

RESPONSIBLE GOVERNMENT FOR CANADA,

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THE Official Gazette has lately told us that we have a new Provincial Ministry; provisional, no doubt, and incomplete; but still a Ministry, an Executive Council sworn to advise the Governor, and held accountable to the Province for the advice it shall give. The machine of Responsible Government, after the rude shock that for two or three weeks had seemingly stopped its movements, is again moving, though not altogether as it did before. Has the shock damaged it? Will the system work, or is its failure about to hurry us into a state of "constituted anarchy," worse than that from which Lord Durham and the Union, by making Canada a Province with a real Government of its own, promised to rescue us,—worse, because following upon the boldest remedial measure within the power of the Crown, because proving that measure insufficient, because leaving us no room to hope for the successful application of the principle of the British Constitution to the Government of a British Colony?

The question is one of no little moment, and seems to me to call for a more thorough examination of the subject than the limits of newspaper discussion admit. Random assertions affecting this public man and that, may be made by any one with little trouble, and if need be in few words. Of them, therefore, we are always sure in the war of politics to have enough and to spare. But in a case of this magnitude we want something more. For the public mind to judge correctly, the real facts of the whole case require to be stated, and the great principles involved in it discussed. It is not every one who has the time or the temper to do this. *Faute de mieux*, the occasion leads me to propose making the attempt. I am not vain enough to fancy I can succeed in doing all I wish. But as an Anglo-Canadian, an attentive observer for some years past of the course of Canadian politics, and not unacquainted with either of the two great sections of the Province nor with either of its races, I feel called upon to do my best. I have always been and am a staunch supporter of Responsible Government; I have never regarded but with extreme regret the bitter national jealousies that have prevailed in this part of the Province; and to my thinking, the great use of the Union is that it has given Canada the means of securing the former, and the opportunity of putting an end for ever to the latter. If it is to fail of either of these ends, every Canadian will have bitter reason to lament the failure.

At the opening of the Session of Parliament lately brought to a close, no one could doubt the fact of our having a Responsible Provincial Government, and a strong one too. Its majority in the House was such as hardly to leave the minority a chance to act at all against it.

Its measures, numerous and important beyond all precedent, seemed likely all to pass, almost by acclamation. Complaint might be made and objections, but no one supposed defeat possible on any question of the least importance. Two strong majorities were united; active organised opposition to them there was literally none. Out of doors there was more said, but not more doing. The Government was beyond question popular; whether or not its popularity was on the wane it might have been hard to say, but certainly there was no sign of such a re-action as could cheer its opponents with the hope of its early overthrow. The leading features of the host of Bills it brought forward for Parliamentary sanction were popular. On the one question that at one time seemed to threaten it—the removal of the Seat of Government—it gained a decisive triumph. Three weeks after, in the very middle as it seemed of a four months' Session, almost nothing finished, the scene changes. The Executive Councillors, all but one, are out of office. For a fortnight Parliament is in a ferment, debating the reasons of their resignation, and patching up and hurrying into laws a few of the great and some dozens of the little measures of the Session. All else is lost. The vacant offices remain unfilled. The scramble can only end with a prorogation; and now, after the prorogation, we have the announcement of a new but obviously provisional Administration.

To what is all this owing? Something wrong, it is quite clear, there must have been somewhere. Was it in the system, or only in the men? Must Responsible Government in a Colony of necessity lead to such results? Or is the fault traceable to any of the parties here charged with the task of carrying it into practical effect? Has the Governor General been wrong, or those, if any there were, who may be presumed to have been the secret, irresponsible advisers of the course he has taken; or should the blame rather rest on the ex-Ministers?

Let the fault rest with whom it may, if only it be not in the system itself, there is hope it may do good by the lesson it will have taught our public men, whenever it shall have been rightly understood, and its immediate consequences felt. The blunders of public men do mischief; but they are not without their use, inasmuch as they may serve, and often do, to prevent other public men from making worse. But if it be the system that is in fault, if it be in the nature of things impossible to make the machinery of the British Constitution work better in United Canada, the prospect is beyond question gloomy. We cannot advance further towards democracy than the forms of the British Constitution allow, but by first severing the tie that binds us to the Parent State.