

disgust and ostracism, or in certain cases to save him from the prisoner's dock and the convict's doom. The latest case that has been referred to, that of Captain Verney, is certainly one of the vilest conceivable, and one cannot avoid the feeling that the sentence of one year's imprisonment with hard labour is a very inadequate punishment, in view of the peculiar baseness and cruelty of the offences. The trained Christian conscience of the nation is making itself very troublesome to ill-doers in English public life, and with admirable results. There is in recent and current history much ground for a rational and energetic optimism.

WERE it not for the intense moral interest of the subject, it would be almost amusing to read the various deliverances of the great English newspapers touching Sir Joseph Pease's resolution which was carried against the Government in the Commons, calling upon the Government of India to resign the profits of the opium trade, and to prohibit the manufacture of the drug except for medicinal purposes. As it is, these articles furnish an instructive study in the evolution of opinion—were we disposed to be cynical we might say of principles—and in the effects of self-interest in dulling the perceptions of many who see straight enough when no question of loss or sacrifice is involved. Between the lines of most of the leaders on the subject it is not very difficult to read an admission that the traffic is bad, if not wholly indefensible, on high moral grounds, and that the argument for its continuance must rest on grounds of political or economical expediency. Even the *Times* says in so many words, "We most heartily wish that the Government of India had not to rely on the income from the opium traffic." But strange to say the *Spectator* offers a bold and elaborate justification of the business *per se*, apart from all revenue considerations. Opium, this powerful journal has discovered, is "the most perfect of the sedatives" in which the people of Southern China find "the luxury of relief from the pressure of despondency, low spirits, and the ill-health engendered by infamous sanitary conditions." "Taken in strictly limited doses, whether by swallowing or inhalation," it "produces in most Europeans and in all Asiatics an delightful sense of tranquillity and ease, accompanied by no loss of mental power, and attended by a great increase of that faculty of endurance which among the Chinese, who are a terribly overworked people, is held to be essential to life. That so taken, the drug is injurious to its votaries, is probably a pure assumption." The Rajpoots of India and scores of thousands of Chinese workmen, we are told, habitually use the drug through life without revealing any deleterious consequence, etc. "Unfortunately the drug," the *Spectator* concedes, "like alcohol, is capable of being abused, tempts a certain proportion of its votaries to abuse it, and when abused, ruins the constitution and destroys mental energy as badly as absinthe or gin, though with this noteworthy difference, that while alcohol generates crime, opium does not." This is the first instance, so far as we can recollect, in which we have seen what amounts to a defence of the sale and use of the drug on general as distinct from commercial principles. With all due respect to the *Spectator* we cannot refrain from wishing that it had indicated some of the sources of its knowledge, and given a little testimony from those who have had opportunities for studying the question in the East. It is not too much to say that such evidence, and a good deal of it, will be needed to discredit the testimony of merchants, travellers, physicians, missionaries, Government ambassadors and officers and Chinese statesmen, which Mr. David McLaren, J. P., in the strong paper to which we alluded a couple of weeks since, and many other writers have brought together. All these will, we believe, be found to be pretty well agreed on two points: first, that the effects of what the *Spectator* would call the abuse of the drug are not only awful beyond description, but that such abuse is vastly more widespread in proportion to the whole number of opium users than the *Spectator* would lead us to suppose; and second, that so far from the habit not generating crime, not only does it destroy all manly and virtuous sentiments in its victims, but, once the taste is formed, its votaries will stop short of no crime to procure it. The Chinese Government might fairly be supposed to know the facts, and their convictions on the subject must have been pretty strong to impel them to engage in two or three wars with the terrible power of Britain, in the vain effort to keep the drug out of the country. There are still ringing in the ears of thousands of the morally thoughtful among the English people those noble and

memorable words of a Chinese Emperor who, when urged by British ambassadors to legalize the traffic and make it a source of revenue, exclaimed: "Nothing will induce me to derive a revenue from the vice and misery of my people," and again, "To go on to destruction, although an increase of revenue may result, will provoke the judgment of Heaven." It is specially noteworthy, and not specially creditable to British journalistic candour, that neither the *Spectator* nor any other paper opposed to the reform aimed at by Mr. Pease and his supporters makes any attempt to answer the appeal made to the national sentiment of righteousness, in regard to the iniquitous manner in which the traffic was forced upon China. Yet this is really the question, so far as the primary moral responsibility of the British nation is concerned.

OTTAWA LETTER.

SCARCELY had the corridors of the Parliament Buildings begun to echo with the tread of many footsteps, when they were again comparatively deserted, for a short recess only in the House of Commons; but there will be nothing to record in the annals of the Senate until the 26th inst. "*Surtout point de zèle*" has before now been the watchword of diplomats, but in the case of the presiding genii of Parliament Hill, so many of whom are fulfilling their functions for the first time, the verification of a homelier axiom might have been looked for. The inactivity, on this occasion, of the proverbial new broom is, perhaps, only the exception that proves the rule, or possibly, as regards the Opposition, our mistake of "*reculer pour mieux sauter*."

Meanwhile our Capital is beginning to lose the lethargic aspect it has worn for many months past. The spring foliage will soon transform some of the streets into leafy avenues; whilst on the principal thoroughfare there is daily quite a motley crowd driving and walking. Great and reverend signiors, together with younger and more frivolous members of the Lower House, may be seen, presumably discussing the affairs of the nation, or possibly the latest society function. Of these, it would be difficult to chronicle the number of "teas," past, present and to come. There have not as yet been many dinners and dances, but these will follow in due course; the festivities of the Session being inaugurated by a ball at Government House on Tuesday.

The most important society event since the last issue of THE WEEK was, of course, the Drawing-Room, at which it was pleasant to see Her Excellency Lady Stanley, who was prevented by illness from being present last year. It was a most unfortunate evening, in point of weather, and that, combined with the late beginning of the Session, which has deterred many of the families of members from coming to the Capital, no doubt accounted for a comparatively small attendance. The routine of a Vice-Regal Drawing-Room with its *mise en scène* is familiar to many readers of THE WEEK, still there are always some fresh elements of interest and even of amusement in this apparently solemn ceremonial, and the fortunate person who gets his or her obeisance over early in the evening has the advantage of watching and freely commenting on the performances of others. There are the eager people who bow too soon, the timid people who bow too late, and the utterly distraught ones who turn and flee without having bowed at all. These vagaries occur every time in spite of the perfectly audible entreaties of the A. D. C. But when all's said and done it is in truth an ordeal to pass through the serried ranks of those that "have gone before," who, however tame their own performance has been, feel quite at liberty to criticize their successors. It may be only five minutes between the time of our standing in the corridor, where a certain amount of pushing and shoving goes on to the strains of the Queen's Band, till we find ourselves one of a single file moving up the Senate Chamber, at the end of which our eyes are dazzled by patches of gold, blue and scarlet, which resolve themselves into the Governor-General and his suite. Now we have handed our card to the A. D. C. Now we have moved more or less unsteadily to the right, and, judging our distance as best we may, bow and pass on, our name sounding as if it belonged to someone else. The galleries are crowded with spectators, and, take it altogether, there are few prettier sights in the Capital than the Senate Chamber on a Drawing-Room night.

The number of petitions presented to Parliament is surprising, considering that with the exception of those for private Bills which are scrutinized by the Standing Orders Committee to see that due notice has been given, there is seldom anything heard or seen of them after their presentation, which is the briefest possible statement of the purport of "the prayer of John Smith and so many others." Once in a while their object is so pressing, or the Member in charge so zealous and influential as to secure their reference to a Select Committee. But as a rule they are pigeon-holed for all time. Some incongruities occur at times. The other day a distiller found himself charged with a petition for prohibition of the liquor traffic, but he did his duty to his constituents bravely. The great number of petitions for stricter legislation as to Sunday observance has, not for the first time either, necessitated Sunday work by some of the employees, without

which the documents could not be examined, docketed, and indexed in due time.

The appearance of the first divorce petition of the Session was the occasion of a little discussion in the Senate as to the necessity and opportuneness of establishing a uniform law of divorce, and courts to administer it in the Provinces which are without such tribunals. Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island have special divorce courts established before Confederation, and the Supreme Court of British Columbia holds that the adoption of English law by that Province gives it jurisdiction in divorce and matrimonial causes. Senator Macdonald, of British Columbia, was the principal exponent of the opinion which makes for divorce legislation, and no doubt there is a good deal to be said on that side. But the principal argument adduced—that of equal relief to rich and poor—can hardly be urged fairly against the present system. A divorce by special Act costs about \$250 for advertising the notice, printing, translating, and fees, which latter may be, and have in some cases been, remitted on account of the poverty of the applicant, leaving only some \$50 to pay. Counsel fees and the cost of bringing witnesses would be the same in Court as in Parliament, so divorce could hardly be made much cheaper. As to the objections to the nature of the tribunal—a special committee in each House, followed by the vote of the House itself—they are more specious than well founded. It is true enough that legislative bodies are singularly ill-fitted to discharge judicial functions, but anyone who has followed a Divorce Bill through Parliament will admit that wherever there has been any doubt as to its justice or expediency, it has received as careful consideration and discussion as would be given by any court, and perhaps the very absence of technicality has conduced to substantial justice. The manner in which the evidence has been analyzed in some hard-contested cases is beyond anything that could be expected of the best special jury. With the adverse religious sentiment of a large element, supported by the moral objections of others, this question must always be a thorny one for any ministry to take up. And in view of there being only half-a-dozen applications for divorce at the most in any session, it is likely to be some time before any practical steps are taken. All the same, the mooted of this question is a sign of the times.

After the passing of the Address, the introduction of Bills and motions for returns were the main business of the Commons. This went off very quietly.

It is supposed that there is something more promising than usual in the stereotyped reply that a two-cents rate of letter postage is "under the consideration of the Government," but Mr. Denison's hope that this reduction can be made to apply to letters to all parts of the Empire is hardly likely to be realized after the rather discouraging reception a recent query on the subject got from Mr. Raikes in the British House of Commons.

An inch is a great deal in many things besides a nose. Hence the importance attached to the announcement, made on seemingly good authority, that it has been decided to increase the space to be allowed for each animal on board cattle-steamers from two feet six inches to two feet eight inches.

As at the commencement of the last Parliament so now there is complaint of undue delay in gazetting election returns, whereby, it is asserted, an undue advantage has been given the party in power to contest the seats of certain of its adversaries. The blame, if any, was then laid upon the Clerk of the Crown in chancery. Now the returning officers are found fault with. But judging from the disclaimers of Mr. McMullen and Mr. Mulock of any reflections upon the fairness of their particular returning officers, and the fact that Sir John Macdonald has suffered equally with others of both political stripes, while Mr. Charlton's instance of complaint was actually that of delay in the return of a Conservative, it is unlikely that there has been any systematic unfairness. As the Premier pointed out, there are many causes of delay, and Mr. Mills' complaint of the inefficacy of a penal action against a man who has nothing, may be met by an amendment of the law. In fact the details of the Franchise and Electoral Acts are likely to be thoroughly overhauled this Session.

The way to the discussion of two burning constitutional questions was opened delicately. Mr. Larivière confined himself entirely to his formal motions for papers respecting the Manitoba Schools Act and the abolition of the official use of the French language in that Province. This course avoided discussion on imperfect information, and the immediate plunging of the House into what is sure to be a heated debate with many ramifications. It commended itself to everybody except Mr. Devlin, as their silence showed. Report has it that the eloquent speech of the member of Ottawa was delivered without consulting his party, who are by no means pleased with either the force of his oratory or the widening of the issues, and that Mr. Laurier wrote him a stiff homily on subordination. Mr. Devlin will perhaps have reason to say, "Timeo Danaos" of his opponents' compliments on his maiden speech. By the death of Mr. Haythorne the small band of Opposition Senators loses one of its ablest members, and the Upper House a gentleman of the old school, liberal in the truest sense of the word. His scholarship and refinement made him sure of an attentive and interested hearing, whether on local questions affecting Prince Edward Island or on wider issues which he treated with the same ease and zeal.