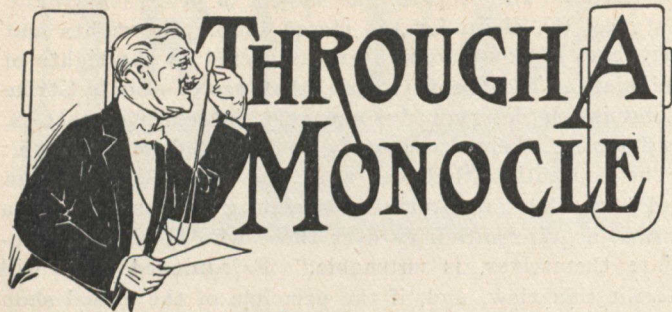




ARE the Dominion elections coming this year? We noticed a newspaper paragraph in which Mr. Borden was reported to have said that he expected them but then, on the other hand, Mr. Emmerson told his New Brunswick Convention that he did not look for any election this year. Still, Mr. Emmerson may not know all that is going on; and then, again, his ignorance may be merely official. Every public man has two minds in which he knows things—one is his official mind in which he only knows what is convenient for him to know, and the other is his private mind in which he knows a lot more than he is paid to know by the State. A politician is one of the few men who can make ignorance pay—official ignorance. He very frequently makes greater progress because of the thing he does not know than because of those he knows. Just as a bad memory is a good asset for an election trial witness, so a bad "knowery" is a proof of great wisdom on the part of an astute politician. But still again, Mr. Emmerson may know that the elections are not coming on; and Mr. Borden may be merely mistaken.

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An election this year would probably be a good stroke of business on the part of the Government. The Opposition is disorganised. The country is still prosperous; but Mr. Byron E. Walker has recently told us to look out for squalls. Disorganisation is becoming apparent, too, in the ranks of the Ministry; but it has not yet gone far enough to produce any great weakness, though there may be a different tale to tell next year. That Mr. Emmerson does not feel too secure in New Brunswick, the calling of his convention showed. Bourassa has disturbed Quebec; and, if rumours of the early retirement of Sir Wilfrid should become credible before the elections came on, his disturbance might amount to a cleavage in the party. In Ontario, things are bad; but they are not likely to become much better. Railway building will probably keep the two new Western Provinces safe, and their representation is about to be increased; but it is still small. Should young McInnes capture British Columbia, that might be the signal for battle.

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These rumours of the retirement of Sir Wilfrid are becoming as little credited as the advertisements of the "farewell tours" of great artists. The Premier's health is now, happily, quite as good as that of any man of his age who is under so great a strain. There is no likelihood that he will be driven from his seat in the Commons to an invalid's chair. Nor, as age advances, is he likely to consider any more favourably the idea of retirement. It is only young men who can toy pleasantly with the notion of stepping aside from the battle of life, and ending their days in calm and comfort and intellectual ease. Older men are too near the borders of compulsory retirement—feel too chill upon their cheeks the icy breath of man's last resting-place—to look upon the cessation of activity as anything but a prelude to the cessation of life. They have all but too few years before them, and they feel that they must live them—every minute. The young man thinks of retirement as a state of leisure from which he can return at will. To the old man, it has the dread sound of an euphemism for "the end."

Gladstone retired with great good will in 1875 with twenty years of active life yet before him; but when, having returned to the arena, failing health more and more steadily demanded a second and final retirement, the dying gladiator waved his sword to the last. Sir John Macdonald did not retire at all—he fell in battle. Sir Oliver Mowat did not retire. Alexander Mackenzie sat in the Commons for years after he had ceased to be a factor in its deliberations. Retirement is not a habit of public men; and there is little reason to expect that Sir Wilfrid Laurier will now retire so long as he can do his work. Yet the tradition of his bad health—which at one time had all too much foundation—is so strong in the country that people are always talking as if it were about to occur; and, as he grows older, this expectation is bound to weaken him and his party, especially in Quebec. This, however, is one reason against an election this autumn. Should it be brought on after only three sessions of this Parliament, the rumour would at once gain ground that it was to be followed by the transfer of the baton from Sir Wilfrid to Mr. Fielding.

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The position of the Liberal party in Ontario comes as near as possible to a surrender. The position of the Conservative party amounts to the occupation of the surrendered field by an unorganised and quarrelsome mob. The Whitney Government is the one effective organisation in the Province. The Liberals ought surely to produce Provincial and Federal leaders for this Province without delay; for, in such a case, the policy of drift is a policy of disaster. The Federal Conservatives, on their part, want a local leadership—distinct from that of Mr. Borden; a local loyalty, this time including Mr. Borden; and a policy. What can be done in the way of policy-making, Adam Beck has shown; and what aggressive leadership will accomplish, even when the aggressive leader singularly lacks the confidence of the people, "Billy" Maclean is demonstrating. If the Conservatives would let Maclean write their policy, and then get E. B. Osler to advocate it, they would make the Liberals "sit up." If, on the other hand, the Liberals could produce just one leader of the Mowat-Mills-Sifton-Joly-Blair-Fielding-Fitzpatrick-Tarte calibre, they could put their opponents in a serious position.



Without Prejudice.

Britannia.—"Accept my congratulations, Sir, on the splendid growth of your Navy, and, since I have your assurance that your programme is not an aggressive one, I feel sure you will be interested to see what I have been doing in the last three years!"—Punch.