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Personalities and Problems

No. 25—Hon. Charles Wilson Cross

The Suave and Silent Director-General of Liberal Forces in the Alberta General Elections on April 17th

By AUGUSTUS BRIDLE

ON a summer's evening, in 1900, there was a little caucus of young men in a small room back of Tom Hourston's fur store in Edmonton. The writer of this article was one of them. The rest were young Liberals. Most of the plain talking at that meeting to organize the young Liberals of Edmonton was done by a slim, silent young man who stood with one foot on a chair and in a slow, hesitant style told the audience the tremendous importance of getting into the game of politics in an organized way. It was a poor speech. But it made a good impression. "Charlie" Cross was a comparatively unknown man in that little town of 1,500 people on the Saskatchewan. The most that anybody knew of him then was that he was W. B. Short's partner in the firm "Short and Cross," that he was a university graduate and a Liberal up to the hilt.

Calling on Mr. Cross one day—he had little to do, for most of the polyglot clients were being handled by Mr. Short—I found him calculating chances. He said that he was waiting. Something would happen in that part of the world that never happened anywhere else in Canada.

"There will be a city of twenty thousand people here before long," he said, slowly, over a big pipe. "Don't you think so?"

I looked out of the window at the dog-leg street where a pack of half-breeds went rollicking by on lean cayuses and a gang of sheepskinned Galicians swirled into Block X on the river bank. It was an hour of sunshine between spasms of rain that for three months had been swamping the scanty crops on the hills round about the furpost town with no railway and one cable ferry and an iron bridge. Edmonton was beautiful. But Edmonton was down in the mouth. Everybody was poor—except John McDougall and Dick Secord, whose three-storey store up the street was regarded with the same awe as the Pyramids of Egypt. The Ross Bros. were coming along pretty well in hardware. Nobody else seemed to have any money. The town was wallowing in mud and the little poplars along the main street were drenched with rain. But Edmonton was amazingly beautiful. And as Charlie Cross gazed out of his dingy, mean, little office he admitted that.

But he wasn't exuberant over the scenery. He was far more interested in half-breeds and Galicians.

"All the half-breeds vote for Oliver," he said, in his odd, crisp manner. "I don't know what we'll do with the Galicians yet."

HE was thinking politics, a young lawyer in a land of almost no politics. It was time to organize. Other men might be absorbed in mere crops and buildings and population and the new gospel of learning to live in a new country. C. W. Cross had his eye on the growth of government. He very probably had it on a Cabinet position. But at that time Alberta had no Cabinet, for it was not yet a province. He could wait. But he worked while he waited.

"I've told Frank Oliver," he repeated, "that we must organize to get the vote out. Here's an election coming on this fall. There's no machinery for handling it. He says he doesn't need any. Well, so far as getting him in is concerned he doesn't. He's bound to win. He's got everybody. But—" Then he got lost in the future. There was a

time coming when merely personal politics would be out of date. There would be real party politics. Alberta would become a province. The old no-party Legislature at Regina would be effete. Either Edmonton or Calgary must be the capital of a new province with the boundary line running north and south.

And Charlie Cross intended to be a big factor in the politics of Alberta, because he was the first young Liberal in Edmonton that ever took hold of the business of organization with a real grip.

His going to Edmonton may have been something of an accident. He was born in Madoc, Ont., not far from a talc quarry; reared in a community where politics were the breath of life. He was educated at Toronto University and became somewhat famous on lacrosse teams as the "Slugger." He was a good student; and he played lacrosse like a real hard game. Afterwards he attended Osgoode Hall and became a barrister-at-law. Then he looked about for a practice. Just at that time Edmonton had become famous to the world as the outfitting town for the overland route to the Yukon. Cross may have intended to reach the Yukon; and he may not. Anyway, he went. When he got to the furpost town some of the Klondikers were trailing back; some were still on the way. Edmonton was still the gateway to a fabulous land, beginning to be the rendezvous of derelicts and of hundreds who came into the big valley to find homes under

the Sifton regime of immigration.

And in that muddy but splendid little town of much hope on the high banks of the big river Charlie Cross saw visions and dreamed dreams. He worked early and late—at politics. He was in politics as a game. In the election campaign of November, 1900, he was one of Oliver's organizers. Oliver won by a huge majority. Cross chuckled. This one-man majority could not last forever.

Meanwhile he had his way to make in law. There was no money in politics. There was mighty little in law—or in anything else. Edmonton hadn't even begun to take an interest in real estate. It was a land of poor men; and Charlie Cross had no objections to being poor. He never seemed to have any particular regard for money, except as a means to an end. He thought much more of his reputation as a lawyer which was yet to make. If he failed at law he might as well keep out of politics.

His first chance came when some boy was arrested on a charge of stealing a registered letter. Cross undertook to defend him. There was little or no money in the case even though he should win it. And that looked doubtful. Cross haled a host of witnesses. He got the sender of the letter, the clerk that registered it, the mail clerks who handled it—clear down to the man in whose hands the letter was last seen. With an ordinary lawyer the case might have been finished and the lad sent to jail in a single day. With Cross on the defence the case lasted ten days—and he got the boy off.

That was organization. Cross winning that case was the same Cross who wins elections in the game of politics. Very likely he has had scores of cases since that time of immensely more importance. But he will forget most of them when he remembers the boy and the registered letter.



The man who, born with political instincts, is in politics as a game, first, last and all the time.

IT was five years after the election of 1900 when Alberta became a province and held its first election. Mr. A. C. Rutherford, the amiable and much-respected lawyer of Strathcona, was asked to take the leadership of the Liberal party—and there was yet no Conservative party worth noticing. Charlie Cross went into the campaign as first lieutenant. The result was a sweeping walkover for the Liberals, who had all the prestige of Frank Oliver behind them and the organizing genius of Cross right in the camp. They still banked heavily on Oliver at Ottawa. But they were beginning to find out that Cross at Edmonton was a bigger force in the politics of Alberta than even a Dominion cabinet minister. C. W. Cross was taken into the Rutherford cabinet as Attorney-General. He has been there ever since—except for one year when he got out over the Alberta and Great Waterways deal.

Whenever a Dominion election came round there was Cross in the thick of it working tooth and nail to elect Frank Oliver, whose motto was, "For heaven's sake don't!" Cross believed in Liberalism. He never believed that you could cut off provincial politics from Ottawa. Does anybody as practical politics believe it? He believed in the Liberal ascendancy in the prairie provinces. He would extend it to British Columbia and Richard McBride; even to Manitoba and Sir Rodmond Roblin.

And the game must always be played. As in 1899, when he began to weave the web of organization, so in 1905, when he was regarded as the