

If, after being a colony, our country is now master of its own destiny, and if, on December 11, 1931, the British parliament adopted the legislation officially known as the "Statute of Westminster", it is only fitting that I should recall certain phases of our constitutional evolution, of which the above statute is but the logical conclusion.

We are proud of our autonomy, but we should not forget that the Liberal party gave us its most valiant champions. Laurier was one of the pioneers in that task of national liberation, but Mackenzie King, Lapointe, St. Laurent and the Liberal party pursued without truce, intermission or respite the lofty ideal of our great fellow-countryman, Laurier. He foresaw its achievement, because he never ceased repeating in his speeches:

Canada is bound to become a nation just as a child is bound to become a man.

Our Tory friends sometimes contend that they brought about the enactment of the Statute of Westminster in 1931. I wonder if they are really unaware of the title of that legislation. What is it, exactly? I quote:

An Act to give effect to certain resolutions passed by imperial conferences held in the years 1926 and 1930.

The 1926 conference, in which our great Liberal leaders, Mackenzie King and Lapointe, played such a leading part, recognized the sovereignty of the dominions and adopted the formula sometimes referred to as the Balfour formula, although some contend that it was drafted by Mr. Lapointe.

I have here a speech delivered at Quebec in 1938 by the Right Hon. Ernest Lapointe and I would like to quote a few excerpts which are of special interest at the present time. Here is what Mr. Lapointe said about the Liberal party's share in the achievement of Canada's autonomy.

The Statute of Westminster is our achievement. When, sometime after 1921, I joined the King government, with my friend, associate and leader, Mr. King, we began working for the recognition of Canada's rights.

In 1923, when I was called upon to sign a treaty with the United States regarding the Pacific fisheries, I refused to have the British ambassador to the United States sign it with us. I contended that Canada's signature was sufficient and I did not let anyone hold my hand.

During the same year, there was trouble in Europe and Mr. Churchill, who was then Colonial Secretary, asked Mr. King whether he would agree to send a contingent to Chanak. He replied: No, parliament will have to decide.

About the same time, at Lausanne, Canada was invited to sign a treaty regarding the boundaries of certain European countries, but Mr.

[Mr. Tremblay.]

King refused to sign it on the grounds that Canada had taken no part in the drafting of that document.

In 1926, at the conference which has been mentioned yesterday, our charter was defined and Canada was recognized as England's equal, independent and self-governing.

In 1929, I had the honour of leading the delegation sent to discuss and to draft the Statute of Westminster. I worked during two months on the final draft.

At the following session, when I moved a resolution for the endorsement of our work, I was accused by Mr. Bennett of trying to cut the last bonds which united Canada to Great Britain. Mr. Cahan spoke of "stupid," "silly" and "childish" endeavours. But our plan was accepted by the House of Commons and placed on the British statute books in 1930. We were entitled to that right, but it was withheld and we had to fight for it. We were the ones who fought. There lies the difference.

Canadian autonomy was the work of the Liberal party and we owe it principally to the present Prime Minister, grandson of William Lyon Mackenzie, the rebel who, in 1838, was forced into exile with a price on his head because he had led the uprising in Upper Canada for the establishment of a government responsible to the people and not to the Governor General.

The leader of the Liberal party strove for this ideal which he had assigned to himself in his youth with consummate ability, tact and persistence.

Has anyone forgotten the Chanak incident? Mr. Mackenzie King had been leading the Liberal party for only two years and had been Prime Minister for a year when this incident broke out in 1922. Had it not been for the Prime Minister's constitutional knowledge and strength of character, Canada might have been held up to ridicule and—an even more serious consequence,—might have been plunged unwittingly into a new European war.

When the London government asked the dominions to send troops over—their appeal was published in Canadian newspapers before the telegram requesting expeditionary forces had even reached the dominion government—the great Liberal leader answered blandly that it behooved the Canadian parliament to pass judgment on such a grave question and not the Canadian government alone. He added that he would consider, in the light of all pertinent factors, whether the British government's request warranted the convening of a special session of parliament. Because of this firm, dignified stand of the Liberal Prime Minister of Canada, Mr. Asquith was prompted to state in the British House of Commons that he was glad there were statesmen in the dominions who had the wisdom to ask why their country should go to war.