

The Gleaner.

W. R. CROCKETT, EDITOR AND PROPRIETOR.
THURSDAY, MARCH 15, 1898.

THE QUEBEC RESOLUTIONS.

The Interprovincial Conference resolutions were submitted to the assembly this afternoon, and are now being discussed. The questions involved are of special and deep interest to all of the provinces of the Union, and their consideration will, we trust, be approached in a just and fair spirit, and free from all partisan feeling.

Last week the Ontario legislature heartily endorsed these resolutions. Premier Mowat, in presenting them, did so with his usual moderation and in excellent taste. He commenced with a brief statement of the circumstances which led to the convention held at Quebec in 1884 for the purpose of carrying confederation. Government of the old provinces of Canada, owing to the difficulties continually occurring between Ontario and Quebec, had become an impossibility, and relief was sought from this difficulty by forming a general union of the provinces. The resolutions adopted at that conference, composed of leading men from all the provinces then in existence, had formed substantially the Dominion of North America. Mr. Mowat proceeded to say:

"Nearly a quarter of a century has elapsed since that time, and it would be wonderful indeed if our experience, during that long period of the working of that constitution, did not make us to perceive amendments to that constitution which would be of great value in accomplishing the purpose of confederation. Our experience in regard to all matters of legislation, matters involving compromise, matters of difficulty, is that no legislation, however carefully considered, is perfect in the first instance, but requires amendment from time to time, and we may well repeat the same thing in regard to our constitution. Friction has developed that has not occurred to the authors of the act or to those who took part in the conference, and it seems that if consideration is to be given to the amendments, it will be to work satisfactorily considerable changes will have to be made in it."

That the above are merely plain statements of fact is undeniable, and nothing can be more absurd than the position taken by a certain class of Tories that the British North America act is one of those holy things, such a divinely inspired creation, that it is not susceptible of improvement, and that no hand should dare to alter its text or its spirit. Mr. Mowat claimed, with perfect truth, that the recent conference at Quebec was held for the purpose of amending the act without reference to party considerations. To avoid any appearance of this all the provinces were invited to take part, whether Liberal, Conservative or coalition governments, and the Dominion government was waived as well. All the provinces were represented with the exception of P. E. Island and British Columbia, and the Dominion government, we think, most unwisely declined to attend. We quote:

"Every case was examined to express the resolutions in such a way that they might not be at all offensive to conservatives, nor that nobody of whatever party might have any difficulty in joining in the substance of them; and there is nothing in them which conservatives ought not to agree to. (Applause.) I wish I could see the Conservatives of this house agree with the reforms in passing these, all party triumph would be taken away from them, for no one party would be able to claim a victory over the other. If the matter is converted into a party question, such a course will, no doubt, delay the coming of the time when we shall receive the amendments that we are asked for in these resolutions, but the time would only be delayed. It must come. (Applause.) All the amendments are so valuable and commend themselves so strongly to the judgment of all candid minds, and have such strong reasons in support of them, that I hold it to be perfectly safe that they will all be certainly achieved unless some most stringent measures of reform are substituted for some of them."

Mr. Mowat then proceeded to discuss and explain the resolutions in detail, giving a resume of the reasons which led to their adoption. First, there was the question of disallowance by the federal government of provincial acts. This he discussed at considerable length. He showed the British North America Act was inconsistent with itself, and that this led to confusion. That not expressly declare that the provincial legislatures shall have exclusive jurisdiction to make laws on a variety of subjects, but, he said, "while they had that express declaration that provincial legislatures should have this exclusive jurisdiction, yet in another part of the act was a provision which enabled the Dominion government to disallow every act passed by the provinces. It is not merely a power to veto an act that might conflict with the Dominion policy, but a power that enables them at their own discretion, and without so much as giving them a reason, to disallow every act that provinces might pass." He said that if this power was never acted upon it might remain on the statute book. If acted on only once or twice in a number of years it might remain. "If acted on only in the same way as that in which the imperial government dealt with provincial statutes it might remain." As Mr. Mowat was one of the "fathers of confederation," having taken part in the deliberations of the Quebec conference in 1864, we quote him at some length in giving an account of how the power of disallowance happened to be vested in the federal government:

"That provision was introduced into the constitution in 1864 because the notion was that the Dominion government would exercise that power of veto less frequently than the imperial government would exercise it. Nobody then had the idea that it would be more freely exercised than veto by the imperial government, that it would be used as a curb upon the provincial legislatures. There was a feeling that the colonial relation required the veto power should exist somewhere. Personally he did not agree with that. He did not see why the veto power should exist anywhere. He did not see why, when a body of the people's representatives, elected for that purpose, had made up their minds that a certain law was necessary, it should be interfered with by any body. (Applause.) But, while he personally entertained this

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Miss Henry, daughter of James Henry, Prince William, goes to Manitoba this week. Her many friends will be sorry to see her go, as she is a very good girl, and her presence in the household was a great help.

Mr. Wm. Dwyer, of Cork, had on the 10th inst. a very fine horse, and he is justly proud of it, as he made it himself. It is well known that he has a fine stock of horses, and he is a very good horseman.

Mr. Geo. Love, of Prince William, was here on Saturday. His horse took fright at a quarter of a mile, and would not do any more. It caused a little excitement, but no harm was done.

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