

# THE CONSTITUTION.

"Honi soit qui mal y pense.—Dieu et mon droit."

ONLY ONE CENT EACH.



QUEBEC

Monday, 29th April, 1878.

## TO THE ELECTORS OF THE PROVINCE.

You now stand face to face with the greatest problem of your life-time. A great issue is presented you for solution. You are called upon to decide for the first time an important question of constitutional policy. It is this: will you hold to the inestimable principle of self government secured to you by the practice and traditions of the Empire, or will you surrender that right with all that is therein implied to the single head that may for the time be appointed to rule over you from the lordly halls of Spencer Wood?

The great central principle of the British Constitution is that the King, or his representative does not rule in fact, but must at all times be under the advice of the administration of the day that may be selected by him, subject to the approval of the people's representatives, and who, therefore, must have the confidence of parliament. He is bound to take that advice without reference to his own political or personal views of policy; and though he may under the constitution have the right to change his advisers, he is bound to take them from the majority in the legislature, or if none are in his opinion fitted to be his advisers, that he must appeal to the people to ascertain which party it is their wish shall govern the country; and this he must do before dismissing an existing government; otherwise he insults the people who, through their representatives in parliament, have allotted to him these advisers.

Lieut. Governor Letellier refused to act upon the advice of his cabinet, dismissed them of his own motion in the closing hours of parliament, at a time when they possessed the confidence of a large majority therein and were stronger in that confidence than they had ever been at any previous time, and replaced them by ministers selected from the minority:—then, and not till then, did he appeal to the people. The statement of facts, as they appeared to the Lieut. Governor, and the answer to them, are before you,

you have had ample time to digest them; and the House of Commons, the highest court of reference in the nation, to which you appealed have by a majority vote of 12 declined to set right or pronounce any opinion upon the merits of the question at issue between you and the Lieut. Governor; and have sent the question back to you for settlement at the polls. Have a care how you decide it.

We have not only admitted that the power or right, as contended for, may reside in the Lieut. Governor, that is, the right to set aside by an arbitrary exercise of the prerogative the decrees of the people constitutionally pronounced in parliament, and to reject the advice of his ministers acting in concert with your representatives; but it is contrary to usage to do so, as in practice it is obviously a dangerous power to invoke. Your endorsement of the principle contended for by the Lieut. Governor may prove disastrous to your rights and liberties in the future; as thereby you will be affirming the dangerous doctrine that a Lieut. Governor is not bound to be the executive of your wishes, and is at liberty to reject the advisers you may appoint to him and to choose his own, when and wheresoever he may. You will thereby surrender and set aside parliamentary institutions and every recognized principle of responsible government. Charles Stuart contended with the people for this prerogative right, and he lost this head in the attempt; his son revived the claim and had it allowed; but the people paid a fearful price for their apathy, and it took many years before they won back what they had lost.

You will remember that the gravamen of the Lieut. Governor's complaint against Mr. de Boucherville's administration was that they had been extravagant and prodigal to recklessness in their financial policy, that they had plunged the Province into debt, mainly by undertaking public enterprises beyond the ability of the province to pay for. Admitting for the sake of argument, what we do not in fact admit, that this pretension is well founded, we insist that the Lieut. Governor went beyond his privileges in pronouncing any opinion upon that point, he may have an opinion as any other subject may, but he has not the right to express it nor take action thereupon. But the same charge may be made, and with much greater truth, against the Dominion Government by the Governor General. They, too have largely increased the public expenditure, converted a surplus into a deficit and laid upon the country additional taxation; they have also added to the debt.

Their majority in parliament is relatively very much less than that which supported Mr. DeBoucherville. The Lieut. Governor contended, however, or perhaps pretended, that the majority in parliament did not represent a majority of the people of the province, notwithstanding that since the general election they had never lost a seat at any special vacancy created since then; while the federal government have lost 18 in the same space of time, and had some ministers rejected and others barely saved at the polls. What would the liberals say if Lord Dufferin were suddenly to send Mr. Mackenzie to the right about as Mr. Letellier did Mr. DeBoucherville? would they not protest as the conservatives are doing, and would not these same conservatives join in that protest? surely, they would.

Let us now look at those features of the DeBoucherville policy against which liberals so loudly declaim. First and chief, the debt of the province is an article in the indictment. We dispose of that objection by simply denying that as a matter of fact, the province is in debt. What we understand by a public debt is a very different thing to a mere ledger account in which Dr. and Cr. balance each other.

If a nation go to war, and spend in its prosecution the money borrowed therefor as well as its own funds, at the close of the conflict for the first named sum she is so much in debt, inasmuch as she has nothing to show as a set off for it. In our case we have for the larger part of our pretended debt a railway to show for it, which will be more or less remunerative and will ultimately redeem its own cost; and for the rest we have it, invested in fact, in other railways owned by private companies; the sum advanced to which will of necessity come back to the province in the profits from increased business, and through the augmented population, which will follow. The capital of the province is in its wild lands; they are worthless until occupied; railways will promote their settlement. The money borrowed, therefore, for these railways is, strictly speaking, not a debt. You will also bear in mind that this debt, if debt it be, was incurred at your request. You were unanimous in urging upon the successive governments of Messrs. Chauveau, Ouimet, and DeBoucherville the policy of fostering railway enterprise and you have from first to last sustained them in doing so; and it is only the truth to say that if all our petitions and demands had been granted the debt would have been many millions of dollars larger than it is.

The city of Quebec should be the last to complain of the railway debt, mainly she has had the largest measure of advantage from it in the building of the North Shore line, which she had anticipated repeated attempts for 20 years to do by means of local effort. The people who have the best right to complain in regard to this debt are those on the South Shore, who have to bear their proportionate share of the liabilities incurred, mainly for the advantage of Quebec and Montreal, and they have not complained.

The cry of extravagance is equally unfounded as truth. Quebec compares favorably in this respect with Ontario. What is called extravagance results of necessity from circumstances over which government can have no control. The entire charge for all public services, not strictly municipal in their character and even for some of them, is paid out of the Provincial Treasury, while in the other provinces it is borne in part by the municipalities. We are obliged by law to use two languages necessitating double work and two sets of servants.

The great area over which our population is scattered causes the outside public service to be far more expensive than the number of our population would seem to justify.—Civil administration is based on the old French model, thereby rendering the legal machinery cumbersome, and of course, more expensive, and finally we have two houses of legislation—the upper being a contrivance in the interest of the minority which they will not give up, except by having substituted for our present system a Legislation Union, which again the majority will not consent to. The adoption of direct taxation for supplementing our present fixed and inflexible revenue is only a question of time. It is bound to come—we have simply anticipated that time by undertaking now, instead of postponing our railway projects; and if the obligations imposed upon us thereby have already overreached the limits of our inadequate revenue, it is you, and not the government, who is responsible for bringing upon the country the present necessity for direct taxation. The system is in practice in every province of the Dominion except Quebec; and to this circumstance is referable the greater vigor and more solid prosperity of our sisters provinces.

## QUEBEC WEST.

### Great Mass Meeting Yesterday.

The meeting on Champlain market wharf yesterday was the most magnificent demonstration that has