

Orators Two

It was at the Literary Society dinner of the University of Toronto last week. Sir Wilfrid Laurier and Sir Alan Aylesworth were the chief orators. One spoke on Phases of Democracy, the other on the Empire.

Sir Alan delivered a good oration. He is one kind of orator. He built up the Empire and called upon the audience of six hundred, students and faculty and guests, to admire it. He looked as plain as a prophet. His baldness of head and smoothness of face; his wry, solemn visage; his curious contortions of countenance when he quoted from the Bible—the Book of Job and of Ruth, with sobs appropriate—"Where thou goest, I will go." "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

And to put it politically. Though the mother country make things hard for the overseas dominions, stick to the Empire, which is Almighty.

The Borden Government could have wanted no loftier endorsement of their attitude towards the Empire. And the audience at that dinner heard Sir Alan, the learned, legal luminary at his best in building up his ethics of Empire. It was a revival of the good old days when a dinner oration meant a thesis set to the key of G sharp minor and delivered with all the rotund, artificial devices of the man who practices oratory by listening to himself without using the looking-glass. They say of one very eminent European conductor that he rehearses symphonies alone in a room with mirrors on the walls.

Sir Alan never uses the mirror. Being a trifle hard of hearing he probably does not know quite what his voice sounds like. But he delivers his able thesis with admirable effect, you hear every syllable he speaks, and you know you are listening to an orator of the old school who is a scholar and a thinker, and could be heard to advantage upon any platform by the most critical audience in the world.

Sir Wilfrid is different. His oratory is not new. He has been at it for more than forty years. Those who had heard a great many of the old chieftain's best speeches declared this to be one of his very best. He spoke about democracy. This is nothing new. Sir Wilfrid has for a long while been "a democrat to the hilt."

But he was not speaking politically; was not thinking of Ottawa. He was not considering mainly the big-wigs, the professors, not the newspaper reporters, nor Sir Wilfrid. He was concerned chiefly with the students.

"My young friends," he called them every once in a while, as he did at the opening.

He was directly in live-wire touch with the people on whose behalf he was supposed to speak. He wanted to teach those young men something as though he had been a professor in a lecture room. He wanted to do it in a simple, yet dignified way. And he wanted, at the same time, to build up a discourse that if reduced to print would read almost as well as it sounded.

But then, of course, it never would. Finished and faultless in style, matchless in English diction, fascinating in its piquant French accent, and embellished with all the subdued charm of a man who has adapted himself to almost every sort of audience in the world—it was the poetic, highly restrained, always intellectual, but never academic deliverance of a man who, for all a stranger could tell, might never have seen a hustings or worked for a vote, or known anything about the cabals of politicians.

It was the incomparable personal expression of a marvellous personality. It kindled the imagination. In his discourse there was nothing new. It had all been said before. Historians had written it. Orators had spoken it. Essayists had toyed with it. Democracy; what is there under the sun new about that?

Sir Wilfrid made no pretense of a revelation. He merely took for a task the development of a mental picture—the growth of democracy the world over.

Yet he was never once impassioned. He never once resorted to a trick. He kept on a high level of gentle dignity and he was as simple as a child. And when he wound up with the modest quotation of a few apt lines from Tennyson, the audience could have heard him for as long again.

You would not call it oratory. It was—Laurier; the old man eloquent at his best, at his ripest period of reflection and scholarship and public sense.

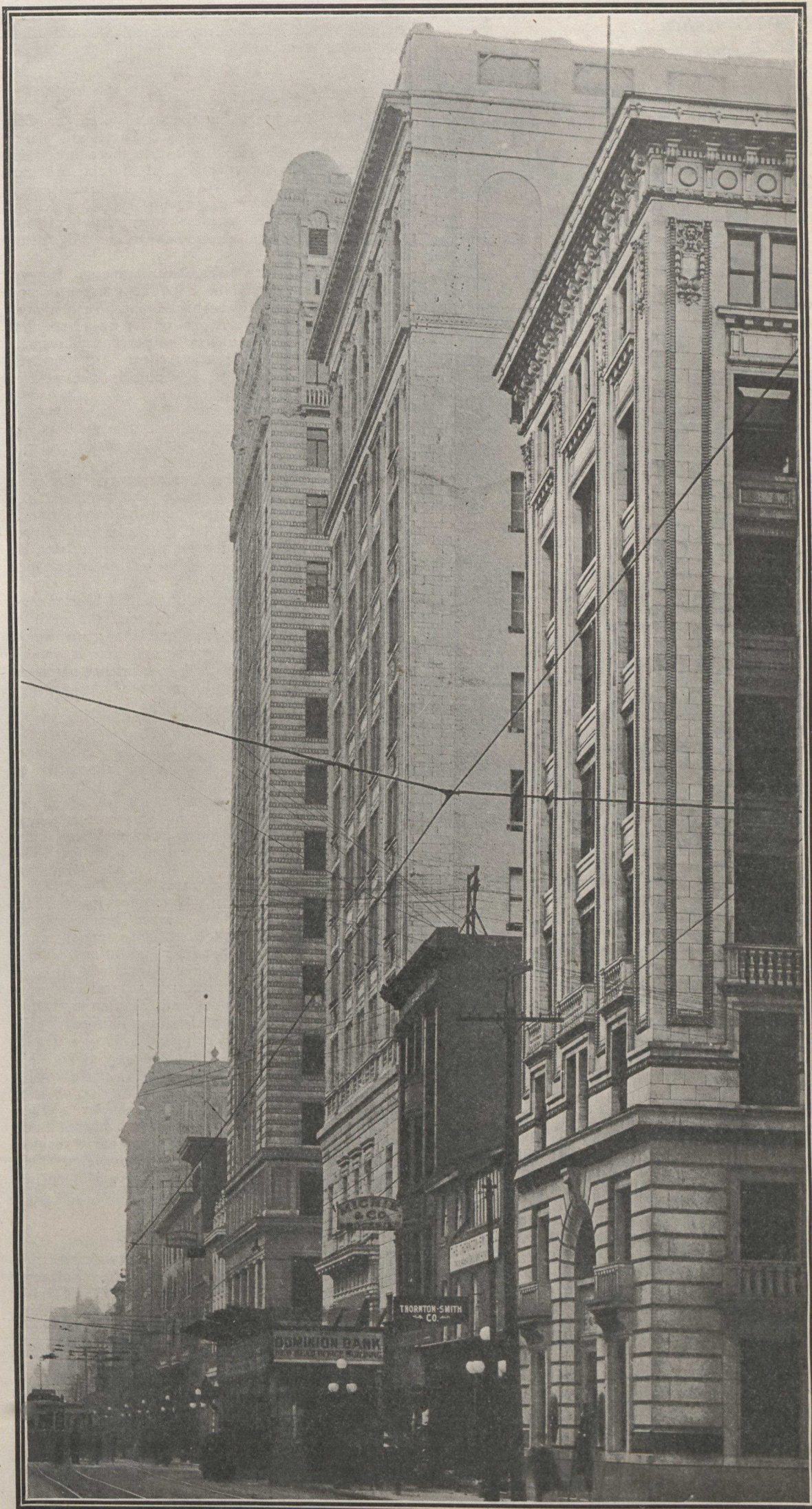
Commission Government

A CORRESPONDENT of the Canadian Courier in St. John, N.B., in the course of comment on Maritime Province affairs, writes as follows:

As to commission government in St. John: Without going into detail or writing anything just now for publication, I may say that the new form of government is now generally acknowledged, even by former opponents, to be a vast improvement upon the old. Of course, the success and efficiency of any government depends very largely upon its personnel, but, apart from that, it appears that with men of only the same average ability in authority, the system by which these men are able to devote their undivided thought and attention to civic affairs does and must conduce to more effective work and better results. I am satisfied that if commission government were again submitted to a vote in St. John, it would be even more emphatically endorsed.

THE APEX OF A CITY

How the Busiest Corner in Toronto has been Transformed from an Old-Country Picture to a Miniature of New York



In less than two years, the intersection of King and Yonge Sts., Toronto, has been completely revolutionized. Toronto has no ten-storey limit like Montreal. A few years ago the Traders Bank went up near this corner, fourteen storeys. This year the C. P. R. building was finished, with sixteen storeys. A few days ago the last terra cotta facing went on the new Dominion Bank building on the opposite corner, twelve storeys. Excavations have been made on another corner for a building of twenty storeys. The only remaining corner was bought over a year ago at a record price and may be expected to evolve another skyscraper. The building in the foreground of this picture is the eight-storey Standard Bank. That in the background is the King Edward Hotel.