

THE WEEK:

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TOPICS OF THE WEEK.

A STATESMAN must be greatly at a loss for practical subjects of legislation when he goes out of his way to abolish an anomaly which is not also an evil. It cannot be said that the anomalies of the Franchise in the different Provinces were evils; not a word of complaint respecting them had been heard. It is probable that, if their history were examined, they would be found to be not merely accidental but adjustments in some measure to social or economical peculiarities. When the question is put, each Province seems to wish to remain as it is, and Tory delegations give a party assent to equalization only on condition that their own Province shall be left out. To bring on a political crisis with a military crisis already in existence, merely for the sake of forcing on everybody a uniformity which nobody desires, was surely not the part of a statesman. Unfortunately the measure cannot be called purposeless: the longer the discussion lasts the more clearly it appears that there was an object, and that the object was, under colour of regulating the Franchise, to perpetuate the ascendancy of the party now in power. The proposal to enfranchise the Indians speaks for itself: these poor pensioners of the commonwealth must needs vote with the meal bag, which is in the hands of the agents of the Government, and more than one constituency might probably be strangled by their vote. The aim of the Female Suffrage Clause was revealed by Sir John Macdonald himself when he told a deputation that the Conservative Party in England was a unit in favour of the measure. The Conservative Party in England is not yet by any means a unit in favour of the measure, but the managers have recently taken it up in the hope of party gain, believing that the women would vote Tory under clerical influence, and Lord Beaconsfield, from the same motive, used to support it by his silent vote and his clandestine influence, though he never ventured to support it in a speech. That, however, which bears most distinctly the mark of a sinister policy is the provision for the appointment of revising

barristers to draw up the list of voters and decide upon the title to vote, which has called forth widespread and most reasonable indignation. The revising barristers are to be appointed all at once by Sir John Macdonald, under the conventional alias of the Governor-General in Council; there is to be no appeal from their decision except with their own consent, nor any means practically of getting rid of them so long as they continue to serve the interests of the party by the head of which they are appointed. In England the revising barristers are appointed by the Judges, and hold their offices only for a year. The patronage will of course be exercised on the strict party principle, and ill-omened names are already heard. We have seen enough to be convinced that such nominees would shrink at a pinch from no disregard of electoral rights, and that the more unscrupulous the service they rendered the surer would be their reward. If the Canadian people submit to such treatment they will show themselves bad guardians of their freedom; but their minds have been so perverted by party influence that there is no saying what they may do with their birthright if party calls for the sacrifice. In the United States there would be always a hope of reversal in the Senate, and at present there would be the certainty of a Presidential veto on iniquity; but our Senate is a registration office and our President is a figure-head.

MANITOBA has been debating the question of the ballot, and the Tory majority of her Legislature has decided, apparently by a strict party vote, in favour of open voting. There is a good deal to be said in favour of open voting. Mill, though a strong Radical, advocated it, while all his brother Radicals were for the ballot. It must be deemed the manlier method, and the one under which the people are likely to receive the best political education. It will generally prevent a man from abusing the franchise by voting on palpably mean or personal grounds. On the other hand, the main object of suffrage legislation is to get at the real opinions of the people, and where intimidation or any influence other than free conviction is at work the ballot becomes a necessary safeguard. In England, after the long controversy and the violent party struggle about the ballot, the result of the measure, when carried at last, was comparatively unimportant. The Tory landowner lost the power of coercing his tenants, the Tory millowner lost the power of coercing his workmen; but the Trade Union also lost the power of coercing its members, the artisans generally lost the power of coercing those of their own class, and the upshot was little gain or loss to either side. The tendency of the ballot probably is rather to loosen the hold of party organization, and thus to facilitate sudden changes in the balance of power. No doubt many Grits took advantage of it to vote for the National Policy. Much will necessarily depend on the social and economical circumstances of the community to which the system is applied. In Manitoba the presence of a dominant railway company, and of Government influences exceptionally strong, seems to render the shield of the ballot specially needful; and it is to be feared that the motive of the Tory majority for the retention of open voting was not merely a desire that the franchise should be exercised as a trust.

A COMPANY of generous spirits bounding forward with the light of enthusiasm beaming in their faces in pursuit of an object invisible to all except themselves, and conjuring everybody to join them, but not to ask what it is that they are chasing—such is the aspect which the Imperial Federationists present to those who do not share their vision. With all possible respect for the gentlemen who have been holding a Federation meeting at Montreal, we cannot see any use in the further discussion of this question. If a practicable scheme has been formed, let it be brought without further delay before the Imperial Parliament, with which any measure or authoritative overture to the colonies must originate. If no practicable scheme has yet been formed the debate must stand adjourned; we cannot argue about a reverie or a sentiment. Mr. Freeman, writing in *Macmillan*, has imparted some novelty to the well-worn theme, first by showing that the very term Imperial Federation is devoid of sense, an Empire being the exact opposite of a Federation; and, secondly, by pointing out that a Federation of the Empire would necessarily include the two