

ROBERT BICKERDIKE, M.P., of Montreal—who will be remembered as the statesman who first proposed to enact cigarette prohibition—nominates Lord Strathcona as our next Governor-General, Sir Wilfrid Laurier as our next High Commissioner under the title of Lord Athabasca, and Mr. Aylesworth as our next Premier. From this I infer that Mr. Bickerdike is a better judge of popular legislation than of political probabilities; and how good a judge he is of popular legislation may be inferred from the fact that he has abandoned his anti-cigarette bill to stranger hands. If I were going to venture into prophecy, I would contradict Mr. Bickerdike on each of his three predictions. To appoint Lord Strathcona Governor-General would be to entirely change the character of that office. Lord Strathcona is fit for it, of course; but if the British Government desires to give him such an office, it had better follow the precedent in the case of Sir Francis Hincks and make him Governor-General of some other colony—say Australia. To appoint a Canadian to the Canadian Governor-Generalship would be to rob the office of its character as an Imperial link; and, if it be robbed of that, it will be naked indeed.

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However, Lord Strathcona should stay exactly where he is so long as he is able and willing to serve the nation. He is an ideal High Commissioner, and has made it exceedingly difficult for any one to follow him in that position. Of Sir Wilfrid the same can be said. He is an ideal Premier in many ways, and it is altogether likely that he will die in harness. The Liberal Party would never be mad enough to let him go. If Sir Wilfrid should go to England, however, I would rather see him go as a member of the British House of Commons than as Canadian High Commissioner. He would serve as a link of Empire himself in this capacity, and an exceedingly sane and safe link. Mr. Aylesworth may be Premier some day. Again, it can be said that he is quite big enough for the job. But he would not be the Premier now if Sir Wilfrid were to be sent to London. He lacks the Parliamentary experience which he will gain easily enough if given time. Then the party could not afford to snub Mr. Fielding; and to raise any other man over his head just now, would be to pointedly administer just such a snub.

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Mr. Stead—the human dynamo—has been buzzing through the country, and we are left regretting that so much mind power should be so wastefully frittered away. For mental activity, it would be hard to name an equal to this sturdy little English radical; but when it comes to mental balance, we can only put him at the head of the class by counting from the bottom. He reminds me of a remark Sir John Macdonald is said to have made regarding Nicholas Flood Davin—a man very unlike Stead in many ways, but like him in having more mental ability than discretion. Someone said to Sir John one day—“What a pity it is that Davin has not more balance!” “If he had,” replied Sir John, “we would probably never have heard of him.” Much of Stead’s notoriety is due to his eccentricity—his scorn for convention—his ability to plunge into a question and bring out an erratic conclusion. The Stead view of a subject is invariably unique. The rest of the world con over the

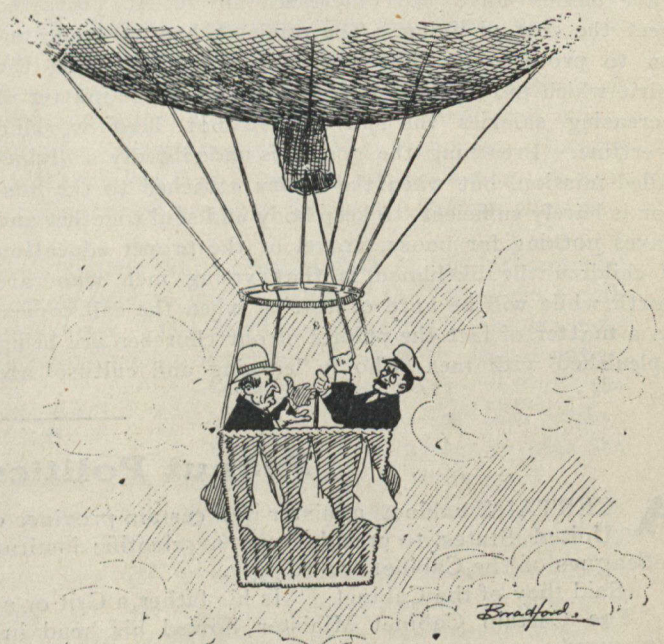
problem and arrive at answers which may differ but which fall into classes. Stead takes the same figures and arrives at an answer which has occurred to no one else.

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His “forte” seems to be believing things which other people dismiss as absurd. Now he has been making great play in Canada with an interview he says he had with Sir Wilfrid Laurier at the Coronation Conference in which Sir Wilfrid is represented as saying that Canada could remain “neutral” in a war waged by Britain with which she did not sympathise. Of course, Sir Wilfrid could not have meant to say anything of the sort. It was too utterly foolish. He may have meant to say that Canada did not feel bound to send contingents to every British war, which is quite a different thing. Any other person except Stead would have realised that Sir Wilfrid was using the word “neutral” in some such sense. But Stead believed that Sir Wilfrid meant the word “neutral” as the word is employed internationally; and he has builded a vast fabric of question and conjecture on that belief. That is very Stead-like. It is all very clever and convincing—except for the trifling circumstances that it all rests upon a statement which no one else believes.

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Again, Mr. Stead has been telling us that an eminent American told him that if he had been Secretary of State when Canada sent her contingents to South Africa, he would have regarded the act as a “casus belli” and told Canada to mind her own business. Now that is a tremendously startling statement if the anonymous American was a man at all likely to be Secretary of State. Such an act would mean war between Britain and the United States, fought out chiefly in Canada, as surely as the sun will rise to-morrow morning. But I will venture to guess, without knowing in the least to whom Mr. Stead referred, that his menacing American is some side-tracked genius who is as likely to be entrusted with the Secretaryship of State as Mr. Stead is with the position of British Foreign Secretary. If Stead gave us his name, he would probably spoil his story. So with Mr. Stead’s attitude on peace. If one could accept his premises, his conclusions cannot be escaped. But he leaves out of his premises all such facts as the existence of the fighting instinct in every race and nation, the self-interest of commercial peoples who expect to profit by the results of war, and the natural desire in every human breast to exercise mastery over others. What Mr. Stead needs more than anything else is the power to distinguish the probable from the improbable.



“We are up too high. I’m going to let out some gas.”
 “Vot? With gas a tollar a tousandt? Throw oudt the sandt, vich costs nodingk!”—N.Y. Life.