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THE COAT OF MANY COLOURS

How the Toronto News Has Survived the Shock of Radical Changes

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ALL the real respect I ever had for a newspaper was at one time epitomized to the nth degree in the Toronto Evening News. The young journalist with some aspiration to becoming a newspaperman who could not have considered himself rather a superior sort of scribe by being on the staff of the News in the interval of 1903-05, would have been sadly lacking in one very essential part of a newspaper career, imagination.

The News of the second period was a remarkable and picturesque paper. I prefer to begin considering it at that point, because it was there my real knowledge of the paper began. As I had no practical experience with any other newspaper, except once a week to arrive in the editorial office of a provincial daily with a wad of copy at a dollar a column for the Saturday edition, the News of 1903 was necessarily a revelation. The only thing I could ever adequately compare it to was hearing my first play, which happens to have been the Merchant of Venice, done by Irving and Terry. It took me weeks to recover from that play. I have not yet recovered from my initiation into the temple of fame known as the Toronto News after it was acquired by Mr. J. W. Flavelle and placed in the hands of John Stephen Willison.

Whatever the News had been before that time was very much as if a benefactor had picked up a gutter-snipe, and having discovered in him the latent spark of nobility proceeds to make a man of him in the old-fashioned, dignified way—by means of good clothes, plenty of baths, a good education and pleasant companions. Thus it seemed to my unenlightened perception when I went on the staff, or rather the faculty, of the second News in 1903.

What the News has become since that time—ah, how short and swift a period!—is still another story. Politicians may differ about the News of 1916. Sociologists may have disputed about the original News, whose reporters were once stigmatized by an eminent Toronto publicist as the "sewer gang." Only poets and philosophers are entitled to appreciate what the News was in its golden age of Greek development beginning with 1903.

There never has been a chapter of Canadian journalism quite the equal of that. There will never be again. The age of romance that still clung to the world in the post-Victorian era came to a climax in the rehabilitation of the Toronto News. Seven years before that time it had happened in Canadian politics—when Laurier swept into power with a college of experts for a Cabinet and a new Canada to exploit with new political doctrines. But the resurrection of the soul of the News under Messrs. Flavelle and Willison was to the neophytic mind even more auspicious. There was no party politics about this glorified enterprise. The whole philosophy of free and unfettered humanity was expressed in that marvellous epitaph at the head of the editorial page:

"An independent journal devoted to politics, education, literature, the presentation of current news and the diffusion of useful information."

NEVER before had such a label appeared on any Canadian newspaper. Here at last was a vehicle of thought that should find as much use for The Data of Ethics as for the news of the drunk and disorderly down at No. 1 Police Station. Socrates himself would have approved of that manifesto. Indeed it seemed almost as though some Socrates had designed it.

The precise story of how the News passed into the sphere of the educated philanthropist need not be

told here. It was conversion that mattered; the Methodistic fact that you could change a brat into a philosopher by spending money on it without even changing its name.

A number of kettles seemed to be brewing at once in those days. Mr. Flavelle, just coming to the apex of both finance and Methodism in Toronto, had a desire to spend a large amount of money in enlightenment of other people as well as himself. It was said by a Methodist minister in Toronto that his intention was to found a religious or quasi-religious, at all events ethical, weekly which would have taken a stout hand in politics. We do not swear to this. It is quite clear, however, that Mr. Flavelle had the money and the desire, that he could see possibilities in practical religion not yet exploited, sad defects in the Conservative party to which he belonged, and still sadder degeneracy in the Liberal party of Ontario under Sir George Ross, and some evidences of backsliding at Ottawa.

Here was where the steam from two kettles seemed to mix. Up in the Globe office there was a similar state of mind in the person of at least the chief editor, John S. Willison, who had played a very big and leading part in making the Globe the stronghold of true Liberalism that it was. In the eyes of the undeceived public Mr. Willison was the apex of true and equable Liberalism. He was the throne-room confidante of Laurier, whose life and times he had written. No other journalist had such a close view of the Premier. The Globe editor was regarded as somewhat the kingmaker of the party. And the Globe had earned the distinction because of a broad and tolerant Liberal policy, giving both sides of politics in its news whether in the House or from the hustings, and having given to the world a notable political eulogy in The Life and Times of Sir Wilfrid Laurier. No other editor-in-chief had written such a book. No other Premier in Canada had ever been so analytically and historically glorified.

BUT Mr. Willison had not yet written the life and times of the Liberal party in Ontario; though he was coming to it. And his ideas on that subject were not crystallized completely when the spotlight at Ottawa revealed a few bad spots that Mr. Willison by no means liked. No doubt they had been there before; but not so noticeably. The shield and sword of Sir Galahad were not so bright as they looked in 1896, the year of the Globe's greatest triumph. And the claymore of the Highland chieftain in Toronto, Sir George Ross, was a sad-looking weapon indeed.

After all, to a man who was born a Tory and became a Liberal by habit of reading and force of editorial circumstances, there might be a new way of looking at Liberalism. A thing which had become so manifestly bad-behaved in Ontario could not be beyond serious criticism at Ottawa. Ontario was the real keystone of Liberalism—not Quebec.

Only politicians and editors know exactly how the moral sense of a born Tory who became a Liberal chief in a sanctum came to revolt at what evangelists call a change of heart. It was time for a change. There was bound to be a revolution in Ontario. Unless signs failed there might be a subsequent radical change in Ottawa. Anyway, Editor Willison was not satisfied with Liberalism as it was in 1903. There were dissatisfactions even in the Globe office itself over matters not directly concerned with either of the two Liberal Premiers. Mr. Willison could no longer reflect the undivided sentiments of either the

Liberal party or the Liberal Globe. It was time for a change. How would it come? What turn of any wheel could deliver John S. Willison from the body of this death.

Psychologically—enter Mr. J. W. Flavelle. Here was a philanthropist willing to spend money on a higher type of journalism for reasons already mentioned. Here was a great editor dissatisfied with his own acquired party which he had helped lead to victory more than once, and with a newspaper that no longer embodied the kind of Liberalism to which he seemed to aspire.

But neither of these men knew the other except by reputation. Mr. Willison knew Mr. Flavelle as the organizing genius of the William Davies Co., of the Cox group of financiers, and of the Methodist Church in Canada. Mr. Flavelle knew Mr. Willison as the great editor of the Globe, the friend of Sir Wilfrid Laurier, and the Anglo-Canadian editor who seemed to understand Quebec.

TO get these two unsatisfied beau-idealists together would be to take the "tide in the affairs of men" at the flood. With so many unrealized ideals in the persons of two leading citizens and with plenty of money to spend on a machine that would realize them, the combination of Flavelle and Willison looked to some ardent souls like the moral and journalistic salvation of Canada.

It was a newspaperman who brought about the connection between Mr. Flavelle and Mr. Willison. Mr. A. H. A. Colquhoun, who had left the Mail and Empire and was then working for the Maclean Publishing interests, negotiated the acquaintance of the two promoters and afterwards the sale of the old News to Mr. Flavelle. The first paper considered was the World. Offers were made, but the price was too high. It was thought then that a new paper might be started, but the objection to this was the fact that this would merely be adding a new paper to a field already over-crowded. To buy the News, the only paper available at a low price, meant to wipe out a competitor. This was done. The price reported to have been paid was \$135,000.

When I first made the acquaintance of the News as a member of its faculty the unadjusted ideals of two big men were still in a process of ferment. The old News office and plant was the scene of the greatest reorganization of opinions and ideals in Canada. What a place it was for such an event! Down on lower Yonge St., where for years the old News had been the busy centre of yellow journalism in Toronto, where "Billy" Douglas had paced the floor dictating his fire-eating editorials, where Edmund E. Shepard in an earlier day had fired the prairie and made the News both psychic and notorious, where the Katzenjammer Kids had led the opera comique, and where the alleged "sewer gang" had carried on its disrespectful campaign against everything that had the first sign of a vested or established or any kind of corporate interest—there of a sudden began to burn the lambent flames of a new gospel that should enlighten the dark places of Canada.

The dark stairs still creaked painfully under the rushing feet of a great staff of reporters picked from all the newspapers of Toronto. The little dingy rooms on the second floor rocked with the bursting opinions of editorial writers and of departmental heads who were yet engaged in drawing up the syllabus that should convert mankind even while they condescended to issue a newspaper. In a rear room below behind a new army of uncomfortably crowded clerks a bank manager of much ability was engaged in