

population; with the permission of this honorable House, I will read for his benefit the letter of a Lower Canadian priest, who, having the advantage of a somewhat closer view of things than the bishops of the Maritime Provinces, is in a better position to judge whether our special institutions and our nationality will be sufficiently guaranteed under the Federal system now about to be imposed upon us. (Hear, hear.) This letter appeared in the *Canadien* :—

To the Editor of the *Canadien*.

SIR,—In the Confederation of the provinces may be considered a thing decided upon, there is nevertheless no denying the fact that the minds of the people are filled with a fear and anxiety which nothing can remove. I have read the speeches of our representatives; I have heard their explanations; and far from being reassured, I am more uneasy than ever. The necessity of Confederation has indeed been demonstrated, but has there been any attempt to explain certain causes of a dangerous character in a French-Canadian and Catholic point of view? Promises, eulogies, dazzling pictures of our future prospects, figures more or less successfully grouped, all these we have had *ad nauseam*; but what I have looked for in vain is a satisfactory explanation as to our future liberty of action under Confederation. With your permission, sir, I will state as briefly as possible my objections to the scheme of Confederation, and the features which cause it to be dreaded so much by almost all those who have studied it. I leave aside the question of divorce; the ecclesiastical authorities being silent upon the matter, I do not pretend to be more Catholic than the Pope. Let every one bear his own responsibility. When, at some future day, Catholic Lower Canada will be dishonored by the presence of a divorce court, every one will, no doubt hasten to wash his hands of the matter, and repudiate all responsibility for . . . . . the circumstances in which we are placed. My objections to Confederation as proposed, are—first, the dangerous centralization it establishes; second, the enormous expense it entails. Centralization! Behold the great danger of modern governments. In place of endeavoring to confer on each of our provinces the greatest measure of liberty compatible with a central power, one would fancy that our Ministers had done their best to leave us but the very smallest measure possible. In endeavoring to avoid the excess of power vested in the states of the American Confederation, they have given us a scheme tolerably closely copied from the Swiss Confederation. They wished to avoid state independence, which caused the war between the North and the South, and they expose us to a new Sonderbund with all its disasters. Let us see what are the powers of the Central Government, and the rights of the provinces, and of Lower Canada in particular, under our Confederation. The Central Govern-

ment will be composed of—first, an elective Chamber, based on population; second, a Senate; third, an Executive Council, and Responsible Ministers, and a Governor. The Lower House will be composed of 194 members. Of these 194 sixty-five will be Lower Canadians, and fifty French-Canadians. In the House of Representatives we shall therefore be one to three, or, if we count as French-Canadians, 1 to 4. How many Lower Canadians or French-Canadians are we to have in the Executive Council? One, perhaps; two at most. Such is the measure of our influence in the Central Government. And this is the Government that is to appoint our senators after the first selection is made. It will appoint, or rather impose upon us, a governor. It will have the power of veto over all our local measures. It will also enjoy that power through the governor, its creature! Was there ever a more dangerous centralization? What liberty of action, then, is there left to our legislature? An Orangeman will perhaps be sent to govern us; and what can we say? Our senators will be selected, if it should please the central power, from the ranks of our enemies; to whom shall we apply for redress? All our most cherished local measures, our acts of incorporation, will be reserved or vetoed; and who will redress our grievances? But all these are mere imaginary dangers! Imaginary, forsooth! Heaven grant that they may be! But do we not know the Orangemen? Is not the example of Ireland before our eyes? But the Sonderbund war! Be quiet, we are told; men so well tried, so honorable as our leaders, would never propose the measure for our adoption if it could possibly be of a fatal character. I do not desire, in any way, to accuse our statesmen or to question their motives. But have our statesmen always avoided contradiction—dangerous measures? Is it prudent to trust solely to men, without scrutinizing their measures? What of the experience of the past? What of the maxim, "Measures, not men?" "Fear not," we are told again, "none of the dangers you fear can arise; the thing is impossible." Impossible! Why, then, leave a possibility of danger in the law? Why so much haste with a measure of such importance? The authors of the Constitution of the United States labored for months and years at the draft of their Confederation, and after eighty years it is found defective. Our statesmen elaborate a Constitution in a few days, in the midst of the noisy rejoicings of hospitality, and we are told that Constitution is perfect! "You must not touch it; you shall not amend it." But, we say, it contains dangerous clauses, it gives our enemies power to annihilate us. The answer is: "Be silent! It is the creation of our Ministers, our leaders! Trust in their honor, in their talents." Excellent reasons, no doubt! And yet, strange to say, people are still uneasy, still distrustful! But, are not the clergy, are not the people for Confederation? As to the clergy, no; they are not all for your Confederation as it is proposed. A great many of them, it is true, feel no uneasiness, and trust all to our statesmen;