

which illustrates well enough what we are saying. There have been from time to time a number of defalcations by municipal treasurers, and it has usually been found that their accounts have been audited in a perfunctory manner. Last session the Government appointed a new official to be known as the provincial municipal auditor, whose duty it is to frame rules respecting the number and forms of books of account to be kept by the treasurers, the system of book-keeping to be followed by them, and a provincial audit of their accounts. What does such a provision imply? Simply a want of faith in the power of municipal bodies to manage their own business. The ratepayers are treated as if they were children. How is a healthy and sturdy manhood to be developed unless people are held responsible for the results of their own laxity or negligence? If councilmen are unfit for their places let their constituents select others who are competent; and if the people will not take the care and trouble to do this, by all means let them suffer the penalty, and let them suffer it in their pockets—oftentimes the most sensitive part of the human organization.

It is against tendencies of this kind that we should set our faces. In the interpretation of the British North America Act the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council has steadily favoured the claims of the provinces. The interpretation of a written constitution is not at all a mere matter of the application of legal rules; it is a question of

State policy, and decentralisation has been the aim of the Privy Council where there is a conflict of jurisdiction. There was such a conflict for years, and Provincial autonomy was a rallying cry in the struggle between the Dominion and the provinces. If provincial autonomy is a good thing, if its maintenance is a worthy object of patriotic effort, local autonomy within the province should be equally dear. In local bodies we have the nurseries of civil and political freedom.

The argument for particularism is not a plea for anarchy or national disintegration. In its application to the actual political organization of Canada and of Ontario the question is admittedly one of limits; but the true principle is that where a function is essentially local in character, where the interest in it is predominantly local, where its performance is quite within the competence of local bodies, these should not be interfered with by the general government. As regards the private citizen, the State has its own place and its own proper duties. These also are necessary for the welfare of society. Aristotle tells us that "Man is by nature a political animal," and further, that "apart from the State he has neither safety nor freedom." But the undue extension of State authority, the meddling interference of the Government with individual action, is an evil against which we must be constantly on guard if we would secure the continued development of our civilization in the onward path of progress.

*R. W. Shannon.*

