

N° 18.

Petition of Merchants and others connected with the Canadas, dated 17th May 1828.

of your Honourable House to what appears to them the only effectual remedy for those unfortunate differences in time to come.

That in the honest conviction of your Petitioners, the Act of the 31st George 3d, c. 31, whereby the late province of Quebec was divided into the provinces of Upper and Lower Canada has been the fruitful source of all the evils with which the Canadas have been and are now afflicted.

That this most impolitic measure was passed at the time without being desired by the then few inhabitants of what now constitutes the province of Upper Canada, and in direct opposition to the wishes of the inhabitants of what now constitutes the province of Lower Canada, whether of French or British extraction, as clearly appears by the representation of their joint agent made at the bar of your Honourable House on the 23d of March, 1791.

That the baneful consequences of this measure were even then so clearly foreseen, and brought so fully before your Honourable House, that your Petitioners cannot describe what has actually occurred in more appropriate language than that used by the individual above alluded to on that occasion: in urging the continuance of the province of Quebec undivided he says, "There is one consideration of the utmost importance to the tranquillity of the people inhabiting all parts of that country, and which will alone, I hope, be sufficient to engage this Honourable House to reject the plan of a new independent government. I beg leave to request that Honourable Members will recollect and attend to the geographical situation of that country, from which it will appear evident that no vessel of any kind can proceed farther up the river St. Lawrence than the city of Montreal on account of the Rapids, which are immediately above that town. Of course, as every article of necessity or luxury which the inhabitants of the upper districts have occasion for from Britain, or any foreign country, must come to them by the river St. Lawrence, they must be landed at or below Montreal, where they must be stored by the merchants of Quebec or Montreal, until carriages or boats are provided to send them forward; likewise, that every article of produce which the people of these Upper Districts wish to export must be sent in boats to Montreal, or perhaps to Quebec, for the purpose of being shipped for exportation; and that as well the articles of import as of export must, in passing through the Lower Country, become subject to the laws, regulations, duties and taxes which may be imposed by the Legislature of the Lower Country. Now supposing the division to take place, as it may be expected, that the new Legislature of Quebec shall, in due time, provide a revenue towards the support of the civil government of that part of the province, it is more than probable, that whatever money is raised for that or any other public purpose will be done by duties payable upon importations. It is therefore an object that deserves the most serious reflection of Honourable Members to consider how far the people inhabiting the Upper Government will approve of, and be content to pay taxes or duties on their importations or exportations when the produce of those taxes or duties is to be applied towards supporting the expenses of the civil government of the Lower Province, or for building public edifices, or otherwise improving or beautifying that part of the country; or for the purpose of granting bounties or encouragements to promote agriculture, or particular trades or manufactures, of which the people in the Upper Province cannot, from their situation, participate the advantages. It is impossible, Sir, if the province of Quebec is divided, for the wisdom of man to lay down a plan for these objects that will not afford matter of dispute, and create animosities between the governments of the two provinces, which, in a few years, may lead to the most serious consequences. This would be sowing the seeds of dissension and quarrels which, however easy it may be to raise, it will be found exceedingly difficult to appease."

Again he adds: "Sir, I have considered the subject a thousand times since I first heard of this intended division, but have not been able to form any reasonable idea of the motive which has induced the proposition of such a dangerous experiment: if at any future period experience should point it out as expedient for the advantage and safety of Government, or for the general convenience or prosperity of the people, to divide that country, it may then be done with more judgment, from a more certain knowledge of the consequences of such a division. The inconveniences that may arise from continuing the province united under one Legislature are few, and they are well known and understood: the advantages are unanimity, mutual support and strength; but no man can tell the dangers of a separation. The dangers, however, to be apprehended are political weakness, disunion, animosities and quarrels."

That it is within the knowledge of several of your Petitioners that the above Act had hardly become a law when the impolicy of the division of the province of Quebec became apparent to His Majesty's ministers, as was declared by them to the individual who made the representation from which your Petitioners have now quoted.

That although by the wisdom of the Imperial Parliament an Act was passed in 1822 intending to set at rest, at least for the moment, the disputes between the two provinces in regard to duties, for which end the power of determining upon the share of duties to which Upper Canada may be entitled is taken out of the hands of the two Colonial Legislatures and given to arbitrators, yet as the very passing of such a law implies the existence of a very great evil, so your Petitioners are well assured that this remedy, viewed as a permanent measure, would in its execution prove a source of endless dispute, dissatisfaction and jealousy between the two provinces; and as pregnant with the same effects do your Petitioners regard the depriving of the Legislature of Lower Canada of the power to raise any duties