

In the Event of Secession.

What would Happen if a Province Tried to Withdraw from
Confederation The Peculiar Nature of the
Canadian Dominion.

By a well-known French-Canadian M.P.*

WHAT would happen if the people of one of the Provinces of the Dominion—say Quebec—should decide to withdraw from Confederation? How would they go about it, and how would the other Provinces resist their demand, if unwilling to let the dissatisfied one depart in peace? Certainly there is no immediate prospect of such an eventuality, but in view of certain occurrences and utterances that have engaged the attention of Canadians of late, speculation on these points becomes rather interesting.

The precedent everyone recalls, the moment there is talk of breaking up Confederation, is the attempt of the Southern States to withdraw from the Union—which led to the costliest war of modern times. But there is manifestly a fundamental difference between the case of the United States and our own. The States of the Union entered into the federal pact by mutual agreement, but, in doing so, did not require the consent of a higher authority. The Canadian Provinces likewise agreed amongst themselves to federate, but not being sovereign states, they could not, of themselves, give effect to the provisions of the agreement. The project had to go before the Parliament of Great Britain, and to receive the sanction of this central authority. Theoretically, it was the Imperial Parliament, and not the Quebec Conference, that federated the Provinces and created the Dominion of Canada. It is by virtue of the British North America Act—an Act of the Parliament at London, duly passed by Lords and Commons and assented to by Her Majesty—that every public thing in the purview of either the Dominion or the Provinces is done. And without that Act, the Dominion could not have existed for one moment.

When the Southern States wished to withdraw from the Union, their Legislatures passed resolutions to that effect, and their people ceased to send representatives to Congress. There was no higher authority to consult. The States had entered the Union by mutual consent, and it was by voluntary action that they withdrew from it, without asking the leave or license of anyone. At least such was the view taken of it by Southerners. The North, it is true, resisted this conception of the nature of the Union to the utmost, and, by force of arms, compelled the secessionists to stay in the federation.

If the majority of the people of a Canadian Province should be in favor of seceding, they would first have to elect a Legislature representative of their views, and this Legislature would then require to petition the Imperial Parliament to amend the British North America Act, in such manner as to release the Province from the Union. Of course, the secessionists might not wait for these formalities, but might declare the federal pact at an end, and stand ready to uphold their position by arms. But, in that case, they would probably not only precipitate immediate war with the other Provinces, but would become rebels against the Crown itself, subject to punishment by the Imperial authority, whose legislation they would have defied.

But the constitutional procedure would be for the Provincial Legislature to petition the Parliament in London, as above described, and also probably to endeavor to have the Dominion Parliament forward a similar petition or pass a resolution approving the petition of the Province.

*The name of the writer of this instructive article is withheld by request.—EDITOR.

It is doubtful if the Dominion Parliament could ever, under any circumstances, short of a general movement throughout the Dominion in favor of repeal, be induced to sanction the withdrawal of a Province. And, without such sanction, it is extremely questionable that the Imperial Parliament would interfere with the B. N. A. Act. If, however, the Province were determined to withdraw, it is hard to say what the Imperial Parliament would do, rather than precipitate rebellion and civil war. The problem would be a most delicate and dangerous one for it to deal with.

The nature of the Canadian Confederation is such that no single Province, except those at the extremities of the Dominion, could withdraw without breaking up the whole union. Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, British Columbia, or even New Brunswick, might step out, without involving the remaining Provinces, but it would be impossible for Quebec, Ontario or Manitoba to do so, for these Provinces are links in a chain binding East and West together. They are essential to the very existence of the Dominion.

Should such a misfortune as the breaking up of Confederation ever come to pass, it is doubtful whether the isolated Provinces could long maintain themselves as British territory. Either they would one by one be seized by the United States, or, even if not molested, they would be unable to resist the natural forces—then a hundred fold increased—that make for political union with the strong nation to the South.

The future of the British Empire as an American power—and perchance, indeed, as a world power—depends on the continuance of the Canadian Dominion. If designing men should succeed in creating a solid Quebec—similar to the solid South of ante-bellum days in the United States—and should then point to Quebec's political unanimity as a reason for a counter solidification of the English Provinces, there is no telling what misfortunes might follow. Those who rest their faith in the future of mankind on the equity and freedom that exist beneath the flag of Great Britain, should do all in their power to preserve the Dominion from such discord as might lead to dissatisfaction with the results of Confederation in any Province; for discontent, like a noxious weed, spreads with miraculous rapidity and soon chokes out all wholesome sentiments, whilst maturing and scattering everywhere the seeds of violence and destructive fury.

PRO PATRIA.

COLD was the market place and grey,
In the dim morning light;
As an Englishman stood facing death,
For Britain and the right,
No battle cry rang in his ears,
Alone he was and still,
Facing the end with calm, brave eyes,
At a bloody tyrant's will.

He would not join with England's foes,
To wreck her Empire great;
Far rather would he die alone,
And share her dead ones' fate.
He faced his murderers, serene,
Grand 'gainst the darkened sky,
He showed those Boer dogs what it was
To see a Briton die.

A puff of smoke, and all was o'er!
The martyr's path he trod—
His body 'neath a Transvaal sun,
His soul safe home to God!
Oh! gallant heart, serene and high,
No blood is shed in vain,
If we can pay this foul deed back,
And wipe away this stain.

The days will pass, the years will go,
And men will oft times tell
Of heroes fighting for the Flag,
'Mid bullets, shot and shell.
But will they ever think of him,
Who gave his life, his all,
True to his Country and his Queen,
Behind a prison wall?

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