

POLITICAL NOTES.

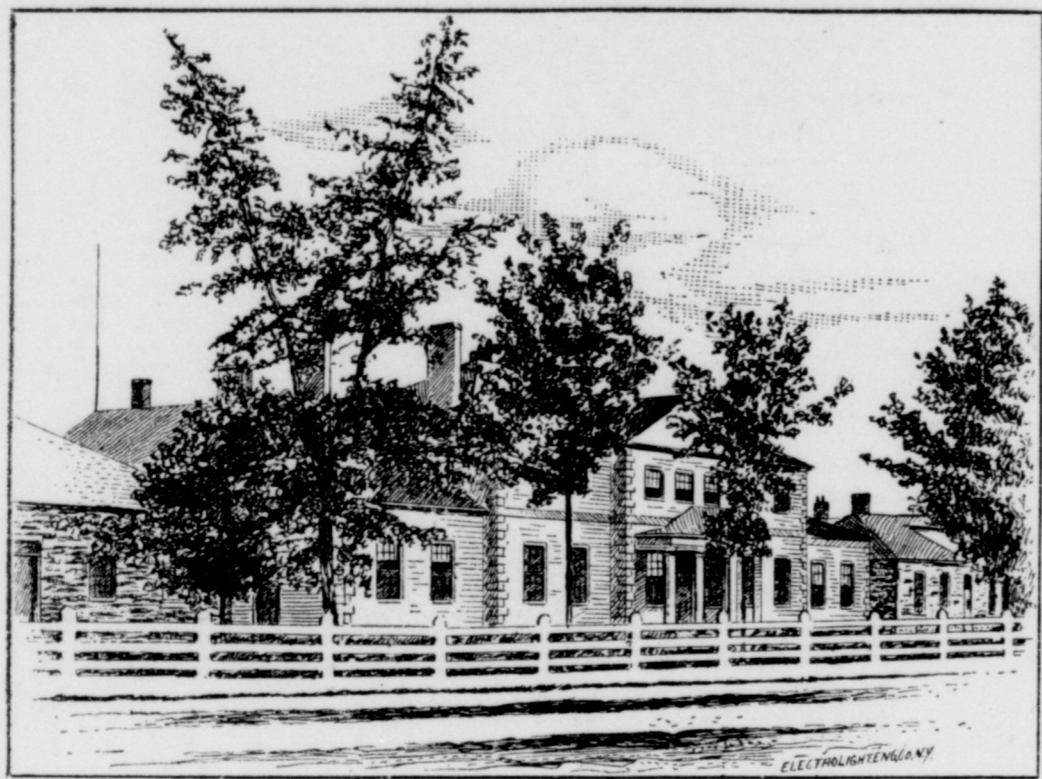
A Glance at the Leading Measures Carried in the House of Assembly of New Brunswick, from the Year 1854.

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Explanatory, No. 1.

The continuation from Volume First of the Political History of New Brunswick, may not be considered out of place by publishing it in a serial form, from week to week, until the whole is completed—say from this date down to a comparatively recent period—to be followed afterwards by some future historian possessing political enthusiasm enough for the undertaking. In this way there would be a connected Legislative narrative from 1840 onward, which in the distant future will be found not only of incalculable interest, but of great value to the coming politician. Had such a work been undertaken, even at the beginning of this century, and continued down to 1840, when this was commenced, we should to-day be in possession of a mine of political wealth, which gold could not supply—as to what the old school said or did, who they were personally, what parts they played in the political forum, and what their talents and statesmanship, nothing is known, more than that they made laws, no doubt good speeches, monopolized all the offices and were looked up to by the

have the same voice in all appointments and in the administration of public affairs. No one at the present day can form an adequate conception of the struggles through which the early Colonial reformers passed, leading at one time to a great rebellion, that of '37,—except those who were present and are now alive to tell the story. The Press in those days was less confiding in the honesty of party than in its principles—nor was it influenced by the rewards, present or prospective, that wait upon subserviency. Indeed politicians had not arrived at that fine code of ethics, which permits the buying and selling of men like so many sheep in the shambles. The public moneys were held as a sacred trust for legitimate public purposes,—while what is now called "boodlesism" was a term that had not yet found place in our vocabulary, but which since the days of "confederation," or when that great event began, teachers and scholars aglore have not been long in discovering its meaning and the pillaging practices represented thereunder. The Conservative party, however wrong in their political teachings, according to the canon of their opponents, were men of honor and integrity, as much so as those who opposed them, and sought their overthrow. Things have greatly changed since then. Even the honors of "rank"—known



THE OLD PROVINCE BUILDING.

Destroyed by Fire in 1880, wherein were Fought all the Great Battles for Responsible Government.

masses as very clever men, whether descended from the Loyalists or of old Colonial stock. The journals of the Legislature, from the beginning, provide, it is true, a record of all the proceedings, but these as it is well known, are but the husks and not the wheat from which the historian may draw political pabulum; from them we learn how a member voted upon a particular resolution, but why he so voted, or the bent of his mind in arriving at a conclusion upon an important measure, we are left entirely in the dark. The public have not even a connected account of the reporters' work in the gallery, in regard to the speeches delivered on the floors of the House, prior to the last eight or ten years—from the fact that such reports were given spasmodically; some Sessions would pass without a Reporter being present; sometimes the House of Assembly would vote sums to defray such expenses; then other Sessions would pass on and no pay be allowed. The effect was that in those days publishers of papers were too poor, however rich they may be now, to send Reporters from St. John to attend the House—hence no published debates some Sessions; the thread of continuity was lost; so that had not the present writer been on hand in some way, and kept the run of things through friends at the Capital, during the thirty years of his journalism, it is certain he would be unable at this time of day to enter upon and carry out the work in which he is now engaged. There was a time in the forties and fifties when the writer was intimately acquainted with every member on the floors of the House, through business political relations, whether Liberals or Conservatives, and therefore had opportunities of learning much that was going on behind the scenes—good, bad and indifferent—hence he had an abundance of grist for his mill, and a surplus to lay aside for the future. Enough, however, has been preserved to enable him to provide all that is necessary or interesting for the appetite of the political student.

It will be noticed that in a number of cases, the names of members are given on a division. This may appear unnecessary to the general reader and it takes up space, but the object is to revive the names of old members who have long since passed away, and will be of interest to their descendants. Again, to many persons who take no interest in historical matters some of the reading may seem dry—but those can pass over to other columns. On the whole, however, the writer believes that most of the readers of PROGRESS will be sufficiently interested in those letters to follow them up week after week and preserve them as they would a book for future reference.

In those early days the battles fought for Responsible Government were more formidable than any since, whether Provincial or Federal. They were not mere contentions for office, upon modern defined issues, but for great underlying principles, for the uprooting of old practices and old prejudices, and the substitution thereof of a more equitable order of things—a government of freedom, in which every man in the country and the Legislature should stand upon a fair footing, and thus

to flow from a pure fountain, however devious or crooked the paths which lead thereto—do not in every case sit upon brows free from unpleasant suspicions. Politicians now-a-days stand upon the order of their doings as formerly—nor do they hesitate about stooping to ignoble means for the attainment of selfish ends.

Such men as the late L. A. Wilmot and Charles Fisher should never be forgotten by a grateful country—for to these two gentlemen chiefly we are indebted for the system of government of which we are in the enjoyment of this day. They fought the battles of Responsible Government day in and day out upon the floors of the Assembly against most formidable odds—nor did they lay aside their weapons until the blows they had been dealing for so many years had pierced the armour of their adversaries and forced surrender. We read of statues being reared in the Upper Provinces to Politicians whose reputations in some cases do not rest upon as solid foundation as the granite which sustains their effigies. Let New Brunswick show the same spirit, and remember Wilmot and Fisher, in enduring brass or marble, upon the Banks of the St. John River, in front of Fredericton's Parliament buildings.

Although some time has elapsed since the former publication of Political Notes, the subject, it is believed, has not lost its interest by the long delay; and it might be added that it is doubtful if even now it had been resumed, had it not been for the request of many friends and persons of prominence, that a second volume should appear—such prominent persons for example (from each of whom I hold, unsolicited, personal letters) as Hon. T. W. Anglin (at one time Speaker of the House of Commons)—the Marquis of Lansdowne (when Governor General)—the Rector of St. Mary's Church, Rev. W. O. Raymond, St. John—the late Joseph W. Lawrence—ex-Governor, Sir Leonard Tilley—Hon. Judge Wilkinson, Miramichi, Dr. Stockton, M. P. P., Ex-President of the Historical Society, St. John—Collector Ruel of the Customs Department, St. John—the Hon. Judge Steadman, (formerly Postmaster General), and many others. Nor does the writer suppose that it is from any literary merit in the work itself that would have for its continuance is thus expressed by those gentlemen; but rather that a faithful Legislative record, in condensed form, might be preserved for future reference, and for the use, as the years go on, of members of the House of Assembly who may desire to look into it for precedent.

The Old System.

In order to some understanding of the old political system, and as an introduction to these letters, the following remarks are offered:

From the settlement of this Province up to the year 1854,—when the system of Government under which we now live, was first put into operation—the conduct and management of public affairs and business, and the distribution of patronage, vested in the hands, and were under the control of a dominant class. The "family compact," as it was familiarly and systematically styled by those outside the pale, was composed of men of consideration who, with seats in the Executive Council, held all the higher offices to which large salaries were attached. The compact was a kind of autocracy—the members of which maintained they were not amenable for their acts to the people; but while holding themselves independent of the popular voice, they were subject to a higher power than their own—namely, the

Lieutenant Governor, who carried out the will of the Colonial Secretary. The Province in the first half century of its existence was in fact governed from "Downing Street." Holding their positions and offices from the Crown, it was the interest of the council to uphold the prerogative in the hands of the Lieutenant Governor; and it happened that the members of the Executive seldom resisted any encroachment of the Governor on the power it was assumed they possessed in virtue of their positions. If the advice tendered by the Council on any grave matter was disregarded by the Governor, because it was contrary to the views he himself held, or not in consonance with instructions from Downing Street, his Excellency's advisers were constrained to yield. This state of things was long held, by the leading spirits on the popular side, to be a grave grievance; and to effect a reform was a work to which the rising and ambitious talents of the country addressed themselves earnestly and persistently. In 1840 the cry for "Responsible Government" was loud and echoed on the floors of the House. Year after year from that date, the agitation was maintained, and in conducting it some of the ablest men the Province had produced took the lead. Not until fourteen years after the commencement of the Responsible Government reform movement did success perch upon the banners of the agitators. In 1854 the reins of power were for the first time wrested from the grasp of those who for half a century and more had tightly held them. Then began the system of government by which the members of the Executive held office and power, not during good behaviour, continually, but so long as they could command a majority upon the floors of the House of Assembly. Their "good behavior" is now judged by their good performances, not only in the capacity of advisers to the Lieutenant Governor, but as originators of sound measures for the advancement of the best interests of the country.

These letters usher the dawn of a new political era, commencing with the Fall of 1854, when a strictly party Government upon well defined issues, was formed for the first time, and has been going on ever since, in one continual chain—old links occasionally being removed and new ones substituted—down to the present year—1894. The cause of the downfall of the Administration of 1854, will be fully explained in future articles. The Lieut. Governor (Sir Edmund Head) like his predecessors, exercised a resolute will; but the arms of the reformers in the Assembly had gradually been gaining strong nerve-force—while the eyes of the people were daily being opened wider and wider to the realities of the situation, and the semi-bondage under which outside intermeddling appeared to hold them. The last ounce which bore too heavily upon a long patient country, at length broke the spell of passive obedience, and led to the rupture between the reformers in the House and the Governor's Council, who were charged, tried, condemned and punished for having allowed his Excellency to act and decide for himself in a grave matter, without protesting on their part or resigning their seats on account of the usurpation. It was assumed that the lesson thus taught, in the defeat of the Government, on account of the conduct of Sir Edmund Head would keep future Governors within the limits of their power, and future Governments up to their responsibilities. The coming of the new Governor to the Province in the autumn of 1854, after the general elections which took place in June, was hailed with great satisfaction by those who expected to see the principles of responsibility fully and fairly carried out. The reputation of the Hon. Mr. Manners-Sutton, as an eminent member on the reform side of the House of Commons, had preceded him and high hopes of him were entertained. Yet, as will be recounted in these letters he too showed a disposition to act independently of the advice of his Council when a grave question arose between them, and that within a year from the time he was sworn in. And his successor, Hon. Arthur H. Gordon, was also firm set in his own opinions, and as little disposed to be guided entirely, on matters of moment, by his Council. But the disposition of a Governor to act independently was now kept in check by a class of men whom the reform agitation had brought to the front, and were thoroughly imbued with the new theories of government, and determined to carry them out in practice. They were not satisfied to have the form without the substance—the leathers without the bird. And, as it will be seen hereafter, whatever Governments have come into power since 1854, they have, when occasion called, maintained their constitutional principles by resigning office when the Governor refused to act upon their advice. These remarks, however, apply to what was formerly called "royal Governors," sent out from England. Since "Confederation" our Governors are appointed from a class of men who better understand the wants and habits of the people, and the Constitutional rights they possess; and from having served a thoroughly Colonial Legislative training themselves, know how to govern from experience, and not from opinions formed on the other side of the Atlantic, often at variance with the "well understood wishes of the people" on this side.

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