

The Botheration Scheme

Before deciding to hand over to the Canadians the patronage and revenues of Nova Scotia, let us enquire whether there is anything in our present condition to compel us to make this transfer.

Prior to the introduction of Responsible Government into this Province, Downing Street claimed the authority which it is now proposed to erect at Ottawa. How did we like that? Why, so little that our best men gave the flower of their lives to the struggle by which the system was changed. Huntington and Howe, Young and Uniacke, Doyle and DesBarres, and all their sturdy compatriots, in two or three Parliaments, fought out the great battle by which the appointment of our own officers--the control of our own revenues--the management of our own affairs--was secured to Novascotians. We possess and exercise these high powers now, in as full and ample a measure as the freest people on the face of the earth. And shall it be said that the labors of these men were in vain--that their policy was unsound, and that their lives have been wasted?

At this hour our Legislative Councillors, our Judges, and all our public officers, are appointed by our own Government, resting upon the confidence of a clear majority of our own Parliament freely chosen by our own people. If this power were hereafter to be exercised by the nineteen members that we are asked to send to Ottawa, they would be but a minority of the fifty-five who now possess it. Is this Responsible Government? We think not.

But will the nineteen be entrusted with these powers? No. When they go to Ottawa they will be merged into the General Legislature. If they all hang together and always support the Government of the day, they may be largely consulted and very influential in the management of their own Province; but should they ever act together and go into opposition, who then will manage Nova Scotia? Some wily Canadian, who will have his own correspondents and servile creatures here, and who will so make his appointments as to mortify and weaken the influence of the Novascotian delegation. Men that no Novascotian likes--that no man trusts--that all our members disapprove--may and will be appointed in spite of their unanimity, so sure as they dare oppose the Government.

But will they be unanimous? Who believes it? Dr. Tupper and Mr. McCully may be friends from the teeth outwards, just so long as it necessary to carry this scheme, but when once it is carried and they meet on the floor of the Parliament House at Ottawa, they will be rivals, perhaps enemies again. Our members will be no longer unanimous, but split into two factions each following the fortunes of its leader, and each trying to bargain with the minister for the patronage and control of Nova Scotia. No matter which succeeds, the Province will be at the mercy of either, with a following of three, five or ten members, as the case may be. Is this what Novascotians desire to see? Is this the kind of Responsible Government which any sane man would desire to substitute for the wholesome control which the two Branches now exercise over nine gentlemen, discharging Executive functions in presence of the people, and day by day liable to be questioned or displaced by a Parliamentary majority? We think not.

If we were to choose between the two systems, we would say at once, give us back the old Council of Twelve, with Downing Street behind it, rather than the exercise by a little knot of politicians 800 miles away of powers which could not fail to be grossly abused, and for the abuse of which it would be impossible to obtain redress.

But it is said "Something must be done." A wise statesman once remarked that he always apprehended danger when certain people declared that "something must be done." We are reminded of the droll story told of two boys who were upset in a boat and who got on her bottom in the middle of a rapid river not far above a waterfall. "Ned," said the eldest to his companion, "Can you pray?" "No," was the candid reply of the terrified lad. "Neither can I," said the other, "But something must be done, and that d---- soon."

Now here we have our two lawyers and the doctor embarked in the same boat. The waves are beginning to rise and the fall is not far off, and we are certainly very much amused with their vehement outcry that something must be done.

Why should anything be done? Nova Scotia, secure of self-government, can even bear with serenity an Administration that certainly tries her patience at times, for a year or two longer. She has been blessed with a good crop, an abundant fishery, a healthy season; her mining interests are extending; her shipyards have been busy all the year; her railroads are beginning to pay, and her treasury is overflowing, affording ample means to push forward public improvements just as fast as it is wise to push them, with the little surplus labour we have.

We have not a question to create angry discussion with the mother country, with our neighbours in the United States, or with the Governments of the surrounding colonies. We have entirely reorganized our militia, and drilled every man liable to be called out under the law, within the year.

Who says, then, that something should be done? Those who desire to daub this peaceful picture, with the hues of their distempered imaginations. There is one thing certainly that ought to be done. We ought all to go down on our knees and thank the Almighty for the abundant blessings he has showered upon us. There was a certain person once who could not let people alone when they were well off. "Don't you see how naked and ignorant you are--come eat of this fruit and you will know things good and evil, and live forever," and they were tempted, and ate, and we all know what came of it. Now we do not blush for being happy, nor are we ashamed to admit that we are content. The Delegates may be as wise as serpents; let us, thanking God for his mercies, not be ashamed to be as harmless as doves.

But it is said that the Canadians have outgrown their Constitution. Well, if they have what of that? If they are in trouble let them get out of it; but don't let them involve us in distractions with which we have nothing to do. Are not the Canadians always in trouble? Did not Papineau keep Lower Canada in trouble for twenty years, and McKenzie disturb the Upper Province for about the same period? Then did not both Provinces break out into open rebellion, which it cost the British Government three or four millions sterling to

suppress? What would have been the situation of the Maritime Provinces then, had they been controlled by the Canadians? Would they not have been compromised by these outbreaks, and might they not all have been made the theatres of civil war? But they were not under Canadian influence. They maintained their loyalty unsullied. The conflagration was confined to narrow limits, and was soon suppressed.

Again, in 1849, the Canadians tried their hands at another insurrection. They burnt down their Parliament House; pelted Lord Elgin and his Lady through the streets; hung American flags out of the windows, and published a manifesto, to which the principal citizens of Montreal signed their names, demanding annexation to the United States. Novascotians must have short memories if these things are forgotten.

Then, are not the Canadas always disturbed by religious feuds and secret societies?--Was not the Prince of Wales kept two days off the port of Kingston by a community who would not permit him to land unless he would give the Orangemen a party triumph? And when he got to Toronto, was not his whole visit disturbed by the display of party emblems and by the violence of local factions that met his Royal Highness at every turn?

But a few short months have elapsed since there was a bloody fight, all round a church and grave-yard, between the Protestants and Catholics of Toronto, in which deadly weapons were used, and what do we see now --Every mail brings us tidings of the organization and arming of Fenians and Orangemen in all the chief cities of Upper Canada. People are drilling in the churches. Arms are coming in from the States in coffins, and in other disguised packages, and we are told that 50,000 Fenians stand ready, armed and disciplined, in New York alone, and prepared to cross the border.

Now, is this the country for Novascotians to unite with, and to whose entire control we should hand over the management of our affairs? Here we have peace and order, everybody worships God as he pleases, and everybody obeys the law. there are no armed midnight processions--no villains chalking our doors at night--no arms secreted--no Fenians drilling--and everybody sleeps in his bed securely, with no man to make him afraid. In the name of common sense then, are we to peril all these blessings and mix ourselves up with distractions, the end of which no living man can foresee?

If civil war breaks out in Canada, from the apparently irrepressible conflicts of her secret societies, let the Canadians settle it among themselves. If border wars breakout, arising out of raids upon a people with whom we ought to be at peace, or the stupidity or ignorance of magistrates, let those who provoke these controversies fight them out. We have no secret societies to disturb us--no frontier to tempt raiders to commit outrages on our neighbours. We are surrounded by the sea, and can only be involved in a national war when proclaimed by our sovereign, and then we are within ten days' sail of the fleets and armies of England, which, aided by our own volunteers and militia, would soon give a good account of any expedition sent by sea to disturb us. We do not go into financial calculations just now, though we may touch these before we are done.

Admitting all Mr. Archibald's calculations to be accurate (which we are far from doing) we place this argument on much higher grounds than that of mere figures and finance; and we say that even if the bargain was financially a good one, we would not accept it at the cost of internal and external peace--of institutions hallowed by a possession of a hundred years, improved and consolidated by twenty years' labor of our ablest statesmen. Of all the characters of ancient story, the poorest spirited creature that we know is Esau; but if Novascotians surrendered their powers of self-government and provincial independence for the precious mess of pottage brought hither from Quebec, we would forever after be held in deserved contempt even by those by whom our birthright was enjoyed.

Source: *Halifax Morning Chronicle* (Nova Scotia: January 11, 1865).