

# THE WEEK:

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## TOPICS OF THE WEEK.

A PRESS of subjects last week prevented us from noticing the argument of the *Globe* on the question of Disallowance. Such a power, vested as it now is in the hands of a party leader, is objectionable and liable to abuse. So far we heartily agree with the *Globe*. It is the fashion to say that the fictions of Constitutional Monarchy are very useful, and that our retention of them is a proof of our practical wisdom; but here is one case at all events in which they have done manifest mischief. Had it been openly proposed to give the leader of the dominant party at Ottawa a veto on all Provincial legislation, everybody would have recoiled from the folly and injustice of such an arrangement. But the arrangement is accepted without question when its real character is veiled by styling the leader of the dominant party "The Crown." On the other hand we cannot regard without misgiving the idea of making the Legislature of Prince Edward Island a sovereign power even with respect to the class of subjects assigned to Provincial Legislation. The Dominion is, or aims at being, a nation, though with a federal structure, and, in order to fulfil its ideal and prevent its dissolution, sovereignty must reside in the nation. The thing wanted is a judicial tribunal, clear of party, such as the Supreme Court of the United States, and with principles laid down for its guidance like the clause in the Constitution of the United States which forbids legislation impairing the faith of contracts. To lay down these principles would no doubt be a difficult task, but to accomplish difficult tasks in the province of jurisprudence as well as in other provinces is the glory of science; and if nationality is to be combined with a federal structure this problem will have to be solved.

No sooner has the building trade begun to prosper than its progress is arrested by a strike. The day is long past when any question could be raised as to the right of working-men to combine in a demand for higher wages. But this does not render industrial war less costly or its ravages

less calamitous. In England the cost of strikes to the men over a period of ten years is reckoned by Mr. Warner to have been £26,812,800. The loss of the masters over the same period is reckoned by the same authority at £4,189,500, less than a fifth of the loss incurred by the men, the sum received in profits while the trade is being carried on being of course far less than the aggregate amount paid as wages. But as Mr. Warner observes, the evil inflicted by strikes and locks-out is not to be measured by the mere cost. The suffering and misery caused by them must be taken into the account. The poverty, pauperism and degradation of thousands of families are among the consequences of those prolonged contests, and the propagation of social bitterness must be added to the black list. In some trades in Europe the consequence has been total and final wreck. Nor are the effects likely to be less injurious here than in the Old World: the English artisan if he reduces himself to destitution in a strike has a poor-law to fall back on, the American or Canadian artisan has none. Men fancy, perhaps not unnaturally, that as soon as profits rise wages ought to rise in proportion, forgetting that the capitalist must look not to the high profits of the moment but to the average returns of the trade. It is not easy, however, to see how the evil is to be ended or diminished except by the growth, which is likely to be very gradual, of intelligence among the men and of a better feeling between them and the masters. The principle of association, or giving the workmen an interest in the business, though attractive and promising, does not seem to make much way. In England industrial war has sometimes been averted by arbitration; but in a society such as ours where everybody is employer or employed arbitrators are not easily found. Unfortunately there are restless or designing spirits, like the organizer of the great Telegraphists' strike, whose trade is industrial war, and there are editors of Labour journals whose sole object it seems to be to instil venom into the mechanic's heart and to indoctrinate him with the belief that the capital without which his trade could not be set on foot and the commercial guidance without which it would at once be wrecked are the bane of his industry and the proper object of his hatred. The practical truth which ought always to be impressed on the minds of strikers is that though the Boss is the organizer and paymaster, the real employer is the community, which cannot be compelled to give for labour or its products one cent more than they are really worth to it. Beyond that point strikes will no longer produce a rise of wages, though they may produce and have more than once produced the ruin of a trade.

THE result of the Scott Act election in Middlesex is being paraded with exultation by the friends of the Act, but is merely another instance of that which has so often occurred before. The majority in favour of the Act was large, but only two-fifths of the constituency voted; three-fifths stayed at home. This abstention is the practical condemnation of the Act; it shows that the great majority of the people have, at all events, not made up their minds in favour of Coercion, and will not give it their support when the Act comes to be applied. The organized minority brings all its votes to the poll; on the side which is really that of the majority there is no organization, no trumpet to call to arms; and people will not rouse themselves to an effort, especially as they have not only to take some trouble and give up some of their time, but to face the anathemas of the Methodist clergy and the other enthusiastic partisans of the Act. When, however, the attempt is made to put the law in force; when it comes to getting a neighbour fined or sent to gaol for an act which everybody knows to be no crime, and which the State expressly sanctions in the adjoining county, indifference assumes the form of passive resistance. Then follows the demand on the part of the Coercionists for severer penalties and further violations of the law of evidence and justice, till at last you have the Blue Laws of Maine and Vermont combined with an unlicensed trade in whiskey. The proposal that a majority of the whole constituency shall be required for the adoption of the Act was obviously reasonable, though it is easy to see why it was so strenuously resisted. Politicians, if they would take note not only of the majorities, but of the numbers polled in Scott Act elections, would perhaps be less paralysed by fear of the Prohibitionists than they apparently are.