

CANADA.

wantonly destroyed in this section of the province during the rebellion. That it was false to affirm that the measure was intended for the benefit of rebels; that, on the contrary, all convicted rebels, as well as those who having confessed their guilt were sent to Bermuda, were expressly excluded; and that for the rest the Commissioners appointed under the Act would be bound, under the sanction of an oath, precisely in the same way as the Commissioners for Upper Canada had been before them, to examine minutely into the justice of all claims preferred before them, and to apportion the indemnity according to the true intent and meaning of the Act.

12. The opposition raised to the Bill in Parliament was echoed out of doors. A considerable number of petitions against it were sent up from different parts of the province. It is remarkable, that although these petitions were prepared while the measure was still in progress through Parliament, and, in many instances, as appears from incorrect statements contained in them, before its provisions were accurately known, the great majority were addressed to me, but few comparatively being presented to either branch of the Legislature. Whether from the belief that it was hopeless to attempt to cause their views to prevail with the Representatives of the people, or from some other motive which may not be so easily intelligible at a distance, it seems to have been from the first the determination of the Opposition to force me to join issue with the Local Parliament upon this most delicate and exciting question.

13. The petitions addressed to me on this subject generally concluded with the prayer that I should either dissolve Parliament, or reserve the Bill, when it reached me, for the signification of Her Majesty's pleasure. The former of these courses was obviously full of hazard, and could only have been justified by the pressure of an overbearing necessity, and the clearest prospect of success. The Parliament had been but recently elected under the auspices not of the Ministry, but of the Opposition. To have recourse to a general election, in order to test the feelings of the people on this exciting topic, was to provoke in many parts of the country scenes of violence, perhaps of bloodshed. Moreover a dissolution implied a change of Administration, and if it failed of its object, its only effect would be to implant suspicion and mutual distrust between the Representatives of the Crown and the Local Parliament. I was bound, therefore, as it appeared to me, to weigh all probabilities carefully before resorting to so desperate an expedient. The best consideration which I was able to bestow upon the subject led me to the conclusion that a dissolution of Parliament, under the circumstances in which the province was placed, would not have been justifiable, either in principle or policy.

14. The other course suggested by the petitioners, viz., that of reserving the Bill, was undoubtedly more safe and practicable. Perhaps if I had consulted in this matter only my own case I might have been induced to follow it. But I felt that after what had occurred, with respect to indemnity in Upper Canada, I could hardly fail to cause just umbrage to Parliament, if I declined to sanction the Bill which it had passed for the benefit of sufferers in Lower Canada. I analyzed with care the votes of the Assembly, and I found that on the passing of the Bill, 47 voted for and 18 against the measure; that of 31 members from Upper Canada who voted on the occasion, 17 supported and 14 opposed it; and that of 10 members for Lower Canada of British descent, 6 supported and 4 opposed it. These facts seemed altogether irreconcilable with the allegation that the question was one on which the two races were arrayed against each other throughout the province generally. I considered, therefore, that by reserving the Bill, I should only cast on Her Majesty and Her Majesty's advisers a responsibility which ought, in the first instance at least, to rest on my own shoulders, and that I should awaken in the minds of the people at large, even of those who were indifferent or hostile to the Bill, doubts as to the sincerity with which it was intended that constitutional Government should be carried on in Canada; doubts which it is my firm conviction, if they were to obtain generally, would be fatal to the connexion.

15. At any rate, however, this is a point which can be determined only by the Government of the Queen. If I have erred the error is not irreparable. Should your Lordship be of opinion that there is in the character of this measure some speciality which ought to have removed it from the category of local questions on which the Local Parliament is entitled to pronounce, I shall at once bow to your decision, confident that you will still give me credit for