

# THE WEEK.

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## Current Topics.

The Death of the Right Honourable Sir John Thompson.

On Wednesday morning, at about eleven o'clock, the sad and startling news reached Canada that the Premier of the Dominion had died suddenly that day, immediately after being sworn in as an Imperial Privy Councillor. The night before he had spoken amidst great applause in London at a meeting held to discuss matters brought out during the Intercolonial Conference. It is ever the unexpected that happens. A terrible blow to Canada is this tragic death of her greatest Statesman. His career has been one of the most remarkable in Canadian history, and his service to his country none can fully estimate. A great Canadian is dead. And he died almost at the foot of the Throne of our beloved Queen whom he had served so well.

The General Election.

Quite a flutter was produced in the party dove-cotes, a few days since, by the announcement in one of the city dailies, on the alleged authority of a Cabinet Minister, that the coming dissolution of Parliament and general election would take place in March next. The announcement brought prompt and somewhat emphatic denials from the Ministers concerned. These denials were, in each case, it was observable, worded with peculiar care. It was denied that, as a matter of fact, any such conclusions had been come to by the Government, or that the question had even been debated in the Cabinet. If we do not misread them, the speakers take care not to deny the possibility, or even probability, that the event may take place as alleged, or at some early date. That this will be the case seems to be the general impression. The activity observable in the political field looks like it. The past history of Conservative Parliaments creates a presumption in its favour. The state of the public finances, involving the certainty of a serious deficit, affords a strong reason why the Government might wish to postpone discussion until after the general election. On the whole, therefore, it may be pretty safely affirmed that the probabilities are all on the side of an appeal to the people within the next few months. All parties are agreed that the one great issue on which the battle will be fought is the tariff question. It need not be added that the many inter-

ests bound up in this question will make the contest one of the most important as well as one of the hottest yet had in Dominion political history,

The newly chosen leader of the Ontario Opposition has been peculiarly unfortunate, to speak euphemistically, at the outset of his career. A chieftain whose prowess has been proved on many a battle-field might, perhaps, on occasion venture to change his tactics somewhat suddenly, in the face of the enemy, but the untried commander who puts himself in a position in which he is forced to do so, or resign his command, need not be surprised and should not complain if he finds himself for some time thereafter viewed with distrust by friends and derided by foes. This will be more surely the case when it is known that the disastrous strategy, so suddenly abandoned, was not only wholly of his own choosing, but was chosen even in opposition to the advice and wishes of some of his most experienced lieutenants. This was, it is pretty well understood, the case with Mr. Marter, in bringing to the front his prohibitionist and ultra-Protestant policy in the London election. It may be that he will object to having described as "tactics" and "strategy" those views which he may say are with him matters of profound conscientious conviction. He would have the right to put forward this plea, had he not now publicly renounced those views as having been tried and found wanting, not in themselves, perhaps, but in their usefulness for party purposes.

Who Constructs the Party Platform?

Apart, however, from any question of personal conviction and loyalty to conscience, there is a hopeful element in the affair. Few men would have had the courage or the frankness to take the right-about so promptly and squarely as the Opposition leader has done. We must do him the justice to suppose that he is not less convinced than heretofore of the righteousness of his utterances on those two questions, but only of the possibility of winning a political campaign with "Prohibition" and "Down with Catholicism," inscribed on his banners. The most puzzling feature of the case is how any man with the acumen necessary for a successful party leader could ever have persuaded himself that success could be possible under such banners. We think it was Mr. Marter himself who complained in one of his speeches that the Roman Catholics in London went to the polls like a flock of sheep, to vote for his opponent. How, in the name of human frailty could he have expected them to do otherwise? Could he have conceived it possible that they should vote for the candidate and the party whose leader permitted himself to become identified with a secret society formed for the purpose of proscribing and ostracising them and all their co-religionists on account of their religion? A somewhat similar absurdity could be shown to have been involved in his Prohibitionist appeals. The question has been broached, in connection with this incident, whether should the party leader construct the platform for the party, or accept it from the party? Probably both Lord Rosebery and Mr. Marter have learned lessons on that point which may stand them in good stead in future campaigns. No leader who is worthy to be such will adopt and advocate measures of which he cannot conscientiously