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## THE WEEK:

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### CURRENT TOPICS.

The new French Government is now fully committed to the Panama Canal investigation. Premier Ribot, in the Chamber of Deputies, and M. Bourgoise, the leader of the Senate, have affirmed their determination to aid parliament in pushing the investigation by every legitimate means in their power. The immense majority by which the Government was pledged the confidence of the House after the Premier's manly declaration leaves him no alternative. It is likely, therefore, that the serious and eager public, not only in France but the world over, will be regaled in a few days with the details of one of the most gigantic frauds ever perpetrated upon an enthusiastic and too confiding people. The first link in the chain of evidence is said to have been already forged in the establishment by autopsy of the fact that M. Baron Reinach died by

The forthcoming annual banquet of the Toronto Board of Trade bids fair to be of surprising interest. The presence among the

guests not only of the Premier and some of his most prominent colleagues, but also of the Opposition leader and some of his supporters, will give a zest to the speeches which is necessarily wanting when the orators are all of the same political stripe. This is, too, as it should be. It would be an excellent thing for the country if the leaders of the two parties were to come face to face before the people much more frequently than they do. It is hardly to be expected, of course, that upon a festive occasion anything in the nature of a political debate can take place. Yet there is an impression, we know not how well founded, that Sir John Thompson will take advantage of the opportunity of his first appearance in Ontario in his capacity of Premier to give at least some inklings of his policy. Before the Board of Trade he can hardly avoid foreshadowing to some extent his trade policy at least, and that is now the great and absorbing question before the country.

The latest accounts at the time we are writing seem to indicate that a crisis is imminent in German politics. The downfall of Chancellor Caprivi, or the dissolution of the Reichstag, may occur before these notes are in the reader's hands. The latter is, however, improbable, seeing that the opponents of the Army Bill would almost surely come back with an increased majority. On the other hand, it will be very hard for the Emperor to admit that he and his Chancellor have been beaten, and must bow to the popular will. The result of the conflict will be awaited with great interest, even outside the Empire. The issue between autocracy and democracy is probably more directly joined than it has been at any period in recent German history, and the result can hardly fail to have an important bearing upon the future of its parliamentary system. The one uncertain element in the situation seems to be the fact that the balance of power is in the hands of the Centrists, and that there is reason to believe that they are seeking ulterior objects, or that they may at least be found amenable to influences of a kind entirely distinct from any involved in the passage or rejection of the Army Bill.

A Canadian gentleman of high intelligence and unquestioned patriotism made in our hearing the other day the astonishing statement that the results of the last census did not trouble him at all. We have pondered over the saying since in a vain attempt to get the speaker's point of view. Can it be nothing in his view that our young country cannot maintain, even with the help of hundreds of thousands of immigrants, its natural rate of increase of population? Does he suppose that the universal law which makes growth the condition of vigorous life, and cessation of growth the turning point toward stagnation and decay, does not hold in the history of peoples as well as of individuals? Is his ideal for Canada, in this age of throbbing vitality and nervous energy, the unprogressive quiet and simplicity

of some primitive Arcadia? Would it not be a sin as well as a shame for Canadians to be content with leaving undeveloped the vast resources which benignant nature has stored in her treasure-houses for the supply of the great world's needs? But our best conjectures must be doing injustice to the meaning of one who is himself a clear thinker as well as an energetic worker. We hope, however, that he is the only Canadian who is not troubled by the census.

It is curious to observe the gradual processes of constitutional change which can be seen going on in the United States, notwithstanding the fact that its written Constitution seems to be adapted and probably was designed to guard against such changes, or at least to make them as difficult as possible. We refer not particularly to such proposals as those which now are or will shortly be before Congress, looking to the election of the President by direct popular vote, but also to such cases as that of the State of California, in which not only were no less than six minor amendments to the State Constitution submitted to the people at the recent State election, but also two questions of great importance in regard to which the Legislature desired to be "instructed." The first of these was whether United States Senators should hereafter be elected by the people instead of the Legislature. On this point the vote was twelve to one in favour of the change. The second question was whether an educational qualification to the suffrage should be imposed. To the surprise of most who voted for this change, they found that they outnumbered their opponents three to one. The proposed law restricting the suffrage allows no one to vote who "cannot read and write the English language." Thus the Swiss method of the "referendum" seems to have been quietly introduced. Its results were so satisfactory that its use is likely to become general.

As we have before had occasion to remark, one of the most serious objections to protective tariffs from the moral point of view, is their tendency to create bad blood between nations. This tendency is the logical outcome of the protection theory. It is seen in a light which makes it appear almost grotesque in one or two passages in President Harrison's recent message. To ordinary thinking it would appear that the foreigner who steps in and does the carrying between two sections of a country which have products to interchange with each other, or who performs a similar service in the exchange of goods with the outside world, more cheaply than the parties trading could do it for themselves, renders them and the whole country a service. To the charge that the foreign carrier is thereby doing injury to those citizens of the country who would like to do the work at higher rates, the answer is that these citizens must be engaged in some other more profitable business, else they would be willing to do the work at least as cheaply as the foreigners, and that in any case it would