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The Journal of Commerce

FINANCE AND INSURANCE REVIEW.

MONTREAL, MAY 13, 1876.

MR. HAMILTON MERRITT'S BIOGRAPHY. [3.]

About the time of the last general election for Upper Canada, namely, in July, 1836, Mr. Merritt sustained a heavy loss by the death of Mr. J. B. Yates, of New York, who had subscribed largely to the capital stock of the Welland Canal Co., and had co-operated most generously with Mr. Merritt up to the time of his death. The report of the select committee referred to in our last number had not been without its effect on the party in Toronto, by whom Sir Francis Head was advised. A new Board of Directors was constituted under the presidency of Captain Macaulay an officer of the Royal Engineers, but belonging to a Canadian family, and he employed two civil engineers, Messrs. Baird & Killaly. Negotiations were set on foot for the transference of the Canal to the Province, and the stockholders were certainly indebted to Mr. Merritt for obtaining the most liberal settlement that in all probability any hopelessly insolvent company had ever before succeeded in getting. The Province not only undertook to pay for the stock at par but to pay interest at 6 per cent. from the time of subscription, whenever the tolls should amount to £50,000 in any year. This scheme was not fully carried out at the time, but the government loans were converted into stock, and that was

vested in the government by giving it a majority at the Board. Mr. Merritt was subjected to the annoyance of being excluded from the Board of Direction, the proxies of the executors of his old friend Mr. Yates having been used against him. The year 1837 was a memorable one in the history of Upper Canada. A financial crisis occurred about the middle of the year which led to a general suspension of specie payments, both in the United States and Canada, and in December the rebellion broke out, and, though speedily suppressed, the country was kept in constant excitement, owing to rumors of invasion. Throughout this critical period Mr. Merritt seems to have acted with great judgment and moderation, and we find that he joined with other influential men in the Niagara District in representing to the new Lieut-Governor, Sir George Arthur, the expediency of commuting the capital sentences passed on the political prisoners. We cannot afford to dwell at any length on Mr. Merritt's career previous to the Union. He seems to have had considerable influence in the Tory House, and his biographer claims for him the credit of having also made representations to the Earl of Durham, many of which were incorporated in his Lordship's celebrated report.

The main recommendations in the Earl of Durham's report were the Legislative Union of the Provinces of Upper and Lower Canada, and the concession of Responsible, or Parliamentary government. Unfortunately for Mr. Merritt's claims, he himself voted in 1860, as we learn from the biography, in favour of a dissolution of the Union, which he was so active in promoting. His adhesion to Responsible Government, which had been contended for by the Reform party for many years, was given promptly after the publication of Lord Durham's report, from which time he was acknowledged as a member of the Reform party, as appears by many confidential letters addressed to him by leading men of the party, and especially by Mr. Baldwin. In the year 1839, before his change of party, Mr. Merritt met with a disappointment, which, judging from the notice taken of it in the biography, must have chagrined him not a little. The House of Assembly passed a bill appointing two delegates to proceed to England to represent the Province, and named Messrs. MacNab and Merritt. The St. Catharine's Journal, which is constantly quoted by the editor, published one article containing the following passage: "No thing more conclusively shews the narrow, envious, and spiteful character of the Hagerman clique than their spiteful conduct in relation to sending a

"commission to England." It proceeds to explain what this spiteful conduct was, and we find that it was substituting the name of Mr. T. B. Robertson for that of Mr. Merritt, the consequence of which was that the House "very justly asserted their dignity, and for the insult offered them in the person of Mr. Merritt, literally kicked out the bill altogether." This is a convenient place to notice a few of the blunders in names which meet the reader in almost every page of the biography. No English reader would identify "Sir P. Thompson" with the Right Hon. Charles Poulett Thomson, afterwards Lord Sydenham; and no Canadian reader could imagine that Mr. J. B. Robertson was the Hon. John Beverly Robinson, then Chief Justice of Upper Canada and Speaker of the Legislative Council. At the period referred to Chief Justice Robinson was on leave of absence in England, and this circumstance no doubt led the Court to insist on nominating a Member of their House, in conjunction with one from the Assembly. It is difficult to understand what "the insult" was. While on the subject of inaccuracies we may notice a statement with reference to Lord Dalhousie, who was Governor General for some years, ending in 1828. It is said: "He was awarded with the Governorship of India. Where in his Imperial Palace at Calcutta, &c." That Lord Dalhousie was never Governor General of India, though his son did fill that high office. Lord Dalhousie himself, who was a general officer, was for some time commander of the Forces in India.

Mr. Merritt entered the first Parliament of United Canada as an avowed member of the Reform party, and after contesting the seat with his old friend Mr. Rykert, his name was considered with others as a profitable candidate for the speaker's chair; but the necessity of having a gentleman in that position who was thoroughly conversant with both languages led to a general concurrence of opinion in favor of Mr. Cuvillier. A most extraordinary blunder is made by the biographer on this point. He says that one of Mr. Merritt's first acts was to second a motion made by Mr. Cuvillier that Mr. Morin should be the speaker. Mr. Morin never was even proposed at the private meeting of the Reformers. The choice was between Mr. Cuvillier and Mr. D. B. Viger. During the session Mr. Merritt gave a general support to the Draper administration, and afterwards visited England on business connected with the Welland Canal stockholders and their claims. Soon after his return the second Session of the first United Parliament was held, but although it was commenced by