

PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURE.

Speeches Made by Messrs. Laforest and Labilloy on the Speech from the Throne.

(From the Official Report.)

Mr. Laforest followed Hon. Mr. Emmerson in the debate on the address. Although he did not pretend to be a great authority on parliamentary matters, he thought that it was customary that when a member found it necessary to change his position toward an administration which he had supported that he should take the earliest opportunity of explaining why he had changed his position and if possible to justify his action. Before going into details as to why he had adopted a different attitude towards this government from that of last year he would speak of a matter upon which the parties on both sides of this house agreed. He referred to the paragraph in the address relating to the unfortunate campaign in South Africa, which campaign he hoped they would be all able to soon refer to as a fortunate one. As a representative of a French Canadian and Roman Catholic constituency, and being himself a Frenchman and a Roman Catholic, and having in view the great effort that is being made in different parts of the province to stir up race discord, he deemed it a duty to contradict the statement that the people of his race and religion were disloyal. (Applause.) He was proud of the fact that he was a British subject, but, unlike some high personages, he was a British subject first, last and all the time. There was no condition nor limitation to his loyalty. He was proud of the privileges which he enjoyed under the British crown. He would not exchange his position as a citizen of the British nation for any other citizenship in the world. (Applause.) French blood flowed in his veins, he was born a French Canadian and a Catholic, and these were facts of which he was not ashamed. What was dearer to him than anything else were the rights of citizenship as guaranteed to him under the British constitution.

The French Canadians loved France as the country of their fathers, and while for that reason they sympathized with France, they rather pitied her present condition. England, when she conquers a country, gives that country greater rights than they ever enjoyed before. That was the case with the Frenchmen in Canada, and that, he believed, would be the case, when the war with the Boers was over. Those people would enjoy greater rights, and have more freedom than they have heretofore enjoyed, and it was in consequence of his admiration for England's methods towards the people that she conquers that he wished England God speed in the present war. The French in Canada hated England before the latter had conquered them, but, because of her generous treatment towards them, the French Canadians had learned to love England, and could be depended upon to stand by her until the end. While he said this, he could not but deplore that an attempt was being made—and in this regard he would not blame one political party more than another—to incite race and sectarian strife. Why are the French Canadians and Catholics of Canada proud of belonging to the British Empire? Because we know we have more rights in Canada under British rule than it would be possible for us to have in France. He must congratulate the members of this house upon the happy tone of the speeches made on both sides. There had been nothing in those speeches calculated to disturb the harmonious feelings which should exist among all classes, creeds and nationalities among our people. That was the way that the members should act toward each other if this country was to be made the great country that it was possible for Canada to be made. As a representative of the French Canadians and coming from the most essentially French Canadian county in the province, he must deplore the attempt on the part of some English speaking papers to stir up racial strife. Their conduct was calculated to start a fire in this country; their articles being as a flaming torch applied to a stack of straw. It was the duty of public men when England required a united Canada to do everything possible to stamp out this fire. The present was an occasion when on all sides the public men of the country should be moderate in their language, so that racial and religious strife might not gain a headway. He hoped that the press to which he referred would stop the nefarious work of casting reflections upon the loyalty of French Canadians. Their present conduct was a disgrace to Canada. Of course he did not mean to say that all the English speaking papers were guilty of the conduct of which he complained, and he was not afraid to say that some of the French Canadian papers were also a disgrace to Canada by reason of their attempt to appeal to the prejudices of the people. He did not wish to be understood as an alarmist, but he thought that if something was not done speedily, in order that the harmony that is necessary to a country's greatness should exist among all classes and creeds, the prosperity which Canada would otherwise undoubtedly enjoy, would be greatly retarded, if not completely destroyed. If the fires of discord are to be permitted to blaze, there is no knowing what calamity may occur. Something more is wanted to allay discord than even the action of

the press, or the moderate expressions of public men. The governments of the country have a duty greater than the press, or the peoples representatives. He had no sympathy with the idea that this or that man should be appointed to an office because of his being a Frenchman or a Catholic, but there was no disguising the fact that this country was made up of different creeds and nationalities, and it was by harmonizing these different elements, that it was possible to make Canada the greatest country on the earth, and the government that does not take these matters into consideration, is not doing its duty towards the people of the country. What do we find here in New Brunswick? Notwithstanding the fact that in this province there is a large French and Catholic population, and the additional fact that during the last twenty five or thirty years, ever since he was a small boy, that there were two Catholics in the government of this province, today there was but one Catholic in this government with all the seats filled up. He had no hesitation in declaring that this was wrong, and it was one of the many things that go towards adding to the discord which is so disastrous to the welfare of the country. Of course this government can afford to do as it chooses, because of the strength of its following in this house. They can even ignore the claims of the people from whom they receive a very large part of their present strength. The present condition of things, so far as the personnel of the government was concerned, was one of the reasons why he was not in unison at the present time with the government. He hoped the matter of which he complained would be remedied. He would not say that that of which he complained was intentional on the part of the government but the present condition was calculated to add to the present, and create new disorders.

He would ask the government to show more consideration for the rights of the Catholics of the province than they had been doing. Not only had the French and Catholic representation in the government been decreased, but the French and Catholic representations on the floors of this house had diminished. The election of the honorable member for Gloucester (Mr. Young) was a most extraordinary thing, considering that that county is very largely French and Catholic, and while he said this he had no desire to reflect upon the honorable member whom he believed was in every respect a worthy gentleman. The honorable members election, however, showed him what he regretted to observe, that the influence of the French people of this province was going down. He regretted to notice that they did occupy the proud position in this province that the English people occupied. He would like to see the rights of the French Canadians respected. A few years ago there was a bye-election in the County of Gloucester, and we had the spectacle of a minister of the crown going into that county in order to bring about the defeat of the French candidate, and we had the statement of an honorable member on the floors of this house on that occasion that the French majority of the county must be taught a lesson. That county, as he already said, was very largely French, and the action of the minister, and the remarks of the honorable member just referred to were not calculated to assist in bringing about the harmony that should prevail among the different sections of the people.

Hon. Mr. Emmerson—I do not desire to interfere with the Hon. gentleman in the delivery of his speech, but I do not believe that the statement was ever made on the floors of this house that the majority of Gloucester county must be taught a lesson. If any such statement was made, it would be in the Hansard, and if the honorable member can produce such a statement, he should do so immediately.

Mr. Laforest—I have a copy of the report of the speech in which that remark was made. I have mislaid it at the moment, but I will produce it in support of what I have stated.

Hon. Mr. Tweedie—Who was the honorable member who made any such statement?

Mr. Laforest—I would have preferred not mentioning the name of the honorable member, as he is not now a member of the house, but I have no objection to saying that the member to whom I referred was Mr. Venoit.

Hon. Mr. Tweedie—Do you say that Mr. Venoit is reported in the official debates as having made any such statement?

Mr. Laforest—I will have the report here. I am not going away. I read the statement from the official debates as they appeared in one of the papers. He (Laforest) had no desire to make any reflection upon Mr. Venoit, particularly as that gentleman was not now a member of the legislature, and he believed Mr. Venoit to have been thoroughly patriotic, but on the occasion referred to, he had gone into Gloucester at the instance of the government, and in company with a minister of the crown, if possible to bring about the defeat of the French candidate. After the defeat of Hon. Mr. Richard, it was expected that another French Catholic would be taken into the government. This had not been done, however, although Mr. Johnston, the member for Kent had been hounded by the government to give up his position in order to find a constituency for Mr. Richard.

Hon. Mr. Tweedie—Mr. Speaker, this will not do. It will not do for the honorable member to say that the honorable member for Kent was hounded by the government, or any member of it, because such a statement is not true.

Mr. Laforest—I would prefer hearing that statement from Mr. Johnston himself, rather than from the Provincial Secretary. While there was but one Catholic member in the government, it might be of interest to know that the salaries of all the assistants in the department over which that Catholic member presided were increased with one exception, and that was the case of the Catholic assistant. He regretted to call attention to these matters, or to have occasion to open up this matter at all.

Mr. Pugsley—You are just doing it in order to promote greater harmony in the province.

Mr. Laforest—I am doing it with the hope that it is not too late for the government to remedy these matters. With respect to his own position, he (Mr. Laforest) might almost repeat his remarks of last session. The position of himself and his colleague was a peculiar one. They had been elected as Liberals and could not do otherwise than support the government. In their election provincial matters had scarcely entered into the contest at all. The government were not pleased with the election of his colleague or himself, certainly not until after the election. The government had done all they could to defeat his colleague and himself. Indeed they had had the influence of two governments against them. Having been elected as Liberals and there being no Liberals on the Opposition side of the house there had been nothing left for his colleague and himself to do but support the government. He had given the government a fair support last session, but the government had ignored the will of the people of Madawaska, and in the distribution of patronage had not consulted the representatives of the people, representatives who, as he had said were disposed to treat the government fairly. The French people of Canada saved this country to the British empire, but they were among those who rose in rebellion when there was a condition of things in Canada that was obnoxious to the people. If the government was to treat the people of Madawaska in the future as they have since the election of his colleague and himself, then he could say that there was no more law in this country, and it was time to enquire where this thing is going to stop. The people who have had the distribution of the patronage since his election have had no right to it. They have it against the will of the people, and if the government was going to continue its present tactics with respect to the patronage in his county, then it was impossible for him to longer support them. He had mapped out a line of conduct for himself during the present session, and it was his intention to ask for information, and perhaps for investigation into affairs in Madawaska county. He believed that when the facts were brought out with reference to the conduct of the government regarding matters in his county, that the people of the county would be astounded. The honorable minister of Agriculture had not visited his county during the year. He regretted to have to call attention to these matters, but felt obliged to do so in the interests of the county and in defence of his own position in withdrawing his support from the government.

Hon. Mr. LaBilloy said it was not his intention to have addressed the house on the present occasions and would not have done so had it not been for the remarks of the honorable member for Madawaska, and that honorable member's reference to himself (LaBilloy). He was proud to hear the honorable member speak of the loyalty and devotion of the French Canadians to the British Empire. (Applause.) He had lived for fifteen or sixteen years in the grand old city of Quebec, and he knew how thoroughly attached to British institutions were the French Canadians of that city, and he was glad to be able to state that from his travels elsewhere, from all he could see and hear that what was true of the loyalty of the French Canadians in Quebec was also true of the French Canadians in every other part of the Dominion. (Applause.) He wished to be understood as agreeing fully in what he said regarding the loyalty of the French Canadian people, but he thought the honorable member had gone out of his way in the statement that the French people of this province were going backward instead of forward, and were losing their influence in this province. He believed that the very opposite was the fact, and that the French people of the province were making rapid strides. Take the county of Madawaska, which the honorable member (Laforest) represents. When the officers of the Board of Agriculture visited that county the year before last, we found agriculture in such a backward state that leading men of the county told us that it would be useless for us to hold meetings. We held meetings, however, and the result of our visit to that county was to give a great impetus to agriculture. He thought it was unmanly for the honorable member to charge against him that he had not been in the county last year, considering the attention he had given to it the year before.

Mr. Laforest—I was not in the house

the year before, and I fail to see where I was guilty of anything unmanly in mentioning that you had not been in the county last year.

Hon. Mr. Labilloy—As a result of the efforts of the Department of Agriculture, Madawaska has come to the front as a leading agricultural county. Two cheese factories that had been for a long time idle began active operations, and last year some thirty thousand pounds of cheese were manufactured, a large quantity of butter was produced, and two roller mills were in operation. With regard to the statement of the honorable member that a member had declared on the floors of this house, that a lesson must be taught to the French majority of Gloucester he had no hesitation in saying that Mr. Venoit had been misrepresented and on no occasion had Mr. Venoit made the statement attributed to him by Mr. Laforest. He felt satisfied that the official debates would not bear out the statement of the honorable member for Madawaska. (Applause.) The attempt of Mr. Laforest

to excite religious and national strife by his reference to the election of the honorable member (Mr. Young) an English speaking gentleman in the French county of Gloucester was not in the best interests of the county. Mr. Young was a gentleman who had large interests in the county, and the French Catholic people of Gloucester had supported him in preference to one of their own nationality, thus presenting a spirit of liberality which could not fail but win the approval of all right minded people. It was not right to introduce these questions of race and creed. He (Labilloy) had been many times elected in the county of Restigouche where there was a majority of English as well as a Protestant majority. If we are to work in the best interests of the county, we must put aside these appeals to race and religious prejudices. Such appeals are dangerous, because, if they operate in favor of one particular element in this county, they may operate against the same element in some other county. It was true at the present time there was

but one Catholic in the government, but honorable members would know that it is not always possible to have due regard to matters of detail as viewed from particular standpoints. The government could be depended on at all times to do justice to all classes and creeds. The attempt to make it appear that he (Labilloy) had increased the salaries of the Protestant employees of the agricultural department, and had failed to increase the salary of the Catholic employee of the department would lose its force when he informed the house that in the case of the former they were old officials while the latter was a new man. It was by sinking our sectarian and racial feelings and working as a united people that this province can be made the great country which nature intended it to be. (Great Applause.)

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