

dependence on the Imperial Government of Great Britain. Political thinkers who were liberal enough to be influenced by other considerations than the party questions of the hour, saw that such relations were indisputably hostile to the interest of all the provinces concerned, which could hope for a position of importance on the American continent only by such unrestricted commercial and social intercourse as might ultimately weld them into one people. It was evidently also in the interest of the Imperial Government that the colonial minister in London, instead of being obliged to deal with a number of petty states, should be able to correspond with a single government representative of them all. But the circumstances which led immediately to the confederation of the British American provinces cannot be understood without a brief reference to the previous history of Canada.

When Canada was ceded to Great Britain it was all embraced under one province, extending somewhat indefinitely into the West, and known by the name of the province of Quebec. In 1791 the western section of the province, which had meanwhile been populated by English settlers, was separated into an independent province, with British institutions, while the eastern section continued to retain its original French character. These two provinces, of Upper Canada or Canada West, and Lower Canada or Canada East, remained separate till 1840, when they were united into one province, styled the Province of Canada, in the hope of allaying the political discontent which had culminated in the rebellion of 1837. In this province, down till the period of confederation, ten years ago, politicians had been divided into two parties, one of which was distinguished by the name of *Conservatives*, while their opponents were known as *Liberals* or *Reformers*, though commonly dubbed, in more familiar style, *Clear Grits* in Upper Canada, and *Rouges* among the French of the Lower Province. The history of the struggle between these two parties may be read still with a little more than ordinary human perseverance, but by no human intelligence can it be comprehended. Its incomprehensibility does not indeed arise from the absence of any question suffi-

cient to call the political combatants to arms, for at times there was a measure of solid importance flouted by one of the parties as a standard round which its forces rallied. But even in such cases it is impossible to see why the measure should have been taken under protection by its advocates rather than by its opponents. The student of the period, whose imagination cannot now be fired by the heat of its burnt-out passions, fails, even after patient investigation, to discover any general principle which uniformly inspired either party, and breathed a soul into the particular measures for which it fought. The rapidly changing administrations of those years show, at this distance, a scene not unlike a well-known juvenile sport, in which boys divide themselves into two sets, for the mere enjoyment of a tug against each other's strength, and, after one set is victorious, divide themselves again and again, till they get worn out. Unfortunately in contests of this kind, bloodless though they be, mere mortals, unlike the ghostly heroes of Walhalla, do at last become exhausted. This exhaustion came all the more naturally upon the combatants in the political arena of Old Canada, owing to the circumstance that for some time neither party was cheered by any decisive victory. In truth, their struggles assumed a serio-comic aspect at times, as one administration after another attempted to carry on the business of the country by a majority which occasionally reduced itself to a unit, and was likely to become a vanishing fraction or a minus quantity whenever a test question was pressed to a decision. Can we wonder that in these circumstances both parties at last laid down their arms in despair, and sought a peaceful settlement of their quarrels?

Looking from our passionless distance at those old conflicts, one may reasonably question whether the political system of the province was not less to blame for their fruitless perpetuation than the incompetence of the polemical politicians by whom they were carried on. But however this may be, the fault of the deadlock between the two parties was charged by the politicians, not on themselves, but on the political arrangement by which the two Canadas were united. As a result of this, a coalition was formed