

# THE WEEK.

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## THE WEEK:

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UNREST and excitement prevail at Ottawa. The general effect of Mr. Osler's cross-examination in shattering the testimony of the witness Murphy was at the last moment counteracted to a considerable extent by the closing declaration of the witness, which was, unhappily, but too speedily confirmed by the confession of the person implicated—the Chief Engineer of the Public Works Department. It is well that the truth, even in one matter, has been brought out, though the spectacle of a public servant, who has so long had an honourable reputation, forced at the approach of old age to quit the service in disgrace, is a sad one. Everyone must feel a degree of pity for Mr. Perley. Indeed, were it possible to believe, as some newspapers are contending, that the acceptance of the tempter's gift, at the last moment, when it was too late to influence Mr. Perley's judgment or action in the discharge of his duty, was his only fault, one might well query whether mercy might not be mingled with justice in the case. But it is well-nigh impossible to reconcile the astounding revelations concerning the singular run of good fortune in securing contracts, changes, increased prices, extra allowances, etc., which came to the firm of Connolly and Company with any theory of impartiality and probity on the part of the Chief Engineer. Were it otherwise, there would be an unanswerable force in the contention that his act was not perceptibly different in principle from that of Sir Hector Langevin and other Ministers who have from time to time accepted testimonials for themselves or gifts for their wives, from those with whom they had business relations, and that there would be positive injustice in letting the principals go free and punishing the subordinates, who did but follow the example set them. One singular and humiliating feature of the investigation is the fact that the two chief witnesses thus far produced have contradicted each other's testimony in the most pointed and positive manner. Nor can it be said that the one has left any better impression in regard to his trustworthiness than the other. The forgetfulness of Connolly touching facts and transactions in which he bore a principal part is simply incredible. The total result is that the testimony elicited from this remarkable pair is valueless, save when supported by other testimony or by documents. It cannot be denied, however, that the facts already brought out in this investigation, coupled with those elicited by the Public Accounts Committee in regard to the Kingston Dock

affair, have very seriously damaged the reputation of the Public Works Department of the Government, not to say the Government itself. One natural effect is that a feeling of distrust and suspicion is spreading all over the country. This is not to be wondered at, though it is to be hoped that the indiscriminate charges of wholesale corruption, so long and vehemently made by political opponents, may still be found to be grossly exaggerated. But there must be something seriously wrong in the Administration under which such transactions as have been already brought to light could occur. Nothing but the most searching investigation of the working of the whole Governmental machinery will now satisfy the respectable adherents of either party throughout the Dominion.

WHATEVER may be the final outcome of the investigations at Ottawa, enough has already been developed to set in a very clear light a singularly weak and dangerous feature of our political system. It is remarkable that glaring as the irregularities, and the misappropriation and waste of public funds may have been, very few seem inclined to suspect that any Ministers or Member of Parliament profited personally by the crooked transactions. All the evidence tending to implicate any person in either of these positions goes to show that the misappropriated funds, if any, were used for electioneering purposes. It would be deplorable, though scarcely surprising, should it be found that politicians in high positions, while personally incorruptible, should have been brought by the influence of the party spirit to persuade themselves that there is less moral guilt in accepting money for strictly party uses from contractors and others, with the understanding that the donors shall be recouped in business transactions at the public expense, than in accepting similar gifts for personal uses. It is not too much to say that there is a good deal of evidence pointing in the direction indicated—evidence which it is almost impossible to explain in any other way. If such facts be clearly established it may be hoped that they will lead to a radical reform in political methods. The most direct means of bringing about such reform would obviously be the introduction of the system which we have often advocated, under which the expenses of all candidates in elections are strictly limited, while an accurate account of the sources and uses of the funds raised must be rendered, subject to verification by impartial authorities. So long as the existing state of affairs is suffered to continue, and the success or defeat of candidates depends very largely upon the amount of money at their disposal for election purposes, so long the temptation to underhand dealings with contractors and other parties seeking Government favours will be irresistible by any but the most robust moral natures. Still better, infinitely better, than any merely legal device would be, of course, the choice of none but men of the highest integrity for all positions in the Government and in the Departments. But the day when none but those whose characters are above suspicion can reach such positions is unhappily yet in the dim future. And such men, even if they could be had for all departments, would be the very ones who would readily submit to the most stringent regulations, as evidence of good faith and conscious integrity.

LORD SALISBURY'S replies to the depositions which recently waited upon him on behalf of the Imperial Federationists have not been long in bearing fruit. Sir Charles Tupper has, we are now informed, submitted to the Council of the Imperial Federation League a series of definite proposals, as the basis of a plan for the federation of the Empire. These propositions seem to have been favourably received, as the Council promptly and unanimously decided to appoint a committee representing all parts of the Empire to consider the proposals and to prepare for submission to Lord Salisbury a definite plan for the federation of the Empire. The brief announcement of these facts by cablegram has naturally attracted a good deal of attention in Canada, and further proceedings in the matter will be followed with interest. It is, to say the least, satisfactory to know that the promoters of Imperial Federation have at last decided to cease beating the air, and to bring their project to the test of an attempt to formulate a definite scheme. The leading features of

the High Commissioner's proposals, so far as made known by the too brief cablegram, are the admission of the High Commissioners of Canada, Austral-Asia and South Africa to the Imperial Privy Council and the Imperial Cabinet, they also to be members of the Federal Cabinets of their respective Colonies, and the imposition of a small preferential duty within the Empire upon foreign goods. It is by no means likely that this bald outline does the High Commissioner or his proposals justice. As was very clearly and forcibly shown in an article in the *Toronto Mail* the other day, the first of the two proposals is beset with difficulties on every hand. These stamp it as utterly impracticable at the outset. How, for instance, on any sound constitutional principle, could the Canadian High Commissioner become a member of the British Government without a seat in the British Parliament, or a member of the Canadian Government without a seat in the Canadian Parliament? How could he have a voice in the decisions of the former, decisions involving say the question of expenditure of large sums of money, or even of a declaration of war, without being in any way responsible to the British tax-payer? And the same question might be asked in reference to his relations to the Canadian people. These are but samples of the practical and seemingly insurmountable difficulties which at once suggest themselves, and which lead us to think that the meaning of Sir Charles Tupper's proposals cannot have been accurately given us. We shall, therefore, refrain from discussion of details, waiting fuller information. It is hardly conceivable, for instance, that Sir Charles could have coolly proposed to ask two very important concessions from the Mother Country, while offering nothing in return. That would be a "jug-handled" arrangement truly! To plead what we have done to strengthen the Empire, by building the St. Lawrence Canals and the Canadian Pacific Railroad, as a reason why we should be excused from paying any part of the expenses of the British Navy, a squadron of which we should expect to be always within calling distance for our defence, would surely expose us to the retort that these works were constructed for our own purposes and not with any benevolent aim to strengthen the Empire generally; and that, so far as military considerations entered into the matter at all, our aim was rather to make it easier for the Mother Country to succour us in case of need, than to enable us to aid the Empire on general principles. The trade arrangement proposed seems equally one-sided. We are glad to learn from the reply to a question in the House that Sir Charles Tupper is acting on his own responsibility and not under the direction or with the sanction of the Canadian Government. Yet it is obvious that his position is such that it is likely to be generally supposed that he represents the Government in this as in other matters.

THE Minister of Justice has wisely determined to act upon the suggestion made by Mr. Blake at the last session of Parliament, in respect to the exercise of the veto power, and has introduced a Bill embodying the principal features of that suggestion. Sir John A. Macdonald, indeed, at the time intimated his approval of Mr. Blake's view and promised to act upon it. The essence of the change proposed is that, instead of using the prerogative of disallowance, as it now has the constitutional right to do, without reference to outside opinion, the Government shall take power when any question comes up likely to be productive of friction, to go to the Supreme Court for an opinion touching the constitutionality of the Act which it is proposed to disallow. The question is to be argued fully before the Supreme Court and the latter, instead of a simple yes or no, is to give a reasoned judgment, which will be of permanent value for the guidance of future legislation. The judgment of the Court will not, of course, be binding upon the Dominion Government, but it is evident that any Government which should veto an Act of a Provincial Government which, in the opinion of the Supreme Court judges, the Local Legislature had a right to pass, would assume a serious responsibility. The fact that the Government will still have the option of submitting or not submitting a given Act to the Court, before using the veto, makes it still formally master of