

CANADA.

explained, the mere negotiation of an adjournment would not have advanced matters in any degree, unless the issues relative to the future proceedings of the Committee could have been settled at the same time; but the divergencies of opinion upon these points were irreconcilable, and could never have been satisfactorily dealt with except by the House in full Session.

If then my choice lay—which seems to be admitted—between a short prorogation and a barren adjournment for a similar period, I do not think it can be disputed that the former was the preferable of the two.

Of course it was always open to me to have dismissed my Ministers, and to have taken my chance of Parliament approving my conduct, but I did not feel myself warranted in hazarding such a step on the data before me. Indeed, the rashness and injustice of the proceeding would probably have aroused such a feeling of dissatisfaction in the minds of what I have no reason to know may not prove the majority of the constituencies that there would have been a great chance—if Sir John and his friends came at all decently out of the affair—of their being borne back into office on the shoulders of the people. If wholly exculpated, your Lordship can imagine what my position would become in presence of the reaction that would have ensued. At all events, as I told the remonstrant members in my reply, I was not prepared by publicly withdrawing my confidence from my Ministers, to proclaim to Canada, to America, and to Europe that I believed untried men guilty of such atrocious crimes as those imputed to them. It is, however, not necessary to debate this line of conduct, as no responsible person in this country has ventured to recommend it.

But though not directly suggesting the dismissal of my Ministers, it has been very generally contended that I should have considered them under a ban, and should have ceased to act on their advice, though still retaining them in office. The establishment of a relationship of this kind between the Crown and its Ministers would be a novel fact in constitutional history, and might have proved difficult of execution. I was to go to my Council and say to them, "Gentlemen, you state that in your opinion the Crown has pledged itself to Parliament to prorogue on a certain day; you assert as a matter of fact that relying on this pledge sixty or seventy members are not in their places, and that to allow the House to proceed to business in their absence would be a gross impropriety, to which you would not consent, and that in view of this circumstance as my Constitutional Advisers, placed about me by the will of Parliament, you unanimously advise me to prorogue. Well, gentlemen, when Parliament last voted, you possessed a commanding majority: whether you have lost the confidence of Parliament or not I cannot tell. You say you have not. Others say you have. Your political opponents have brought grave accusations against you. You are therefore under a ban. You have forfeited my confidence. I do not intend to take your advice, except on mere questions of administration, but—pray retain your places." To which, of course, these gentlemen would have replied:—"We are highly sensible of your Excellency's forbearance, perhaps you will favour us with a list of subjects on which you will accept our recommendation, as well as an index expurgatorius of those which are tabooed. The arrangement will lighten our responsibilities, our salaries will remain the same, and our honour"—I cannot exactly conjecture how the sentence would have concluded. But the suggestion that my refusal to take their advice on prorogation would not have been tantamount to a dismissal of them, is too untenable to need refutation.

Before, however, closing this head of the discussion it may be well to examine the grounds on which it is alleged I ought to have withdrawn my confidence from Sir John Macdonald and his colleagues.

In order to answer this question, we must inquire what I had to go upon? There were Mr. Huntington's statements as displayed in his motion—but these statements were not statements of facts, but of conclusions drawn from facts within Mr. Huntington's knowledge perhaps, but not within mine, and offered no safe foothold. Next there were Sir Hugh Allan's statements, but upon which was I to found myself,—upon those in Sir Hugh's letters, in which he admits there was a good deal of "inaccurate" language, or upon those in his affidavit? If upon the latter, could I have pronounced the Government guilty? Then there were Mr. McMullen's statements,—but these have been much questioned, and many of them have been contradicted. I do not think the people of Canada would be willing to allow the reputation of any of their representative men to be staked upon evidence of this nature. Lastly, there were Sir George Cartier's letter, and Sir John Macdonald's telegram. In respect to these documents, I would merely observe that, suspicious as they might appear, no man would have been justified in acting upon any conclusion in regard to them, until it had been shown with what transactions they were connected. There is as yet no evidence to prove that the sums