

CANADA.

conduct of public business are to be capriciously tampered with, and changed at so short a notice as to preclude the distant representatives from being present, it is evident much wrong and inconvenience would result, and the door be opened to a great deal of trickery at the hands of an unscrupulous Minister.

The foregoing considerations pointed pretty distinctly to prorogation as an inevitable necessity of the situation. Only one other alternative indeed either suggested itself then, or has occurred to me since, and that was another adjournment of the House to such a date as would suit the convenience of the absentees. At first, I confess this course appeared to me fairly practicable, but further reflection disclosed difficulties I had not at once seen. In the first place, this was an arrangement which I had not the power of enforcing, and I was confronted by the obvious reflection, that if the Government made a motion to that effect, it might be defeated or met with an amendment tantamount to a vote of want of confidence at the hands of the majority in presence, and I should then find myself landed in the very position which I was quite satisfied ought to be avoided. Even if the opponents of the Government were to refrain from taking so unfair an advantage of their numerical superiority, it was evident that in view of the adjournment preliminary issues would crop up of vital importance relative to the fresh instructions to be given to the Committee; for instance, whether the evidence was to be sworn or unsworn, and if the former, how the oath was to be administered—all of which would necessarily be decided in a manner unduly adverse to the Government, and in the absence of those who had an undoubted right to make their voices heard on the occasion. I was so anxious, nevertheless, to find some way of avoiding a course which I foresaw would be denounced, however unjustly, as an undue exercise of the Queen's prerogative, that I thought it desirable to make a suggestion in this sense to Sir John Macdonald, offering at the same time to become the channel of communication by which an understanding between him and his opponents might be arrived at. Sir John's reply was very much in the sense I had anticipated. He insisted upon the injustice of his Government being given over, bound hand and foot, to the tender mercies of their opponents in the absence of his supporters, whom he had dismissed to their homes with my sanction and with the acquiescence of Parliament. He called my attention to the fact that the Opposition organs, far from hinting at any compromise, were insisting on the fact that a quorum of Parliament could do anything that Parliament itself could do, and were evincing by unmistakable signs that they would show no quarter; that both Messrs. Blake and Dorien had endeavoured to persuade the Committee to content themselves with unsworn evidence, and that if Parliament met for business they would be in a position to pass an instruction to the Committee to that effect, that no man would be willing to risk his life, still less his honour, in the hands of witnesses released from the consequences of perjury and finally; that he would not feel himself safe in entering into any arrangements dependent upon the bona fides of those with whom I had suggested he should treat.

Unfortunately in this country party animosity is intense, and the organs of each side denounce the public men opposed to them in terms of far greater vigour than those to which we are accustomed in England. The quarrel at this moment is exceptionally bitter. The one party openly accuse the other of personal dishonour, while these regard their opponents as unscrupulous conspirators. As a consequence, a mistrust of each other's fair dealings—which I cannot believe to be justified on either hand—has been engendered, which would render the rôle of mediator under any circumstances extremely difficult. As it was, the former part of Sir John's representations, though not the latter, coincided too closely with what had occurred to my own mind to enable me to deny its cogency. There being, however, no further time for correspondence, I left Halifax on Saturday night, the 9th August, and arrived in Ottawa on the morning of Wednesday 13th. Had I been at liberty to have done so, I should have preferred starting sooner, but the town of Halifax had organized a series of popular demonstrations in our honour for Saturday afternoon, and it would have occasioned great dissatisfaction had I absented myself.

Before continuing my narrative, there is one incident connected with my stay at Halifax which perhaps ought to find mention here. Mr. Huntington sent me a sealed packet covered by an official communication to my secretary, which, as I understood from the gentleman who brought it, as well as from Mr. Huntington's letter, contained copies of the incriminatory documents in his possession. As the matters to which the papers referred had become the subject of a public investigation before a House of Commons' Committee, and as I was still uncertain what turn affairs might take, I did not consider it would be proper for me to take personal cognizance of these papers. I therefore returned the packet unopened to Mr. Huntington.