

sought anything else than to be treated as British subjects, and as soon as they were treated as British subjects, though they had not forgotten the land of their ancestors, they became amongst the most loyal subjects that England ever had. Sir, since our loyalty has been impugned by hon. gentlemen opposite, I am inclined to quote the sentiments of my race and of my party, as they were expressed by my hon. friend from Megantic (Mr. Langelier) on an occasion which was not political. Last summer certain delegates from boards of trade in France visited Canada. They were entertained by the Corporation of Quebec which presented them with an address, and the hon. member for Megantic, in his quality of mayor, answered as follows:—

“The fate of arms has decreed that our political destinies should be united with the destinies of England, and when we consider all the advantages which we have reaped from that state of things, our regret at being separated from France is not without compensation. When we can establish with France extended commercial relations, nothing more shall we want. We preserve a political *régime* of which we are proud, and we obtain at the same time the satisfaction of preserving our interests and sentiments.”

This is the loyalty of the French Canadians to-day. They are true to their ancestors. And who should object? We speak the French language, and if you look at it from a purely utilitarian point of view it is a great disadvantage, because we have afterwards to learn a foreign language to take our part in the national movement of this country. Everyone must learn to speak it the best he can in his own poor way. It would perhaps be best, from a utilitarian point of view, to have only one language; but the French is the language of our mothers, the language which recalls to our minds the most sacred associations which first dawn on the heart of man and which can never die out, and so long as there are French mothers the language will not die. But these sentiments are quite consistent with our loyalty to England, and loyal we are to England; and if I were called to illustrate it, I could not do so better than by quoting the remark of a French Canadian lady to Mr. De Bolvize who, in 1855, visited Canada by order of Napoleon III: “Our hearts are with France, but our arms are to England.” But loyalty must be reciprocal. It is not enough for the subject to be loyal to the Crown; the Crown must also be loyal to the subject. So far as England is concerned she has done her duty nobly, generously; but this Government has not done its duty towards the half-breeds. The Government are shocked, and their friends profess to be shocked, because those men claim their rights and demanded them with bullets. Have the Government been loyal to those half-breeds? If they had been loyal to the half-breeds no such trouble would have occurred. But the Government have not been loyal to the laws. If the Government do not respect the law themselves, and if afterwards men, to vindicate their rights, take weapons in their hands and brave the laws, I say the Government are bound to search their consciences and see if they have given occasion for rebellion, and if they have, to give the benefit to the guilty ones. This is what we, in Lower Canada, have been claiming, and this is one of the reasons why we have felt so warmly upon this question. But such is not, however, the doctrine of the Government. The doctrine of the Government is not put in that way in the memorandum which was issued some time after the execution of Louis Riel. Shortly after that execution the Government thought it proper, and I do not blame them for it, to put their defence before the country. They did it in a very able paper signed by the late Minister of Justice, Sir Alexander Campbell. In the very first words he speaks as follows:—

“The opponents of the Government have asserted that the rebellion was provoked, if not justified, by their mal-administration of the affairs of the North-West Territories and inattention to the just claims of the half-breeds. With this question, which has been made one of party politics, it is not thought becoming to deal here. Upon such a charge, when made in a constitutional manner, the Government will be responsible to the representatives of the people, and before them they will be prepared to meet and disprove it.”

Mr. LAURIER.

That the Government should be compelled to submit their reasons for having so acted goes as a matter of course. They were to give their reasons—they were responsible to the people. This is a matter of course. But this is not what is contended here. The contention laid down is that when the people of Canada are to examine the action of the Government in executing Riel, the question whether or not the rebellion was provoked is not to be taken into consideration. Was there ever a more unconstitutional, more intolerable doctrine propounded? I say it is contrary to the true doctrine, for if there is any occasion when the Government is bound to search into the matter to see if provocation has been given for the committal of an offence, which has involved the death penalty, it is when the offence charged is purely a political one. It is always with regret that the Minister of Justice finds himself unable to report in favor of the commutation of a death sentence. Whenever in this country a sentence of death is passed upon any of our fellow beings, it is the duty of the Minister of Justice to enquire into the causes of the crime in order to see if the requirements of the law would not be equally met if the death sentence were not carried out. Nothing is left behind that can lead to that desired end? And yet we are told here that when a man is charged with a political crime, the Government are not to consider whether there was provocation or not by the Crown? With the Government all rebellions are alike, whether provoked or not, and they have all to be treated in the same way. You are to look at all rebellions as utterly bad. You have to look upon the rebellion of Junius Brutus and the attempted rebellion of Cataline as equally bad. I say, on the contrary, that this is one of the grounds on which I arraign the Government. It was their duty when they came to consider, whether the death sentence should be carried out on Riel, to consider whether he had received provocation for the deed which brought him into that situation; and having failed to do so, the Government, on their own confession, stand guilty of having failed in a duty, which is one of the most sacred that ever can fall upon man. But the doctrine of the Government is so untenable that they could not adhere to it to the last. Even before Sir Alexander Campbell had reached the end of his factum, he abandoned his theory, for in the very bottom lines, he says:

“Whether rebellion alone should be punished with death is a question upon which opinions may differ. Treason will probably ever remain what it always has been among civilised nations, the highest of all crimes; but such conviction for that offence must be treated and disposed of by the Executive Government upon its own merits, and with a full consideration of all the attendant circumstances. In this particular instance, it was a second offence, and, as on the first occasion.”

The ex-Minister of Justice commenced by saying that we should not look into the causes which had induced the rebellion; he had conveniently left aside looking into the causes, but he no less conveniently looked into the fact that this was a second offence. This was the second offence. So it was, and for the second time the Government was guilty of that rebellion; for the second time Riel was a rebel, and was a rebel on account of the conduct of the present Government. Sir, I am not of those who look upon Louis Riel as a hero. Nature had endowed him with many brilliant qualities, but nature denied him that supreme quality without which all other qualities, however brilliant, are of no avail. Nature denied him a well-balanced mind. At his worst he was a subject fit for an asylum; at his best he was a religious and political monomaniac. But he was not a bad man—I do not believe at least that he was the bad man that he has been represented to be in a certain press. It is true that at the trial a most damaging fact was brought against him; it is true that he had offered to accept a bribe from the Government. But justice to his memory requires that all the circumstances connected with that fact should be laid before the House. If he accepted this money, it is evident that in