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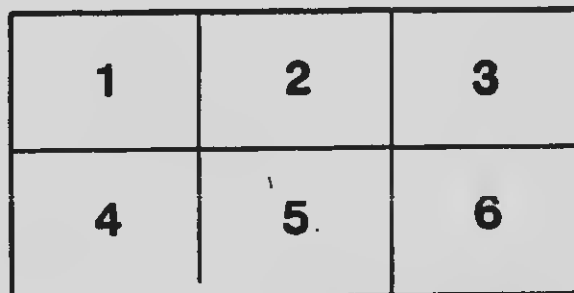
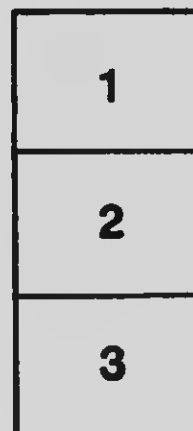
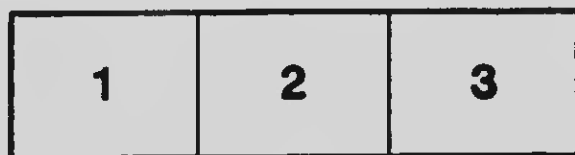
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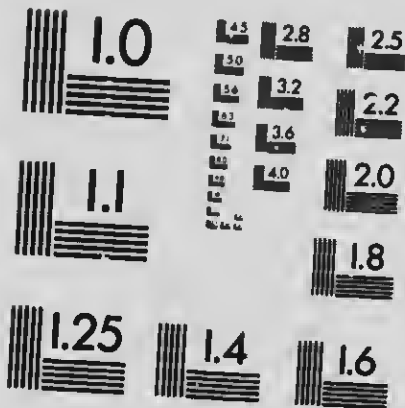
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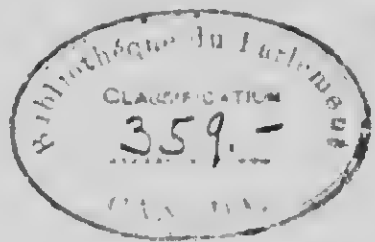
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**THE REAL SIGNIFICANCE**  
**OF THE**  
**NAVAL ISSUE**

1911

# The Real Significance OF THE Naval Issue

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ADDRESS DELIVERED BY C. H. CAHAN, K.C.,  
BEFORE THE CANADIAN CLUB OF MCGILL UNIVERSITY,  
AT MONTREAL, NOVEMBER 6th, 1911.

Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen:—

The great problem that now presses Canadians most closely for solution is that of Canada's political relations with the Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, with her sister Colonies of Australasia and South Africa, and with the Great Indian Empire.

So far there has been no clear cleavage between those who looked forward to the political independence of Canada, and those who believed that Canada's best interests would be best served by continuing for all time as one of the federated states of the British Empire.

The union of the Provinces in 1867, and the later incorporation and political organization of British Columbia and the North-Western Territories as Provinces of the Dominion of Canada; the development of lines of internal communication by railways and canals; the construction of wharves and docks, lighthouses and buoys along our coasts and great internal waterways; in fact, all the vast and varied works of opening up and developing a new country, which have engrossed the attention of our people since the isolated Provinces first obtained responsible self-government; all this has been in perfect accord with the attainment of any and every national ideal.

We have not hitherto, in the development of our Canadian political institutions, reached the parting of the ways. We have been content to exercise, according to the will of our own people, the rights

of self-government, within the Dominion of Canada, which the Parliament of Great Britain and Ireland conferred upon us in 1867, when it enacted the British North America Act. We have been content to have our political activities restricted to our own territory, and to the foreshores of the two great oceans which bound us upon the east and upon the west, though occasionally we have insisted upon being consulted with regard to the disposal of the fisheries within the limit of three miles from our coasts and headlands.

We created some slight misunderstanding, and met with temporary opposition, when, thirty odd years ago, we insisted upon adopting a national policy of fiscal reform, involving absolutely independent control of our own customs tariff, the protection of Canadian industries, and the imposition of uniform import duties upon British as well as foreign manufactured products; but that policy was inaugurated by a Canadian statesman of the first rank, who declared that "a British subject I was born and a British subject I will die," and who convinced the leaders of political opinion in Great Britain that the protection and development of our own Canadian industries were not incompatible with the preservation of the existing political relations with Great Britain and with the Empire, and that, in any case, in so doing, we were acting well within the political powers vested in our Federal Government by the precise terms of the British North America Act.

Incidentally, questions relating to copyright, to the control of our shipping upon the high seas and in foreign ports, to consular service abroad, to the right of the Canadian Government to be heard in the negotiations by the British Government of treaties and conventions affecting Canadian fisheries, Canadian trade, and immigration into Canada, have been adjusted in a spirit of compromise, on the basis of maintaining the absolute supremacy of the British Parliament and the British Government, and of admitting Canada to be consulted and occasionally to be represented in negotiations with foreign countries in so far as these negotiations dealt exclusively with Canadian interests.

Up to a recent date, at least, Sir John MacDonalD, Hon. Edward Blake, Sir Charles Tupper and Sir Wilfrid Laurier, all leaders of public opinion in Canada, have each assiduously cultivated the idea that Canada was best serving the Empire and best conserving imperial interests by applying our financial resources to the construction of railways and public works in Canada, the development of

Canadian industries, and the creation and maintenance of a Canadian militia for federal police service within our territory, and for the protection of our borders against possible foreign aggression.

In the meantime, contemporaneous with our growth of population and with our industrial and commercial expansion there has developed more of social and business intercourse, more of mutual insight, understanding, sympathy and respect between the two great races of this country, more tolerance for differences of religious opinion, in fact, a more definitely defined and more clearly realized Canadian national life and spirit.

Probably most Canadians would have been content for our day and generation, at least, to have continued unobtrusively along these paths of peaceful progress, of growth in population, of internal development, consolidating and unifying Canadian interests, invigorating our own national life, increasing our own national strength.

But peaceful progress develops neither strong men, nor strong nations. We can only develop as a nation by meeting and overcoming difficulties, by seeking intelligently, patiently and dispassionately to understand and to solve political problems as they arise.

In the recent federal elections, the people of Canada gave clear expression to their confidence in the stability and strength of the commercial and industrial institutions, which they have now created, their faith in their own prosperous future, their determination to maintain their fiscal and industrial independence, and to preserve Canada from entangling alliances with the greatest of the American republics.

But having confidently answered one question affecting our national destiny, we are immediately confronted with another of even more serious import. The naval question is not in itself the real problem. It is not a mere question of whether we shall expend a few millions in constructing Canadian ships in Canadian shipyards, or whether we shall contribute to the British treasury those same millions to assist in the construction of British ships in British shipyards. It is not a mere question of patronage or of dollars, but it is a problem of political destiny. It is the question of Canada's colonial status that confronts us. It is the problem of our political relations with Great Britain and her Empire that demands consideration and ultimate solution, with all the tremendous and far-reaching results that that solution involves.



We were content till recently to expend all our energies and all our available funds in overcoming the physical difficulties of developing this new country, in creating commercial, industrial, political and social organizations suitable to the needs of our increasing populations, and particularly, the needs of the vast new districts recently opened up for settlement. But the ever-increasing burdens of Empire, resulting from the unprecedented military and naval developments that have been created by European and Eastern nations, with which the British Government have felt compelled to compete,— these burdens of Empire have been borne by the people of the British Isles with ever-increasing discontent, because they have borne them by themselves solely and exclusively. They have seen their colonial dominions beyond the seas, enjoying the protection of the British Navy, without contributing one penny to its support; and British Statesmen and the British Press have not been backward in suggesting that the time has arrived when the colonies should contribute of their men and their means to maintain the British Naval supremacy.

It is suggested that we profess loyalty to the throne, while we are utterly lacking in liberality, that our professions should be supported by contributions in pounds sterling, that our devotion to the Empire should find expression in dollars. We are told of the necessity of maintaining British Naval supremacy for the protection of our trade routes on the Atlantic and the Pacific, and of the gratuitous assistance given by the British diplomatic and consular services in protecting our citizens abroad and our trade exchanges with foreign countries.

At home, in Canada, we are beset with most passionate appeals to our patriotism, our loyalty, our racial sympathies and our racial prejudices, with covert suggestions also regarding our lethargy, our indifference, our niggardliness, our disposition to be mere spongers upon the British treasury and upon British generosity, until many Canadians are really disposed to become shamefaced and diffident because of these frequent biting criticisms.

The fact is that we have no need to feel ashamed. We have been engrossed in the great and highly laudable work of laying broad and deep the foundations of a magnificent Dominion on the northern half of this Continent, in levelling the mountains, bridging the rivers, cutting the canals, surmounting physical obstacles of every nature, description and kind, and making straight the paths of progress for generations yet unborn. In no half century of the world's

history have so few millions of people accomplished more of material progress and development than the Canadian people have done since 1861.

But it is evident that the close of that half century finds this generation face to face with a political issue of intense interest and of vital import to this and to future generations of Canadians: whether we shall devote our energies to the development of an independent Canadian nation, in the land that Providence has committed to our care; or, whether we shall aim to conserve the ties that bind us to Great Britain and to the South African and Australian Colonies, and to develop in the future as a co-ordinate unit in the Empire, co-operating with the other units of the Empire to maintain its prestige, its power, its naval and military supremacy.

If we are wise and courageous, we shall not seek to conceal from ourselves the obvious fact that we are in truth approaching the parting of the ways; and that, in determining the nature and extent of our naval policy, we are really deciding whether Canada shall take the road to political independence, or the road that leads to more active participation in the defense of the Empire and in the administration of Imperial affairs.

In adopting a naval policy, we must determine, even at the outset, whether we shall have a purely Canadian navy, built by Canadians, manned by Canadians, for the prime purpose of protecting the coasts of Canada, or whether we shall assume our share in the responsibilities of Empire, and co-operate with all self-governing units of the Empire for the protection of all those imperial interests which can only be safeguarded by maintaining the supremacy of the British Navy.

I believe that the Canadian people are prepared to face that issue frankly, courageously and intelligently, with all the responsibilities that the issue involves. But they insist as absolutely essential conditions precedent to the assumption of imperial responsibilities, either directly or indirectly, first, that Canadian control of purely Canadian affairs shall be frankly and fully conceded; and secondly, that Canada shall participate in imperial control of imperial affairs to an extent commensurate with Canada's contributions to the cost of administering and of safeguarding imperial interests.

Probably in the Colonies, even more vividly than in the British

Isles, we have realized the vital significance of the political revolution that has recently been effected in Great Britain, a revolution of far-reaching importance to the whole Empire, but a revolution in respect of which the Colonies were probably never considered, and certainly never consulted. We had been accustomed to consider the House of Lords as one of the three stable elements of constitutional government for the Empire, as the high court of appeal of the Empire for the consideration of all political grievances of the Colonial Dominions beyond the Seas, and as being almost as firmly rooted in the traditions of the past as the throne of England itself. The realization that the supreme control of imperial affairs, both legislative and administrative, is now vested in an executive committee of the House of Commons, consisting solely of elected representatives of England, Ireland and Scotland, came as a sudden shock to the older Colonies, and especially to the Colonists of Canada; and the more complete realization of the actual facts has served to compel Canadians,—even those of the strongest imperialistic tendencies—to recognize that it is improbable that Canada shall long continue as a nation within the Empire, unless Canadian representatives shall be invited to participate, on a basis of equality, and in proportion to their contributions for imperial purposes, in the administration of imperial affairs, in the direction and control of imperial policies in peace and in war.

The outcome of the American Revolution, settled for all time the utter vanity and futility of the expectation that the descendants of European races, living on this Continent, might ever willingly contribute regularly and continuously to the imperial exchequer, while they are persistently denied proportionate representation in the government of the Empire.

I believe that the Canadian people are prepared to face the issue; that they are willing to contribute to the support of the government of the Empire, on condition that they are invited to participate in that government; but they will certainly be reluctant to contribute otherwise than on such a basis of equality.

With all respect for his personal character, his skilfulness, his tact, his resourcefulness as a political leader, I believe that Sir Wilfrid Laurier failed, and that, apart from the issue of reciprocity, he was destined to fail, because he in part avoided and in part concealed the really vital issues which were involved in the adoption of the naval program for which he assumed responsibility.

I am merely giving expression to my own personal impressions, but if there were Canadians who cordially supported, and were prepared to defend that program by intelligent rational arguments, I have never made the acquaintance of its defenders and have never heard the arguments presented. As an imperial policy it was inadequate and ineffective; as a purely Canadian policy it was unnecessary, useless and expensive.

It has been suggested that the issues involved in the naval program might be settled by a plebiscite of the Canadian people; but unfortunately that suggestion is based on the fallacious assumption that the issue, in the first instance, will depend upon the decision of the Canadian people. Canadians are not wholly enamoured with the idea of settling vital issues of political policy by means of plebiscites; and when once the determination of the naval issue, and all that it involves, rests with them, the people of this country will find or create a government of their own which is willing and even anxious to carry into effect the popular will.

The people of Canada are, I believe, prepared to co-operate with the British Government in maintaining the supremacy of an imperial navy, on any basis that offers to them equality of citizenship within the Empire; but intelligent observers of English public opinion entertain serious doubts whether the British Government is prepared to invite the self-governing colonies to participate in the control of imperial policies, on the condition that these colonies shall contribute their proportionate share of Imperial expenses. My personal acquaintance with citizens of the British Isles is more or less limited; but, I confess, I have never yet met an Englishman in England who appeared anxious to receive colonial contributions on that basis, and I do not believe that Canadians are willing to authorize their own Federal Government to make contributions upon any other basis.

It is suggested that in view of the imminence of a naval conflict in the Baltic Sea, the Canadian Government should voluntarily contribute money or ships and men, as an expression of our loyalty to the Throne, our sentiments of kinship, our desire to preserve the traditions and to maintain the naval supremacy of the British race; and so we might contribute generously and voluntarily, once or twice or thrice, as one neighbour contributes of his energies and resources, out of sheer neighbourliness, to quench a conflagration upon his neighbour's property. But once that we recognize a moral or legal

duty to protect our neighbour's buildings from fire, we admit the existence of a still stronger moral or legal obligation to contribute annually of our financial resources to maintain, continuously, fire insurance upon our neighbour's property for our neighbour's adequate protection against fire.

This really vital issue cannot be for a long time obscured by mere nomenclature or by sophistry. The Canadian people are not disposed to rest quiescent under continuous taunts as to their alleged shameless indifference to imperial duties and despicable niggardliness in contributions to imperial defense. They do not deserve and they certainly resent the imputation that they are wanting in manly independence and in self-respect. They are willing, and many are even anxious, to pay their shot man for man; but, if there is to be a partnership in obligations to contribute for imperial defense, they insist upon being admitted to participate in the direction and control of the destinies of the Empire.

Every Canadian of French descent knows full well that every important colony of France is invited to be represented directly in the chamber of deputies which represents the French Republic, and none can understand that citizens, of so important a British colony as Canada, should be expected to contribute for imperial purposes while they are utterly deprived of constitutional representation in imperial affairs.

Canadians of British and of French descent alike prefer to work out their national destiny within, rather than without the British Empire; but they first look to their own representatives, in their own Parliament and in their own Government, to ascertain by tactful negotiation with the British Government, and to ascertain definitely, whether the British people are willing to share their imperial responsibilities with the so-called Colonists who now inhabit and who are destined to develop the northern half of this North-American Continent, until it shall become the home of many millions of happy, vigorous and prosperous people. It is in this position, as it seems to me, this momentous issue now rests, and here I leave it for your careful, intelligent and dispassionate consideration.



