

# THE WEEK.

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## THE WEEK :

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All articles, contributions, and letters on matters pertaining to the editorial department should be addressed to the Editor, and not to any other person who may be supposed to be connected with the paper.

A DEBATE of more than ordinary importance sprang up in the Commons on Friday, in Committee on the land subsidies to Manitoba and Northwest railways. The Government is to be commended for proper liberality in the encouragement of branch railway building on the prairies. As every one who has visited the country knows, the value of land for farming purposes diminishes rapidly as the distance from a railway station increases. At a distance of thirty or forty miles, the expense of getting a crop to market begins to exceed its value, and the best farms become comparatively worthless, as it is useless for the occupant to do more than raise food for the subsistence of himself and family. It is too late now to discuss the question as to whether a policy in railway building and in the disposal of lands might not have been adopted in the first instance which would have prevented the undue scattering which now, as Mr. Davin pointed out, makes the solitude of the settler's life oppressive and works great injury to the country. To this effect the omnipresent reserves have largely contributed. The practical question just now is how to encourage to the fullest extent these necessary branch railways without tying up further immense blocks of land and thus increasing the isolation which it is one object of the railroads to remove. When it is considered that, even according to the statement of the Minister of the Interior, fifty-six millions of acres, out of a total of one hundred and thirty-four millions have already been given away, it will be apparent that there is cause for the note of alarm sounded by Sir Richard Cartwright and others. The question is undeniably difficult. Railways are an indispensable condition of settlement and progress, and liberal land grants are, under present circumstances, the indispensable condition of railways. Yet nothing can be more disastrous to the future of the country than to have immense blocks of the best lands tied up in the hands of railway companies, or other speculators, waiting for a rise. The history of the United States in this respect should be a beacon to warn our legislators. It may be, as Mr. Dewdney says, that to put a maximum price upon the lands granted in aid of railway building would, in many cases, prevent the companies from raising the moneys required, though we should hope otherwise. Nothing, however, can justify Parliament in putting it into the power of the railways, or of speculators, to shut up large blocks of the best lands and

the best localities for an indefinite period or to hold them at exorbitant prices. Hon. Mr. Mills' suggestion seems on the whole the most feasible. He proposed that "the Government should fix a maximum total sum to be received by the Company from the sale of lands, the lands to revert to the Government when this sum had been realized." Why not? And why not in every case recognize the lands as simply hypothecated to the railroads as a guarantee for this fixed sum, the Government retaining the right to resume possession of the lands at any time upon payment either of a rate per acre agreed on, or of the balance of the total amount thus secured? If this arrangement tended to eliminate the speculative element from the Company's transactions, so much the better.

THE people of Canada are to be congratulated on the fact that Parliament has, however tardily, vindicated its regard for its own honour and purity in the two affairs which have been before it. The reports of the Committees on the Rykert and the Bremner furs cases were such as the evidence manifestly demanded, and both have been promptly accepted by the Commons. If there was any disposition, on the part of any members of the Committees, or of the House, to burke investigation, or save the culprits from the just consequences of their own misdoings, all such attempts have been happily frustrated. As Mr. Rykert had already withdrawn from the jurisdiction of the House, there was nothing to be done in his case but to accept the Report of the Committee with as few words as possible. As the late member has actually had the nerve to come before his old constituents for re-election, it is now left for them to confirm the verdict which decrees the final banishment from public life of one who seems strangely destitute of a sense of the requirements of decency, not to say honour, in a position of public trust. Now that the disgraced candidate has been unsparingly condemned by his own political friends at Ottawa, it is altogether unlikely that he will be able to justify his boast in regard to the readiness of his former constituency to re-elect him. It is only to be regretted, for the good name of that constituency, that it did not sooner repudiate a candidate so unworthy of political honours, seeing that the essential facts of the transaction, which has now been visited with condign punishment, were before the public at the last election. In the case of General Middleton, Mr. Blake's pitilessly clear speech swept away every refuge of ignorance which the charity of friends had erected, by showing how unmistakable are the principles and traditions of the British military code in regard to such offences. While we are sorry for the man we cannot forget the supreme importance of establishing a Canadian precedent that shall stand as a warning in all the future, and at the same time of showing that Canadian justice knows no distinction between high and low. It would never do to tolerate in the commanding officer what would have brought swift retribution upon the private soldier. But while the treatment of these scandals has been now vigorous and satisfactory, the cause of this sudden rise of virtuous indignation on the part of the Government is wrapped in profound mystery, seeing that both these offences were committed, and were well known to have been committed, years ago, and that both have repeatedly been brought in previous sessions to the notice of the Government in vain.

NOTHING could more strikingly illustrate the absurdity of retaining the names "Liberal" and "Conservative" in local politics than the reports which reach us from day to day of the contests which are now being waged in several Provinces of the Dominion. In New Brunswick the old party lines seem to have been pretty well obliterated during the recent struggle. It would now, we fancy, puzzle the keenest politician to trace them in the division of parties as they now exist in that Province. In Nova Scotia the questions at issue, if one may judge from the manifesto of the local Premier, published a few weeks since, relate almost exclusively to the apportionment of the too scanty public funds amongst the constituencies of the Province. Indeed, a considerable part of Mr. Fielding's address consists of his defence against the charge of having failed to provide for the Public Schools and for roads, bridges, and other local purposes as liberally as his

predecessors. The claim upon the Dominion for increase of subsidy is still insisted on, and, from the Nova Scotia point of view, at least, with some show of reason. Incidentally, in explaining the causes which led to the holding in abeyance, if not the final abandonment, of the agitation for secession, Mr. Fielding throws a revealing light, or perhaps we should rather say a revealing shadow, upon the sudden political transformation which the political sentiment of the Province underwent just before the last Dominion elections. Magical indeed, in its effects, was the wand which Sir Charles Tupper waved before the eyes of the electorate, when he so hurriedly left the dignified repose of the High Commissionership to come to the rescue of his hard-pressed colleagues. That the magic was costly has been pretty well shown in Committee of Supply in the Commons, on various occasions, since that memorable contest. But of Nova Scotia, as of New Brunswick, it may be said that there is scarcely a pretence of keeping up any longer the old political division-lines, in the contest now going on for the supremacy in the Local House. The loud discussions of the Jesuits' Estates Act, Separate Schools and dual language questions, which are still ringing in the ears of the people of Ontario and Quebec, scarcely awaken an echo in the happy constituencies down by the sea. The tariff discussions must, no doubt, have a perennial interest for all dwellers in the Maritime Provinces, but, as the Provincial Legislatures have no power to deal with such matters, even these can hardly be said to be an issue in local politics.

COMING to Quebec we find the contest hardly far enough advanced as yet to bring out very clearly the exact lines on which it will be waged. The "Ins" in that province have, however, the immense advantage of having at their head a leader who is scarcely inferior as a master of strategy to Sir John A. Macdonald himself. This, combined with the fact that Mr. Mercier can show in many respects a really good record, renders it rather unlikely that the present Government can be defeated, however its majority may be reduced. The finances of the Province are, it is true, still in a somewhat precarious state, but it can hardly be denied that they have been better managed during the present than in the previous regime. By his Nationalist programme Mr. Mercier has no doubt strengthened his position with the great majority of his fellow-countrymen, and yet he has managed to retain, in a good degree, the confidence of his English-speaking supporters. The readiness he manifested to meet the demands of the English representatives, even in the matter of the Jesuits' Estates Act; his fairness in securing a tardy act of justice, in the admission of graduates of Protestant colleges to study the learned professions without further examination, and other evidences of a disposition to hold the balances even between the two races and religions, will probably secure him the support of many of the English-speaking and Protestant electors, while the man who framed and passed the Jesuits' Estates Act, and settled the long controversy arising out of those claims, may rest pretty secure in the support of a majority of his own co-religionists. True, in some important respects, Mr. Mercier has proved recreant to his old professions of Liberalism. He has given the ecclesiastical authorities a place and a recognition in the affairs of the Province which are utterly incompatible with true Liberalism, or with any sound theory of political freedom. But so long as there is no true Liberal party to oppose him, that could hardly affect his chances of re-election, even were Liberalism and Conservatism issues in the politics of the Province. But there are really no such issues. The questions which are now so hotly debated are primarily questions of race and religion, or of finance, local administration and personal character, and only secondarily, if at all, questions of Liberalism and Toryism or of general politics. While we thus claim that there is really no broad or well-defined political issue in the local contests now going on in any of the Provinces, we do not, of course, deny or doubt that many voters in each Province will be swayed more by the fancied demands of loyalty to old leaders in Dominion politics than by any deliberately formed opinions on the local questions which are really involved.