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WILL COL. LAVERGNE ENLIST?

By So Doing He Will Prove Himself a Real Nationalist

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SOME weeks ago, down among the Laverignes, at St. Irene, their summer home, the writer was playing a revised version of the Pilgrim's Chorus from Tannhauser.

"I'll gamble you don't play that in Toronto," said Armand, at the end of the piece.

"On the contrary," I assured him, "about fifty musicians in Toronto gave a performance of it last Christmas week among a crowd of art workers and were forced to repeat it."

"That may be art—but not Toronto," was his crisp rejoinder.

He was not so far astray. That was before the entente cordiale was organized. It is possible that Toronto may yet prove a willingness to meet Quebec City half way in a mutual desire for a better understanding. But there are extremists in Toronto who will be somewhat annoyed at any "rapprochement."

Later in the day, discussing Roger Casement, some one ventured the opinion that he should have been given his own choice of how to die.

"No," exploded Armand. "By the British people he was adjudged a traitor. If he was a traitor, he deserved nothing but a hempen rope. If Toronto ever hangs me, I ask nothing better."

Here Lavergne was on stage. Toronto has no desire to hang anybody. Mr. Bourassa invented that idea. In his hands it makes material for bad articles and worse speeches. Col. Lavergne knows that this hangman talk is only borrowed hysterics.

In anything following hereafter about the first lieutenant of Henri Bourassa—who would delight to be tried for treason by a Federal Parliament and heroized as a martyr by a Quebec minority—there must be no mere racial or local prejudice. If Toronto is intolerant—for the time being obliterate Toronto. If Lavergne is parochial, bigoted, mistaken—let us say so. Where each is right, Toronto or Lavergne, let us admit it.

I SPENT a day and parts of two others with Lavergne, both at St. Irene and in Quebec. I was not sentenced to this by any court except that of good fellowship. I cannot recall having spent pleasanter hours with any new-found acquaintances anywhere. There were the Judge, father of Armand, Madame his mother, Madame his wife, and himself. In a family a man sometimes gets softened down to a human consistency. But I had spent several hours with Lavergne in his office and on the Terrace at Quebec. He was not different, except that he was oftener cynical in the home, delighted to say more acrid things about Toronto, and seemed generally more restless.

I was from Toronto, which in matters affecting Quebec is not far from Missouri. I had some belief in the Empire; he professed to have none. I believed that the British navy was an institution that conserved at least a measure of liberty for the world; he believed that it meant the freedom of the seas for Great and greater Britain. I believed in Canada taking part in the war as a voluntary act; he believed in compulsory enlistment based upon the clause in the B. N. A. Act, which he read to me from the French in his office. He attended early service in the St. Irene church Sunday morning, while I slept, admitting that I had no particular personal faith in priests, altars and confessionals. We were mutually outspoken about our individual beliefs; also, perhaps, mutually reticent to a certain degree. I think he talked to me as freely as he does to most people. But that he was ingenu enough to tell me all he knew I have no belief; and though his sociability and that of his people drew me out, I fancy there were a few lurking obliquities and bigotries of my own that I did not lay upon the table. So be it. Neither of us tried to convince the other. What we did try to do was to discover our differences and as far as possible to determine how, as individuals, in all deference to our varying birth,

FOR the sake of the good that he and his compatriots may do in place of the mischief that Bourassa's mania has accomplished, Col. Lavergne is invited to admit that in a time of nation-making emergency it is possible to act on the principle of compromise. The Canadian army abroad contains men with every conceivable variation of doctrine about the exact political character of the future Empire. It contains many French-Canadians who were born with as great a love of Canada and as little political allegiance to France as Col. Lavergne. In the face of a common menace these men have buried their differences. Because of that danger to all civilization these French-Canadians have refused to believe that the madness of Henri Bourassa is any more Canadian than the mania of modern Germany. As a former disciple of Bourassa without whom there would have been no organized movement known as French-Canadian nationalism, Col. Lavergne has the opportunity to realize that Mr. Bourassa is not now and never can be the real voice of French Canada. The courtesy extended to Bourassa in the invitation to speak at the entente cordiale gathering in Nicolet he abused by attacking Sir Wilfrid Laurier and the Empire and by talking about the possibility of taking the measure of his neck with a hangman's rope. It was the speech of a madman to whom conciliation is impossible. Col. Lavergne is privileged to repudiate that madness. By enlisting as a compatriot of French Canadians now at the front he may win back what he has lost in the esteem of other Canadians, both English and French, and become a leader of sound French-Canadianism instead of following a false light that leads to anarchy and disruption. Whether he does so or not makes no difference to this article which is an attempt to discover a little more of the common ground between the two races.

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race and education, we could admit them and at the same time find a common ground broader and bigger than the differences. In so doing, we endeavoured to avoid the mere lingo of sociability that puts on affable masks and when the conference is over begins at once to play the school for scandal.

My first visit was to his office, opposite Mountain Hill, overlooking the River St. Lawrence. There were simple habitant rag rugs on the floor made by some of the people in Arthabaska, where Lavergne was born, and has since practised politics along with his law and his Nationalism. I do not remember that there was any portrait of Laurier on the walls—though there was a small one of Bourassa. It is some time since Armand Lavergne had anything to do with Laurier, whom he sometimes describes as an old Tory; though his father, the Judge, warmly remembers the day when Laurier and himself began a twenty-five year partnership in law at Arthabaska, and will not agree that the great French-Canadian Liberal leader has become a Tory or has lost his ancient power in Quebec.

Lavergne's most obvious symptom was his openness to discussion. He seemed eager to be understood; in which he differs radically from his captain, Bourassa, who takes a fanatical martyr's delight in being misinterpreted. This comparison to Bourassa is inevitable, though sometimes perhaps not in the best literary taste. Lavergne is not a mere echo of his chief, whose audacity he may simulate in public, but in private is as good a listener as he is a talker. Bourassa is a bad listener. Lavergne misses nothing. He is willing to converse.

"Since neither of the old parties in Canada has any ideas," he said, "it is necessary for the Nationalists to have at least a few."

There seemed to be truth in this. Much depends on how far we can interpret Nationalism.

"Pardon me if I offend any of your political notions," he asked.

"I am not carrying them with me. What I want to understand is the reason you take the stand you do."

"Especially in respect to the war, perhaps?"

"Yes. Why do you block enlistment?"

"Because we do not believe in volunteering to go to a war concerning the declaration of which we were not consulted. Because I believe in enforcing the law of Canada, which says—"

HE took down the B.N.A. Act and turned up Clause 10, which he read, to the effect that in case of Canada engaging in any war deemed to be for the defence of the country, the Government shall have power to command the services of all able-bodied men of military age.

"Enforce the law and we will obey it," he said.

"French-Canadians believe in obeying the law."

"Even a law in which you do not believe?"

"Decidedly. Let the Government institute a national register. Let them tell us it is our duty to comply with the terms of that, and to shoulder arms. We will obey."

This is one of the rocks on which Nationalism splits with Ontario, as represented by Toronto, the most military city in Canada. Talk to the Orangeman and he will be more satirical at the expense of Lavergne than Lavergne ever is over Toronto and the old parties. And unless we go behind that, no common ground can be located.

What is the common ground as enunciated by Lavergne? It is—Canada.

That again needs interpretation. Ontario and Quebec do not implicitly agree on what Canada really is.

As an Ontario man practically cradled in the bush lands and brought up among the stumps, I was free to say with regard to the Nationalist assumption that he represents Canada better than the average citizen of Ontario.

"Yes, since your grandfather's grandfather may have been born in Quebec, you have at least the advantage of a lineal descent. But the pioneer in Ontario born in England became just as true a Canadian as any Quebecker whose ancestors came over three centuries ago. The bushman's shanty in Ontario was just as Canadian as the habitant's shack on the St. Lawrence, even if the bushman was born in England."

Lavergne did not deny this. He probably expected it. He is used to argument of this kind.

"Yes," he said, "and if differences went no further than that we should have more in common than there now is between either the French-Canadian or the Anglo-Canadian and the mid-Europeans who have been brought here by hundreds of thousands."

He agreed that it was the national business of both the Anglo and the French-Canadian to unite in the conservation of a real native-born Canada among a population which, if immigration should be resumed on the scale it had reached before the war, would some day outnumber both the native races put together.

"We believe in Canada for Canadians," he insisted.

"But not in Quebec for the Anglo-Canadian?"

He shrugged. "We have four hundred thousand Anglo-Canadians in Quebec now. They will not tell you they are an oppressed minority. Go to the Eastern Townships and Montreal and ask them."

"But is not Quebec essentially your—?"

"Ha!" he exclaimed. "That is an old argument—that French-Canadians should be put on the reservations like the Indians. No!" he added, with warm gusto, "we have as much right to plant our parishes in provinces outside Quebec as any European immigrant has. At least that. So we have three hundred thousand in Ontario; a number of settlements in the western provinces—"

"But if you are anxious to preserve what you call national liberties of language, religion and race, why don't you first occupy Quebec? You have a trifle more than two millions. You have room for more than twice as many."

"Impracticable. The practice of Quebec governments does not encourage out-settlement. The timber laws are against us. The farmer is not en-