

AN ADDRESS

ON THE FORMATION OF RIFLE ASSOCIATIONS FOR DEFENSIVE PURPOSES,
DELIVERED IN THE TOWN HALL, GUELPH, ON WEDNESDAY
EVENING, THE 15TH OF AUGUST, 1866,

BY DR. HOWITT.

Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen.

THE people of these Provinces, with few exceptions, are inspired with a profound feeling of love for Great Britain, and for the land which they inhabit. The good and glorious sentiment prevails that we owe a debt of gratitude to the former, and possess privileges in the latter which neither persuasion nor coercion will ever induce us to forget or surrender. "England and Canada" is our cry and watchword. Actuated by this feeling, the most earnest desire pervades all classes to see this country placed in such a position that it not only shall have nothing to fear from the filibustering incursions of a few miserable Fenians, but that our birthright shall be secure even though we should have to contend against that gigantic power from which alone we have anything to dread. In other words, if in the inscrutable dispensations of Providence war should ever arise with the United States, the most anxious desire is, that our defensive arrangements may be so perfected that we may come out of the struggle without losing a jot of our rights or surrendering a foot of our territory. There are a few among us who, relying on the strong arm of Fatherland, see no great necessity for extensive defensive preparations. There are a few, too, who may be designated as the no-danger men; who ridicule all defensive preparations as absurd, because the chances of war, they consider, are so remote as not to be calculated on in the chapter of accidents. Likewise there are a few who, though ardently attached to British institutions and to British connection, believe it would be futile to contend with a tremendous power like that of the American Union. The influence of these parties—insignificant though they be

—is prejudicial to our safety. To the first I feel free to state, that no matter how mighty and terrible would be British prowess, backed by Britain's vast resources, it is simply preposterous to imagine that Canada would not be wrested from her grasp if Canadians failed in their duty. As regards the second, I shall content myself with saying, that if this country is to continue forever in a state of peace, we shall constitute the first example in the history of the world of a people existing in close proximity to a great and ambitious nation, that had not to struggle for its existence. To return an answer to the third party will involve an examination of the very question for the consideration of which we have met this evening, namely, How is this country to be successfully defended? I think it will be generally conceded by those who have made this question a matter of serious thought and reflection, that the resources of these provinces are too limited to keep up a sufficient military organization to render them secure against anything beyond a mere filibustering invasion; that if war should ever unhappily occur, our only safety would be in the resistance which the masses—the bone and sinew of the country—could offer to the aggressive foe. Let it not for a moment be inferred that there is the slightest desire to disparage the present volunteer organization, or that under the contingency just mentioned, that organization would fail to render not only essential but indispensable service. On the contrary, it is abundantly apparent that without some such an organization all effort for defensive purposes would almost inevitably end in confusion and failure. Our volunteer companies are rapidly becoming well drilled—capable of taking the field and rendering services