



A FOOLISH NATIONAL FEAR

I DO not know how it affects you, but I am growing terribly tired of hearing our fellows talk autonomy every time any one suggests that we might possibly do a little more for Imperial defence. Our autonomy is in no danger. No one in the world is attacking it or challenging it or trying to restrict it. It is sixty years since any British Government thought that it could govern Canada without the full and free consent of the governed. Canadian autonomy has been a dead issue ever since the elections of 1848—and there are very few of us who can recall going to the polls on that occasion. My grandfather went; and he voted for Baldwin and autonomy. And even then he felt that he was not voting so much against British interference as against the Canadian Family Compact. Now if the Two Canadas—a struggling fringe of settlement along the St. Lawrence and the Lakes—could secure its autonomy and get full recognition of it from the British Government, which had no high opinion of Colonials at best, is it not pitiable for us to be always acting as if it were in the greatest danger when we are “Nine Canadas” with seven million people and have enjoyed the utmost local liberty for more than half a century?

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IT really looks as if we wanted to change the subject when the topic of our contribution to the common defence of the Empire comes up. A British statesman says, in effect: “I am delighted to hear you say that you desire to join with us and do your full share toward defending our Imperial heritage, our liberties, laws and ideals. We would not have ventured to suggest it ourselves, for we knew that you were very busy building up a nation. But it is only the simple truth that new dangers have arisen and it is a question whether the Mother Country can alone carry the whole burden of defence much longer. Still we felt that the initiative lay with you; but we will not conceal our gratification that you have taken it.”

At which we thrust out our chests and smile proudly as we reply, “We could do no less. We are British subjects as truly as you are, and the British Empire will never fail so long as we have a cartridge in our belts or a man to march.”

“You are a true whelp of the lion,” replies the British statesman with a fine glow. “Your brave words stir the blood of this old island as nothing has moved us for centuries. Now, of course, as we neither of us have any resources to waste, and as the perils which confront us are immense, we had better sit down and devise the best means

by which our contributions can march together. Cooperation is the secret—”

“But,” we break in at this point, “we must most carefully guard our local autonomy—”

“Certainly,” agrees the British statesman in surprise. “We should not dream of interfering with that. We awaited your initiative before we mentioned the possibility of a contribution from you at all. Still it will be necessary for us each to know what the other intends to do if we mean to make the most effective use of the efforts of both; and hence we must consider—”

“It must be distinctly understood,” we again remark with a defiant expression, “that our autonomy must be recognised and protected to the full. Canada must reserve for herself the entire decision of what she will do, how she will do it and when she will do it. The subject of autonomy is one which lies very near to the hearts of our people—”

“Quite so,” observes the British statesman into his beard. “I quite understand. I fancy that under the circumstances I had better go and prepare a little essay on the maintenance of the Magna Charta. We are obviously not going to talk business to-day.”

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SURELY Canada might take it for granted that her autonomy is safe. Surely it is obvious that Britain could not now take from us our autonomy even if she desired to do so. If the Canadian Parliament were to reject any proposal made to it by the British Government, the British Government would never be insane enough to think of endeavouring to compel us to adopt it against our will. The coercion of a reluctant Canada under the shadow of an ambitious United States is a task which nothing but a Ministry of madmen would dream of trying. Canadian autonomy is as safe as the independence of the United States; and what would we think of the Americans if, on some occasion when the British and American Governments sat down to concert a combined plan of campaign for the defence of the interests of both, our neighbours were first to begin to insist that their independence won from the British Crown more than a century ago on many a hard-fought field be definitely recognised? They were as ready as possible, we can imagine them saying, to fight side by side with glorious old Britain; but they would never consent to imperil their national independence.

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WHAT would we say if, under such circumstances, the Americans followed professions of an immense eagerness to co-operate by talking this sort of nonsense when some one suggested getting down to business. Well, whatever we might say can now be reserved for home consumption; for it would be no more irrelevant and silly for the Americans to talk as if their independence were in danger than it is for Canadians to talk as if their autonomy were menaced. The next time our politicians or journalists want to “change the subject” when Britain begins talking business regarding Imperial defence, I hope that they will talk of the weather.

THE MONOCLE MAN.

HOW MCGILL UNIVERSITY IS RECOVERING FROM THE GREAT FIRE



The New Macdonald Physics Building



The New Macdonald Engineering Building