

a moment let us examine one of the most damning features of that offer—sufficiently damning to nullify whatever good features that miserable policy may have presented—the idea put forward by Sir Wilfrid Laurier and incorporated in his Naval Act, that when Great Britain is at war Canada may, or may not, participate in the conflict.

Let us understand just what this doctrine means in order that we may better realize how disastrous its recognition would be to the future of the Empire. The claim advanced by Sir Wilfrid Laurier was that in a British war, the Dominions,—Canada, for example,—would decide whether they propose to enter the struggle as the allies of Great Britain, or to keep entirely aloof from it. It is not here a question of petty wars against the hill tribes of India, or punitive expeditions, naval or military, that are launched against the cannibals of the Caroline Islands, or the bushmen of Borneo. It is self-evident that there is no need to discuss whether or not forty-six million people of Great Britain are prepared to undertake these enterprises without aid from Canada. What was meant was, that in a real war—a war between Britain and a foreign power—Canada would only participate provided the Government of the day decided to do so in each particular case as it arises.

In other words, Canada would only participate if a majority of the particular party in power voted in favour of war, no matter what might be the views of the rest of the Canadian people.

Anybody who wants to verify the accuracy of this interpretation need only read over the Laurier Naval Act of 1909, sections 22, 23, 24, and interpret them in the light of Sir Wilfrid Laurier's own statements at the Imperial Conference of 1911, as recorded in the official report.

What happened at that conference was this: In the discussion of the rules of warfare under the Declaration of London, Sir Wilfrid expressed the opinion that Canada ought not to be consulted, nor to wish to be consulted, about the manner in which the British people proposed to conduct war. He used these words:—

"If you offer advice on such a subject, it implies of necessity that you should take part in that war. How are you going to give advice and insist upon the manner in which war is to be carried on, unless you are prepared to take the responsibility of going into war. We have taken the position in Canada that we do not think we are bound to take part in every war, and that our fleet may not be called upon in all cases."

The meaning of these words is perfectly plain. The Declaration of London was not framed, nor discussed, with reference to a mere punitive expedition. It referred to real wars—as between one great power and another—and it was this kind of conflict that Sir Wilfrid had in mind when he said that "we are not prepared to take part in every war." Thus it will be seen that Sir Wilfrid meant, and his Naval Act meant, that Great Britain might be involved in a great war, and Canada might or might not go to her assistance, but remain neutral.

Can any Canadian worthy the name think such a course possible?

Let us see what such a step actually meant.

It presumed, in the first place, that the hostile nation, in its war