

# THE WEEK.

Vol. XII.

Toronto, Friday, June 7th, 1895.

No. 28.

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## Current Topics.

**The Porte and the Powers.**

It seems probable, as we go to press, that strong detachments of the British, French, and Russian fleets are by this time assembled in the Bosphorus. It is pretty evident that the argument derived from such a demonstration is the only one which is likely to convince the Porte of its duty in regard to the joint proposals of the powers touching reforms in Armenia. If it be true, as reported, that Turkey's reply to those proposals is tantamount to a refusal to accept the High Commissioner and joint commission on Armenian affairs which constitute their chief features, and a repetition of the old verbal promises, it is time that the stronger arguments were brought to bear. It is hardly conceivable that the Porte will be so infatuated as to hold out in the presence of so tangible a proof that the powers are in earnest. However it may be with the other powers, it is clear that the British Government cannot, in view of the strength of the national sentiment which insists that the abuses and atrocities of which the Armenians have been so long the victim shall come to a sudden end, accept anything less than the most satisfactory guarantee of future good behaviour. In short, a crisis has now been reached when the Sultan and his Government must either accept the joint proposals of the Powers without reserve, or prepare to have the business of governing Armenia taken out of their incompetent hands and transferred to those of such agencies as can be relied on to maintain good government. Should a judicial madness spur on the Turk to court the utter destruction of his sway over all non-Ottoman peoples, neither the latter nor the civilized world would have any cause to regret the fact.

**Freedom of the Press**

According to a recent judgment of the Montreal Court of Review, if it is correctly reported, the fact that a statement in a newspaper is an exact and faithful report of the proceedings of a public meeting, does not protect the paper from prosecution for damages, in case the remarks of the speaker thus reported contain anything actionable. This is a decision which, if generally acted upon, would press very hardly upon the public journal, as well as react injuriously upon the interests of the news-loving reader. If we may say so without offence, it is a judgment which, however strictly it may accord with the law, does not by any means commend itself to the common-sense notion of what is reasonable and just. If the editor or proprietor of a newspaper, in addition to holding himself responsible for the correctness of his paper's report of the speech of a public man, is also to be held responsible for anything libellous which may be contained in that speech,

his position will be a hard one indeed, and he will need to keep, in addition to his reporters and editors, a staff of lawyers to examine hot political and other speeches reported before publication, lest they should contain something which may be challenged as libellous. We are glad to note that the proprietor of the *Montreal Star*, the journal immediately affected by this decision, intends to carry the question to the highest court.

**The Tariff Debate.**

After thirteen days of debate, during which several times that number of speeches in attack and in defence of the protective

policy of the Government were delivered, the decision of the House of Commons was reached through a division in which every member who was present and cast his vote, with perhaps one exception, that of Mr. Calvin, of Kingston, voted just as every other member knew he would vote, as soon as Sir Richard Cartwright had proposed his motion. Sir Richard Cartwright's motion was defeated, as every person who understood the situation knew it would be defeated, by a strictly party majority. So of the tens of thousands of intelligent electors who have, it may be assumed, followed the course of the debate more or less closely, a statement of the same kind may be made with confidence. One would be surprised to learn that half-a-dozen votes in the whole Dominion were immediately changed by means of any argument presented in the debate. This does not mean, of course, that there may not be, or may not have been during months and years past, many changes of opinion in the electorate in regard to the practical value of protective tariffs in general and the tariff now in operation in Canada in particular. There seems to be, indeed, good reason to believe that such changes have taken place to a considerable extent. But it is obvious to the careful observer that, as a rule, these changes come as the result of observation and personal experience rather than as the result of argument in Parliament or out. It is one of the evils of our party system that the speeches and arguments of the party leaders and their more zealous followers are listened to rather as exhibitions of the cleverness of the several speakers in thrust and parry with their antagonists, than as honest, straightforward efforts to set forth the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, in regard to the important questions discussed.

**The Value of the Parliamentary Debate.**

In thus saying we by no means intend to argue either that there is no such thing as honesty and sincerity in a Parliamentary debate, or that the time used in such debates is wholly wasted, so far as the effect upon either the members or the country is concerned. We have been speaking of the immediate, tangible effect, and in so doing we have thought of the hearers, *i.e.*, the electors, as wholly included in the two-fold classification of supporters and opponents of the Government. A moment's reflection makes it clear, however, that there is now a considerable, and as we are glad to believe, a growing class of electors who are no longer blind adherents of either party, and who are, therefore, prepared to listen with comparative freedom from prejudice; to cast aside the purely partisan matter which makes up so large an element in even the best of the speeches—and it is undeniable that there are a number of able debaters in the Canadian Commons—and to balance carefully the really weighty facts and considerations presented on either side. In addition to this there is to be taken into the account what we may call the *insensible* effect often produced by a good argument, even upon the minds which are fortified by loyalty to party, and will not at the time admit that their convictions