

Old Shibboleths Will Pass Away

OTTAWA, July 12th, 1916.

I HAVE watched Sir Robert Borden's hair turn from iron grey to white during the five years that I have been in the press gallery. And I take it that no man who has sat beside, or behind him during that time aspires to succeed him either as leader of the Conservative party, or as Premier of the Dominion. In fact, I venture the opinion that the man to-day who aspires to the leadership of either of the parties has "too much ego in his cosmos," for it is a giant's job. There may be men who aspire for the position through lack of appreciation of the responsibilities which must devolve upon the man who takes it, but their very lack of appreciation must unfit them from the start for the task. There are undoubtedly professional politicians in both parties who believe that they could handle the reins of power, and the rudder of state, but the job is not for a professional politician. I take it that the leadership of any party during the coming years is a task which might make any man quail. When to that is added the inevitable possibility of premiership, the prospect must be even more formidable. Canada has had statesmen in the past at the head of her affairs. And there never was a time when statesmen were more needed at the head of the parties than they are to-day. From the national standpoint alone there are problems for the creating of which professional politicians have been largely responsible. Their solution cannot be looked for from professional politicians, but from statesmen. And to these problems have been added in the past decade international problems, which width of vision and breadth of character only can hope to cope with. Very few Canadian federal leaders have assumed the role of their own volition. Presidents in the United States are elected; Premiers in Canada, as such, are not. Sir Robert Borden would be happier to-day in his law office at Halifax. But Sir Robert is not a free will agent. He didn't seek the position at the start; he was pitchforked into it, and like Samuel, could only say, with all humility: "Here am I; take me." Sir Robert has been ready on many occasions since to resign; but caucus—and Lady Borden—have prevented him. And I think the same is true away back down the line of Canada's premiers; few of them have aspired to the position. The Conservative party has always had trouble in securing and keeping leaders in the Federal arena. During a period of thirty years and more the Liberal party has had but one—Sir Wilfrid Laurier. In that same space of time the Conservative party has had no less than six—Macdonald, Thompson, Abbot, Bowell, Tupper, and Borden! Who will be the next?

I HAVE said that the task is for a statesman. When, therefore, I undertake the job of choosing the Next Man Up in the Conservative party I should look for a statesman, or the makings of one. And I don't think that anyone will quarrel with me when I say that they are scarce. I have said that the job is not one for a professional politician of the party kind. That is why at the very outset I beg leave to eliminate Hon. Robert Rogers, with all his admirable qualities, from the list of possibilities. That is why in a lesser degree I beg leave to eliminate Hon. Arthur Meighen, with his undoubted parliamentary ability. Both have qualities which make them factors in the political life of the community, but both have been connected too long with a certain school of politics to be classed in the ranks of statesmen, or even coming statesmen. There must come times, especially in the future, when the leaders of both parties must forget, and be willing to sacrifice, purely party advantage for the common weal.

In fact, I cannot see a successor to Sir Robert Borden from the West, at all, not even R. B. Bennett, the gifted and brilliant member for Calgary. For there are times when judgment is sacrificed for brilliancy, and when a man may be carried away by the very exuberance of his own eloquence.

In my estimation there are only two men in the running as the Next Up in the Conservative party. They are Sir George Foster and Sir Thomas White. The first has many of the qualities which go to make the statesman; the second has potentialities in that direction. Sir George was a grown man when Sir Thomas White was in swaddling clothes. He had been in public life some years when Sir Thomas was struggling to put himself through college. He was Minister of Finance for the Dominion when Sir Thomas was a humble reporter. In fact, Sir George is one of the veteran members of the Conservative party, and of Parliament. Sir Thomas is only a matriculant even in the game of politics, and has

THEREFORE :

Sir Thomas White is Picked as SECOND MAN UP To Sir Robert Borden

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graced Parliament for only one term. But despite the comparison I venture the belief that Sir Thomas White has more than an even break in the running for the next man up, though, mind you, I don't believe that either man aspires for the task.

Certain things must be recalled at this point to justify my contention. When the tidal wave of Sept. 21, 1911, swept the Liberal party off its feet, and Sir Robert Borden was called on to form a cabinet, he had at least one man fitted for the important task of Finance Minister. Sir George Foster had held that position under no less than five premiers—Macdonald, Thompson, Abbott, Bowell, and Tupper, and had been financial critic in opposition for nearly fifteen years. Surely he was the man for the task. But it is related that the first slate prepared by Sir

Robert didn't even contain his name in connection with any portfolio! When the final slate was prepared he had secured the portfolio—not of finance—but of trade and commerce, a far less important one. W. T. White, a Toronto financier, and a man twenty years his junior in years, and thirty years his junior in politics, was chosen to supersede him, and given the banner department.

Which proves my contention that neither premiers nor cabinet ministers are elected as such, but are the victims of caucus, and circumstance. Sir George Foster possesses many of the qualities which go to make a great premier. He is cultured. He is a brilliant orator. He has vision, and imagination, if he does not possess enthusiasm. He is a hard worker, and a fine student. But I venture the opinion that as Tom White superseded him for the position of Minister of Finance, Sir Thomas White will supersede him if the two men ever figure in the question of successorship to Sir Robert Borden. Sir George Foster might make a good premier; but I don't think he would make a great leader. And a man must lead to be a premier.

WHEN this war is over old shibboleths will pass away; many old faiths will be abandoned by the man who would be a national leader. For that reason I believe that the man who aspires to leadership should be a man whose political tenets (I mean party political) are not interwoven with his heart strings. A new interpretation of the National Policy, for instance, may be necessary. And there are some who think that Sir Thomas White has already put a broader interpretation upon it. In any case his heart strings are not too tightly interwoven with any party doctrines. His acceptance of the Conservative faith "synchronizes" with his reception into the Borden Cabinet; before that he was a Liberal. Disraeli was a Radical once; Gladstone had Conservative tendencies on a time; Borden, Whitney and Roblin are all "turncoats." So there are many precedents. And I believe, though I stand subject to correction, that both Sir Robert and Sir Thomas defected on the reciprocity issue.

In fact, Sir Thomas White is no politician in the party sense of the word, and that is one of the reasons why I think he might be the man to solve the problems created by the party politicians. His very worst performances in the House have been when he has espoused the party cause and taken upon the role of defender of the faith. He is not at home on that job, and it doesn't become him.

Lawyers have predominated among the Canadian leaders of the past. Borden is a lawyer; Laurier is a lawyer; Macdonald, Abbott, and Thompson were lawyers. Bowell was a newspaper man; Mackenzie was a stone mason; Tupper was a medical doctor; Sir Thomas White is a lawyer, newspaper man, and financier. He studied law at Osgoode, and to put himself through worked on the reportorial staffs of the Toronto Telegram and the Toronto News. He won the gold medal at Osgoode, and was taken onto the Toronto Assessment branch. He used to appear before the Court of Revision on behalf of the city in connection with protests against the assessments. And he won for himself a reputation here, most of those who appealed being satisfied after Tom White got through that their assessment was not higher instead of lower. His success here led to his being taken on the staff of the National Trust Company. And from there he came to Ottawa. Since then he has been seeing to it that every individual in Canada is assessed.

Tom White has grown during the few years that he has been here. He is now Sir Thomas White, and he wears his honours well. He has raised more money during the past two years than any Finance Minister in the past considered it necessary to raise in treble the time. I am led to believe that in most cases he financed well. His budgets are a model of conciseness and clearness. He is a great student, and is one of the half dozen men on the front benches of the Conservative party who wouldn't starve to death if you locked him in a library for half a day. Of necessity he is a student not only of national, but of international affairs, for the money market is influenced by many things. He has dignity and presence; he has forcefulness and logic; he has youth and enthusiasm; he has imagination, and a certain vision. If he grows as fast in the next five years as he has in the past five, I do not think that I will need to apologize for having placed him in the front rank of those who may aspire to leadership in Canada. He is the one "best bet" as the next man up in the Conservative party.