

## THE LIFE OF SIR WILFRID LAURIER—1

*A Series of Articles Taken From Professor Skelton's Latest Book  
"The Day of Sir Wilfrid Laurier."*

The one grown-up history worthy of the name that we have of Canada's development since 1870 is Professor O. D. Skelton's "The Day of Sir Wilfrid Laurier," in the series "The Chronicles of Canada," edited by Professor Wrong and Mr. Langton, of Toronto University. There have been many so-called Canadian "histories," some of them sawdust grinds, some nursery pap, some mere chatter or puerile nondescript. But Mr. Skelton's book has life, dignity, perspective and proper craftsmanship. No clumsy amateurism here, but solid information, plus an ordered and lively expression.

It is The Advertiser's purpose to quote, in a series of articles, what this master of Canadian history tells us of Laurier. The reader will see what Laurier has done for Canada and the Empire, soberly and authoritatively set down by a great historical scholar, not in any heat of election argument, but in the non-partisan quietness of scientific judgment. You will get glimpses of Laurier, not as an election expert like Robert Rogers might represent him, nor as one loving the great leader not wisely but too well might overpraise him, but as an historical expert sees the career of Sir Wilfrid in its Canadian and imperial setting, steadily and whole.

One thing that Mr. Skelton brings out in especial salience is the moderation, fairness and calmness of Sir Wilfrid Laurier. He has been ever the mediator, peacemaker and unifier of the two Canadian races. He early took up, also, and has maintained a political position between the anti-clerical Liberalism of continental Europe and a weak-backed Liberalism that in Quebec should fear to assert the full right of individual independence in deciding on political affairs. This position he has always held to be that of British Liberalism, viz., to stand for individual freedom and toleration but to avoid a conflict of church and state. When the Church in Quebec has seemed intolerant, or inclined to exert undue influence upon the voter or too interfering with secular affairs, Laurier has been its opponent.

To quote from Mr. Skelton:

"The understanding and the intolerance and good-will which understanding brings, were destined to abide for life. It was not without reason that the ruling motive of the young schoolboy's future career was to be the awakening of sympathy and harmony between the two races." (p. 6.)

Laurier is still striving to hold Canada together. He fought in 1911 and fights in 1917 against those who would disrupt the Dominion built by Sir John Macdonald and himself. Mr. Skelton says again (p. 11) of Laurier's valedictory address on his graduation in law at McGill University (1864), that it stated "the need of racial harmony, the true meaning of liberty, the call for straightforward justice." The historian refers (p. 12) to Laurier's "cool, discriminating moderation," "the strength of brain and the poise and balance of temper which the years had brought him." (p. 17.)

From 1863 to 1866 Laurier, then a young man of 22-25 years, was a member of the Institut Canadien at Montreal, a society persecuted by the reactionist French clergy. Toleration was the motto of these young French-Canadian Liberals and toleration was a sin in the eyes of the hostile clergy. It was Laurier's mission to teach the needlessness of clerical and political antagonism. When elected later to the Quebec Legislature (1871), Laurier opened up his parliamentary career by "scoring the Government for its backward educational policy, urging active steps to check the exodus of French-Canadians to the mills of New England, praising the ideals of British Liberalism, and calling for a truce in racial and religious quarrels." He was doing good service from the start to his province, to Canada and to the Empire: He was a light to lighten the habitants, a harmonizer of the races and a peacemaker between church and state. Further quotations will show how Laurier is still the light of Canada, the safe guide in the storm.