

nation. In his journey through Nova Scotia he saw "half the tenements abandoned and lands everywhere falling into decay." How different the spectacle now, from Victoria and Vancouver on the Pacific to St. John, Halifax and Sydney on the Atlantic! Depression exists in some districts, but it can be said with truth that there are not in the world five millions of human beings better fed and better clad, or more peaceful, prosperous, intelligent and God-fearing than the five millions who call Canada their home, and who would fight to the death for the welfare, the unity, or the honour of their home. Confederation has not brought the millenium. It may be doubted whether any political arrangement or rearrangement will do that; but, at any rate, Confederation has not been a failure.

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THE FEDERAL CONSTITUTION.*

CANADIAN politics are also exemplifying a weakness of democracy which though little noticed by political writers is very serious—its tendency to narrow localism in elections. In the United States the localism is complete, and the ablest and most popular of public men, if he happens to live in a district where the other party has the majority, is excluded from public life. In England, before the recent democratic changes, places were found on the list of candidates for all the men of mark, wherever they might happen to live, and a good many non-residents are still elected, though localism has evidently been gaining ground. In Canada there is a chance still for a non-resident if he holds the public purse, perhaps if he holds a very well-filled purse of his own, but as a rule localism prevails. Even the Prime Minister of Ontario, after yielding power and dispensing patronage for eighteen years, encounters grumbling in his constituency because he is a non-resident. A resident in one electoral division of Toronto would be rather at a disadvantage as a candidate in another division, though the unity of the city, commercial and social, is complete. The mass of the people into whose hands power has now passed naturally think much less of great questions, political or economical, than of their own local and personal interests; of these they deem a local man the best champion, and they feel that they can correspond more freely about them with him than with a stranger. Besides they like to keep the prize among themselves. Such, in the exercise of supreme power, are the real tendencies of those whom collectively we worship as the people. That the calibre of the representation must be lowered by localism is evident; it will be more lowered than ever when the rush of population, especially of the wealthy part of it, to the cities shall have concentrated intelligence there and denuded of it the rural districts. The Hare plan, of a national instead of a district ticket, would immensely raise the character of the representation if it could be worked; but it assumes a level of intelligence in the mass of the people far above what is likely for many a generation to be attained. In the meantime as, on the one hand, the local man represents the choice of nobody outside his own district, and on the other hand men are excluded by localism whom the nation at large would elect, the net outcome can hardly be with truth described as an assembly representing the nation.

But the most important point of all in the case of Canada, as in that of every other Parliamentary country, is one to which scarcely an allusion was made in the debate on Confederation, and of which the only formal recognition is the division of the seats in the Halls of Parliament. Regulate the details of your Constitution as you will, the real government now is Party; politics are a continual struggle between the parties for power; no measure of importance can be carried except through a party; the public issues of the day are those which the party managers for the purposes of the party war make up; no one who does not profess allegiance to a party has any chance of admission to public life. Let a candidate come forward with the highest reputation for ability and worth, but avowing himself independent of party and determined to vote only at the bidding of his reason and conscience for the good of the whole people, he would run but a poor race in any Canadian constituency. If independence ever presumes to show its face in the political field the managers and organizers of both parties take their hands for a moment from each other's throats and combine to crush the intruder, as two gamblers might spring up from the table and draw their revolvers on any one who threatened to touch the stakes. They do this usually by tacit consent, but they have been known to do it by actual agreement. What then is Party? We all know Burke's definition, though it should be remembered that Burke on this, as on other occasions not a few, fits his philosophy to the circumstances, which were those of a member of a political connection struggling for power against a set of men who called themselves the King's friends and wished to put all connections under the feet of the King. But Burke's definition implies the existence of some organic question or question of principle, with regard to which the members of the party agree among themselves and differ from their opponents. Such agreement and difference alone can reconcile party allegiance with patriotism, or submission to party discipline with loyalty to reason and conscience. Organic questions or questions of principle are not of everyday occurrence. When they are exhausted, as in a country with a written constitution they are likely soon to be, what bond is there, of a moral and rational kind, to hold

a party together and save it from becoming a mere faction? The theory that every community is divided by nature, or as the language of some would almost seem to imply, by divine ordinance, into two parties, and that every man belongs from his birth to one party or the other, if it were not a ludicrously patent example of philosophy manufactured for the occasion, would be belied by the history of Canadian parties with their kaleidoscopic shiftings and of Canadian politicians who have been found by turns in every camp. Lord Elgin, coming to the governorship when the struggle for responsible government was over, and a lull in organic controversy had ensued, found, as his biographer tell us, that parties formed themselves not on broad issues of principle, but with reference to petty local and personal interests. On what could they form themselves if there was no broad issue before the country? Elgin himself complained, as we have seen, that his ministers were impressed with the belief that the object of the Opposition was to defeat their measures, right or wrong, that the malcontents of their own side would combine against them, and that they must appeal to personal and sordid motives if they wished to hold their own. That is the game which is played in Canada, as it is in the United States, as it is in every country under party government, by the two organized factions—machines, as they are aptly called; the prize being the Government with its patronage, and the motive powers being those common more or less to all factions—personal ambition, bribery of various kinds, open or disguised, and as regards the mass of the people, a pugnacious and sporting spirit, like that which animated the Blues and Greens of the Byzantine Circus. This last influence is not by any means the least powerful. It is astonishing with what tenacity a Canadian farmer adheres to his party Shibboleth when to him, as well as to the community at large, it is a Shibboleth and nothing more. Questions of principle, about which public feeling has been greatly excited, questions even of interest which appeal most directly to the pocket, pass out of sight when once the word to start is given, and the race between Blue and Green begins. Questions as to the character of candidates are unhappily also set aside. It is commonly said that Canada produces more politics to the acre than any other country. The more of politics there is the less unfortunately there is of genuine public spirit and manly readiness to stand up for public right, the more men fear to be in a minority, even in what they know to be a good cause. People flock to any standard which they believe is attracting votes; if they find that it is not, they are scattered like sheep. Political aspirants learn from their youth the arts of the vote-hunter; they learn to treat all questions as political capital, and to play false with their own understanding and conscience at the bidding of the wirepullers of their party. The entrance to public life is not through the gate of truth or honour. These are not peculiarities of Canada; they are things common to all countries where the party system prevails, and peculiar only in their intensity to those countries in which party is inordinately strong.

It is a necessity of the party system that the Cabinet is made up not of eminent administrators, but of men who are masters of votes or skilful in collecting them. One minister represents the French vote, another the Irish Catholic vote, a third the Orange vote, a fourth the Temperance vote. The Ministry of Finance in a commercial country is consigned to a star of the philanthropic platform. Next to gathering votes by management the chief attribute of statesmanship is effectiveness on the stump. Hardly a public man in Canada has a high reputation as an administrator. The Prime Minister notoriously pays little attention to his department. He speaks on great public questions, such as the fiscal system, only to show that he has not much given his mind to them. His title to his place is that of unique experience and unrivalled dexterity in the collection and combination of votes. In all this, Canada only resembles other Parliamentary countries, but in analyzing a particular set of institutions it is necessary to recall the general facts.

The absence in the debate on Confederation of any attempt to forecast the composition and action of Federal parties fatally detracts from the value of the discussion. If Australia or any other group of Colonies thinks of following the example of Canada, a forecast, as definite as the nature of the case will permit, of Federal parties will be at least as essential to the formation of a right judgment as the knowledge of anything relating to the machinery of the Constitution.

Party government necessarily brings with it a party Press, with its well-known characteristics, in which the party Press of Canada has certainly not been behind its compeers. Of late an independent journalism has been struggling into existence and giving some expression to opinions unsanctioned by the party machines. Questions, such as that of the Jesuits' Estates Act, on which the politicians were tongue-tied, have in this way been freely treated, and men who would never receive a party nomination have been enabled on such questions to take a share of public life.

The best apology for Party is one which at the same time, in the case of Canada as in every other case, discloses an almost fatal weakness in the whole elective system of government. The system theoretically assumes that the electors will lay their heads together to choose the best men. Practically, it is impossible for the electors to do anything of the kind. They are a multitude of people unknown for the most part to each other, without anything to bring them together, and without any power of

setting a candidature on foot. The best qualified are not likely, perhaps they are of all the least likely, to come forward of themselves. An organization of some sort there must be to bring a candidate forward and collect votes for him, and it is difficult to devise any other sort of organization than Party. The inevitable results of this, however, are the domination of faction, with all its malignity, its violence, its corruption, its calumny, its recklessness of the common weal; the ascendancy of the Caucuses and of Mr. Schnadhorst; government of the people by the people, and for the people, in name, government of the Boss, by the Boss, and for the Boss, in reality. The consequence in England is nearly half the House of Commons trooping out behind a party leader, and under the lash of the party whip, to vote against their recorded convictions for the dismemberment of their country. The fruits of the system in Canada, and everywhere else, are of the same kind. In Canada, as elsewhere, though there are honourable men in public life, the standard of morality which ought to be the highest in politics is in politics the lowest. The community is saved by its general character, by its schools, its churches, its judiciary; by the authority which chiefs, generally worthy, and always more or less able, exercise over industrial and commercial life. By its elective polity it would scarcely be saved.

The partition of power giving the civil law to the Provinces and the criminal law to the Dominion, whereas by the American Constitution both are given to the States, does not seem very reasonable in itself. The same legislative intellect is required in both cases, nor is the boundary between the two lines clearly defined. But this was a necessary concession to Quebec, who clings to her French law as a pledge of her national existence. It has been already mentioned that the absence of divorce courts is a concession to the same influence.

The structure of the provincial governments and legislatures generally, with their constitutional Lieutenant-Governors, their Parliamentary Premiers and Cabinet, is the same as that of the Dominion Government and Legislature, though on a small scale. Like the Governor-General, the Lieutenant-Governor is a figurehead, and constitutional writers who say that he has the assistance of an Executive Council to aid and advise him in administering public affairs, might say the same thing with equal truth of his flagstaff. Identical also is the procedure, and so is the ceremony, so far as any ceremony is retained. But Ontario, Manitoba, and British Columbia—democracy apparently becoming more intense as it goes west—have done away with the Upper House. In other provinces, as in Nova Scotia, efforts have been made to abolish the Upper House, as a waste of public money, but the House clings to its existence. Members nominated on the special condition that they shall vote for abolition, when they have taken their seats, find reasons for endless delay. No proprietor of a rotten borough ever clung to his political property with more tenacity than a democrat clings to any anomaly in which he has an interest. The change to a single house, if not material in itself, brings clearly to view the fact that a heavy responsibility is cast on these bodies of municipal legislators, which by a single vote can in one night enact the most momentous change in anything connected with civil right or property, totally alter the law of wills, or profoundly modify the relations between the sexes by the introduction of female suffrage. The Legislature of Ontario once broke a will at the solicitation of parties interested, though the Courts of Law found a reason for treating the Act as void. The Governor of a State in the American Union has a real veto, which he exercises freely. A governor put his veto not long ago on a Bill passed in a moment of heedlessness, which would have subverted the civil status of marriage. Moreover no amendment can be made in the Constitution of an American State, no extension of the State franchise can take place, without submission to the people. This is a great safeguard. The general disposition of the people is against change. In other respects the experience of Switzerland in regard to the Referendum is confirmed by that of the United States. At all events the people are not accessible to personal influence or cajolery as individual legislators are, while the issue being submitted to them separately, and not mixed up with other issues, as is the case at general elections, can be better grasped by their intelligence. Nominally the Lieutenant-Governor of a province has a veto, really he has none; and once more we see the pernicious effect of constitutional figments in veiling real necessities. Political architects in the United States, looking democracy in the face, attempted at all events to provide the necessary safeguards. At first, under the Canadian Constitution, the same man could sit both in the Dominion and the Provincial Legislatures. Provincial Legislatures were led by men who sat in that of the Dominion. But, by a self-denying ordinance (1872), the wisdom of which was perhaps as questionable as that of self-denying ordinances in general, it is now forbidden to any man to sit in more Legislatures than one. This change increases the demand on the not very abundant stock of legislative capacity in the country, lowers the quality of the Provincial Legislatures, and enhances the peril of committing vital questions to their hands. The farmer, the country practitioner, or the village lawyer, are good representatives, we are told, of the average mind; they may be, but to solve aright problems at once the most difficult and the most momentous something more than the average mind is required. Perhaps the advocate of the party system may find a specious argument in the subordination which it entails of the rank and file of a

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