

## HOUSE OF COMMONS.

FRIDAY, 26th March, 1897.

The SPEAKER took the Chair at Three o'clock.

PRAYERS.

### ADDRESS IN ANSWER TO HIS EXCELLENCY'S SPEECH.

The House proceeded to the consideration of His Excellency's Speech delivered at the opening of the session.

Mr. RUSSELL. Mr. Speaker, if any difficulty presents itself in attempting to move a reply to the Address with which His Excellency the Governor General has been pleased to open the present session, it certainly does not arise from any want of material to form the basis of discussion. Perhaps I might be allowed at the very outset, to dispel any fear which any hon. gentleman may entertain of a too long discussion on my own part, by assuring the House in advance that I shall not feel obliged to deal with more than one in three of the numerous subjects which are treated in the Speech from the Throne. Those subjects are so numerous, Mr. Speaker, and so diverse, that we might very well be alarmed by the fear of a long and protracted session, if it were not for the fact that as to most of the questions at issue, I think I may fairly anticipate that there will not be any very serious differences of opinion between the two sides of this House. I may perhaps be a little sanguine, but I do think that it is quite possible that on most of the subjects which are presented for our consideration in this Speech, we shall be troubled with very little discussion of debatable principles, and that our attention will for the most part be confined to matters of detail. Whatever little opportunity I have had of observing the trend of public feeling in this country, whatever little skill I may have in discerning the spirit of the people throughout this Dominion, or rather in gathering the impressions of those who are wiser and have more experience than I have myself, has convinced me that the people of Canada are tired for the moment of political agitation, that the very violence and acrimony of the discussions in which we have been engaged during the immediately past few years have produced a feeling, perhaps not exactly of exhaustion, but at all events a disposition which longs for calmness and repose. Speaking for the great mass of the people of Canada in general—leaving out the extremists of whatever kind or description they may be—I think, Sir, that there is no one desire that is more widely entertained by our people, no one aspiration that is more fervently breathed

Mr. LAURIER.

by the people of this country, no one prayer that meets with a more profound response in the breasts of the people of this country, than that we may be allowed a short breathing space during which to forget the angry and bitter controversies in which we have been engaged, and which during the last few years have made so great and so inordinate a draught upon the public energy of this country.

I forbear to dwell upon those unhappy differences. The remembrance of them is grievous. It was a great comfort to me to know that even in the estimation of the distinguished and hon. gentleman who holds a position in this House, perhaps second only in importance, and hardly second in dignity to that of the leader of the House, the time had come when these angry controversies might be allowed to cease. It was, Sir, a great comfort to gentlemen on both sides of the House; it must have been peculiarly gratifying to hon. gentlemen on his own side, to hear his frank and unequivocal declaration, as I understood it, that he proposed for the future to confine himself to those subjects that come legitimately within the sphere of the political activity of Parliament, and to abandon the agitation of those exciting questions, which cannot be flung down, and which never yet have been flung down into the political arena without exciting the wildest and fiercest passions of which our human nature is susceptible. And, Sir, I think it would not at all be improper, for me to say further, that I have observed an interesting change in the hon. gentleman's manner in this House since those exciting controversies have been abandoned. I believe I have observed in the hon. gentleman, a spirit of mildness and sweet reasonableness, which well befits the unique position which he holds in this House; a spirit of fairness and equity which he has brought to the discussion of most of the questions, with which he has been called to deal, a spirit, I say, which is very engaging to many of us, especially the younger members of this House, who, while we cannot agree with that hon. gentleman, and while we cannot approve or endorse all that hon. gentleman has said and done throughout a very long and very distinguished public career, nevertheless entertain a high admiration for the Titanic force which has characterized his public life, an admiration which has led us to entertain with virtual and probably with absolute unanimity the desire that he may be spared for many long years and for many Parliaments if that were possible, to adorn the distinguished and honourable position which he now holds as leader of the Opposition.

I have said, Sir, that the public mind in respect to that exciting and once disturbing question is at rest. Thanks to the admirable spirit in which the question has been approached by the distinguished leader of this