaps it will be replied that men accustomed to hard work and hardship can live very well in confinement, but that the delicately nurtured cannot do so. This would mean, apparently, that no one who has been accustomed to luxury and ease should be sent to prison, no matter how heinous his crime, for imprisonment is not intended as a death penalty, and justice and humanity alike forbid to take the life of a criminal by slow processes, unless he has been condemned to die. Must we then have one law and penalty for one class of citizens and another for another class? That would hardly be democratic, to say the least. A third thing that is a little curious is that the

prisoners, one of them at least, seems not to think of attributing his release to the state of his health at all, but congratulates himself on having been set free because all creeds and classes united in urging the Government to render him justice, even at so late a day. In fact, the whole business is a curious affair from first to last. We wonder if we have heard the last of it.

Three-quarters of a million of dollars is a large sum for a young and not very wealthy colony, with a population of only five millions, to pay annually for a steamboat service. We know not what view the people's representatives in Parliament may take of the arrangement which it is announced has been agreed upon by the Dominion Government and Mr. Huddart. But if there is any direction in which it is wise for the country to go to the verge of extravagance, this is certainly such a direction. It is possible, we suppose, to urge strong and sound theoretical objections against taxing the people for the subsidizing of any private company or business whatever. It is to be hoped that as people become wiser, some means of accomplishing national ends will be found, whereby the profits of such enterprises may be retained for the use of the people who pay for them. But in the meantime the desirability of developing the policy upon which the country has not unsuccessfully entered, is so manifest, and the wisdom of stimulating foreign trade by the use of all legitimate means so obvious, that Parliament will probably sanction the contrast, notwithstanding its costliness. If satisfactory guarantees can be secured, not only for the high rate of speed specified, but for the most approved refrigerator arrangements for the carrying of perishable products of the farm and garden at reasonable freight rates, it is highly probable that the benefits resulting to Canadian trade with the Mother Country would quickly far exceed the cost. Parliament will, it may be hoped, before sanctioning the contract, see to it that effective control of freight and passenger rates shall be had, so that they may not only be made reasonable at the outset, but be subject to re-adjustment from time to time. This, we have always maintained, should have been done in the case of the Canadian Pacific, and all other subsidized railways. Of course there will be abundant room for the play of Opposition sarcasm, in regard to the consistency of the Government which builds with one hand tariff walls for the prevention of foreign trade, and