

FEDERATION OF THE EMPIRE.

BY G. E. FENETY.

No. 4.

Once more there is a disposition to rekindle the old Colonial enthusiasm, and it is suddenly discovered, by Englishmen out of office particularly, that the Colonies are worth something after all; but the nostrums propounded, as far as can be gathered, are far from being adequate to the case. We are told that we are on the verge of great events—that England and her Colonies are in a transition state—that in Canada we must either confederate, or annexation will be our fate—that the Colonies cannot remain long as they are, in their disjointed condition, and that disintegration is at hand. It is only the fears of timid people that can be overcome by such shallow soothsayers. But it is an old story re-vamped. In order to hasten Confederation of the Provinces it was necessary in 1865 (?) to get up what was called the "Fenian scheme," and it was urged that unless the Provinces united they would be swallowed up by the Americans and Irish combined, as if union would render us less vulnerable to attack, or more able or willing to fight in self-defence as we showed a disposition to do on the occasion of the boundary troubles in 1839. The Right Honorable W. E. Foster, one of the movers for federation, but since deceased, remarked in an article upon the subject in the "Nineteenth Century Magazine," "the idea of the permanent unity of the realm, the duty of preserving this union, the blessings which its preservation will confer, the danger and loss and disaster which will follow from disunion (the italics are made by the writer), are thoughts which possess the minds of Englishmen both here and over the seas." These thoughts so fearfully sketched out by Mr. Foster, certainly find no such expression on this side of the water. These Colonies remain as they have always done—stationary, or somewhat progressive and loyal; there are no more storm-clouds gathering in the political horizon than have been discernible within the last fifty years. We are at peace with our neighbors in the West; the only ripple of disturbance is in regard to our trade relations—both sides being more anxious than ever to form a closer intimacy in these respects, to cultivate the arts of peace and good fellowship. These hollow, disunion cries would have been quite pertinent forty years ago, when England adopted her free trade policy and invited the whole world as it were to enter her markets in competition with the principal trade upon which we had to depend, viz: our ships and timber. That was a blow that staggered us, and caused our people to be very outspoken. Talk of the bugbear annexation, and cries of independence at the present day in this Dominion,—why, they are mere whispers to what they were formerly. Did England in years gone by stop for a moment to consider our interests, and her leading men ask us to form a United Empire with a view of preventing disintegration? Not they. Nor is there anything to warrant the present agitation. But the history of every movement has been ushered in with deep prophetic warnings; and in this case the warning of disintegration in the event of not falling into line with the unfledged opinions of federationists, whether in England or America, will come to naught as on former occasions, when the cry of wolf brought no wolf with it.

The old thirteen Colonies set up in business for themselves with a population of three millions, while Canada is now closely verging upon five millions—and in twenty years according to predictions made on the opening up of the great North West, twenty millions may be counted upon. Twenty years is but a short time in the life of a Nation. Will Canada then with such a population continue in leading strings, and be subject to a controlling power three thousand miles distant, under the guise of a grand federated hybrid? All experience and common sense seem to point otherwise with the unerring finger of destiny, as the "survival of the fittest," according to the modern school of evolutionists.

If those who advocate the federation of the Empire were to enlarge the scope of their vision and embrace the world's English speaking population in their scheme, the prospects of success might appear more evident. Nor would it follow that the sixty millions of Americans on our west would necessarily have to change their flag, or England change her flag, in order to bring this about. It would be a commercial union, trade carried on as freely as if all belonged to the one National family—a reunion of interests between England and America—all alike actuated by one principle, the desire to benefit each other as members of one concern, for mutual cooperation, good will and unbroken peace and advancement as the fruits thereof. Would such a change be less practicable or reasonable than that which the federationists are now after? This, however, is only by the way.

But the most remarkable thing about this NOTE.—In article No. 3 (last week) the following passage was omitted: "And yet this difficulty might be overcome, even by a resort to direct taxation, provided the boon of free-trade could be obtained."

new Utopia is in the fact that no man holding an official position in England and Canada has yet committed himself to it; while on the other hand those officials who have done so, oppose the scheme on the ground of its hollowness or its impracticability, or because they desire it to be known that they do not wish to be misunderstood—for example, when the present Prime Minister was approached by a federation delegation to ascertain his views, he remarked that a "Customs union should be of mutual advantage to both countries (England and her Colonies), and a union of this kind is what is mostly wanted." No doubt of it, but the way or the possibility of bringing this about is not even suggested. And so with others in office; they are willing to agree in the abstract that union would be a good thing (it is a safe investment of a political idea), but the details do not appear to concern them. The details of the remarks of Sir John Macdonald, Sir Chas. Tupper, even of the new Governor General (Stanley) himself, and there is not a single expression to indicate that their hearts are in the cause, or that they have made up their minds to assist in flying the kite. They seem to be actuated by the principle that the ball being in motion they will not interfere with its progress, even if so disposed; let others do the engineering—for in case of success they are sure to reap whatever advantages there may be in official advancement, becoming great lords in England, instead of simple knights in Canada. Again, on a festive occasion in London a few weeks ago, at which were present some of our Canadian lights, as well as men of position in England—among them the Colonial Secretary, who remarked that if federation is to become a living issue, it must originate with the Colonies themselves,—which means that whenever you get ready to knock at the door of the Imperial Cabinet we will listen to what you have to say, and then we shall see about it. This and nothing more. Mr. Parnell is quoted as favoring Imperial Federation, but it is the voice of the prisoner in chains, to escape from which sympathy may be sought from any quarter,—for his condition can be no worse whatever betide him, with chances of commencing a new life under freer auspices; but it is amazing to find a Colonist already free, seeking argument from such a quarter in behalf of federation. Parnell wants home rule, which Canada has already, while the political condition of Ireland—never having had home rule, in its rightful sense—furnishes no case at all analogous to that of Canada or any other self-governing Colony. Mr. Parnell's opinion is therefore valueless in connection with the federation question, as to what the Colonies would lose or gain by its acceptance. Mr. Mowat, the Premier of Ontario, also spoke on the occasion, and he was non-committal although somewhat expressive that England and her Colonies should be drawn closer together, to which no one can object,—but in what way we are not told. In such a place and under such circumstances, and in such company, and after dinner, no man would venture to say anything displeasing to the company and its general tone,—for this was not an arena for debate or discussion, but for harmony and sociability.

But those officials who have been outspoken upon this federation story, have given forth no uncertain sound—as for example, the Premier of Quebec (Mr. Mercier), spoke as follows in April last, on the floor of the House of Assembly:—

"The situation is a grave one; we are in face of the greatest danger that ever menaced our political organization. They wish to force us into a regime which can have but disastrous consequences. Up to the present we have lived a colonial life, but today they wish us to assume, in spite of ourselves, the responsibilities and dangers of a sovereign state, which will not be ours. They seek to expose us to the vicissitudes of peace and war against the great powers of the world; to rigorous exigencies of military service as practiced in Europe; to disperse our sons from the freezing regions of the north pole to the burning sands of the desert of Sahara; an odious regime which will condemn us to the forced impost of blood and money, and wrest from our arms our sons who are the hope of our country and the consolation of our old days, and send them off to bloody and distant wars, which we will not be able to stop or prevent. We are Liberals, Nationalists, Conservatives, and the National party of Quebec does not want anything like this. We will combat such a scheme with all the energy at our command; and if they succeed in imposing this mad project upon us, it will be by trickery or by force."

Mr. John Bright, in January last, remarked:—

"The federation project is mainly the offspring of the Jingo spirit, which clamors for a vast and continually widening empire; and seems almost ready to boast that the Empire can fight the world outside of its own limits. He would recommend sensible men to let the question rest."

But let us note what our late Governor General (Lord Lansdowne) said upon this subject at a dinner given to him in Toronto in May, on the eve of his departure for England; although having already been widely published, it will stand republication here:—

"I have never seen any scheme formulated on paper and worthy to be called a scheme of imperial confederation which would have been likely to work in practice for six months; indeed, the most conspicuous writers on the subject have shown a most commendable spirit of caution in approaching it, and have wisely limited themselves to pointing out the imperfections of the present system without committing

themselves to the remedy which they proposed. We all know that the Irish post-boy usually keeps a gallop for the avenue at the end of his journey. (Laughter.) The writers of most of such essays, however, start at full gallop, lapse into a trot after they have travelled over part of the ground and finally come to a standstill long before they get to the end of the course. We have yet to see a scheme, the execution of which would on the one hand leave unimpaired the strength and solidity of the central government of the Empire, and on the other afford to the Colonies a real and not a sham opportunity of influencing its councils without depriving themselves to a great extent of the liberties which they now enjoy. (Hear, hear.) I am, however, very far from saying that there is nothing to be done in the direction of an additional strengthening of the ties by which the constituents of the Empire may be united. I was glad, for instance, to observe that amongst the subjects to which most prominence was given in the deliberations of the conference was that of imperial defence. I do not for a moment think it would be just or equitable to ask the country to undertake liabilities much exceeding those which it has already incurred in providing for its own defence. To ask a young country, which needs every shilling of its revenue for the development of its own resources, to sink millions in fortifications and armaments would, I think, be a most iniquitous proposal. Your people have, and must for some time continue to devote the whole of their energies to the settlement of their own country and the consolidation of its scattered and sparsely occupied Provinces. (Applause.) You have already by a line of railway from ocean to ocean across your continent completed in a few years an imperial work for the execution of which you might, if you had thought proper, have taken the lifetime of a generation. You have provided a militia force large enough for the requirements of the country, a force which has shown itself capable of suppressing disorder in the remotest portions of the Dominion, in the face of very great difficulties and dangers, and without asking for the assistance of a single soldier from the imperial forces. (Loud applause.) All this has constituted a reasonable if not a sufficient contribution to the defences of the Empire. I do not think that there is any disposition here as at home to ask you to incur extended liabilities on a largely increased expenditure. There is certainly no desire on the part of the Imperial government to admit its own liabilities or to repudiate its existing engagements for the defence of any part of the Colonial Empire. (Hear, hear.) I do not hesitate to express my own preference for a reliance on feelings of this kind to any of those ingenious schemes for the creation of an Imperial Legislature, in which Canadian members would sit by the side of representatives from the antipodes to vote upon questions in which they have no common interest, or even of those more modest proposals, such as that for the admission of Canadian statesmen to the English House of Lords."

This extract may appear rather long, but it contains the pith and marrow of the whole story, as far as Canada is concerned, and exhibits a disinterestedness well worthy of the deepest consideration by those who have not yet studied the question, but are apt to be led away by high-sounding cries for consolidation and glory. But as regards Canada, considering her peculiar geographical position, she, of all the Colonies, cannot enter into such a compact without losing far more than she can possibly gain. Nor is this a party question. Men in England and Canada of strongly pronounced political opinions, although not numerous, appear to gather together in this one great cause: Whigs and Tories, Liberals and Liberal-Conservatives out of office meet on neutral ground to talk, but all are equally vague and indefinite in formulating their ideas.

The advice offered in concluding this article is to let well enough alone,—do not attempt to disturb the settled order of things. Whatever is to be the destiny of Canada, no earthly power can prevent it. Australia and the other Isles of the sea may imagine that some good would come to them by a closer union; but in what manner, or by what means to bring this about, even they have not vouchsafed an answer. But as regards Canada, with an American frontier three thousand miles long, and fast ripening into National activity, as well talk of running Niagara and making the water to run up hill, as to expect to compact politically a vast country like this, binding it to Colonies having nothing in common and whose interests in most cases are as divergent as their natural productions. To read some of the speeches delivered in England on the side of federation, one would suppose that Macaulay's South Sea Islander was already on his way to take his seat upon London Bridge to view the ruins of a wasted Empire, and that the glory of the Nation was all but extinct; that a process of sapping and mining was going on throughout the Colonies, so that the world was coming to an end, as far as they are concerned. It does not occur to those who are in such doldrums, that the flag that has "braved a thousand years the battle and the breeze," may be good for yet another thousand years; nor do they see that the latter possibility becomes more and more apparent in the light of facts which present themselves on all sides, if they would look about them. The argument used now in this direction might have had some weight twenty years ago, when England was at war with the whole world, especially Europe and America; when her Colonies were a prey to every buccaneer who thought proper to rove the seas. But how is it today? The world is at peace. The old warlike fires have gone out. England has no cause of quarrel with any nation. But even if she had, she reposes within the

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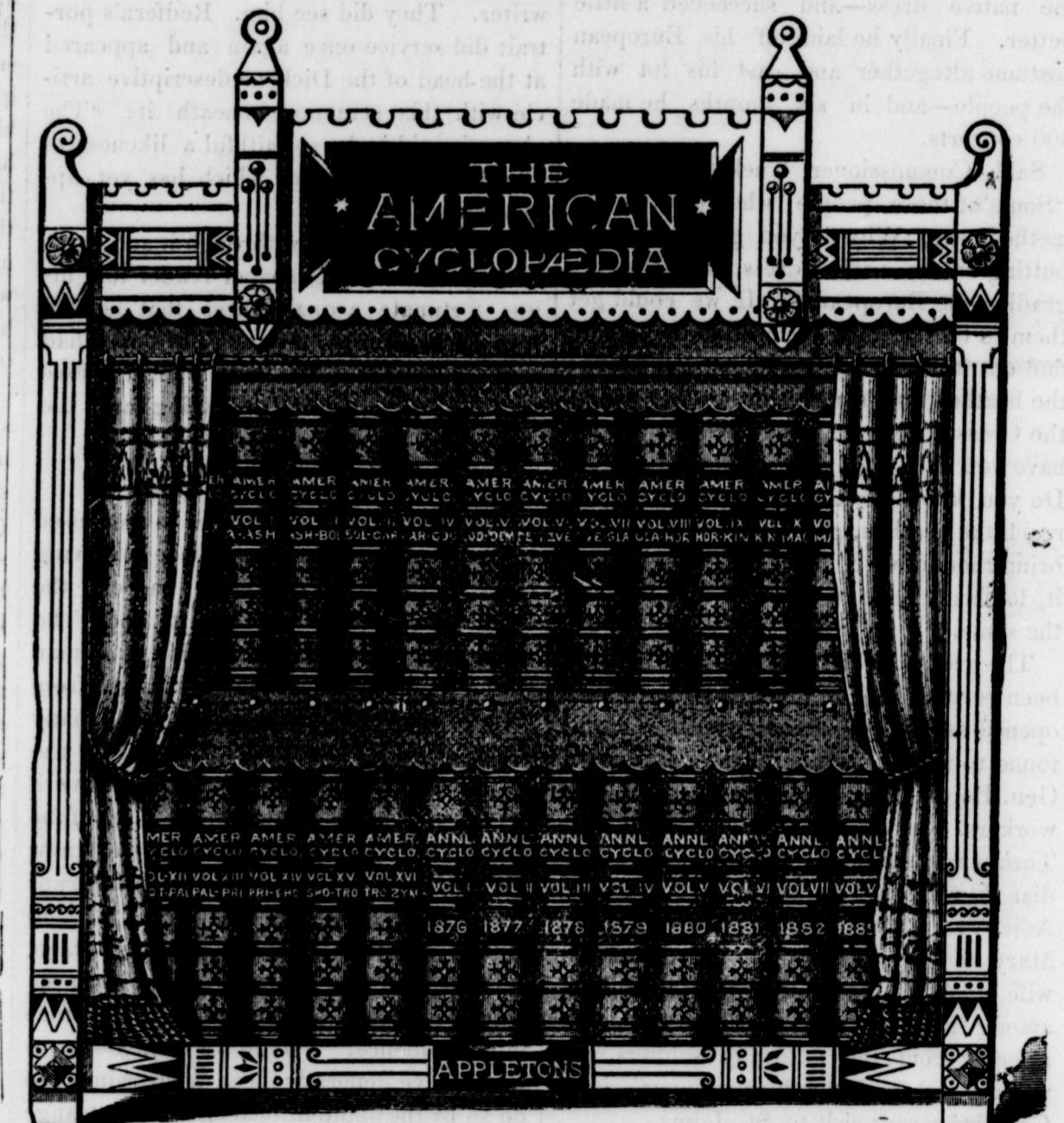
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