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TOPICS OF THE WEEK.

If a government wishes to get into a mess it can hardly do better than bring forward a franchise bill for which there is no demand. The English Liberals under Lord John Russell did this in 1852. There ensued a series of floundering and miscarriages so mortifying as on one occasion actually to draw tears from Lord John in the House of Commons. At last the Liberals, having, owing to the absence of popular desire, no real force behind them, lost command of the question altogether; and the upshot of fifteen years of their effort was the Tory gerrymandering Bill of 1867. And now the two parties, locked in the embrace of hatred, have rolled together into household suffrage, from which at the outset both of them would have recoiled. Here, the Conservative leader finds that he has gratuitously stirred the question of manhood suffrage; and in manhood suffrage the movement which he has set on foot will probably end; for the Liberals, when power passes into their hands, will no more rest satisfied with his gerrymander than the Liberals in England have rested satisfied with the gerrymander of Lord Beaconsfield. It may be presumed that one of his objects in levelling all the Provincial differences of suffrage by a Dominion Act was centralization, towards which his policy always tends, his impression being that he is thus strengthening Federation. But here, with great deference to his political sagacity he is on a wrong tack. There was a good deal to be said in favour of a legislative union had not the separatism of Quebec put its veto on that plan. But the Federal system once adopted it is in scrupulously respecting the principle of the system that the hope of success lies. So long as each State or Province is assured that its internal independence is secure and that the Federal power will be exercised only for objects strictly Federal, there will be no danger of disaffection; nobody will want to break a tie of which the

advantage is manifest and of which the pressure never galls; but let it be felt that the Federal power is encroaching and trouble will at once arise. As has been said more than once before, Canadian statesmen misinterpreted the example which was so much before their eyes. Secession in the United States was not occasioned by weakness in the central government: it was occasioned by the apprehension that the central government would assume and exercise the power of interfering with the social institutions of the Southern States. It may be said, perhaps with truth, that there was a deeper cause than this, and that the radical antagonism between the two social elements rendered the conflict certain. But so far as political institutions were concerned, it was not defect of power in the central government, but apprehended encroachment, which gave birth to the Civil War. A Federal standing army large enough for coercion would of course have prevented secession in another way. But that was out of the question in the case of the United States as it is in ours.

LORD MELGUND in what he said about the attack on Poundmaker evidently did not mean to criticize Colonel Otter's military operations. What he meant was that he was sorry to see the commencement of an Indian War. Before the affair at Cut Knife an Indian War could not be said to have commenced. The Indians had committed depredations, as they were sure to do when the country was disturbed and plunder tempted. Some of them had joined Riel, attracted by the fighting and fancying that they were going to fight on the winning side. But they had not gone on the war path against us with malice prepense and on their own account. To chastise the offenders and make the whole race feel that authority had force on its side was necessary; but to make a regular war upon them was to open new and a very serious chapter in this history. Lord Melgund's warning was wise and seasonable. In dealing with these disinherited sons of the hunting-ground, the one object is to keep them quiet, which is to be done by satisfying them that to remain quiet is the way to being fed. To treat ignorant and irresponsible savages vindictively or engage in hostilities with them, in deference to a point of honour, would be almost as absurd as to deal in the same manner with the buffalo; and, if they are once got into the state of the Indians on the American frontier, there will for some time to come be no peace or security in the North-West.

IN Bruce the Scott Act people have been proceeding against offenders, and out of six prosecutions four have failed, owing, if we may believe the account in the *World*, to the unwillingness of the witnesses, whose memories conveniently failed them. This is just what might have been expected. When you make that a crime by law which in morality is no crime, and fail, as you must, to carry the conscience of the community with you, evidence will not be forthcoming: and if you drag men into court as witnesses against their neighbours they will shirk, and perhaps palter with their oaths, which is hardly a less evil than the sale of a glass of beer. An informer under the Scott Act is sure to be treated as a sneak. There are more drunken men to be seen on the street in Walkerton, we are told, since the Act came into operation than there were before, and liquor is sold on the sidewalks by people going about with bottles in their pockets. This is hardly an improvement on a licensed and well-regulated trade; but it is the inevitable result of sumptuary legislation which is not backed by the convictions of the people. Then follows a call for better machinery to enforce the Act: that is to say, for still more tyrannical violations of the rules of evidence and the first principles of justice. In the United States, the other day, the court found it necessary to overrule some enactments of the Prohibitionists which it was justly said would have set up a star-chamber in every district. All this is because some worthy people cannot bring themselves in their reforms to keep terms with human nature and allow fair play to the moral influences which have already banished the evil habits of former days and made native Canadians on the whole a very temperate people. In this country, so marked has been the progress of free self-reform that nothing but Prohibition can save drunkenness from gradual extinction.