

SIR WILFRID LAURIER AT MONTREAL

Speech at Monument National, December 9, 1915

MONTREAL accorded to Sir Wilfrid Laurier one of the most notable and enthusiastic receptions in his long and illustrious public career when the Leader appeared at the Monument National on the evening of December 9th under the auspices of the Young Liberals' Association of Montreal. Few meetings in that city in recent years have attracted so much general attention and interest and it is doubtful if any utterance by any public man in that time has created so profound an impression. Sir Wilfrid, quite recovered from his recent illness, spoke with his oldtime vigor and directness and his nearness to the heart and the understanding of the people was never better illustrated than by the close attention with which he was followed throughout and the unbounded enthusiasm which his speech, breathing as it did the highest spirit of patriotism and fervent loyalty, evoked. The big auditorium was packed to its capacity and literally thousands of people were disappointed in their effort to gain admission. Among the other speakers of the evening were Hon. Geo. P. Graham, Hon. Rodolphe Lemieux, Hon. Charles Marcell, Sir Lomer Gouin, Senator Dandurand and Mr. J. Demers, M.P. (St. John and Iberville).

Sir Wilfrid eschewed controversial politics, devoting himself to a vigorous defence of the cause of the Allies, an outlining of the attitude of the Liberal Party towards participation in the War and a clear propounding of some foundation principles of Canadian duty and patriotism. The main portions of Sir Wilfrid's notable speech are reproduced herewith:

Principles of Liberalism

"It may be asked: what are the doctrines of the Liberal party? What do they represent? To many of you, such a question may seem idle, but it is always well to go to the root of things. Liberal doctrines need no definition. They will be found defined in the words and the acts of such men as O'Connell, Bright and Gladstone in England, in the words and deeds of the Liberals of France, of Baldwin, Dorion, Blake and Lafontaine in our own country. These men were among those who in the nineteenth century, in their different spheres, yet always guided by the same stars, proclaimed the doctrine of the hatred of absolutism, of arbitrariness wherever it may be found, upheld justice and liberty, stood for the cause of the weak and the oppressed, the lowly and the humble.

"These principles are immortal and they were the constant inspiration of these men. And I claim for myself, and I do not think anyone will challenge my claim, that I have always tried to lead and to keep the Liberal party within the scope of the ideals set forth by these men. During the twenty-five years I have been at the head of the Liberal party, those ideals have always been the guide of

my conduct and they are the ideals too which still dictate the conduct of the Liberal party.—(Cheers)

"At the commencement of hostilities, in August, 1914, Sir Robert Borden, the Prime Minister, declared to the world that he had offered to Great Britain to put at its disposition all the forces of which Canada could dispose. This policy gave rise to no surprise in coming from the Prime Minister. He had always foreseen that in case of war Canada would not only have to defend her own territory, but would fight where Great Britain should be called upon to fight. But if this policy did not cause surprise as coming from the Prime Minister, it certainly caused surprise as coming from those members of the Government whose words in the Drummond-Arthabaska election of 1910 and the general elections of 1911 are preserved in their echoes.

"Rebels," Unworthy the Name.

"It is true that these men, Ministers to-day, have endeavored to give explanations. They compare themselves with Sir George Etienne Cartier and William Lyon Mackenzie. But when these Ministers compare themselves with such 'rebels' as William Lyon Mackenzie and Cartier, they aspire too high. They aspire to heights which eyes cannot reach. They aspire after sacrifices which they should not accept. (Laughter.) Cartier and Mackenzie were rebels for what?—Because, as Lord Durham said in his report, the Government had crushed under foot those rights which men respect the most. They were rebels for what? Rebels in a personal sense?—No. They were rebels for their rights and for justice. They wanted a change in the constitution and they got it. They wanted to breathe the air of liberty under the British flag. But these 'rebels,' they only want to breathe the air of the Government departments at Ottawa.

The Liberal Position.

"When the Prime Minister announced his intention of placing all available forces at the disposal of the British Government, what was the policy of the Liberal party? There were three currents of opinion at the time. There was first of all the Imperialist who would have Canada take part in all the wars of the Empire. There was the Nationalist who would not have Canada take part in any war of the Empire at all and there was the Liberal position. What was our position? We stood for Canadian autonomy. We upheld the sovereignty of Canada. I have several times on the floor of the House sustained that position. I claimed for the Parliament of Canada the right which John Bright claimed in the Imperial Parliament in the Crimean War. I claimed that for my part I would never participate in such a war as the Crimean War. John Bright made one of his most