

THE WEEK:

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TOPICS OF THE WEEK.

In the North-West the drama of the insurrection promises soon to reach the last act. Preparations for the trial of Riel and the other prisoners, of whom there are more than forty, have begun. In the case of Riel the plea of insanity will apparently be relied on by the defence. Justification of the insurrection is, at the same time, being attempted in the interest of Riel and his late companions in arms. Volunteer advocates in the French Canadian press assure us that the proceedings of the insurgents were eminently reasonable; that the Half-breeds did no more than defend their homes against the ruthless Police, on whom all the blame properly falls. By this plea the sanity of Riel is made perfect. Either the volunteer or the official advocates must be at fault when they set up two mutually destructive pleas. It is proper to say that the French Canadian press as a whole is inclined to take a reasonable view of the situation. With Archbishop Taché, the majority of these journals have apparently abandoned Riel to his fate: whatever justice may decree. The fortunes of Big Bear, ever since he attempted to escape in the hope of avoiding collision with the troops, have been steadily on the decline. Following the example of other deserters, the Forest Crees have renounced his leadership, and have not only left, but sought to recommend themselves to mercy by delivering up a number of prisoners, including the McLeans. The return of the troops, except those who remain for garrison duty during the season, may soon be expected. When the end of the present trouble has been reached, some afterclaps in the shape of isolated Indian raids on settlements may occur. Some of the Moose Mountain bands, on the south, have been making threatening demonstrations. Settlers in the neighbourhood of Fort Pitt express a fear of the Indians, by whom, they say, the best arms were kept back and concealed when pretence of a general delivery was made. There may be settlers who, expecting to be compensated for their losses, and

finding it too late to raise a crop this year, would have no special objection to meet in the Indian a bagaboo by which to wear away the summer in profitable inaction. Losses will, in many cases, be exaggerated, and every possible attempt made to draw the largest amount of compensation from the public treasury. Before long innocent Half-breeds and peaceable Indians may, of all others in the North-West, most stand in need of protection. Those who are of the race of the conquerors must not be allowed to indulge in vengeance towards the conquered races. Justice to the Half-breeds and the Indians must be exacted from the white settlers, by whom the experience of the United States shows it is more grudgingly given, when not absolutely denied, than by the Government.

AN increase of the Mounted Police in the North-West to one thousand men is an alternative question. The choice lies between some regular force strong enough to keep the peace in a country in which there are between thirty and forty thousand Indians and reliance on the militia. For casual service called for by some such emergency as the Half-breed insurrection and the Indian uprising, the militia is at once useful and essential. But in that wild country there are permanent police duties required, the satisfactory performance of which is only possible to men whose whole attention is given to them. Local militia have the duties of settlers to perform and they cannot, as a permanency, do both. It is impossible to dispense with the services of a regular police force by whatever name it may be called. In the light of current experience, no one would undertake to guarantee that a less force than one thousand men would suffice to keep order among so large a body of Indians, many of whom, it is now certain, would raid the settlements as a means of procuring provisions in the absence of any restraining force by which they could be held in check. In the early days of French colonization in Lower Canada the settlers often had the duties of self-protection imposed upon them. In the forest and in the field they were liable to be constantly attacked by hostile Indians, and the husbandman sought a precarious safety by carrying with him fire-arms in his daily avocations. Under these circumstances only the slowest possible progress was attainable; and a century after the discovery elapsed before the country produced enough to feed itself. In the interval the pinch of famine had been felt and diseases to which famine gave rise had been suffered. The English colonies suffered from the same cause, though in a less degree. The United States finds it necessary to garrison forts on the frontiers of the Indian country. A wise and liberal administration, in which justice to the Indians and the Half-breeds, not less than to the whites, will minimize the danger against which it is now necessary to guard in the North-West; but when all is done that can be done, in this particular, the necessity for precaution and vigilance will remain.

AFTER the decision of the Privy Council on the North-West Boundary of Ontario had been given, the question of the right to the soil remained. The Dominion Government claimed the land on the ground that it had purchased the Indian title. Only the Crown can acquire the Indian title, whatever it may be—on this point there was no dispute—and the Dominion Government contended that, for this purpose, it was the representative of the Crown. These pretensions the Government of Ontario denied. The question came before Chancellor Boyd, on a case brought to test the validity of a timber license granted by the Dominion Government in the disputed territory. The Chancellor decided that the Indians had no legal ownership in the land, but only a right of occupation, and that the extinction of the title procured by the Dominion Government enured to the benefit of the Province in which the lands were vested as part of the public domain of Ontario. The British Government, when it granted the soil of all the original States of the American Union, in their early colonial days, and when it made over to a company in free and common socage all the land in the Hudson's Bay Territory, acted on the assumption that the Indians had not a perfect title to the soil. Still they had a right, by whatever name it might be called, without a surrender of which voluntarily made the title of the grantees of the Crown, far from being perfect, though intended as a protection against the subjects of other colonizing govern-