

but even then, despite the lessons taught them by the past forty years, British statesmen had serious doubts as to the wisdom of granting responsible government, in the full meaning of the term, to the people of Canada. Though Lord John Russell was far from conceding in its entirety the system as understood and contended for by Mr. Baldwin, Mr. Lafontaine, Mr. Howe, and other eminent Canadian statesmen of those days, yet the effect of his policy was to virtually inaugurate responsible government in these colonies. Personal government was practically at an end, from the moment the principle was admitted that the advisers of the Governors should be changed from motives of public policy; and that they should govern in accordance with the well understood wishes of the people. Lord Metcalfe, on the question of patronage, brought himself into collision with his Government, and in order to obtain a majority in support of his views, exerted his personal influence at the elections which followed the crisis; but as it has been well observed elsewhere, the advantage which he then gained, was dearly purchased by the circumstance that the Parliamentary opposition was no longer directed merely against the advisers of the Governor, but against the Governor himself, and the British Government, of which he was the organ. The time had passed when Governors could make themselves the leaders of political parties. The action of Lord Metcalfe in this particular had certainly its effect in settling for ever the principles on which the government of Canada should be conducted. When Lord Elgin was appointed Governor-General of Canada, he received instructions to act generally upon the advice of the Executive Council, and to receive as members of that body those persons who might be pointed out to him as entitled to become so by their possessing the confidence of the Assembly. From that day to this, the representatives of the Queen in this

country have consistently adhered to the principles of governing in accordance with the well-understood wishes of the people, as expressed through Parliament. In these later times on the occasion of a very perplexing crisis in the political affairs of Canada, Lord Dufferin well defined the duty of a Governor under the system of government that now prevails in the Dominion.

‘My only guiding star in the conduct and maintenance of my official relations with your public men is the Parliament of Canada. . . . To those men alone whom the absolute will of the Confederated Parliament of the Dominion may assign to me as my responsible advisers can I give my confidence. Whether they are the heads of this party or that must be a matter of indifference to the Governor-General. So long as they are maintained by Parliament in their positions, so long is he bound to give them his unreserved confidence, to defer to their advice, and loyally to assist them with his counsels.’

The Union of 1841 was, therefore, the commencement of a new era in the political history of British North America—an era during which all the mistakes of the old colonial system were retrieved. For half a century Downing Street had been omnipotent, and literally ‘meddled only to muddle;’ but with the new condition of things, British statesmen showed an anxiety in the other direction, of only exercising a nominal control over Canadian affairs, and conceding to the Canadians all those measures which they considered necessary for the self-government of the country. After having refused for years an elective Legislative Council to Lower Canada, the British Government granted it without demur to the United Provinces. As a result of the introduction of a liberal system of self-government, municipal institutions spread over the face of the country, and freed the Legislature from a vast amount of parish work, whilst it stimulated the energies of