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== in Canada ==



By Prof. Stephen Leacock

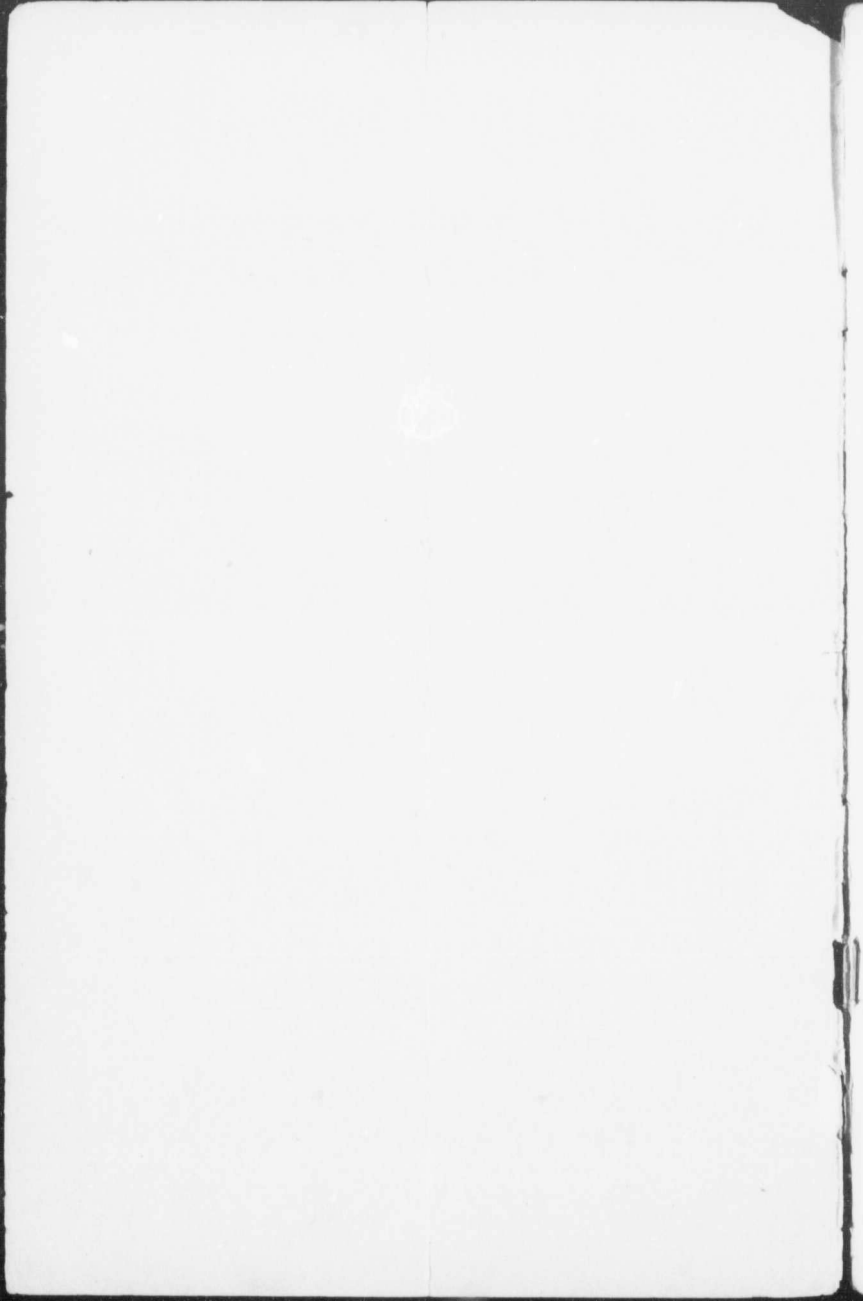
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THE GREAT VICTORY IN CANADA.

The unexpected has happened. The Liberal Government of Canada, entrenched in power as it was by fifteen years in office, has gone down in sudden and overwhelming disaster. It is not merely defeated. It is destroyed. Nothing but a long penitence in Opposition and a plenary renunciation of the cause for which they fought can ever restore the Liberal leaders to the confidence of the people of Canada.

The victory is appallingly complete. In a House of Commons of 221 members (with one constituency, the Yukon, still to vote) a Liberal majority of forty is converted into a Conservative majority of fifty. From the Atlantic to the Pacific there is an almost unbroken tale of Conservative triumph. In the Maritime Provinces, where in the last Parliament the Liberals held twenty-five out of thirty-five seats, the returns now show the election of nineteen Liberals and sixteen Conservatives. To the advocates of Reciprocity this is galling indeed. Under Reciprocity Nova Scotia and New Brunswick were supposed to come to their own. The fish of the coastwise counties and the turnips of the inland townships were expected to flow again in to the market of a grateful Boston. Nova Scotia, rudely torn by Confederation from the embrace of the down-east Yankee, was to have turned again to its first love.

In Quebec the results are equally striking. Here until yesterday the name of Laurier reigned supreme. An unbroken French vote was cast according to the leader's bidding, and, in spite of the existence of the English-speaking population of the Eastern Townships—a plantation of the early Loyalists—and of the smaller half of the metropolis of Montreal, only eleven seats were held in the last Parliament by the Conservatives out

of a total representation of sixty-five. In the new Parliament the Liberal members from Quebec will number only thirty-six and the solidarity of the French vote is broken beyond repair.

But it is in Ontario that the full avalanche of disaster has fallen upon the Liberals. The great central province, the real pivot of the national life of Canada, is swept clean from end to end. Of its eighty-six members, seventy-three are Conservative. In the capital city of Toronto, which contains five constituencies, only one of the Liberal candidates obtained enough votes to prevent the forfeit of his election deposit. In Ontario, the Liberals, or to put it more fairly the Reciprocity men, find themselves, in the homely phrase of the jubilant rural editor, "licked off the face of the map."

Manitoba shows an almost equal Conservative victory. Of its Parliamentary delegation of ten members only two are Liberals. From the Pacific Province of British Columbia a solid phalanx of seven Conservatives will journey gaily to Ottawa without a single Liberal to keep them company. The grain provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan, it is true, have held tight to their allegiance. Before the election the Liberals held thirteen of their seventeen seats: the Liberal representation will now be increased to fifteen members; but so small a ray of sunlight struggles vainly with the hopeless darkness of the Liberal outlook.

Not only is the party overwhelmed, but its leaders, the late Ministers of the Crown, are those buried most deeply by the political landslide. Of thirteen Ministers who offered themselves to the electorate, seven are defeated. Mr. Fielding and Mr. Patterson, the twin craftsmen of the Compact, are out of Parliament. Mr. Mackenzie King, Sir Frederick Borden, Mr. Fisher, Mr. Graham and Mr. Templeman lie buried beside them. Mr. Pugsley, of St. John, New Brunswick, in despite of the prestige of his position as Minister of Public Works, is only declared elected by two votes and hangs suspended by a thread over the yawning gulf of an electorate recount. Mr. Lemieux and Mr. Beland enjoy the mingled consolation and chagrin of being elected in one constituency and defeated in another.

One realizes better the magnitude of what has happened by recalling the position of exceptional strength in which the Liberal administration stood twelve months ago. It had enjoyed some fourteen years in office. Its lavish and increasing expenditures on public works had driven its roots deep into the soil. Its picturesque leader, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, and his more commonplace followers had managed to surround themselves with an air of invincibility that was becoming a legend. A sort of mythology had sprung up. The leader with his white plumes, typified as it were purity and chivalry: his bi-lingual eloquence recalled the union of the two races on which the Canadian Commonwealth is built. Beside him was Sir Richard Cartwright, the Nestor of the Senate, whose views on Free Trade were known to be so profound that they figured, without further utterance, for fifteen years as the solid asset of a Protectionist Government. Here, too, was Mr. Fielding, the magician of the legend who could spin you a yearly surplus out of the palm of an empty hand as easily as a juggler twirls a billiard-ball out of nothingness. Near him, lest the reproach of senility might be brought against a Government growing grey in office, was Mr. Mackenzie King, a sometime economist now "gone to the bad" in politics, whose boyish countenance was useful as typifying the fire of youth and in its gentle moments was supposed to beam with all the roguishness of political childhood. The debonair Mr. Fisher presided over Agriculture and the Weather, becoming, in the Liberal mythology, the God of the Harvest, just as Mr. Pugsley had become the God of Wharves and Bridges and Sir Frederick Borden, from his repulse of the Fenians of 1866, the God of Scientific Warfare. Around the whole group, and especially around the person of their leader, there had grown up, in the soft Indian summer of prosperity in which Canada has basked of late, an atmosphere of exaggerated credence on the part of the electorate scarcely believable in retrospect. The Liberal Government was seen through the refracting prism of the national prosperity—an illusion which its members were in no haste to dispel.

Against this combination, or rather against this favoured environment, the Conservative Party had three times striven, and might again have striven, in vain. Their defeat in 1908

was complete. It was in every sense a personal triumph. There was no great issue before the country. The personality of Sir Wilfrid Laurier dominated the foreground of the political scene. The pot-and-kettle accusations of graft and counter-graft passed harmless over the heads of an electorate happy in the cornfield and the counting-house.

Nor is it to be doubted that had the recent contest been fought over the same issues, or lack of issues, the result would have been the same. It is true that the cause of the Conservatives, even apart from Reciprocity, was good. The lavish expenditures of the late Government, its willingness to build canals without water, wharves without ships, and post-offices without letters, the serious scandals which attached to more than one public department, the gyrations of its little navy, whose *role* in a British war was screened behind a curtain of official ambiguity—all of this contained within it enough to ruin (if poetic justice reigned over politics) any Government that ever sat. But the electorate was over-busy and would not be disturbed. 'You can't beat Laurier,' it said, and that was the end of it. The sunshine vote, which is large in Canada, lay basking on the Liberal side of the fence.

"Whom the gods wish to destroy," so ran the Roman adage, "they first make mad." This is what happened to the Laurier Government. The docility of the electorate had led them to believe that there was no public opinion in Canada other than the creed dictated from the departments at Ottawa. In an evil hour they listened to the fowler's pipe of President Taft, luring them to Washington and Reciprocity.

The proposals of the Reciprocity Compact, now gone to its long home, originated not out of any need or desire of the Canadian people, not from any decline of our commerce or disturbance of our markets, but simply and solely out of the revolving issues of American politics. In the past, of course, as everybody knows, reciprocity of trade with the United States, partial or complete, has more than once figured as the chief issue of Canadian politics. From 1855 to 1866, before yet Confederation had come, reciprocity in natural products was actually in force. Twenty years after Confederation the Conservative Party of

Canada would have been willing to accept a partial measure of the sort had Washington been willing to grant it. In 1891 the Liberals had staked their fortunes on the issue of complete Reciprocity, or commercial union, and had lost. Since then the issue had subsided into a deathlike sleep from which awakening seemed impossible. Sir Wilfrid Laurier himself had frequently made capital by denouncing the policy.

But the situation in the United States had changed. The increasing exploitation of the resources of the Republic led its leaders to look longingly towards the treasure-house of natural wealth beyond the frontier. The ravenous paper and lumber industries, consuming the forests of the United States at a rate three times as fast as their natural growth, turned hungrily to Canada. The millers of Minneapolis computed with envy the growing crop of the new North-West. More than that, the protective system of the Republic, excellent in its ground-plan, had been pushed here and there by the amalgamated interests to the point of extortion. The rising cost of living, due chiefly to the progressive organization of labour, and tending to squeeze the middle classes between the upper and nether millstones, was laid by many at the door of Protection. A tariff question loomed upon the horizon. The voice of the consumer was lifted up in pain. The Democrats, encouraged by the cry, harked back to their classic doctrine of a revenue tariff. The Republican President must do something to set his house in order for the election of 1912. The attempted revision of the Protective system resulted in the abortive Payne-Aldrich tariff, satisfactory to nobody except perhaps to Mr. Payne and to Senator Aldrich. Reciprocal trade with Canada was eagerly taken up as a means of supplying the industries of the United States with the raw material of the Dominion, easing the agonies of the consumer at least until he should awake from the election of 1912, and above all as a means of enabling Mr. Taft to ride the high tariff horse and the low tariff side by side and to perform from their backs his distinguished double summersault into the Presidential chair.

The particular effect of Reciprocity upon the economic life of Canada it was no part of Mr. Taft's official duty to consider. But for British readers, who are habituated to an entirely

different atmosphere from that of this country, and many of whom live still under the preconceptions of a particular school of economic thought, it may be well to consider why it was that reciprocal trade in natural products was rejected by the overwhelming vote of the Canadian people. That the vote was largely due to what may be called national as opposed to commercial reasons, no one will attempt to deny. But the economic case against Reciprocity was enormously strong. To the universalist Free Trader, of course, the whole thing is amazingly simple. It can be settled in the form of a syllogism and written out in a few sentences. Free Trade is a good thing. Reciprocity is part of Free Trade. Therefore Reciprocity is a good thing. It is very likely that many people in Great Britain who entertained very positive convictions on the subject got no further than this. But the moment that one admits that Protection is sometimes a good thing, then the case is altered. Where protection is a good thing, as, for instance, the official Liberal creed has recognized it to be in Canada for fifteen years, then it does not follow that you make it a still better thing by punching a piece out of it. The Reciprocity Compact proposed to leave every producer in Canada protected, except the farmer. His products were to enter into free competition with those of the United States and, as an incident to the compact with those of all other British countries and with twelve favoured nations under special treaty arrangements. In return the farmer got access to the American market, though not, by the way, to the market of the favoured nations.

At the present time the Canadian farmer sells over 80 per cent. of his produce in his own protected market. The prices which he receives are on the whole better than the prices in the closed American market. Wheat and barley and hay are higher in price in the United States, but the prices of horses, cattle, hogs, and other livestock, and of dairy products—in other words, the prices of the finished product of agriculture as opposed to the cruder first products—are better in Canada. All of this was amply proved by Mr. Taft in the documents issued by his Government on behalf of the American farmer. But to the Canadian farmer—except to the grain-grower of the Western plains—the argument worked the wrong way. In other words, the enormous

growth of the home market in Canada has given to the Canadian farmer privileges which he had no mind to forego.

Still less did the compact please the Canadian manufacturer. His industry live, upon Protection: the high wages which he pays demand in the interests of himself and his men the exclusion of goods made with cheaper labour. He was not immediately affected by the compact, but he had the sense to see that if the farmer suffered under it, inevitably his own protection must go down. Reciprocity, in other words, was a breach in the national tariff system under which both farmer and manufacturer have lived for thirty years. The danger to manufacturers carried with it a menace to the great number of factory towns of Canada, scattered from Halifax to the head of the Lakes and rising already in the West; more than all, this danger threatened the belt of towns that runs through Central Ontario, which have grown up, however wicked it may sound, under the shelter of the tariff.

Still less did the compact please the transportation interests of a country whose railroads have been built up east and west in defiance of geography, and which represents an initial economic sacrifice for the sake of a final economic unity.

Behind these arguments lay the greater question of the disposal of our natural resources. The British reader is here on unfamiliar ground, for his national economy offers but little parallel. Yet the case is simple enough. It is best illustrated by considering the future use to be made of the enormous national wealth represented by our forests. Two policies are open to us. We may, under the purest teaching of Ricardian Free Trade, cut down the trees and sell them out of the country to the highest bidder. We sell the pulp-wood: the foreigner, with better immediate advantages makes the paper. The woodcutters live on our side of the line: the paper makers live on the other. As a means of getting as rich as possible in twelve months this system cannot be beaten. Under the other method, the hostile tariff of the foreign nation, or, what is the same thing, an export prohibition like that of the Canadian provinces, prevents the wood from being taken out of the country and forces the foreign manufacturer to move in with his capital and men and swell the wealth

and population of the country. From the cosmopolitan point of view this is needless; from the national point of view it is everything.

These, then, were the economic arguments which, it may be said with confidence, appealed strongly enough to the Canadians to have carried the day, even if they had stood alone. But a greater consideration lay behind. Reciprocity carried with it an inevitable political entanglement. If the Maritime Provinces looked to Boston for their well-being, if Quebec and Ontario were inextricably connected with the market of the central States, if the Grain Provinces poured their harvest into Minneapolis and Duluth, inevitably the lines of social, commercial, and political intercourse would have been distorted from the mould in which we have sought to cast them. This process once started could not have been arrested. The solidarity of the Dominion of Canada, the economic integrity which it is acquiring after years of sacrifice, would have been rent asunder. With it would have been broken the tie which binds this country to the Mother Country and the other Dominions under the British Crown. This, undoubtedly, was the great underlying thought in the minds of the people of Canada, which cast the silent vote of the masses, in defiance of party allegiance, and in many cases in disregard of personal gain or loss, against the Reciprocity Compact.

The whole situation seems clear enough in retrospect. It was by no means so clear in the troubled months just elapsed. It was the first intention of the Laurier Government to have passed the compact on the strength of their solid party vote in the late Parliament. We can see now what a betrayal of the national will such a course would have involved. The first effort of their opponents was to force them from this course. Great meetings were held in Montreal, Toronto, and other centres: the Government was challenged to put the issue before the people. With each succeeding month a national opposition developed, though its strength was realised by few. Prominent Liberals deserted the fold. A national Anti-Reciprocity League undertook to lay the case before the people. The Conservatives in Parliament, encouraged by the spreading opposition, stubbornly blocked

the public business of the country in order to force the Government to a fight at the polls. The Government, serenely confident in its power to have its way either by a Parliamentary vote or by a popular election, granted a dissolution. Then came the conflict. In its earlier stages the supreme optimism of the Liberals was unshaken. Yet the handwriting, for those who could read it, was already inscribed upon the wall. From east to west of Ontario the Conservatives, meetings outnumbered the Liberals in attendance by two to one. The roaring enthusiasm of these gatherings recalled the great days of Macdonald's victories, and the campaigns of 1878 and 1891. Powerful influence was thrown into the balance. Mr. Clifford Sifton, the sometime Minister of the Interior in the Laurier Cabinet, was early in the fight against his former colleagues. The most important journal in Canada, the *Montreal Star*, threw the whole force of its power and the prestige of its reputation into the struggle against the Compact. It sent its special correspondents into the United States; it disseminated articles, editorials, and even anti-Reciprocity advertisements broadcast over Canada. It virtually staked its name and its reputation on the cause it had espoused. Sir William Van Horne left the retirement of his picture-galleries to stump the Maritime Provinces. Every day Liberals wavering in their faith made public recantation of their error, and yet so widespread was the feeling that "Laurier could not be beaten" that on the very day before the elections the correspondent of a New York daily telegraphed to his paper that the betting in the clubs of Montreal stood three to one in favour of the Liberals.

Crosswise through the fight ran the struggle of the French Canadian Nationalists against the supremacy of Laurier and in protest against the policy of defending Canada by sea. In the Province of Quebec they placed a dozen candidates in the field. They fought not in alliance with the Conservatives, but side by side with them, seeking a common object in the overthrow of the Government. Alliance, indeed, was scarcely possible. A portion of the Nationalist creed, it is true, might well command the sympathy of the Conservatives, with whose party traditions it is in intimate accord. The desire to retain unimpaired the rights, the privileges, and the "nationality" of the French Canadians

is in keeping with the best teachings of the Conservative school. Sir John A. Macdonald saw in it, in his day, the only prospect of a united Canada. The demand for honest Government is one that commands everywhere at least a nominal assent. But the claim of the Nationalists that Canada needs no form of maritime defence, whether local or imperial, is as unpatriotic as it is illogical. It can only be held either on the theory, obviously silly, that no foreign nation could ever quarrel with us, or on the theory of a parasitic subordination to the United States. Alliance between the two parties there was none, as Mr. Henri Bourassa, the fervent protagonist of the Nationalist movement, took pains to declare on the very morrow of the victory. But they at least hunted in couples, the Conservatives in most cases leaving the Nationalists candidates unopposed. The fact that the Nationalists succeeded in electing only one candidate entirely belonging to their party removes them from being an active factor in the new Parliament.

The final struggle and the sweeping victory came upon the country with a great wave of surprise, relief, and national exaltation. Every man was proud of his neighbours when he learned that they had been thinking in the same way as himself. It is seldom that Canada has witnessed such throes of excitement as those that marked the election night of September 21. The autumn sky reddened with the bonfires and torchlight processions of the triumphant Conservatives. In many cases victory was achieved where nothing but an honorable defeat could have been expected by the most sanguine. Here and there contests were fought which will go down in history of the Dominion. In the County of Kings in Nova Scotia the veteran Sir Frederick Borden, the Minister of Militia, who had represented the riding for twenty-four years, was defeated by an undergraduate of Acadia College. Most notable, perhaps, of all in Canada, was the contest in Brome, an English-speaking county of Southern Quebec. Here Mr. Fisher, the late Minister of Agriculture, had reigned supreme. Here, as became his office, he had established himself with a model farm and mimic husbandry which, if not remunerative in the meaner sense, at least returned a liberal crop of votes that sprang from a constituency perpetually watered with

the hose and sprinkler of minor agricultural benefactions. Elections came and went, but Mr. Fisher remained undisturbed. Not so this time. The constituency witnessed the sudden onslaught of a young Montreal lawyer, Baker by name, untried as yet in politics, whose father had been one of the strong men of the Macdonald *regime*. Confident of his cause, he canvassed the broad riding from house to house, with an impetuous ardour that turned the hesitating support of his adherents into a flame of enthusiasm. When, midway in the election returns, the news was flashed from city to city that the hitherto impregnable County of Brome had fallen, it was felt that the Liberal *regime* was at an end.

The interpretation of the great election in Canada is of supreme import to the whole Empire. In its narrower sense it means much, of course, for the two great political parties of Canada. It places the Conservative Party not only in office, but in a position of advantage which will last for years to come. They are elected upon a negative question. In assuming control they reinherit their own national policy. Their great majority will enable them to disregard the importunities of factions and place-hunters. The splendid campaign and the indomitable pluck of their leader, Mr. Borden, sets him in the light of the standard-bearer of the whole nation on the path it has chosen. In opposition Mr. Borden has had his detractors. Now that he is in office the country is making discovery of the fact, patent enough long since, that his sterling honesty, which even the most virulent of his adversaries has never dared to impugn, and his unwavering courage of conviction, will make him the ideal head and centre of a truly national Government.

Of necessity the election carries with it the entire discomfiture and disorganisation of the Liberal Party of Canada. As a factor in Opposition the party is weakened by the discredit of its leaders. Mr. Fielding's bid for the succession to the leadership as the man who made Reciprocity has ended in his eclipse. His wreath of laurel is exchanged for a tin extinguisher. Reciprocity, of course, must be thrown overboard; indeed that awkward ballast is already being weaved up to the bulwarks of the dismantled ship by the few navigators who remain on deck. In addition to that the advantage of a solid French vote is lost to the Liberals

for ever in the game of Canadian politics. The Nationalist wedge has been driven deep into the tree. The advantage of the enormous prestige of Sir Wilfrid Laurier as a leader is also gone. Whether his present position as leader of the Opposition be long or short, he can never regain the position in Canada from which he has fallen. Sir Wilfrid Laurier, it may be said, with all the gentleness of speech which is becoming in speaking of such a man on such an occasion, touched in this election upon the one point on which he never fully enjoyed the confidence of the Canadian people—our relations to the British Empire. It has been his fortunate lot to represent us on great occasions. He has ridden for us in coaches of State, to the plaudits of a London multitude. He has coined phrases for us, of summoning us to Imperial councils and the like, grandiloquent in the utterance, but meaning less and less as they recede into retrospect. That he ever really understood the feelings of his English-speaking fellow citizens of Canada towards their Mother Country, that he ever really designed to advance the cause of permanent Imperial unity—these things may well be doubted, even by those who are most ready to pay tribute to the long career of disinterested public service which he has written upon the annals of Canada.

It is this very question, that of our permanent Imperial union, on which the chief bearing of the Canadian election falls. We are, in Great Britain and throughout the Empire, groping for something which we desire but still seek in vain. The great problem of our common future is to find an organic basis of lasting union. That it will be found those of us who have faith in the Empire cannot for a moment doubt. Meantime the voice of the Canadian electorate comes as a plebiscite of the eight million people of this half of the continent in expression of their earnest wish for an enduring union with the Empire. How far and by what steps the new Canadian Government will be able to aid in cementing the bonds of Empire, time and circumstance alone can show. Meantime it counts for much that the greatest of all the Dominions beyond the seas should have borne such witness to its faith.

STEPHEN LEACOCK.

