

AN OLD TIMER'S VIEWS.

WHAT HE THOUGHT OF THE LIBERAL MEETING AND SPEAKERS.

His Opinion of Laurier, Davies and Gillmor, and Some Remarks about Liberal Leaders of Former Days.—Remarks on the Policy of the Reformers.

For the first time in thirty years I attended a political meeting in St. John, on Monday evening the 16th, not as a participant in, but as a spectator of the proceedings. Being an "old Liberal," I felt the constraining influence of the occasion, and was thus drawn from my winter quarters, 60 miles away, to be present at this great Liberal convention, which had been so freely advertised all over the province. I had the honor of a comfortable seat in the auditorium, where I could see and hear, and so composed myself for "eventualities," a very disinterested and independent individual who had passed the rubicon of his days, political and physical, but still uninclined to shrink from battle when the bugle call arouses the dormant spirit of the old war horse.

As soon as the seats on the platform were all filled, with probably 200 persons, old and young, selected for the occasion, I took up "our distinguished visitors," I brought my telescope to bear upon the coup-d'oeil, as one might take a lunar observation, in order to discover the Liberal magnates of the present day, and learn it possible wherein they might differ in appearance from those with whom I myself associated—real grins in the true sense of the word—upon the same platform 40 years before, when the great abstracting, distracting, and dividing bone of contention between Whigs and Tories was on the principles of responsible self-government. Probably I myself was the only survivor present of those stirring times and the liberal heroes who fought the battles.

On sweeping along the platform horizon, my glass brought within range several egiymen, I supposed to give countenance to the occasion, and afford comfort to the enemy, and a great number of young men, most of whom were strangers to me; but some of those I did know I discovered to be descendants of some of the old carboniferous flints, upon whom our old responsible government steels could make no other impression than to draw forth terrible sparks of fire, or ire if you like, upon our devoted heads for daring the attempt to dislodge them from their offices, and high political positions. The Liberals were all rebels and annexationists 40 years ago, for the concession of responsible government would not only lead to the dismemberment of the empire, particularly the St. John portion of it, but be sure to land us into the claws of the great American eagle. Well, here we are yet, and we have responsible government in full flame; still, I did not feel disposed to visit the sins of the fathers for generations back upon the heads of their innocent descendants, but rather pleased to see the descent so well purified politically, and felt like grasping the hands of the young men now within range of my focal observation and bid them God speed in their career for reform.

The time was more than up, by some minutes, when our "distinguished visitors" stalked upon the platform, headed by the chairman, who introduced the first speaker, the Hon. Mr. Laurier, in a short address made up of prose and poetry, five minutes long—the poetry had something of an obituary ring about it. Of course the audience expected a great deal in and from the great leader and expounder of the Liberal party of Canada and its principles; and so there was not a man in that large audience who did not open his mouth and eyes wider than he had done for sometime before, in the shouts of welcome which greeted Mr. Laurier, as he rose to unfold to us the great truths and mysteries of the Liberal platform, as understood at the present day by the new school of Liberal politicians.

[And here it may be explained within brackets, what I mean by using the term new school of Liberal politicians. The present state of parties owes its origin to the federative union in 1867. On that departure, and the changes that followed, many Liberals became Tories and Tories Liberals. In fact, there was a general stampede in and out of the opposing camps. Obstructives, who had invariably opposed every reform were promoted to good fat offices; more inconsistent still, notwithstanding their position to confederation, they were the first to be benefited by the change. Those who fought for responsible government, or were once great reformers, are now hard and fast in the Tory meshes, and opposed to the reform movements of the day. Now, I am not finding fault with these singular changes of base. I suppose the new condition of things necessitated the oscillation of politicians, perhaps never held very firmly by conscientious considerations. Is it any wonder then, that as an old time Liberal I was somewhat bewildered in trying to ascertain who was who in the great Liberal gathering of Monday evening?]

One is impressed favorably with the outlines of the Hon. Mr. Laurier's appearance—tall, genteel and somewhat prepossessing; but I thought at a glance he was a

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man of too amiable a disposition, possessed too much of the *suaviter-in-modo* for a great leader and aggressive politician. In enunciation and action he is considerably Frenchy, but speaks English, on the whole, very fluently and correctly. His voice is somewhat thin—his language good and his periods well rounded. His gestures betoken the bar, while not over-graceful, not at all unexceptionable. He pleaded his case well and made some very good points in favor of the liberal platform, although I thought he took too much for granted in his belief that reciprocity of trade was attainable with the Americans, and it only required liberal success at the polls to bring that desideratum about, whereas, so long as the Tories continued in office a deal ear would be turned to them by the Americans. On the whole, however, it is my humble opinion that the Hon. Mr. Laurier is not a power, to compare with men of such calibre as Joseph Howe, Mr. Blake, or Mr. Cartwright. The first, if not the other two, were or are men of great masculine intellectual strength, Howe particularly. He held an audience, however miscellaneous, by the power of his will and magnetic attraction as no other man of his day could, with one rare exception, L. A. Wilmot; and we have had and still have coming up New Brunswickers who, as great public speakers will yet leave their mark on the pages of our political history. Who can forget Wilmot, whether on the floor of the institute or in the House of Assembly, when measuring swords with another great intellectual athlete, in the person of Robert L. Hazen, for and against Responsible Government? Wilmot of New Brunswick and Howe of Nova Scotia, in their palmy days (say 1840-50), were two such men, that their equal for great oratorical powers did not exist in British North America.

I thought of these great men when listening to our new-comers on Monday night, but not in a mood of disparagement towards the latter, for they were all very good.

Next to Mr. Laurier came the hon. gentleman from Prince Edward Island, Mr. Davies. This gentleman had a sharp, crisp, rasping voice, and when he sprang to his feet his eye ("in a fine phrenzy rolling") and every movement had the appearance of a mischievous intent to knock everybody out on the government side, by the force of his facts and arguments which hung in his quiver (or portfolio) for future use, at the proper time. He commenced by excusing himself for being late and somewhat dishevelled, on the ground that he had been travelling all night, and had no sleep or rest from the time he left home until he struck high-water mark on that platform; and then he glimmered like forked lightning into the editor of the *Sun* for misrepresenting him in his paper. If one night without sleep could produce so much force and fire, what would two similar nights have done with the *Sun* man, but have led to the extinguishment of that luminary altogether. After this prologue, the honorable gentleman balanced himself for solid work, and he went ahead in a volume of language, well chosen, that took with the audience, if the applause given may be considered as evidence. But if a blind man were in the Institute, and the name of the speaker were unknown to him, he would have sworn by all the snakes in Virginia that it was Mr. Daniel Hanington, of Westmorland, who had the floor. If ever two voices were cast in one mould, here we had the phenomenon perfectly.

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Loud, declamatory, sonorous, lungy, tonguey, forcible; and withal the raising of the voice, when it ought to drop, upon the last (or penultimate) syllable—something of a fault, in my opinion, in public speakers, and especially perceptible in those trained at the bar.

When the hon. gentleman alluded to "my leader," which he frequently did, the thought crossed my mind that the occasion, if any occasion, did not require the manifestation of any such servile expression. It is all right for a man to have a master, but when he takes his place upon a public platform, where all are supposed to be on an equal footing, I consider it weak to flaunt the fact that any one of them has a master to direct, guide, and keep him straight, all of which is implied. My opinion was that Mr. Davies was as capable of leading the party as Mr. Laurier; and yet in saying this, my ideal of a great Liberal leader was not reached by the specimens furnished us on Monday evening, although as immediate followers, first lieutenants, both Mr. Laurier and Mr. Davies would fill the bill well.

Perhaps in my strict impartiality of feeling in giving these opinions (it worth anything) I may appear somewhat captious, if not discourteous, but I have no such disposition. I profess to be as great a Liberal as ever, or as any man in the Province, and wish the party success at the next general elections.

Mr. Fisher, an M. P. from Ontario, was the next speaker. By this time, however, it was close upon eleven o'clock, (the hands of time could not be kept back even for a great public meeting,) when the audience were on the tenderhooks to get home to their wives and firesides and cold water, and so a large number of them began to scramble for their hats and coats, and kick up a great din generally on going out, so that Mr. Fisher rose from his seat to address the meeting in a cloud, as it were, for it was several minutes before his voice could be heard, and then those who did remain acted as if they were sitting on pins, very restless—not on account of the speaker, but their own anxiety to get at the end of the meeting. This gentleman spoke for the farmers, and if all that he said be true, viz: that his clients almost to a man were overwhelmed and mortgaged up to the eyes, and in a great state of perturbation on account of the high taxation; so that if the farmers of Canada act upon their convictions, as expressed by Mr. Fisher, Sir John McDonald will certainly be placed *hors-de-combat* next time he faces the public with more of his nostrums or panaceas for the cure of all our commercial and political diseases. The National Policy and those who fatten under it are therefore doomed.

But the *bete-noire* of the occasion was in the part undertaken by Hon. Mr. Gillmor, M. P. for Charlotte. In his early political days Mr. Tilley used to dub Mr. McAdaan of Charlotte, "honest John," a patronymic well deserved. But all the honest public men of Charlotte have not ceased to exist with the political death of "honest John." It is my humble opinion that if ever there was an honest politician (although some people will call in question the possibility of honesty among this class) that man is Arthur Gillmor of St. George, M. P. for Charlotte, at one time provincial secretary of this province. Instead of calling a spade a pitchfork, as the necessities of politicians sometimes seem to require of them, Gillmor calls it just what it is. Having no axes to grind he dubs an axe an axe, and so on with everything else. When Lorenzo Dow, the famous old Puritan preacher of New England, was informed by one of his congregation that he suspected neighbor Kleptomania had stolen his axe, the preacher on the next Sabbath took with him into the pulpit a brick bat, and in the course of his sermon he raised his arm as if to throw and aimed directly at the supposed thief's pew, crying out at the same time, "The man who dodges stole the axe," and down went the sinner's head to avoid the expected blow. Now, if it were possible to conceive friend Gillmor in such a predicament, that is to say had been suspected of tampering with other people's property, instead of dodging the threat and the aim, he would have accepted the situation, and returned the compliment in kind, plus interest. This gentleman by nature is what might be called a compound triplet, a sort of epitome, three men rolled into one—such as Wm. H. Needham, Benjamin Franklin, and William Cobbett—the first famous for his wit and humor, the second for his philosophy and "wise saws and modern instances," the third for his scorching satirical utterances through his journal published at Oldham, England, called *Cabbett's Register*. The vignette of his paper represented a grid-iron, and he broiled and scorched the Tories of his day without remorse or pity. Gillmor's speeches are witty, pointed, honest, straightforward, logical, philosophical; and he held his audience—what was left of it—together on Monday evening in a straight-jacket, a tighter grasp than did any of his predecessors, while his anecdotes in illustrating his assertions, fitted in nicely, and were as effective as amusing. His diatribe on loyalty was good. With him loyalty began at home, one's country first, and afterwards toward those at a distance of the same kith and kin; and that under our free institutions we had a right to discuss any subject in the

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interests of our country, so long as we kept within constitutional limits, and not in a belligerent spirit. It is my impression that Gillmor's speech carried more conviction with it in the minds of his auditors, than that delivered by any of the other speakers.

And now in drawing this rambling article to a close I desire to make a few dissenting remarks upon one or two of the issues raised at the meeting by the respective speakers. However firm a believer I am in commercial union, or reciprocity of trade with the United States, I am of the opinion that as Liberals we should not play this as the only card or even the best we have in hand to bring about a change of government. Do we not as Canadians humble ourselves by knocking at the doors of our neighbours as suppliants for business, as though we could not exist without them, and thus calling upon them as it were to have pity upon our poverty? Since the repeal of the old reciprocity treaty by themselves, the Americans have never once shown a disposition to meet us even half way, for a renewal of the same, or making of any other treaty, but rather repelled our advances, notwithstanding the assurances made from time to time by the Wilmans and the Butterworths that all was working beautifully at Washington. Now, while I believe that reciprocity in its amplest form would be mutually beneficial to both countries, I think it more independent and manly in our politicians not to trouble their heads so seriously about the business, but let the United States see that Canada can exist without them.

Again, one of the speakers charged, or perhaps only repeated what was charged against Canada, viz., discourtesy and incivility toward the United States while defending our fishery rights, as if our government alone were at fault. I answer that if our rights had not been trench upon, had there been no infraction of the treaty of 1818, there could have been no bad blood between the two countries about the fisheries. But then, during the civil war it was complained that the sympathy of Canada was on the side of the rebels, and therefore the Americans have become embittered towards us. This, no doubt, is true to a certain extent, but that it was the general wish of Canada that the union might be broken, I do not believe. But let us look at this charge a little more closely. Is it not a settled historical dogma the world over that the voice of the masses, nay human sympathy, is always on the side of the weaker or resisting party? The real cause of revolt is seldom inquired into; justly or unjustly, the acclamations and good wishes are with those struggling for what they call their freedom. And what nation is more pronounced in this respect than the United States? Everybody is aware of this; but let me cite a few historical instances for the information of the gentleman who, in his speech, seemed to consider that our course in the American civil war was a graveman, which he appeared to take some stock in—at all events, did not attempt to rebut or explain.

During the Canadian rebellion in 1837, public meetings were called in some of the chief cities of the union, presided over by leading men, for the purpose of expressing sympathy with the down-trodden races of Canada as they were called. I was myself present as a youngster, and out of curiosity on more than one of these occasions when the British government were sacrificed as far as vituperation could do it, not by mere demagogues, but by leading public men. Again, during the John Mitchell and Smith-O'Brien foray in 1847, when Ireland sprang to arms to obtain by forcible means what O'Connell failed to bring about by pacific means—her independence—public meetings of sympathy were also held in the large towns, conducted in the same fashion. I attended, as an onlooker, one of these meetings held at Tammany hall in New York city. The speakers were: Horace Greely, the district attorney, and a United States Senator named Harrigan, if I remember correctly. Resolutions were passed and nothing had enough could be said against England, and so it was the

case during the Kossuth revolt in Hungary in 1842 (?). American sympathy was publicly expressed on the side of the revolt. These being solid facts, I would now ask if during the civil war in the United States commencing in 1861, was there ever a public demonstration made, a public meeting held, in any one town, city or hamlet throughout or within the boundaries of Canada, crying aloud for success to the rebels and down with the bloody stars and stripes? No, not one. Then let us hear no more about the uncivil part played by Canada in the late unhappy internecine struggle, especially when assigned as one of the reasons why our neighbors will not trade with us.

In making these remarks it is not through an unkind spirit; our intercourse with our neighbors socially, commercially, and by ties of blood, is too near and dear to us, to cultivate any but the most kindly feelings. They are people, take them for all in all, which nobody can but admire; and although often misled by the foreign element which alas, to a very great extent, controls and directs public affairs, still the great thinkers and common intelligent sense of the nation are ever true to their traditions and the marvellous works and performances of the great Anglo-Saxon race living in both hemispheres.

To return to our subject. In whatever way the present Liberal party was organized, it signifies less than that such a party should exist. The principles of two parties belong to the British Constitution, and have been in operation for centuries, and they are the only safeguards of the people. If the line has been distinctly drawn since 1867, and the policies of the two parties as we now find them, are clearly defined, the men who form those parties and their proclivities must be forgotten, while the measures they have in hand should be recognized as forming the bond of union respectively. The responsible principle of government does not take exception to a change of men moving from opposite sides, in forming a government or holding it together, so long as leading and well-understood measures of a party are loyally observed by its leaders. The dividing questions between the Liberals and Conservatives of today seem to be pretty well understood by the people generally; and it is to afford further enlightenment that the leaders of the two parties itinerate from place to place, to make themselves clear and plain upon the issues of the day. If Sir John McDonald's talking campaign was a success in St. John a few weeks ago, so was the Laurier campaign at the Institute last week. Both parties received a respectful hearing, and both no doubt went away well satisfied.

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