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THE STRONG MAN OF CANADA.

Fredericton Boy's Sketch of Sir Wilfrid Laurier.

WHOSE GREAT VICTORY IN THE RECENT ELECTION

Was a Remarkable Tribute to His Leadership.

IN THE PUBLIC AFFAIRS OF THE DOMINION.

(William Carman Roberts in February Munsey).

The following sketch of Sir Wilfrid Laurier from the pen of Mr. William Carman Roberts, son of our respected fellow citizen Rev. Dr. G. G. Roberts, which appears in the February number of Munsey's Magazine will be read with interest.

In Sir Wilfrid Laurier the statesman is more than the politician. To this fact, and to the love of the Canadian people for a strong and sane personality, rather than to any particular plank in either of the party platforms, was due the result of the Dominion election on November 3rd, giving to his government a victory which increased its strength in the Parliament to a two-to-one majority.

Laurier's personality has for years been a potent force in the destinies of Canada. Today he is preeminently the man of the hour in Canadian affairs. His statesmanship has been distinguished by a union of enthusiasm and discretion. With a constructive imagination, sensitive to the appeal of far-reaching imperial ideas, he combines a rare political judgment and sanity, an impatient mastery of details, a recognition of "the instant need of things." For nothing, perhaps, do Canadians owe him more gratitude than for the patience, courage, and tact with which, throughout his entire public career, he has combatted the denationalizing forces of racialism and sectarianism. He once said:

"If there is one thing to which I have given my political life, it is to try to promote unity and harmony between the divers elements of this country."

LAURIER'S EARLY CAREER.

Sir Wilfrid Laurier is of old French Canadian stock, his people having come to the New World from the province of Anjou some three and a half centuries ago. He was born at St. Lin, Quebec, in 1841, and was educated at the college of L'Assomption and at McGill University. During his boyhood, responsible government in Canada was still in its experimental stage, and confederation a dream not yet accomplished. The air was full of political ferment, and from the first young Laurier's interest was absorbed by public questions.

At the age of twenty-one he was called to the bar of Lower Canada, and for some years he practised law. His partner was Mederic Lanctot, one of the most fiery and Anti-British politicians of that turbulent period. He also undertook the editorship of a French-Canadian newspaper. An editorial published in this paper—of which there are few existing copies—makes it clear that he was opposed to the idea of confederation—a fact in surprising contrast to the breadth and quality of his more mature statesmanship. But when we remember that he was then a young man of twenty-four, whose political opinions had developed in an atmosphere not yet cleared of the reactionary excesses of the old Rouge program, the real cause for wonder is that he so soon achieved an independent and enlightened liberalism.

Laurier's public life began with his election, in his thirtieth year, to the Quebec legislature. Three years

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later we find him sitting in the federal parliament, where he soon after entered the Cabinet as Minister of Inland Revenue. Then the downfall of the Mackenzie administration sent the Liberal party into opposition, where it remained for nearly twenty years.

EIGHTEEN YEARS OF LEADERSHIP.

Even during this long period, however, when his part in the government of the country was an indirect one only, he was growing in statesmanship, learning by the mistakes of

imperial unity. The note of imperialism which he then struck, Sir Wilfrid has never since repudiated. On the outbreak of the Boer War in 1899, recognizing the overwhelming sentiment of the people of the Dominion he did not await the approval of Parliament, which was not convened at the time, to sanction the despatch of Canadian contingents to the seat of war.

Later, replying to a criticism of this action, he said, in the course of a speech declared by Dr. George Parkin to be the noblest ever delivered by a colonial minister:

"Today there are men in South Africa representing the two branches of the Canadian family fighting side by side for the honor of Canada. Already some of them have fallen, giving to the country the last full measure of devotion, their remains have been laid in the same grave, there to

the best ideals of both races, neither of which has reason to doubt his sincerity of purpose.

To a London interviewer, during the Jubilee celebrations of 1897, he said:

"There are men who regret that there is in Canada diversity of race, and who express the hope that with time this diversity will disappear. The hope of the fusion of races into a single one is Utopian. It is an impossibility. The distinctions of nature will always exist. But as to the objection that we could not form a great nation under the British flag because Lower Canada is principally French and Catholic, and Upper Canada English and Protestant, and because the maritime provinces are mixed, it is, in my opinion, altogether futile."

In the earlier stages of his career it has happened more than once to

A MAGNETIC PERSONALITY.

In his public speaking, whether he uses the English language or the French language, Laurier is graceful, persuasive and eloquent, his oratory revealing wide information and a high and chivalrous spirit. His knowledge of both books and men is shrewd and intimate, although lacking in its application that whimsical humor that distinguished the late Sir John MacDonald. To the suppleness of the French spirit he unites the close debating instinct of the great English orators.

When not speaking in his native tongue, his enunciation is marked by a slight French accent. It has been remarked that his English is that of the essayists and constitutionalists rather than that of the traders and economists, and it is consequently less clear and definite when he discusses questions of trade and finance than when he handles constitutional principles.

Although at the outset of his public career he achieved a national reputation as an orator, he did not become a frequent speaker, but on the contrary showed rather a tendency to keep silence except on the more vital questions. He appeals generally to British ideals in statesmanship, and his speeches are often marked by apt classical allusion and a certain bookish flavor; but the most constant feature in all his oratory is his plea for unity and co-operation among all elements of the Canadian people, and for a final truce to ancient quarrels and inherited prejudices.

Sir Wilfrid's tall, erect figure, his sculptured head, his mobile mouth and his fine eyes, large, deep and luminous, give an effect of picturesque distinction. In conversation he has the instinct of gesture, though his manner is both suave and dignified. Among the elements that lend charm to his personality, one may detect something of the brooding fire of the poet, the gravity of the scholar and the unconscious dignity of the grand seigneur. It has been said that he is so constituted as to make it almost impossible that he should have a personal enemy. His nature has a delicacy and refinement that one does not always associate with a forceful personality.

By his friends he is known as a man of kindly and essentially happy disposition. Thoroughly progressive in his principles and ideals, he is by temperament nothing of a revolutionist, and his Liberalism is constructive and conservative. His personal popularity does not rest within the bounds of race, religion, or even of party. So great is his vitality that in spite of a delicate constitution, his powers show no appreciable diminution after nearly forty years of political warfare. In private as in public life his character is one of integrity and purity of purpose.

THE ISSUES OF THE LATE ELECTION.

The sweeping victory of the Laurier government in the recent Dominion elections has been cited by some journals in the United States as the most notable rejection of the idea of government ownership of railroads that has occurred on this continent.

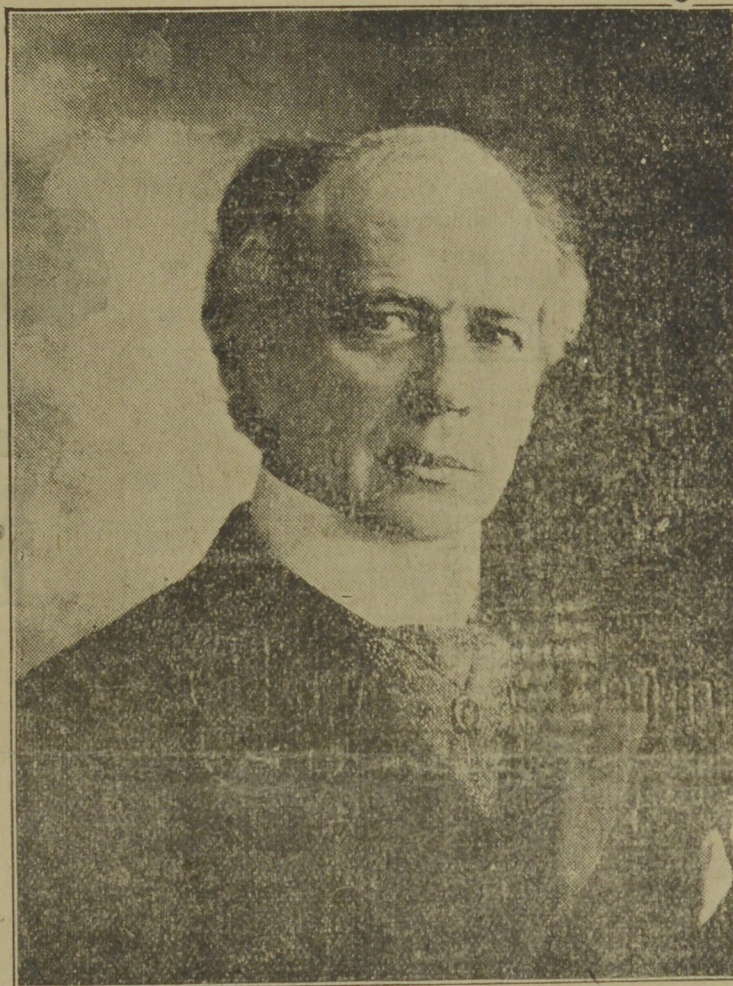
It is true that the question of the control of the projected new transcontinental line played a conspicuous part in the campaign, and that the verdict of the electorate seemed to be an unqualified approval of the Liberal scheme for private ownership with governmental co-operation. In particular would this view seem to be supported by the case of Nova Scotia, which has had opportunity with in its own boundaries to compare the Intercolonial railroad, owned and operated by the government, with the privately owned and operated Dominion and Atlantic, and which, nevertheless returned a solid Liberal delegation of eighteen. But one who knows political feeling in Nova Scotia cannot escape the conviction that, the question of railroad ownership played an insignificant part in the result, compared with that played by the ascendancy in his native province of Fielding, Laurier's Minister of Finance, and by popular confidence in Laurier himself.

In fact the result of the election in all the provinces is not really incompatible with a preference on the part of the Canadian people for government ownership of railroads. It is quite possible that they have not yet made up their minds on so technical a point. There can be no doubt that the prosperity which Canada is enjoying, and the consequent general feeling of contentment with present conditions, were much more important factors than the Grand Trunk question.

Another factor which cannot be lightly discounted was the personality of the Premier whose party has held the reins for the past eight years. The personal element has still greater scope in Canadian politics than in the United States.

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SIR WILFRID LAURIER, K. C. M. G.,

Premier of Canada.

both parties. In 1887 pressure of events practically forced upon him the party leadership. Although many, even among his own political associates, doubted whether it was possible for a French Roman Catholic to lead a political party in Canada, the results proved that they had underestimated the power of Laurier's purpose and personality. Many of those who watched his early career fell into the error of argument, from the balance and symmetry of his qualities, a lack of essential and compelling force.

In 1896 the electorate restored the Liberal party to power, and Laurier became Premier of the country to whose service his energies had been devoted for a quarter of a century. His first notable action, following closely upon his new investiture of power, was a semi-official visit to Washington, in order to discuss with President Cleveland certain matters affecting the trade relations between Canada and the United States.

In the following year, 1897, during the celebration of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in London, knighthood was conferred upon Laurier. Of all the statesmen from all parts of the empire who gathered in England on this occasion, none won more golden opinions from the English press and people than did this French Prime Minister of a British colony. Visiting Paris later in the same year, he was received at first with a certain hostile coldness, which his winning eloquence and his transparent honesty of purpose soon warmed into something of enthusiasm.

That year saw also the introduction, under Laurier's guidance, of a preferential tariff, which made, as a free gift to the mother country, certain discriminations in favor of British goods. This fiscal measure was a bold step in the direction of

remain to the end of time in that last fraternal embrace. Can we not hope that in that grave shall be buried the last vestiges of our former antagonism? If such should be the result, if we can indulge the hope that in that grave shall be buried our old contentions, the sending of the contingents would be the greatest service ever rendered Canada since confederation."

LOYAL TO CANADA AND THE EMPIRE.

It may truly be said that Sir Wilfrid Laurier has devoted his career to the realization of an idea. It was this same idea, the idea of a united Canada, that possessed John A. MacDonald, Charles Tupper, George Cartier, George Brown and the other strong Canadian statesmen of both parties whose efforts bore fruit in confederation. But the idea, although accomplished in fact at the time of Laurier's entry into public life, was yet to be realized in spirit. There remained the problem of uniting permanently, so that they might work together harmoniously and progressively, two nationalities differing widely in character, tradition and language.

Racial distrust and antagonism in Canada, even when not finding active expression, existed as a smoldering fire. To reveal and interpret to each other the French and English elements of the population, and to create from their mutual understanding a coherent national spirit, has been Sir Wilfrid's dream. The ambition and the man are well suited. A lover of his own people, proud of his French origin, he is nevertheless a great admirer of English institutions. As an orator he has won equal reputation in both languages. His intellectual sympathies are sensitive to

Sir Wilfrid to have his loyalty to the imperial connection called into question, but the charge was probably never regarded seriously as anything but an expedient of party warfare. Certain American journals, too, noting his unmistakable friendship and admiration for the United States, persuaded themselves that he had annexationist views. They were as wide of the mark as were those others who imputed to him the hope of seeing a French-Canadian republic on the banks of the St. Lawrence.

In an address to Nova Scotia Liberals at Halifax he once said, in no equivocal terms:

"Loyalty is natural to you men of English blood. It runs in your veins; but I can say also it runs in your hearts, from another and perhaps as sacred a cause. I am loyal from gratitude. I am loyal to the flag of England because under the banner of England my fellow countrymen have found ten times more freedom than they would have found had they remained subject in France."

Although he may not, as does Dr. Parkin, regard Imperial Federation as an immediate issue in practical politics, in temper and conviction Sir Wilfrid is an Imperial Federationist. He has expressed the opinion that if he were twenty-five years younger, he would live to sit as one of Canada's representatives at Westminster. Speaking in London in 1897, he said:

"As for Canada, with increase of population will come increase of facilities for inter-imperial trade; and with increase of population, too, will come a demand to be heard in the counsels of the empire. England must take Canada and her colonies into a regular partnership, with a proportionate control and responsibility in respect to Imperial affairs."