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PREMIER MERCIER has lost no time in formulating the claims which his victorious forces may be expected to press upon the attention of the Dominion Government. His speech at the Montreal banquet was refreshingly frank. In fact a blunt directness of speech seems to be one of his characteristics as a political leader. There is no beating about the bush in the address referred to. His demand is, in effect, for a radical revision of the terms of Confederation in several important particulars. The changes proposed are, it is true, substantially those which were agreed on in the resolutions of the Quebec Conference of 1887. Their chief features are, enlargement of the powers of the Provinces; their complete autonomy in all matters of local concern; the abolition of the veto power now held by the Dominion Government, and such a reconstruction of the financial basis of the union as will materially increase the Provincial revenues. There is, certainly, something rather cool in the way in which Mr. Mercier comes forward and says in effect: "The Province of Quebec has found its allowance too small. It has therefore gone into debt to the tune of twenty millions of dollars, and now expects the Dominion to assume that debt and enable it to commence anew with a clean sheet." This is, of course, just the result which has long been foreseen by those who have noted the cool confidence with which the Quebec Governments have gone on, year after year, incurring deficits and borrowing money, even the interest of which they could not reasonably hope to pay out of the resources of the Province. It was evident from the first—and has been a thousand times pointed out—that the Dominion would be obliged, in the end, to transfer the burden to its own shoulders. The means of compulsion in the hands of the Provincial authorities are two-fold. Canada cannot afford to let one of her chief Provinces become bankrupt; and this Quebec well knows. She knows too that she holds the balance of power, and that the solid French vote is a force too strong to be resisted by any Government or party, even were it alone to be reckoned with. But Quebec and its Premier are not alone in this matter. The resolutions of the Quebec Conference show that at least four of the other Provinces are with him in the main features of his programme, and the large

majorities by which all the premiers who took part in that Conference, and put their names to its resolutions, have since been continued in power, show that the people of those Provinces probably approve, certainly have not condemned, the proceedings at that Conference. True, all those premiers excused themselves from attendance at the recent banquet, and their absence probably had special significance. What that significance was it is not easy precisely to say, but as it is not in the least likely that their notes of invitation contained any hints as to the line of remark Mr. Mercier would follow, it is much more probable that his fellow-premiers were afraid of his nationalism, than that they are disposed to recant in the matter of the Quebec resolutions.

WHAT then is to be done? It is useless to scold Mr. Mercier on account of his Nationalistic proclivities, however mischievous we may deem his appeals to race prejudices. It must be admitted that his speech is a Provincialist rather than a Nationalist speech, and that he does not fail to bring forward some cogent arguments in support of his positions. It must be tolerably clear to all who know the state of feeling in the Provinces, especially the smaller and more distant Provinces, that Provincial autonomy in all local matters is the only basis on which Confederation can endure. Few, probably, save believers in an impossible Legislative Union, will refuse to admit that the absolute Federal veto will have to be given up, if it is not already practically obsolete, and that the question of the constitutionality of Provincial laws is one for the decision of a competent judicial authority, rather than a party Government. Even Sir John Macdonald himself seems to be verging towards this view, as witness his sanction of Mr. Blake's resolution, which is a step in this direction, in the recent session of Parliament. It is hard to resist the force of Mr. Mercier's argument that the Federal Government, when assuming control of railroads built with the aid of Provincial subsidies, should refund to the Provinces the amount of these subsidies. Above all, it has long since been apparent that the financial basis of the Confederation will have to be re-constructed, and probably in some entirely different shape. It is pretty clear that the original plan of subsidies was a political mistake. Certainly that scheme, as originally formulated, has been changed until it can scarcely be said to be now consistent with any fixed principle. It is easy to say that the first "better terms" arrangement, that in favour of Nova Scotia, which was the entering of a wedge that has since been driven home by other Provinces, should not have been made. But, as the Halifax *Chronicle*, we think it was, said the other day, that simply means that there should have been one Province less in the Confederation to-day. It was too, we believe, generally conceded by those who had looked closely into the matter that Nova Scotia had made out her case. Possibly other Provinces which have since succeeded in obtaining increases by less direct methods may have done so too. Embarrassing and dangerous as it was to thus unsettle the stability of the financial basis, it would have been worse than useless to attempt to hold a rebellious Province in the Confederation, on terms which were probably, not to say demonstrably, unjust.

THE fact that Mr. Mercier has taken the earliest opportunity, since his great success at the polls, to bring these questions to the front, may be taken as an indication that they are to be pressed with all the energy at his command. The state of the Quebec finances scarcely leaves him an alternative. What course will the Dominion Government pursue in that event? So far as appears it will have to choose between the alternatives of determined resistance to any further interference with the financial relations between the Dominion and the Provinces, and to all Constitutional changes, and a statesman-like revision of the Constitution. Its ability to carry out the first will depend, of course, upon the attitude of the other Provinces. If the Provinces which were represented in the Quebec Conference of 1887 adhere to the programme then prepared, resistance to their demands will be useless. The central authorities will be compelled to yield in the end that which they might have conceded with good grace in the begin-

ning. Premier Mercier thinks it possible that there may be different views in regard to the details of the Quebec resolutions, but believes and hopes that those resolutions will be accepted by the party which is now triumphant in all the Provinces represented in the Conference. It seems scarcely probable that the people of Ontario will consent to an increase of subsidies, the larger part of which must come out of their own pockets, even though the income of their own Province is increased with that of the others. The wealthiest Province would be pretty sure to be a loser on the whole transaction. Mr. Mercier claims that Quebec and Ontario pay the larger part of the Dominion revenue, and that it can be no robbery to ask back a part of their own. The smaller Provinces will, no doubt, maintain that they contribute as much proportionally as the larger Provinces, and have, at least, equally valid claims to increased incomes. There is force in the contention of the impecunious Provinces that they should not be doomed to perpetual penury in order that the central authorities may have enough and to spare. And yet the strength and stability of the Confederation depend, to a very great extent, upon the amount of revenue available for national uses. When the day comes, as come it no doubt will, for a revision of the Constitution, the re-adjustment of the financial part of the scheme will give more trouble than any other question. All the Provinces, except Ontario, will clamour for larger revenues. Yet justice must be the basis of distribution, and justice demands that account be taken of the fact that all the Provinces, except Ontario and Manitoba, support expensive second chambers; and that all, we believe without exception, appropriate large sums of money for roads, bridges, and other local services which, under the excellent municipal system of Ontario, are provided for by the municipalities themselves. It is in the last degree desirable that the subsidy system should be abolished and the sources of revenue of the Provinces made independent of the Dominion authorities. Direct taxation is admittedly out of the question. "More's the pity," many students of political economy will exclaim. It would be easy to fill columns with details of the difficulties of the situation which will present itself whenever revision is attempted. It is not unlikely that another Quebec Conference may be found necessary at a day not very distant. But in order to accomplish its work it must needs be the Conference, not of certain Governments, nor of a party, but of representatives of all parties and all parts of the Dominion.

A GOOD deal of interest naturally attaches to the utterances of Mr. Laurier at the Montreal banquet, but unfortunately we have but a meagre epitome of them. If the report given in the *Globe* may be relied on, Mr. Laurier's speech, brief as it was, contained two very important statements. If he distinctly reiterated the declaration he made to an English-speaking audience in Toronto a year or two ago, that his French compatriots have no desire to build up a French nation on the shores of the St. Lawrence, he deserves credit for his courage and his breadth of view. If in that statement he represents truthfully the great majority of the French people of Quebec, as it is to be hoped he does, he cannot repeat it too often or too emphatically, both in French and in English. It contains the very assurance that is just now specially needed, and that will do more than almost anything else to allay the dangerous prejudices of race, which have for some time past been threatening irreparable mischief to Canada. Mr. Laurier is further represented as having declared himself in favour of Canadian independence more distinctly than ever before. "The time," he said, "must come when we should have to take our proper position in the world, and, for one, he awaited independence." That ultimate goal of Canadian patriotism may be yet far off, but, whether far or near, the young people of Canada will be stronger and better Canadians for keeping their eyes fixed upon it. Such an ambition is adapted to kindle an enthusiasm of Canadian patriotism, especially in the breasts of the young, such as no other conceivable view of the destiny of their country can do. It involves no necessary disloyalty to Great Britain, and is the surest preventive of the growth of annexation sentiment. It is the view of many of the best friends of Canada in the Mother Country itself.