

The Spotlight

SIR ARTHUR CURRIE

APPARENTLY the Montreal fiscal hierarchy would have an Arthur succeed an Arthur at the head of the Conservative table. The fiscal hierarchy isn't going to have its way; and, if it did, the event would show that its political sagacity really belongs to those discounted regions where the German mark has been wandering these several years. Sir Arthur Currie would not necessarily bungle Conservative leadership; but he would either make a mess of it, or of Montreal fiscal hierarchies.

The simple truth is that the world has gone by the political cogitations of Arthur Meighen's enemies on St. James street; whom it sees rather as codgers of the old time than as prophets of the new. Mankind seems on the way to dedication to the proposition that stock market magnates are born equal in obtusity towards the truth that Time sheds the ideas of generations as inexorably as it sheds the generations.

History is full of the examples of how events have laughed at the impossibilities of the great and powerful, and has proved that they can be done. The history they are trying to make in Montreal just now is of that sort. Sir Arthur Currie will not succeed Mr. Arthur Meighen just yet; but his place in Canadian life makes his unavowed nomination for the office truly interesting in this rather tepid 'tween-season of our chrysaloid of national-ity.

Sir Arthur Currie is rather an astonishing man—to himself as to others. He is head of McGill University; and a very good head, too. Often to himself, and occasionally to his intimates, he regards that distinction as one of those joyful ironies which make life really worth while to all but the most sombre human beings. There surely never was such a transformation in mortal man's condition as the metamorphosis that occurred to Sir Arthur Currie between the summers of 1914 and 1920.

THE war did nothing more revolutionary than to cause an Oxford don, like the late master of Balliol, to recommend as the head of a great university a man who never scholasticated higher than a country high school. Sir Auckland Geddes, who had professed anatomy at McGill, accepted the principalship, after Sir William Peterson's death; but reneged when the ambassadorship at Washington offered. McGill needed more pep than it had enjoyed during several years; and when somebody unnamed suggested the commander of the Canadian division in France to Geddes, he received the light as from on high; fortified himself with the master's approval and other dons; and the thing was done—the most ironical doing towards the culchah of degrees that has ever happened.

Another irony in the way this Montreal situation was ironed out was not mentioned to the master of Balliol, or to the McGill governors.

Art Currie, while at Strathroy collegiate—walking there from Napper's Corners—used to do some teaching of younger fry, and showed great capacity for the duty. Towards the end of his studies he led in a debate, and evoked the remark from Inspector Carlson: "You have too much ability to tie yourself down to the teaching profession." And here he is, after

commanding armies, in the teaching profession, with financiers egging him on to grab the job of teaching the Conservative grandmother to suck eggs. In that setting there is another of life's larger ironies. Sir Arthur, in Victoria, B.C., was a staunch Liberal. With the characteristic misinformations of their kind, it is quite likely the hierarchs have never heard so.

IN 1893, when he was eighteen, young Currie forsook Middlesex for British Columbia, where at Sidney, on Vancouver Island, he taught school for 6 years. He forsook school for insurance, and rose to be provincial manager for the National Life, before he went into real estate in Victoria, during the MacBride-Bowser boom years. As a kid he liked to drill other kids, including his cousin, Harold, to-day's vice-president of the U. F. O. He joined the garrison artillery, and then completed the organization of the 50th Gordon High-



landers, their first colonel having in three years inveigled 120 men into kilts. Currie filled the regiment in six months. For nearly a year before the war he was on continuous duty, the Nanaimo coal strike casting that service on him. By that time coal estate in nine o'clock - in - the - morning - Victoria was not the roseate glory it once had been. Sir Arthur could discourse upon the heartaches that sometimes follow the stunt of biting off just a little more than you can chew.

The war proved what a born soldier and leader he was. Poor Sam Hughes, who began by offering him a brigade and continued to press the Ross rifle upon him, ended by attacking him in the House of Commons for being too lavish a blood-spender. But no man ever carried the devotion of his men more steadily; and the elevation of none to social rank and chief command was ever received with less of envy by his brethren. Of his military qualities the first syllable cannot be uttered here. Whether there was St. James Street inspiration in his declaration (which stunned the Montreal Star) that the Canadian government sent more than 100,000 useless men overseas, it isn't yet important to know. If it was urged upon him to say publicly what he thought privately, it would seem that the deepest political wisdom was not evinced. What great soldier wants a fifth of his former comrades to understand that they belonged to the useless brigade?

SIR ARTHUR is an Imperialist, who has ardently espoused two absolutely opposite principles. At one of the great dinners given him in London, when the Kaiser was finished, he said he wanted the dominions to occupy to the empire the same position that Glasgow and Manchester occupy towards London. He also wanted political equality of the dominions and the Old Land as nations in the Empire. He came home to declare that whenever Britain went to War—not the Empire, mind you, but Britain—Canada must go to war. It is surely a singular order of mind which can believe that it is political equality when one country says: "I am going to war," another country, which may not have been consulted, must say: "I will therefore go to war." Sir Arthur delights to say "My England" to every Englishman seized of freedom. That is vassalage. The term has no terrors for the Montreal hierarchs. They are accustomed to think in the terms of big fleas that have little fleas.

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To the Ed
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