

SIR WILFRID LAURIER

In an Floquent Speech
in Parliament,

**PRESENTS CANADA'S POSITION
TOWARDS THE MOTHER-
LAND,**

In View of the Recent Changes
in the British Budget.

**OPPOSITION LEADER AND FINANCE
MINISTER ALSO ADDRESS
THE HOUSE.**

Ottawa, April 16.—In the House of Commons yesterday Mr. McLean (East York) called attention to the speech of the chancellor of the exchequer in England, and particularly to that feature which imposed a tax on food stuffs without increasing the price to the consumer. But the disappointing part was that Canada did not get reciprocal treatment. He blamed Sir Wilfrid Laurier for this. Had the premier taken a different stand during the diamond jubilee, and had he accepted the offer to discuss imperial defence during the coronation ceremonies, he (McLean) was of opinion that Canada would have had advantage of the proposition made in the British budget and a preference would be given to Canada.

Able Speech by Premier.

Sir Wilfrid gently chided Mr McLean for not giving notice to the government before the house met of his intention to bring the matter up, and supposed the reason was because he was not sure of his own facts or mind. Mr McLean had spoken unwarily and unguardedly on a subject respecting which he had a lot to learn and attacked the government, both for what it did and for what it did not do. If he or the opposition had a policy in regard to what the government should have done as to the invitation to the colonial conference, it should have been put in a resolution which the house could debate. The government was invited to attend a conference and discuss political, military and commercial matters, and answered that it was willing to discuss the commercial situation, but saw little profit or advantage in discussing the political situation or the military situation. Had Mr. McLean anything to say to that position? The government stated to the imperial authorities that, according to their way of thinking, the relations which at present bind Canada to the mother land were satisfactory. Was Mr. McLean prepared to take another course on that question? Did he want to have the position as between Britain and Canada or any of the self-governing colonies in any way improved? If so, let him say what he had to offer. In the estimation of the government, the members of that side of the house and the common people at large, the relations between Canada and Britain could not be improved, at least, he saw no way. If there was any way, he was prepared to discuss it, but when the subject was discussed by representatives of all the colonies and of Britain in 1897, all, with two exceptions, were unanimously in the opinion that the relations then subsisting between the colonies and Great Britain were perfectly satisfactory. Nothing had occurred since to change his own opinion. The basis upon which the empire had grown and now rested was the local autonomy of all its constituent parts, and he did not see that anything could be done at the present time to improve that basis in any way whatever.

Mr. McLean takes up another question, Sir Wilfrid continued. Now he says we have made a great mistake in refusing also to consider the military situation, in refusing to discuss a scheme for the general defence of the empire the government have made a great mistake, that the commercial and the military must go together. If that is the view taken by the honorable gentleman, that commerce and war must be considered together, it is a view from which I altogether dissent, and I challenge him or any other gentleman in this house or outside to present a scheme whereby two things so dissimilar as commerce and war can be considered together. No sir, I do not admit that view at all. It would be a most suicidal policy for the Canadian people to go into any scheme of that nature. It would be the most suicidal policy that could be devised for Canada to enter into the vortex in which the nations of Europe, England included, are engaged at the present time, and which compels them to maintain great military armaments. Sir, what is the relative position of Great Britain and Canada? Great Britain is one of the foremost nations of the world, in many ways perhaps the

foremost nation, certainly the greatest empire which exists today or perhaps which has existed since the supremacy of Rome. Great Britain, by reason of her situation, has to maintain a large and permanent army. Honorable gentlemen are aware how repugnant to the British people is the necessity of maintaining a standing army. Honorable gentlemen are aware how the British people constantly fought against that idea, but they have been forced by events, by the position which the empire occupies in the world, to maintain a standing army and today the principal items on the British budget are the expenses for naval and land armaments.

Canada's Position.

"Now, my honorable friend says that Canada should follow in the same course that we should take part in a scheme of the military imperial defence. Sir, Canada is in a different position. Canada is a nation with an immense territory, but with a sparse population of five and a third millions of souls scattered over an area of 3,000 miles in extent, from east to west. The principal item in the budget of Canada is what? Public works. The development of the country, the construction of railways and harbors, the opening up of ways of transportation. This is the work to which we have devoted our energies and I would look upon it as a crime to divert any part of that necessary expense to the supply of guns, cannons and military armaments generally."

Mr. Hughes (Victoria)—"Did the right honorable gentleman say any part of the expense?"

The prime minister—"I have no hesitation in saying that I share altogether the views which have been expressed by Sir Chas. Tupper more than once, that Canada has done more for the defence of the British empire by the construction of the I. C. R. and the C. P. R. than she could have done by spending that money in military armaments. Certainly, we must improve our own militia. We have a scheme before us today for that purpose, we must look after our own defences, but there is all the difference in the world between undertaking this domestic military expense and the embarking in that vast scheme which is embraced by my honorable friend's conceptions. I do not share his views and so long as my honorable friend wants to link together war and commerce, he will find me unalterably opposed to him. I cannot agree to anything of the kind."

Sir Wilfrid said it seemed to him that the government's decision to go to London to discuss the commercial situation simply, as they were prepared to do, was a wise one. Great Britain appeared to have entered upon a new line of taxation, to have gone back to the old corn duties. Whether it was called protection or not, it was true the new tax was not large, but at all events there was an opening and the field was now clear for negotiations in a new direction in London next June. He did not despair that the representatives at the conference would be able to lay down the basis of a system which would improve the trade relations between Great Britain and her colonies.

Whether this suited Mr. McLean or not, it met the views of the majority of the Canadian people and the government were looking not so much for his appreciation as for the approbation of the people at large.

Mr. R. L. Borden

said that the premier did not always have the view that there was no need of exchanging the relation between Canada and British. In 1892 he said the premier advocated independence, and later on that if Britain wanted any aid she should take us into her counsels. As to imperial defence, Mr. Borden said he would always maintain Canada's right to say how she should contribute, but at the same time he did not think the government should have refused to discuss the subject. He said that on the question of copyright, Canada had receded from the position of self government. He accused Fielding, Laurier and Cartwright of always expressing the view that Britain would not tax breadstuffs, that was the sole reason they give for their not doing anything to secure preference. The premier told the people of Britain that Canada did not want any preference. Was the government still of that opinion?

Hon. W. S. Fielding.

The minister of finance said no one opposite was able to found an argument on this matter without mis-stating the facts. It was absolutely baseless to say that the British government had ever offered a preference or that the chancellor of the exchequer had been prepared to give one. Up to the present moment not a man in English public life had declared his willingness to publish a preferential duty on wheat.

"Did you ask for it?" Dr. Sproule asked.

"The time hitherto has not been favorable," Mr. Fielding replied, "and I speak on the authority of English statesmen who know. The leader of the opposition

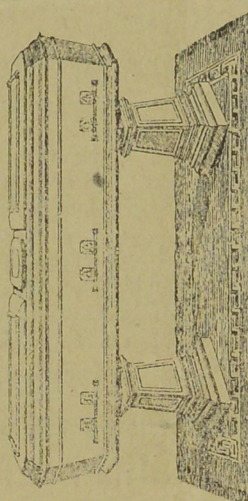
says he heard me say a preference on wheat would not be granted. To have expected the British government or any minister in 1897 to put a duty on wheat was preposterous. Today they have put a small duty on only because of the tremendous cost of the greatest war the nation has seen. But for the war there would have been no duties. Therefore it was unfair to compare what would have happened in time of peace with the even brought about by the stress of a great war. He agreed that a preference would be a good thing from the Canadian point of view, but it was for the English people to say if they would give one. The Conservative party would stand at John Bull's door and demand a preference before consenting to give Britain any advantage.

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