

THE TRUE WITNESS AND CATHOLIC CHRONICLE

MR. MERCIER SPEAKS.

Nothing New in His Programme.

The Principles of the Interprovincial Conference Restated—All Provinces and Little Dominions.

The Club National held its eighth annual banquet at the Windsor Hotel, Montreal, on Wednesday, July 2nd, the Hon. Mr. Mercier being the chief guest. The attendance was large, more than six hundred persons sitting down. The chair was occupied by Mr. Lomer Gouin, the son-in-law of Mr. Mercier, and president of the club. Among those present were the Hons. W. Laurier, M.P., F. Langevin, M.P., Joseph Shehry, M.P.P., H. Stearns, Speaker of the Legislative Council, Arthur Boyer, C. Langlois, Senator Pelleter, E. Robidoux; Messrs. W. Provost, G. Rose, J. K. Ward, members of the Legislative Council; James McShane, M.L.A., B. Osgood, M.P., F. X. Lemieux, M.L.A., and R. Beagrand.

After the dinner the usual loyal toasts and preliminary proceedings having been disposed of by the secretary, Mr. J. G. de la Durasteyre, read letters and telegrams of regret at inability to attend from Hon. Edward Blake, Hon. Oliver Mowat, Hon. W. S. Fielding, Hon. A. G. Blair, Sir Richard Cartwright, Mr. J. D. Edgar, M.P., Hon. Pierre Garneau, Hon. George Duhamel, and others.

The toast "Canada" was proposed by Mr. Desmarais, M.P.P., and Mr. W. A. West, and concluded with the name of the.

Hon. W. Laurier, who said he thought the elections in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Ontario had shown the true feeling of the people, for the endorsement in turn of Blair, Fielding, Mowat, and Mercier could not but be taken as proof that the people were tired of Tory rule. He was glad to see Mr. Mercier present, and regretted the absence of Mowat, Fielding, and Blair. The Liberals of each province rejoiced at the success of each other, for provincial autonomy was the unity of Canada. Some of Mr. Mercier's opponents had made a great fuss about the French Canadians, alleging that they had no common interest with their English speaking compatriots. That was not correct, for though they might speak another language and belong to another church in their desire to advance the common and material interests of the country. They had no desire to build up a French nation on the shores of St. Lawrence as some people said; but they did desire to see their country go ahead. Any friction there was in the working of the confederation was due to the centralizing tendencies of the Federal Government, which sought to reduce their provincial autonomy.

After predicting a great victory for the Liberal party in Dominion politics at an early date, Mr. Laurier sat down amidst loud applause.

Ald. Prefontaine also spoke to the toast and enlarged on the benefits of unrestricted reciprocity.

Mr. J. N. Greenfield said the English speaking minority had rights and did not want more, but this was a British province and they were entitled to fair play. He was confident that when the time came for the Dominion campaign they would go on to victory under Hon. Mr. Laurier or Hon. Edward Blake (applause), or whoever it might be.

Ald. Hainville, M.L.A., and Mr. John Chaffers proposed the toast of

"THE PROVINCES,"

with which was coupled the name of Hon. Honore Mercier, who on rising was received with loud and prolonged applause. After a few preliminary observations he said that he claimed that the toast of the provinces, always in order, was especially significant in view of the victories gained by their allies in Ontario, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, and by the Nationalists in this province on the 17th of last month, and contended that those successes were a triumph for provincial autonomy. The autonomy of the provinces he held to be an essential condition of their existence as well as of the existence of the Confederation itself. The day the provinces ceased to be autonomous, they would cease to be, and the day they ceased to be the Confederation would disappear, giving way to an unknown system, which some called legislative union, and others Imperial federation, either of which meant the death of the provinces. Those then who wanted to maintain Confederation should be in favor of maintaining the rights of the provinces, and those two propositions he made the leading time of his speech.

The powers of the provinces were constitutionally limited but though they were so, it was the duty to defend them, and to refuse to permit any violation of them. These powers had influence on all the essential matters of the existence of the people, their religious, civil, municipal rights, education, administration of justice; in fact, on all the principal matters which the province is interested in. He affirmed that those rights constituted the essential basis of the autonomy of the provinces, and that upon the exercise of these rights their political existence depended. He affirmed also that the provinces should be left entirely free to act up in matters over which they had jurisdiction after a reference to the vote question. Mr. Mercier said he did not believe it was wise to leave the question of the constitutionality of provincial laws to the judgment of the Federal power, and consequently to political men belonging to parties hostile to those of the provinces. The right of dissolution should be left to the courts, for then alone would it be possible to find impartiality. Questions of constitutionality, being naturally questions of law, should belong to the juries of the country for decision. He maintained that the four provinces be named earlier were in union and had declared their programme at the Interprovincial Conference that unanimity could not fail to secure ultimate victory in Federal affairs. He repeated that doubtful question as between the Federal authorities and the provinces should be

LEFT TO THE COUNTS.

Referring to the Provincial Railways Mr. Mercier said the Federal Government by its act of 1882, declaring that whenever certain public works, such as railways should be devoted to be in the general interest of Canada, they should be considered as federal works, had committed a formal violation of the resolution on the subject adopted by the Quebec conference of 1884. This resolution declared works of public interest to be those which were carried on as much in the east as in the west, while the actual law permits the Federal Government to ignore private interests and to declare to be public works railways constructed without the help of the Federal Government and built entirely within the limits of a province. They should also seek to remove all doubts as to the nomination of stipendiary, police, district or other magistrates, to make clear the rights of the provinces to collect import duties on legal proceedings, to define the privileges and immunities of the provincial legislatures; to assure to the province control of its inland fisheries; and to secure to the lieutenant-governor-in-council the power of pardoning and remitting fines on all subjects of provincial jurisdiction in the same manner and with the same powers as are given the Queen and the庶民 General in respect of the jurisdiction of the Imperial and Federal

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