

THE WEEK:

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CONTENTS OF CURRENT NUMBER.

TOPICS OF THE WEEK—	PAGE.
General Strange's Skirmish.....	417
Honour to General Middleton.....	417
Who is Responsible for the Rebellion?.....	417
Future of the North-West.....	417
Disposal of those Killed in Action.....	418
Riel's Insanity.....	418
Justice for the Rebel Leader.....	418
Reckless Prohibition Advocacy.....	419
Canon Farrar and the Scott Act.....	419
Errors in Diet.....	419
The Sunday Question.....	419
War with Russia Unnecessary.....	420
Lord Churchill's Insolence.....	420
Scrutin de Liste.....	420
Insolvency Legislation.....	420
CONTRIBUTED ARTICLES—	
The Royal Academy.....	Ignoramus. 420
"Gone to Texas".....	R. A. B. 422
Scientific Jottings.....	Gradgrind. 423
HERE AND THERE.....	423
CORRESPONDENCE.....	424
POETRY—	
Springtide.....	T. M. Harper. 424
Love.....	W. E. Wilson. 424
SCRAP BOOK.....	425
MUSIC.....	426
PERIODICALS.....	427
BOOKS.....	428
LITERARY GOSSIP.....	428
CHESS.....	428

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TOPICS OF THE WEEK.

GENERAL STRANGE'S skirmish with Big Bear's forces fixed the location of the only Indians at all formidable who still remained on the war-path. After three hours intermittent fighting, the General had but two men wounded, and none killed. The Indians had taken up a position naturally strong, in which they were protected by hills, rocks and ravines. On receipt of the news General Middleton lost no time in setting out with seven hundred men to attack Big Bear's position. On this expedition he goes, let us hope, to finish the work of the campaign. Big Bear, who is fighting with a rope round his neck, will probably be inspired with the desperation of a man beyond the reach of hope. Among the troops who accompany General Middleton on this expedition, the Queen's Own, much to their disappointment, do not find a place. Garrison duty must meanwhile be done at Battleford, and the Queen's Own, having learned all about the surroundings, can do this duty with advantage. Big Bear may make a strong resistance, but his defeat, which must end in capture or flight, before many days pass, is certain.

THOUGH the last shot has yet to be fired in the North-West, it is not too early to express the gratitude which we all feel to be due to General Middleton. It is the more necessary to pay him this tribute because his services have not been of the most obvious kind nor such as are likely to bring him, as a General of the British Army, any great meed of professional reputation. The scale on which he has acted was small and the foeman was hardly worthy of his steel. Yet the difficulty of his undertaking and the risk of miscarriage under the circumstances were great. Had he commanded regulars, whose blood there would have been no special occasion to

spare, he would probably have made short work of Riel's rifle-pits. But his troops were volunteers, of whose blood, though they might be a living mass of impetuous valour, he was bound, as he rightly conceived, to be very chary. Every hair of their heads was numbered by the community, and even a private among them when shot, instead of being "shovelled into a trench" is carried to his home and buried with a pomp exceeding that of a general officer's funeral. General Middleton has managed to make his omelet, to the inexpressible relief of all of us, without breaking the eggs; at least he has broken as few of them as possible. He has also succeeded, by a manner rare among the officers of an aristocratic army, in winning the hearts, as well as the confidence of a citizen soldiery. We were unfortunate in having this work to be done, but we have been fortunate in having General Middleton to do it.

THE Half-breed Rebellion received its death-blow in the bayonet charge at Batoche, and of the Indian disturbance which grew out of it the life is nearly spent. It has been a calamitous affair, costing not a little life, wrecking a number of homes and a quantity of property, sowing, as all civil strife does, the seeds of future ill-will, throwing back the North-West, and entailing upon the country, at a time when our finances are anything but prosperous, an expenditure which will probably not fall short of three millions. While the country is in peril, criticism of those who are at the head of the nation is out of place: we must either change the Government or support it. But the peril over, the nation is entitled to ask, and it will ask, who was to blame. The Minister of the Interior protests that nobody on the side of the Government was to blame. That his intentions and those of his colleagues at Ottawa were as good as those of a partisan administration can be there is no reason to doubt: it is about the conduct of their subordinates that misgivings are felt and inquiry will be demanded. The promptness with which Half-breed Claims are now being settled and scrip is being served out surely indicates that there had been some delay of justice before. The Minister of the Interior avers that no complaints had been preferred at Ottawa. The answer to this is that Half-breeds, and still more Indians, have a very dim idea of constitutional processes and of legal appeals to a remote tribunal. They require to have justice done them by an authority on the spot. What were the Lieutenant-Governor of the Territories and his fellow-officials in the North-West about? Did no monitory sounds of the angry agitation among the Half-breeds reach their ears? Did not warnings of danger come from any other quarter? If they had reason for apprehension, why did they not take measures at once either to satisfy the Half-breeds or, if they deemed concession of the demands out of the question, to put the Government on its guard and prepare themselves for the prompt suppression of an outbreak? The answer probably is that they were politicians, and had more important things to think of than administrative duties and the security of their Province: perhaps some of them were also a good deal taken up with their private speculations in land. If so, it is an old story. The duty of an Opposition, however, in such a case, is to insist on inquiry, and the country will certainly second the demands.

THE armed insurrection we may reasonably hope will soon be in its grave. But out of that grave will evidently rise again the political insurrection of the Farmer's Union. It is idle to talk of this movement as a mere party machination of the Grits: party very likely finds its way into this as it does into everything else; but the discontent is genuine, extensive and well founded. This may be affirmed without accusing the administration at Ottawa or any member of it of any wrong intentions or want of right intentions towards the settlers. The policy of a single railway with monopoly clauses inevitably involved a sacrifice of the railway interests of the North-West. For this Imperialist aspirations have to answer; but otherwise the fault has been in the political system. A distant dependency under a party Government is sure to fare ill; and this is what the North-West has virtually been. It has enjoyed neither the advantages of a vigorous autocracy nor those of self-government. In a vigorous autocracy, when a community is in the first stage of its existence, and its political gristle has not yet hardened into bone, there is a good deal to be said,