

# THE WEEK.

Sixth Year.  
Vol. VI. No. 17.

TORONTO, FRIDAY, MARCH 29th, 1889.

\$3.00 per Annum  
Single Copies, 10 Cents.

## THE WEEK:

AN INDEPENDENT JOURNAL OF POLITICS LITERATURE SCIENCE AND ARTS.

TERMS:—One year, \$3.00; eight months, \$2.00; four months, \$1.00  
Subscriptions payable in advance.

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Subscribers in Great Britain and Ireland supplied, postage prepaid, on terms following:—One year, 12s. 6d.; half-year, 6s. 6d. Remittances by P. O. order or draft should be made payable and addressed to the Publisher.

No advertisements charged less than five lines. Address—T. R. CLOUGHES, Business Manager, 5 Jordan Street, Toronto.

C. BLACKETT ROBINSON, Publisher.

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All articles, contributions, and letters on matters pertaining to the editorial department should be addressed to the Editor, and not to any other person who may be supposed to be connected with the paper.

ONE of the most important questions discussed in the Ontario Legislature during the session just closed was that relating to the teaching of English in the Public Schools in the districts in which the French preponderate. If the British North America Act deprives the Government of all jurisdiction in the matter of text-books in the Separate Schools, as Mr. Mowat contends, that is, we suppose, the end of that matter. It is a great pity, however, that it should be so, and as Mr. Meredith quoted a clause of the Separate School Act itself, which seems to make the question doubtful, it is to be hoped that a legal decision will be pressed for. As to the Public Schools in Eastern Ontario, one of the most perplexing things in the case is the contradictory nature of the evidence. The Minister of Education testifies, on the authority of the Inspectors, that English is now taught in every school. On the other hand, the testimony of different persons, apparently competent and reliable, is adduced to prove that in some schools English is not taught at all, and the teacher is incapable of teaching it, while in others the teaching is so inadequate and perfunctory that it is little more than a farce. This is a question of fact and should be promptly settled. It is a pity, therefore, that the Minister of Education was not more precise and minute in his statements. The general impression, we feel bound to say, left upon unprejudiced minds is that the English teaching in many of the schools is, if it exists at all, scarcely worthy of the name. The contention of Mr. Meredith and others that the teaching should in every case be done in English, seem to us, as we have before said, altogether impracticable. Teaching must be done by means of language, and common sense says by means of a language known to both teacher and pupil. On the other hand, it is but a truism to say that the English language should be thoroughly, systematically and constantly taught in all the Public Schools of an English province. There is too much reason to believe that this is not now done, and a remedy should be applied at once.

IT is the duty of all governments to prevent immoralities in trade. The practice of selling staple articles under cost for the sake of attracting trade is immoral. Therefore the Government of Canada should not suppress the trade combinations, whose avowed object is to prevent the selling of certain lines of goods in which they are interested under cost. Such is, reduced to syllogistic form, about the argument used by Mr. Hemming in another column. It is also substantially that of Mr. Blain and other speakers and writers who are opposed to the passage of the Anti-Combines Bill, now before the Commons. Apart from the main question at issue, it may not be amiss to direct attention to what seem to be weak points in the several links of this chain of reasoning. In the first place, it is not quite clear that the major premise can be accepted as a universal proposition. Much will depend on the meaning attached to the word "immorality." There are, we fear, many practices in trade which would fail to stand the test of any strict standard of morality, with which it would be worse than folly for a Government or Legislature to attempt to interfere. When, for instance, a dozen or more competitors publish flaming advertisements, each claiming that his goods in a certain line are better in quality or cheaper in price than those of his competitors, it is pretty clear that at least eleven of the twelve are making immoral statements; but it would hardly be wise on the part of a Government to try to fix the guilt and inflict punishment. Something must always be left for public opinion and personal conscience to do in such cases. Then, as to the second proposition, stronger reasons than have yet been given will, we think, be needed to make it clear that selling goods under cost, for advertising or competitive purposes, is an immorality of the kind which Government is bound to legislate against. And in the third place, even if we should waive all question as to the soundness of the first two propositions, the crucial question would still arise, whether the best and proper way of putting down the immoral practices is to put monopoly powers into the hands of a combination of interested traders.

WHILE we thus write we are far from wishing to scout the idea that the solution of many of the vexed trade questions of the day may be found in a system of carefully regulated and controlled combinations. We have in a previous discussion admitted that the best solution of the problem may yet be found in this direction. It must be evident to all that old trade methods are giving way, old economical theories breaking down. The doctrine that free competition would settle everything has been tried and found wanting, and trading communities are now gradually feeling their way to some better system. Combination in the learned professions is now legalized in many countries. Some of us may even yet be unconvinced that it is either just or wise to permit a "combine" of doctors or lawyers to say who may practise law or medicine, and to forbid all others under pains and penalties. But we do not see any ground on which those who accept incorporated Law and Medical Societies as incarnations of political wisdom, can object to allowing traders and manufacturers to regulate their business on similar principles. The claim of those whose special interests are at stake to protection is as sound, and the plea of safeguarding the unsophisticated public as valid in the one case as in the other. There are, of course, immense difficulties to be overcome not the least of which must be the difficulty in setting a limit to the process when once the principle is admitted. It is, for instance, just as annoying for the retailer who wishes to sell at a fair profit, or for the clerk or the labourer who wishes a fair day's pay for a fair day's work, to find himself underbitten and pauperized by others, as for the wholesale merchant. The grievance is as real in the one case as the other though the persons affected may be fewer and the interests involved of smaller dimensions. But leaving all these questions out of the account for the present, we can but reiterate our opinion that the rights and liberties of the subject are infringed upon by any combination of rivals which interferes between him and those with whom he deals or wishes to deal. If combinations are to have monopolies they must be legalized and the regulations necessary for their protection must at any rate be enforced under forms of law, not by a system of boycotting.

THE decision of the Governments of Canada and Newfoundland to continue the *Modus vivendi* fishery licenses for another year will be approved by all Canadians of moderation and right feeling. During the first year after the incoming of a new Administration at Washington it would have been most unfortunate to have had a revival of old irritations and controversies to any greater extent than may be absolutely necessary in the firm maintenance of undoubted Canadian rights. The happy absence of occasions of misunderstanding and ill-feeling during the period in which the *Modus vivendi* was in operation augurs well for the effect of its temporary renewal. Whether the Government has received any intimation, official or unofficial, that the new President and Cabinet, at Washington, would not be unfavourably disposed towards a renewal of negotiations with a view to a final settlement of the vexatious fishery dispute, will be learned in due time. The continuance of the licensing system will afford every facility for friendly exchange of opinion, and, if possible, reconciliation of conflicting views and interests. The change of attitude on the part of the Dominion Government affords the Opposition an opportunity, which they will not be slow to use, to taunt the Government with instability of purpose, and it can easily be believed that Sir John and some of his supporters will now regret the strength of their language in opposing Mr. Laurier's motion. The fact, however, remains that that motion was, as we pointed out at the time, singularly inopportune. The Government would have been very short-sighted to commit itself unnecessarily before learning the tenor of the new President's inaugural and the *personnel* of his Cabinet. It might have been wise, however, to have contented itself with the stereotyped reply, "Under consideration." A shrewd suspicion will no doubt prevail, unless authoritatively dispelled, that there is some connection between the visit of the British High Commissioner and the changed policy of the Government.

GLOOMY was the picture of the present condition of Canada set before the citizens of Toronto by Mr. Davies in his Shaftesbury Hall oration the other evening. The worst of the matter is that the truthfulness of some, at least, of its main features must be reluctantly admitted. However prosperous may be the state of the three or four cities which are the chief centres of our manufactures and commerce, it can hardly be denied that the increase of population, both in the older Provinces and in the North-West, during the last decade, has fallen far below what seemed reasonable expectation; that the public debt has swelled to almost formidable proportions; and that a most enervating flow of some of the best elements of our population across the border is still kept up. But it is one thing to establish the facts, it is another and a very different thing to connect them with their true causes. It is in the latter attempt that the logic of Mr. Davies, like that of Sir Richard Cartwright and others of the Opposition who follow the same lines, appears, to say the least, at its weakest. It would be idle to deny that the general policy of an Administration, and particularly its policy in such an important matter as that of taxation, has something, and often a good deal, to do with determining the prosperity, or the opposite, of the country. But those who know how narrow, comparatively, is often all the divergence between the system of a so-called Conservative and that of a so-called Liberal Government in Canada, when in power, will be slow to believe that the present condition of things would have been very widely different had Mr. Mackenzie or Mr. Blake been at the head of the Government during the last ten years. To most thoughtful people it will seem more probable that the chief causes of what, it may be hoped, is but a temporary check are to be found elsewhere, especially in the immense wealth and enterprise of the great nation by our side.

ONE might, for instance, be ready to admit that the Liberal plan of a slower construction of the main line of the Canadian Pacific Railway, combined with a more vigorous extension of branches, in all directions, might have been wiser as a colonizing policy, but it will require some more cogent arguments than have yet been brought forward to convince a calmly reflective mind that the difference in procedure would or could have availed to fill up