

THE BASIS OF CONFEDERATION.

The federation of the British North American provinces in 1867, as has been truly observed, may be shown by time to have been one of the most important events of modern world history. Not only did it mark the beginning of a new power on the North American continent but it set an example, which was to be followed later by the great political consolidations of Australia and South Africa. For Canadians its supreme importance was, of course, that it marked the real beginning of the national status of their country. Confederation was no accident. As the Prime Minister of Quebec, Sir Lomer Gouin, in the masterly defence of Confederation which he made in his great speech on the Francœur motion, truly remarked, Confederation was not the result of caprice or an act of frivolity but the result of a necessity.* Confederation in fact, was an evolution, an evolution towards greater power and increased self government. No more isolated and scattered communities, no more disunited provinces but a union of all under one great federation of sister provinces, each self governing but all united in matters of common interest under a constitution similar in principle to the British constitution.

Fortunate, indeed, was it for Canada and the other British North American colonies, that at this critical juncture they possessed men of the broadest views and the sanest statesmanship who laid the structure of Confederation upon sound and sure foundations from which we shall depart only at our peril. What, let us now briefly enquire, were the real aims underlying the vast design of the Fathers of the Canadian Confederation? That their ruling idea was that the new Dominion should always enjoy the most complete autonomy and that it should ultimately attain the status of a nation in the full meaning of

* Sir Lomer Gouin, Speech on the Francœur motion in the Legislative Assembly of Quebec, January 28th, 1918. Complete English text with Foreword for English-speaking Canadians, issued in handsome booklet form by the LIBRAIRIE BEAUCHEMIN, Montreal.