

promising to take a new course, never till then proposed to him, never suggested to any of his predecessors?

The reservation of the Secret Societies' Bill has been spoken of as a sufficient reason for the resignation. If the ex-Ministers, at the time, thought it was, it is a pity they did not say so; for a resignation upon a public act of that character, an act by which the Governor placed himself in direct opposition to their apparent party interests, would have been perfectly constitutional in form, and open to none of the grave objections on that score, which attach to the course they took. Further than this, however, I cannot go. *In point of fact*, a resignation on that ground would, in my opinion, have been indefensible; and, for a reason that may be briefly stated.

I am not going into any argument as to the merits or demerits of the Bill. It may have been all that is good, or all that is bad, for any thing I need here say to it. The only material point is this, that it was a Bill of a most *unusual* character. It went to disqualify for public employment, all persons who should demur to a test-oath or affirmation, to the effect that the party taking it was not a member of any Society bound by an oath of secrecy, or having secret signs, the Masonic Society alone excepted. I have not a word to say in favour of such Societies, nor against the policy of any course of action, executive or legislative, calculated to put an end to the nuisance (for such I regard it) of their existence in Canada. Nor yet, so far as I can see, from all that has transpired on the subject, had Sir Charles Metcalfe. It was his opinion that the Bill was not calculated to attain its object; but his letter to Mr. LaFontaine declares that he "deprecates the existence" of such Societies, and I am not aware that he is asserted to have ever held any other language about them. But all this is nothing to the point. The one essential fact, I repeat, is this; that there never was a law like it passed before, in the mother country or here; or, so far as my knowledge extends, any where else. Were it ever so wise, it was without a precedent in British legislation.

Now, what is it notoriously the sworn duty of a Governor to do with such a measure, when it comes before him for the Royal sanction? The Royal Instructions, which from time immemorial have been addressed to all Canadian Governors on their assumption of office, say, you shall reserve for the signification of the Royal pleasure every Bill that may by law require to be laid before the Imperial Parliament, and, also, "*every other Bill* which you shall consider to be of an *extraordinary or unusual nature*, or requiring our especial consideration and decision thereupon." Had Sir Charles Metcalfe, in this case, any sort of option?

What, then, becomes of Responsible Government, says some one? Were the Ministers not responsible for the act, and entitled to offer advice upon it? Certainly. They are responsible to Canadian opinion for every exercise of every prerogative in Canada, and may, (by

necessary consequence) advise as to any. Nay, I go further; in a case like this, it was their duty to have offered advice. They had advised the Governor to allow them to bring in the Bill as a Government measure. The tenor of the Royal Instructions could not be unknown to them; and as soon as the Bill had passed, or was certain of passing the two Houses, they ought to have further advised His Excellency, that under those Instructions, it was clearly his duty to reserve it for the Queen's sanction at home. They did not do this, and the Governor made up his mind without asking them. They complain that he did not ask them, or else tell them his mind sooner than he did. As to asking, he surely was at liberty to do that or not, as he pleased, in a case so transparently obvious. If they had wished to speak, there was nothing to prevent them. And as to telling them sooner; to say that with the printed Royal Instructions, and their knowledge of what had passed, in reference to the Bill, between the Governor General and themselves, they needed telling to make them know the course he would take, were to say something a little strange. Right or wrong, he had refused to lay down as a rule of executive action, the principle embodied in the Bill, saying, that although utterly averse to secret Societies, he thought the rule proposed to him was unwise. He had then reluctantly assented to their introducing a Bill into Parliament to carry out their views, telling them when he did so, that he thought it "an arbitrary and unwise measure, and not even calculated to effect the object it had in view." Which of two things ought an assent of this kind to have been held to mean,—a promise to assent to it in spite of his Instructions, or a warning not easy to be misunderstood, the other way?

But His Excellency might have been more explicit. Beyond all question he might; and so, too, might they. Again, as with the patronage controversy, the question we are driven back upon, is rather a personal than a public one. How came there to be the general misunderstanding and reserve there was, between the Governor General and his late advisers?

The ready answer of more than one paragraph-writer and speech-maker is, "Backstairs influence"; a vague charge, always easy to make, hard to establish, next to impossible to disprove. What is there to make it probable in the present instance? Sir Charles Metcalfe's well-known character for honest, self-relying independence, earned by forty years of official service? The habit of reserve that during the session gave no one the power to state what his personal opinion was on any matter under discussion? And by whom was this back-stairs influence exerted? The speeches made in Parliament all pointed, I believe, to one man, the Member for the County of Beauharnois; a man of unquestionable ability, and who has rendered to the cause of Responsible Government for Canada an amount of service second to that rendered