

THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

To the Members of the General Reform Association for Ontario :

In previous years, as a preliminary to discussion at this annual meeting, I have endeavoured to review the position of Liberalism in Ontario, the events of political significance during the year, and the attitude of the party on subjects of controversy in provincial and federal politics. This year, the European war raises for consideration questions of national and imperial concern, so much more vital than any of a purely party nature, that in the present address I shall, with your permission, forego the custom previously adopted and allow my remarks to accord with the "truce to party strife" proffered at the outbreak of European hostilities, in the name of the Liberal party of Canada, by Sir Wilfrid Laurier, its venerable and chivalrous leader.

CONSIDERATIONS IMPOSED BY THE WAR

In adopting this attitude, I should like to make perfectly plain what it may imply so far as the Liberal party is concerned. Perhaps I cannot do this better than to quote from the August number of *The Canadian Liberal Monthly*, the statement of policy agreed upon at the outset of the war, with respect to the subject matter of that publication. After mentioning that nothing would be published calculated to excite partisan discussion, or to embarrass the Government at an hour of supreme moment to Canada and the world, the *Liberal Monthly* goes on, with respect to the Liberal attitude, to say :

"It must not be assumed that in adopting this course, Liberalism in Canada is abandoning in any particular any of the policies, whether of trade, tariff or defence, which it sought to enforce while in power, and for which it has strenuously contended in opposition. On the contrary, existing conditions have, it is believed, shown as nothing else could possibly have done the wisdom and patriotism of these policies, and may yet lead to their general acceptance. Neither is it to be assumed that the Administration has so improved as to render its conduct above criticism in its present management of the country's affairs. It is simply that it is thought fair-minded Canadians everywhere recognize this is not a time for party divisions, party debate and party struggle, and will agree that comment which might otherwise very properly be made, may with propriety and without loss, be withheld until a later time."

If these words were true at the outbreak of the war in August last, events since have certainly helped to throw into relief, so far

as Canada and the Mother Country are concerned, the wisdom and far-sighted statesmanship of policies calculated to materially further the friendly relations existing between the United States of America and the British Empire, and of policies which, with regard to all possible contingencies, seek to gain for consumers and producers alike, the widest markets in which to buy and sell. They have, in an even more pointed way, disclosed the service to the British Empire in time of war, to say nothing of the sense of security and source of pride afforded thereby to its Dominions, of naval services owned and controlled on principles identical with those set forth in the unanimous resolution of the Parliament of Canada of March, 1909, and embodied in the Canadian Naval Service Act passed by the Liberal Administration in 1910. They have revealed, too, especially to those who were strong in their denunciation of the Government at the time, the great wisdom and patriotism of the Liberal policies with respect to Japan and Canadian-Japanese relations, and with respect to relations with the Far East generally. Let us hope that out of the experience and sacrifices of this war will come hereafter more toleration and less bitterness between the political parties in Canada as respects each other's opinions on matters of domestic concern ; and, as regards international relations and obligations, a larger vision and a broader humanitarianism on the part of Canadians generally. At the moment, agreement, if possible, among men of all parties in Canada is what is demanded by the terrible condition of affairs in Europe ; that as citizens of the British Empire we may the more effectively assist in meeting its needs in the present crisis, and help, in particular, to substantially lessen the ever-increasing burden which proximity to the scene of conflict is placing in a variety of directions upon the people of the Motherland.

Among many subjects that might be mentioned, there are at least three deserving of earnest consideration in this connection. With respect to each it would seem that the leaders of the two political parties might, to the honour of Canada, and infinite credit to the parties they represent, join in a common accord.

AGREEMENT AS TO ABSENCE OF PARTY CONFLICT

The first is a frank, open and public avowal that until the war is ended, except as may be occasioned by constitutional requirements, no effort will be made to precipitate a party conflict in the Dominion, save on grounds of the highest public necessity. Financial, commercial and industrial conditions are at the moment sufficiently abnormal and strained to make it imperative that the uncertainties surrounding them should not be heightened by misgivings as to the probabilities and possibilities of political contests. Vital considerations of national and imperial significance demand that false impressions be not created abroad by a course of action that, save for party political considerations can have no possible shadow of excuse.