

THE POLITICAL HISTORY OF CANADA.

1840 TO 1855.

LECTURE BY SIR FRANCIS HINCKS.

(From the Gazette.)

On Wednesday night a large audience assembled in the Mechanics Hall to listen to the lecture by Sir Francis Hincks, on the political history of Canada from the Union of Upper and Lower Canada to 1855, delivered under the auspices of the St. Patrick's National Association.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,—When I was honored with an invitation from the St. Patrick's National Association to deliver them a lecture, it occurred to me that I might, without impropriety, avail myself of the opportunity to carry into effect a long-cherished purpose, and to place on record what circumstances have enabled me to know of the history of Canadian parties during the struggle for, and the ultimate establishment of Parliamentary government, and, during the succeeding years, up to the disruption of the party which had obtained the victory in that memorable contest.

EVENTS BEFORE THE UNION OF 1841.

In the year 1833 the Earl of Durham was appointed Governor-General of the North-American Provinces, and High Commissioner to enquire into and to report on their political institutions. The Earl of Durham arrived at Quebec on the 27th of May, and embarked on his return to England on the 1st of November, 1838, having been little over five months in the country.

LORD DURHAM'S REPORT.

In recommending the union of the Provinces the Earl of Durham was chiefly influenced by his conviction that there was an irreconcilable feud between the Canadians of French and British origin, and as he was thoroughly convinced that it was absolutely necessary that the future government of the country should be conducted in accordance with the will of the majority, he came to the conclusion that the two Provinces must be reunited.

same number of representatives." Lord Durham himself observes in his report:—"I am averse to any plan that has been proposed for giving an equal number of representatives to the two Provinces in order to attain the temporary and of numbering the French, because I think the same object will be obtained without any violation of the principles of representation, and without any such appearance of injustice in the scheme as would set public opinion both in England and America strongly against it, and because when emigration shall have increased the English population in the upper Province, the adoption of such a principle would operate to defeat the very purpose it is intended to serve. It appears to me that any such electoral arrangement founded on the present Provincial divisions would tend to defeat the purposes of union and perpetuate the idea of disunion."

This change might be effected by a single dispatch containing such instructions, or if any legal enactment were requisite, it would only be one that would render it necessary that the official acts of the Governor should be countersigned by some public functionary. This would induce responsibility for every act of the Government, and as a natural consequence it would necessitate the substitution of a system of administration by means of competent heads of department for the present rude machinery of an executive council.

LORD SYDENHAM'S GOVERNMENT.

When the Imperial Government decided to carry them into effect, they selected for the office of Governor-General a Cabinet Minister, Mr. Charles Poulett Thomson, who had represented Manchester, one of the most liberal English constituencies in the House of Commons. Before advertising to the critical period of the Government of Mr. Thomson, afterwards Lord Sydenham, it seems desirable to consider the state of public opinion in the two Provinces. At that time the Reform party consisted of the whole French-Canadian population, an equal proportion of the Irish Roman Catholics, and a British minority equal, if not superior in numbers, to the French-Canadian and Irish Catholic Conservatives.

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was virtually an ultra (in Lower Canada, and owing to the position of parties, almost as powerful in Upper Canada. He had divided the Conservative party in that Province, and in addition to a Conservative minority, had as his supporters the Reformers of Upper Canada and the British or Conservative party of Lower Canada, while the opposition to his government consisted of the French Canadian and their British contingent, and the majority of the Conservatives of Upper Canada, parties having no sympathy whatever with each other. The tone of the press affords a good indication of the state of feeling. The Montreal Herald declared that Lord Durham's report was "the most luminous, comprehensive and best arranged document on the affairs of the colonies which has ever been submitted to the British Parliament."

THE LATE ROBERT BALDWIN.

All the circumstances of Mr. Baldwin's acceptance of a seat in the Executive Council under Sir Francis Head four years previously, and his subsequent resignation being well known, the offer of office was a virtual declaration to the country that the Government under the Union would be conducted in accordance with the wishes of the majority. Mr. Baldwin's political friends were at the time supporters of the Government, and he did not feel justified in refusing the offer of office. His opinion, concurred in by his political friends, was that until after the elections under the Union Act, it could not be expected that the Governor-General could form an efficient administration for the United Province. The Governor had encountered warm opposition from the French-Canadians, and there can be no doubt that his belief was that, by the Union of the British party in Lower Canada with the moderate Conservatives and Reformers in Upper Canada, a working majority would be obtained in the new House of Assembly.

It is no doubt appears strange that any one acquainted with Canadian history could lecture thereon without bearing testimony to the labors of Robert Baldwin, but Mr. Laurier, although professing to review the history of the Liberal party in this country, seems to have been of the opinion that he could do so satisfactorily by ignoring the existence of the Upper Canada section of that party, and by keeping in abeyance the political questions which led to the disruption of that party, although several of them were deeply interesting to the people of Lower Canada. It is to be regretted that no doubt that his memory has been, and will continue to be, held in high esteem by his countrymen.

pledged to support his Government. Some of the loyalists, but notably Terrebonne, for which Mr. Lafontaine, the notable French Canadian leader, was a candidate, were carried by violence, armed bands of non-residents having been marched to a polling place fixed at a remote corner of the county, at a distance from the centres of the population. The consequence of this policy was the increased hostility of the French-Canadians to the Government. On the meeting of the Legislature it was found that the Reformers of Lower Canada, instead of having a majority, as had been fully anticipated, of about twenty, were only equal to the number of their opponents. In Upper Canada the Conservative members, who acknowledged Sir Allan MacNab as their leader were few in number, while the Reformers had a very decided majority. On the meeting of Parliament Mr. Baldwin summoned a meeting of the members of the Liberal party from both sections of the now United Province. The chief object of the meeting was to ascertain whether the Reformers of the two sections were satisfied with the composition of the Government, and there was almost a unanimous declaration of want of confidence. Mr. Baldwin thereupon recommended to the Governor a reconstruction of the administration, and on his advice being rejected, his late colleagues and their friends for the course of proceeding which he adopted, a course which no one would have more readily condemned than Mr. Baldwin himself, if the administration had been formed in the usual way. The union of the two Provinces, the members of which were not even personally acquainted, caused an abnormal condition of affairs. Mr. Baldwin had been invited by the Governor to accept a seat in the Executive Council in February, 1841, in the following terms:—"I am called upon to name an Executive Council for this Province without delay, which at present will be composed exclusively of the chief officers of the Government, and I have therefore included your name in the list."

SIR LOUIS LAFONTAINE AND DR. TRACY.

This is a convenient opportunity to do justice to another highly valued friend, the late Sir Louis Lafontaine. The great French Canadian statesman was of course better known in Montreal than Mr. Baldwin, and many are living in our midst, both old supporters and old opponents. I can hardly believe that there is a single individual in the ranks of either party who would admit that Kaye was correct in attributing to Sir Louis Lafontaine "indecision and infirmity of purpose." I can declare for my own part that I never met a man less open to such an imputation. It is true that Kaye acknowledges that "his better qualities were natural to him; his worse were the growth of circumstances." It was a just and honorable man; his motives were above all suspicion. Strange, however, that Kaye could believe that such a man could be elevated to the leadership of "an important and united party" without any particular fitness, and "by the force rather of his moral than his intellectual qualities." When lecturing under the auspices of St. Patrick's National Association I can't omit paying a just tribute to the memory of one who took an active part in the great struggle for Constitutional Government at the most gloomy period of the contest, but who did not live to share in the rewards of victory. I allude to our distinguished countryman Dr. Tracy, who was cut off in the prime of life, and in the full vigor of his faculties. I had not the advantage of Dr. Tracy's personal acquaintance, but from the period of my first residence in Montreal in 1844, I and my family were privileged to enjoy the friendship of his sister, Mrs. Charles Wilson, who still survives, honored and beloved by the whole Irish population for her intellectual, as well as her many amiable qualities. When in better health than she has of late years enjoyed, she was the most active supporter of every project suggested for the benefit of the Irish population. Those who visit the cemetery are reminded by the beautiful monument erected to the memory of Dr. Tracy, of his patriotic services to the country of his adoption.

POLITICAL COMBINATIONS AFTER THE UNION.

I must revert to the period of our history when a political alliance was formed between Mr. Lafontaine and Mr. Baldwin, which was only dissolved when they retired from public life, about the same time in the year 1851. During the year 1840, in the early part of which Mr. Baldwin accepted office, there were no political events of any importance. There were some communications between the leaders of the Reform party in Upper Canada and the principal French-Canadians, the object being to ascertain how far it would be possible for the Reformers of the two Provinces to act in concert. The Lower Canadian Liberals were unable to accept the Union Act and were consequently in direct opposition to the Government in which the Upper Canada Reformers very generally professed confidence. Unfortunately for the reputation of Lord Sydenham, there was not a fair representation of Lower Canada in the first Union Parliament, and for this to some extent at least, he must be held personally responsible. In the Union bill, it was provided that "the incorporated cities of Quebec and Montreal" should be represented, but in the Act, as finally passed, a clause was introduced empowering "the Governor to define the boundaries of the several cities and towns named in the Act. Under this authority Lord Sydenham, by a stroke of his pen, disfranchised two-thirds of the inhabitants of Montreal and Quebec, inhabiting the suburbs, and secured the return of members

pledged to support his Government. Some of the loyalists, but notably Terrebonne, for which Mr. Lafontaine, the notable French Canadian leader, was a candidate, were carried by violence, armed bands of non-residents having been marched to a polling place fixed at a remote corner of the county, at a distance from the centres of the population. The consequence of this policy was the increased hostility of the French-Canadians to the Government. On the meeting of the Legislature it was found that the Reformers of Lower Canada, instead of having a majority, as had been fully anticipated, of about twenty, were only equal to the number of their opponents. In Upper Canada the Conservative members, who acknowledged Sir Allan MacNab as their leader were few in number, while the Reformers had a very decided majority. On the meeting of Parliament Mr. Baldwin summoned a meeting of the members of the Liberal party from both sections of the now United Province. The chief object of the meeting was to ascertain whether the Reformers of the two sections were satisfied with the composition of the Government, and there was almost a unanimous declaration of want of confidence. Mr. Baldwin thereupon recommended to the Governor a reconstruction of the administration, and on his advice being rejected, his late colleagues and their friends for the course of proceeding which he adopted, a course which no one would have more readily condemned than Mr. Baldwin himself, if the administration had been formed in the usual way. The union of the two Provinces, the members of which were not even personally acquainted, caused an abnormal condition of affairs. Mr. Baldwin had been invited by the Governor to accept a seat in the Executive Council in February, 1841, in the following terms:—"I am called upon to name an Executive Council for this Province without delay, which at present will be composed exclusively of the chief officers of the Government, and I have therefore included your name in the list."

POSITION OF PARTIES IN 1841.

The effect of Mr. Baldwin's resignation was to place him in opposition to his old colleagues, all of whom, Reformers as well as Conservatives, retained office, and although frequently defeated, owing to combination of parties having little sympathy with each other, the government succeeded in getting through the session without serious difficulty. There were at least five or six parties in the House, three from each Province. In Upper Canada there was first, the old Conservative party led by Sir Allan MacNab; 2nd, the Ministerial party composed chiefly of Reformers, with a few Moderate Conservatives under the leadership of Mr. Attorney-General Draper and Mr. Secretary Harrison; 3rd, the Reformers who followed the lead of Mr. Baldwin, numbering six to eight. In Lower Canada there was—1st, the Reformers of French and Irish origin with their allies of the British party, led by Mr. Morin, Mr. Neilson and Mr. Aylwin; 2nd, the British party including the Conservative French Canadians and Irish elected to support Lord Sydenham's policy, and almost uniformly doing so that session, although several of them had a decided bias in favor of a liberal policy while others were as decidedly conservative. I may mention the names of two representative men, both deservedly respected, and both at the time members for the city of Montreal, the Hon. Geo. Moffat and Benjamin Holmes. A year later those gentlemen were completely separated as to party connection, the former being as decidedly on the Conservative as the latter was on the Liberal side. At the period to which I am referring, both were supporters of the Administration. The division lists of the session of 1841 cannot fail to strike any one acquainted with the state of parties as extraordinary. Mr. Baldwin on several occasions voted with considerable majorities in opposition to the Government, while as frequently he was in insignificant minorities. There was a decided tendency towards a coalition with the reformers of French origin on the part of Sir Allan MacNab and the Upper Canada Conservatives. The Ministerial strength lay in the support which it received from the British party of Lower Canada, and from the majority of the Upper Canada Reformers. On more than one occasion, especially the election bill, the latter followed Mr. Baldwin's lead, and the bill was carried against the Government in the Commons but was thrown out by the Legislative Council. There was a great contest over the Municipal Bill, which was the most important measure of the session, and it was on one occasion saved from defeat by the casting vote of the Chairman of the Committee of the Whole. Sir Allan MacNab and his Conservative friends, and Mr. Neilson and many Lower Canadian Reformers were wholly opposed to municipal institutions, while Mr. Baldwin was desirous of amending the Government bill so as to make it more liberal. The Government announced its determination on what I thought at the time, and still think justifiable grounds, to withdraw the bill, if any important amendment were carried, and on this as on several other occasions as the session advanced, I considered it my duty to support the