

SIR WILFRID AND THE BILINGUAL QUESTION

AFTER over 40 years of public life Sir Wilfrid Laurier is the outstanding political figure in our Country. What he does or says, or even thinks, is universally accepted as being of more importance than the actions, words or thoughts of any other man in Canada. Holding such a position he naturally becomes the object of criticism in connection with every leading public question. What he says or does—or just as surely what he does not say or do—is adversely criticized by his opponents, and motives are ascribed with a view to breaking down the pre-eminence of his position and thus securing free right of way for opposing principles, policy and administration.

As Leader for 28 years of the Liberal party, and the great exponent during all these years of Liberal principles, to prove him to have been guided by personal or sectional motives in any course which he has taken or declined to take, would be to discredit in large measure the political party which he has so long and so ably led.

Virulent and Unfair Criticism.

At the present time virulent criticism is being poured out upon him because he supported in Parliament the motion of Mr. Lapointe regarding bilingual teaching in the French schools of Ontario. He is accused of attempting to arouse race prejudice; of inflaming the minds of the French-speaking people of Canada against the present Conservative governments of Ontario and of the Dominion; of placing himself at the head of a movement for French domination throughout the Dominion. It is true that neither the words of the resolution nor the arguments offered in its support by Sir Wilfrid himself or any of his French or English speaking supporters, would bear out in the slightest degree any of these contentions.

The resolution itself declared specifically for Provincial rights in regard to educational matters and declared equally strongly for English education in all the schools of Ontario. No word was uttered by Sir Wilfrid or his French speaking supporters that did not fully endorse and support the resolution in these particulars. The only ground offered for the resolution or for the speeches in its support, was that the privilege, custom or right to have French taught in French-speaking settlements was being unduly and unfairly restricted by Provincial administration under legislation recently passed.

The Great Exponent of Liberalism.

These are the facts as they stand. But Sir Wilfrid's critics are not satisfied to take them at their face value. They insist on looking for motives and purposes behind the facts. That is their right if they are pleased to exercise it. But the arguments to support their conclusions must then be based on other facts, which can only be found in the long and honourable political career of Sir Wilfrid. He is of French race and of the Catholic religion. He is a proud and enthusiastic Frenchman and a consistent and good living Catholic. Not less he is, and has always been, the acknowledged and avowed

exponent of the principles of English Liberalism as expressed in the policy of the United Kingdom and the British Empire under the direction of Gladstone and Bright. Applied to the great, many, and varied problems of Canada during the past 40 years, these principles have been advocated in Opposition and applied when in power to secure the well-being of the State by first securing the well-being of the individuals who compose the State.

Ever since Canada came under the British rule its great and peculiar problem has been the joint occupation of the country by the British and French races under the British crown. Sir Wilfrid Laurier's application of Liberal principles to that situation is, and has always been, to secure united effort in national affairs by conceding individual or local right so far as is found to be just and possible in individual or local affairs. As between the two races his policy has been to establish mutual respect by maintaining the rights of each, while always urging conciliation on points of conflicting views or interests.

Righted Dangerous Conditions of 1896.

His accession to power in 1896 was at a time when under a previous administration—of opposite policy—Canada had been brought to the verge of Civil war. The conditions thus created had been accompanied by a period of business stagnation which had sent the native born citizens of Canada, both French and English, as immigrants to the United States by tens of thousands each year.

In the campaign of '96 he was able to influence his French-Canadian compatriots to support the principle of Provincial rights in the educational interests of the Province of Manitoba; and for the first time in the history of Canada brought about the active and effective union of the two races in the Dominion, which in truth made Canada a nation and finally resulted in the greatest measure of material prosperity that the country has yet known.

When the Provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan were established in 1905, Parliament under the leadership of Sir Wilfrid and in the face of most determined opposition, both in the house and at certain by-elections occurring at that time, provided for the continuation of the separate school rights granted to Roman Catholics by the North-West Territories Act. The result has been that these Provinces have ever since enjoyed a higher measure of educational efficiency with a less degree of friction from any cause than any others in the Dominion.

Unfair Attacks from Front and Rear.

The policy of "divide and conquer" which had kept English and French in hostile camps until 1896 was still held to by those who had brought about or benefitted by that condition; and as well by their successors and others like-minded with them. The easy way of arousing prejudice to obtain power appealed to them as strongly as ever. Sir Wilfrid Laurier in power was made the object of attack both in front and rear; in Quebec because being avowedly pro-British he was guilty of treason