

# THE WEEK:

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## TOPICS OF THE WEEK.

CARDWELL and E. Durham are safe Tory constituencies, so that little can be inferred from the result of their elections. But so far as we have observed there has been a total absence of any sign of a Grit reaction. In politics, as in mechanics, it is impossible to move anything without a motive power, and motive power at present, we must repeat, the leaders of the Opposition have none. To give utterance to this is, in extreme Grit quarters, evidently regarded as treason, and as the betrayal of a desire to play insidiously into the hands of the Tory Government. We wish we were a tenth part as free from liability to err as we are from any such design. We are avowed sceptics on the subject of Party Government, but for practical purposes we must take things as they are, and so long as the system remains in force a strong Opposition will be indispensable; the rule of an unchecked and irresponsible majority being of all forms of government about the worst. Irrespectively, therefore, of any question of policy between the two parties, and simply in order to restore the balance necessary to the safe working of the machine, we should be glad to see the Opposition greatly strengthened. We should say the same if the Government were Grit and the Opposition Tory. But the fact is that nothing can be more misplaced, so far as we are concerned, than imputations of underhand complicity with the policy of those at present in power. We no more desire than does any Grit to see the country forever governed by such agencies as the present, the earnings of the people wasted by scores of millions on the enterprises of a chimerical Imperialism, the Government dominated by French influence, and the people cut off by a perverse fiscal system from their natural markets and from the commercial life of their own continent, or a branch of the Legislature reduced to a mere regiment of retainers. Our counsel, therefore, whatever it may be worth in other respects, is at all events sincere. To pile up eulogistic superlatives about the character and the eloquence of the leader of the Opposition is of little use: nobody questions the truth of the panegyric, but the people are not moved. Nothing will move the people but the prospect of substantial advantage to be gained by a change of Government. Our own opinion has been expressed, that the removal of the Customs Line is the one great

practical object now before us, and that a resolute movement in that direction would evoke sympathies, now suppressed for lack of leadership, on all sides. But whether this, or the Reform of the Senate, or anything else, be the object selected, it must be frankly and decidedly taken up, steadily pressed, and thoroughly worked into the mind of the people: merely to place an opinion on record in the archives of Hansard is of no avail. Sign of a cabal against the leader of the Opposition, or of a desire to run him down, we can discern none: but undoubtedly there are among his followers a growing impatience of inactivity, weariness of a merely critical attitude, and a desire, after beating time so long, to hear the order to march.

THE paper of "Observer" in our last number on "Political Pauperism in Quebec" may be regarded as a cry of agony from a political interest which finds itself in danger of annihilation. In danger of annihilation the British interest in Quebec undoubtedly appears to be, and the political apathy which a writer in a Montreal journal was deploring the other day must be regarded not as a passing chill but as the probable precursor of death. The French Canadians, like the Irish, multiply with extraordinary rapidity; the Church which is common to both encourages early marriage as an antidote to vice, and the habits of the people being, to say the least, simple in an extreme degree, no social pride or family prudence forbids the banns. Statistics given by an American journal the other day show that in New England the marriage rate and the birth rate have greatly decreased, and we may be sure that among the British of Quebec, if they have not decreased, they are low compared with those which prevail among the people of the poorer and less luxurious race. The remnant of British population at Quebec is isolated and menaced with submersion by the advancing tide. In the Eastern Townships it is said that the French element gains ground, and it is even overflowing Ontario, as well as the Northern States, to the people of which its anti-vaccinating propensity is a source of considerable alarm. In the western part of Montreal British Commerce holds its ground, but it is being surrounded and isolated like the British population of Quebec. Had the conqueror used his power on the morrow of his victory the whole of Canada might have become British. The forces of an entire British continent, again, might have sufficed for assimilation, but those of British Canada alone have proved totally inadequate to the task. Socially the relations between the two races appear to be kindly enough, and to fulfil the mute exhortation of the monument which bears on one side the name of Wolfe and on the other that of Montcalm. Politically the French are not so much hostile as alien, having a nationality, interests, sympathies and aspirations of their own. The political pauperism of which "Observer" complains is the almost inevitable adjunct of the elective system in a community which has not a wealthy class, and in which politics, if taken up at all, must be taken up as a trade. All this has been pointed out before; but Montreal seems just now to be acutely sensible of its danger. Tempting wealth and political impotence, with the taxing power in alien hands, must certainly be said to constitute a somewhat critical situation. What will be the ultimate effect of political helotage upon the commercial security and prosperity of Montreal? This is a question which has an interest for all Montrealers, and a pathetic interest for the Montreal Tories, who by supporting Governments based on the French interest have done their best to promote French ascendancy and the political downfall of their own race.

It is neither revolutionary feeling nor want of affection for the Mother Country that leads us to deprecate once more the bestowal of titles by the Home Government on Canadian politicians. Mr. Mackenzie and Mr. Blake declined knighthood, as we are always bound in gratitude to remember, and their refusal showed a just sense of what was due to their own country. That public honour should come from the community which the statesman serves and from no other source is a part, and not an unimportant part, of self-government. Downing Street, in ignorance or under the influence of its own party sympathies, may stamp with approval by the bestowal of conduct which the Canadian people would condemn. When General Middleton, a British officer, is knighted for services which are