

Laurier's Title:

"Earlier in the year (1897) he had explicitly and emphatically declined an offer of knighthood," according to Dr. O. D. Skelton, biographer of Sir Wilfrid and now Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs.

What followed at the Diamond Jubilee has been the subject of much conjecture. There are several versions: "One evening the Queen gave a dinner for the overseas Prime Ministers. When the young Canadian premier, who was again honored by being seated next to Her Majesty, took his seat at the banquet table, he found a card upon which Queen Victoria herself had written "Rt. Hon. Sir Wilfrid Laurier".

"There was no way out of such a situation." So goes the commonly accepted account of the incident.

That Sir Wilfrid, in spite of accepting the honor, never changed his original opinion about a knighthood, is suggested by two subsequent incidents.

In April 1918, a debate sprang up in the House of Commons on the subject of titles.....Sir Wilfrid arose after Nickle had spoken.....

"I may be asked, if you hold these views (supporting Nickle), 'how is it you have accepted a title for yourself?' Why I accepted it is a matter of personal history which I do not care to bring forward.

"But at all events I may say this: I see here a little class of titled people, knights commander of this order or that order. If they will make a bargain with me, I am quite prepared, if we can do it without any disrespect to the Crown of England, to bring our titles to the market place and make a bonfire of them."

A year later Henri Bourassa recalled in the House standing in Laurier House looking at a showcase which contained all the decorations the Liberal statesman had received, waiting for Laurier, who was upstairs. A moment later Laurier came into the room.

"Coming up to me and slapping me on the shoulder, he said: "Henri, you are laughing at this, and quite rightly. Human nature is the same everywhere. Negroes put these things in their noses and ears; we pin them on to our coats because we have coats. But after all it means the same to us all."

W.L.M. King Papers, Memoranda and Notes, 1933-1939  
(M.G. 26, 4, volume 171, pages C121363-C121949)

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