

THE WEEK:

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TOPICS OF THE WEEK.

THIS day Christendom celebrates the coming of spiritual light and life into the world. In thanksgiving for that event all the churches may unite. Even those who belong to no church, but have renounced, or ceased definitely to hold the Christian faith, may join in celebrating the birth of Humanity; for undoubtedly with the Child whose nativity we commemorate to-day Humanity was born. Never before had there been any belief in the unity of the race, in its common aims, in its common hopes; never before had it been pronounced that all men were made of one blood to dwell together on the earth. Up to this time the law of the world had been tribal division with intertribal enmity and war. The most large-minded of ancient philosophers, and the one who in a single passage has come nearest to Christian philanthropy, yet held that the weaker races were destined by nature to be the slaves of the stronger. Conquest had hitherto been the universal aim, and the conqueror's wreath the highest praise. At the birth of the Founder of Christendom for the first time were proclaimed peace on earth and good will to men. From this epoch dates moral civilization, which is identical with Christendom; for the civilization of Greece and Rome soon passed away, and it was founded on slavery. In the family, as regenerated by Christ and his Apostles, moral civilization has its root. And this is in an especial manner the feast of family affection, at which all who can gather together beneath the central roof, while kindly thoughts and wishes go forth to those who are far away. In a society like ours, where the birds leave the parental nest so young, where families are so much scattered by commerce, and the tie of kinship is apt consequently to be so weak, whatever rekindles the family feelings has a special value. So there are very good and highly philosophic reasons for determining to spend a Merry Christmas.

IN celebrating his fortieth political birthday the rank and file of the party could not deny to Sir John Macdonald the privilege of telling his own story; and when a public man becomes his own historian, we all know what to expect. Sir John showed as much fairness in speaking about the public men by whom he has been or is opposed as could have been expected; and he gave proof of dexterity in drawing together threads of history between which nobody else had suspected any necessary or even remote connection. He gave certain Reformers of Upper and Lower Canada due credit for their early advocacy of Responsible Government—to those of Lower Canada he gave perhaps more than their due—but for Attorney-General Draper he claimed the merit of establishing Responsible Government, in 1843, by resolutions brought forward in the House of Assembly. The year was 1841, and Mr. Baldwin the chief author of the resolutions. Remote and important consequences are traced to the resolves of the British American League, in 1850; we are told to find in those resolutions the germs of Confederation and the National Policy, and to accept as an article of political faith that “the principles which were laid down by the British North American League in that year are the lines on which the Conservative-Liberal Party has moved ever since.” The British American League was a screech of despair, uttered by a party

which in 1848 had suffered a crushing defeat at the polls; and its resolves, far from having any statesmanlike foresight, were born of the dire necessity of attracting attention by a platform of startling aspect. If it resolved to favour the British connection, the resolution was no more than a recantation of the Montreal annexation manifesto of the year before. The Legislative union was only nine years old, and there was not then the remotest chance of superseding it by a confederation of British America. Besides, the union proposed by the League was not a Federation at all. The French Canadians had joined the Reformers of Upper Canada, and the two united majorities placed the Tories in a hopeless position. The only possible way to extrication from this position lay in a wider union which should include the Maritime Provinces; and this way was blocked, for without railway connection—and there was not a single locomotive in Canada—a political union was impossible. The wildest talk was indulged in by members of the league. One of the ablest among them, who afterwards became Chancellor of Upper Canada, proposed that the inconvenient French majority of Lower Canada should be got rid of by driving all the French population into the sea. By this, and similar sage proposals, the league covered itself with glory. Its protectionism was a lugubrious lament over the repeal of the British Corn Laws, the members charitably believing that it was the sacred duty of the British artisan patiently to starve for the benefit of the British and colonial agriculturist. Happily for its members, the British American League, its speeches and resolves were soon forgotten. To search among the old ashes of that mock political volcano for anything in the shape of a modern policy would be labour lost. Its platform was broken, scattered and forgotten, instead of being kept in view to direct a party in the way it ought to go. There is no rational connection between the British North American League and anything that is to be found in the political world of to-day. But there is no great harm in Sir John, on his political birthday, trying to imagine that there is a direct connection which settles the supreme question of priority in the advocacy of Confederation.

IT is strange that a man of so much sense as Sir John Macdonald and one at the same time so versatile and buoyant should be so little able as he appears to be to throw off the disagreeable recollections of the past, and that he should even be given to awakening sleeping dogs which his sagacity ought to tell him he had much better let lie. Why cannot he allow the Pacific Railway Scandal to be forgotten? That it was condoned and practically consigned to oblivion, though it would have ruined any public man but himself, is the best proof that he can have of his wonderful popularity and of his hold upon his party and the people. With this reflection he had much better rest content. Yet he is always challenging afresh the moral judgment of the country, which cannot be given in his favour without a total abandonment of principle and a ruinous debasement of the standard of public life. To compare such a transaction to the subscriptions of politicians in England to the Election Fund of the Carlton or Reform Club is preposterous; there is no resemblance whatever between the two cases. Sir Hugh Allan was not a politician, nor did he care a straw for any question between the two parties. His object was purely commercial, and he pursued it like the miracle of moral callousness that he was. We had his letters to his American confederates telling them that in his opinion the most desirable course would be to corrupt the Government through Sir George Cartier; the record of his negotiation with Sir George for the Presidency of the Railway, the Prime Minister taking part by telegram; his undertaking in the form of a letter of even date with the Concession to furnish to each of three members of the Government a large sum to be used in the elections; and his letter to his confederates assuring them that he had obtained from the Government all that he and they could desire. Finally we had the telegrams at the crisis of the election, calling upon Sir Hugh for further payments in consideration of the good thing which he had obtained. A subscriber to the Carlton or Reform Club Fund would be stung to the soul by the slightest suggestion that his subscription was in any way connected with the hope of obtaining a commercial favour from the Government. To say