

## CANADIAN AUTONOMY

with tiresome iteration. No more can Australia, or even the United Kingdom. There are many interests peculiar to each self-governing group within the Empire, which the members of that group must be free to manage as they please. There are Canadian interests quite distinct from those of the United Kingdom or Australia, which Canadians must determine without outside interference. But there are also some vital interests common to the Empire and not special to any part of it. For the British Empire is more than the mere sum of its parts. It is a living whole through which throb the pulses of a common life.

It was unfortunate that in the Act of Confederation no precise definition was given of the principle of autonomy and no definite limitation of its application. The relations of the various Provinces to the Dominion were defined, but not that of the Dominion itself to the United Kingdom or the Empire. It was another instance of the seemingly incurable habit of mind of British statesmen, to look only at the best means of meeting the difficulty of the moment without regard to the future. Instead of proceeding on a carefully thought out comprehensive plan for the whole empire to be gradually completed as the occasion arose, the future was left to take care of itself. And while extensive rights of self-government were conferred upon Canada, and the principle of autonomy for the colonies which were ready for it took the place of government from Downing Street, the opportunity was missed of completing the scheme, by defining once for all the place of the Dominions in the imperial system and the precise nature and limits of their powers of self-government, and by laying down some definite principles by which their share of the burden of imperial defence should be determined.

## II.

Sir Wilfrid Laurier in particular is obsessed with the idea of Canadian autonomy. "Canada would at no price accept anything depriving it of its legislative autonomy," is the constant burden of his speeches on imperial affairs. But if this is more than a flourish of rhetoric, what precisely does it mean? That Canada has the right to the management of her own local