

THE CALL TO ARMS

AND THE

FRENCH-CANADIAN REPLY

**A Study of the Conflict of Races by Ferdinand
Roy, K. C., LL. D., Professor in Laval
University, Quebec. Translated by
J. Squair and J. S. Will of the
University of Toronto.**

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Preface to the English Edition

The excuse of the writer for issuing an English edition of a pamphlet which was written mainly for French Canadians is that his good friends in Toronto thought well enough of it to translate it, and to speak of it as they have done on a succeeding page. For their great kindness he is most grateful.

It may facilitate the reader's task if a sketch is given of the origin and scope of the work.

In July 1917 when this pamphlet appeared in French, the state of the war and the Military Service Bill had placed French Canadians in a most trying position. They had enlisted, under the voluntary system, in fewer numbers than the English. The vote on the second reading of the Bill had rallied nearly all the French members against its principle, in opposition to the almost compact group of English members. Mass meetings were being organized in Quebec and Montreal, where all sorts of speakers, mostly young men, some of them incited by spies of the Dominion Government, preached the necessity of resisting the law, even to the point of promoting civil war.

Appearances thus tended to show the French Canadians as "slackers" in the past, and as would-be rebels, and they were being condemned in Canada, the United States and Europe.

The writer, who belongs to no political party, felt it was a pressing duty to explain why such a judgment was wrong; and to try to enlighten his compatriots so that their future attitude might demonstrate it to be wrong.

This pamphlet was therefore written for a double purpose: 1st to apportion the responsibilities for the awkward French Canadian situation, and 2nd, to appeal to French Canadians for a thorough consideration of their own superior interests, and to warn them against the danger ahead.

To attain the first object, the main causes of the so-called failure of voluntary enlistment in Quebec were summed up, viz:

(a) The race-hatred which, by making the school question in Ontario more irritating than ever, has created, in our minds, the

impression that we are actually carrying the burden of two wars—the distant European war, and the nearby provincial war, where our French language and culture are at stake.

(b) Politics, or rather politicians—who, in both parties, for a score of years enslaved by Imperialism, have spread the conviction that Canada's interests must be sacrificed for the benefit of the British Empire, and have utilized the war to promote their imperialistic object.

Political interference, furthermore, spoiled the very conduct of the Canadian war. The Government was primarily responsible for the manœuvres that were indulged in, in Quebec, to prevent enlistment, and to discourage French Canadian recruits instead of inducing them to enroll. The Opposition was also to blame for allowing the Government a free hand in its blunders and vexations. The Nationalists used the race war and the mistakes of the military authorities, not only to oppose the Conscription Bill—as it could be opposed, for instance, on economical grounds—but to preach the new gospel of no participation, even by voluntary enlistment, in what they called “a war for a foreign cause”, in which we had no interest and which was waged solely for imperialistic and profiteering purposes.

The result of all that had been to engender in the mind of the possible French Canadian recruit, a disastrous confusion of ideas, to make him lose sight of the real importance of the great war, to make him honestly believe that his true duty was to stay at home to defend his imperilled patrimony, and to isolate us, in the form, at least, of our opposition to the conscription measure.

The time had come, for the defence of Quebec, to assert that it had been badly treated, and badly led, and that, at heart, it was not responsible for its so-called backwardness.

The writer's second object was to urge French Canadians calmly and judiciously to enquire what their real duty was, in order to protect their true interests—which are those of the whole community—as well as to save their imperilled honor.

Plain speaking—not always devoid of passion—having been used towards the English fanatics who detract from the general good by presuming on their numerical strength—plain speaking was also used towards Quebec agitators who, under pretence of combating English

Imperialism or Prussianism, not only desire to drop the association between Canadians and their mother countries, but also want to isolate Canada from the rest of the civilized world.

The basis of the appeal to French Canadians is the uncontested fact that Canada entered this war with the unanimous assent and enthusiasm of both nationalities, and of all religious and political parties or groups—as evidenced by a quotation in the pamphlet from the Nationalist leader himself, who wrote in 1914 that Canada must help the two mother countries, on account of Canada's vital interest in the victory of England and of France.

Once engaged in the war, we were not free to desert the allied cause. But in 1917, the Nationalists, claiming that Canada had no interest in the war, that we owed nothing to France as we owe nothing to England, were compelled by the logic of their new attitude to go as far as to say that we should no more be French Canadians, but Canadians tout court. In answer to such a denial of an ethnical fact and necessity, it was argued that the mission of the French nationality in Canada was to be faithful to its French origin, and to the country whence comes to her the intellectual and moral food that her very blood requires; that in order to serve Canadian interests, broadly understood, we were bound to develop to the utmost the very genius of our nature; that, although undoubtedly Canadians first, in order to be loyal to our country we must remain what we are, that is, French—and that consequently for us French Canadians, France and French civilization being at stake in this war, and France being the ally of England, England's and France's caused was truly our own cause.

The conclusion of the appeal to the French Canadian race therefore was, whatever might be its grievances against the other race in Canada, not to forget its mission in this continent, but to realize its true duty, and to make for the cause the required sacrifices, to cease a useless agitation that might lead to civil war, and to show no inferiority to the other race in the answer to the country's call to arms.

The pamphlet was published before the election campaign began. There was something in it that was distasteful to all the political parties. The French daily papers, of one party or other, with few exceptions kept silent about it. It was hotly discussed in the indepen-

dent press. Very many expressions of approval have come to the author from all over Canada and abroad, in the form of letters from independent thinking men, of all shades of politics, in the clergy, etc., some of which were published in a third edition.

Professional politicians, on the other hand, have, as usual, failed to agree in their criticism. A French critic, for example, has accused the author of favouring the Ontario fanatics and the Government, while a Toronto paper has recently accused him of desiring to promote a civil war, and to destroy Confederation.

With critics of that class an author is helpless. He can only hope that a few of his countrymen will take the trouble to ascertain exactly what he has said, and to form their own conclusions upon it.

The writer attaches no importance to his views merely because they happen to be his. But he knows that they reflect a deep feeling among his compatriots, with regard to our participation in the war, while maintaining their convictions upon the right of the French, in their native land, to equality of treatment with the English-speaking races. Some of his kindest critics think his estimate of the incompatibility of the two main races in Canada is too pessimistic, and that it is a mistake to believe that, though there is, and must remain for some time to come one political Confederation, there cannot be an identical English-French-Canadian sense of nationality. He would fain hope that they are right; but he cannot conceive of the possibility of such a unity as they appear to anticipate, until there is a much larger recognition of the French place in it than the English at present seem disposed to welcome.

The writer is most happy to say that he has among his English-speaking countrymen many valued friends. Nothing would be more agreeable to him than to co-operate with them, and with others of similar liberality, in a sustained effort to dissolve the misunderstanding which now beclouds the Canadian outlook.

F. R.

Quebec, February, 1918.

TRANSLATORS' PREFACE

The translators have pleasure in presenting to their fellow English Canadians the frankly-stated opinions of a sincere, intelligent and cultured gentleman of Nationalistic sentiments. They consider it to be a good thing for us all to know what our fellow citizens think. We have known too little of one another. We have too often turned a deaf ear to opinions not our own. We should acquire the temper that enables us to tolerate the expression of all views honestly held by all types of Canadians.

It may not be superfluous for them to say that they do not assume any responsibility for the opinions of the author, with many of which they are not in accord.

They wish, for example, to dissent from his view that a deep racial difference lies between French Canadians and English Canadians. If this were the proper place, they think they could show that the points of resemblance between the two groups are more numerous than those which exist between either group of Canadians and any European group.

And, naturally, they dissent also from his views regarding the hostility of the English Canadian towards the French Canadian. They think there are very few, if any, persons in Ontario who would take pleasure in burning down the houses of French Canadians and hanging their owners.

The translators disagree with the author as to the motives inspiring English Canadians to take part in the war. Most of them thought little of the phantom of Imperialism which looms so large in the ideas of the Nationalists of Quebec. They went into the fight to defend Belgium and France, as well as British and Canadian interests, and they felt puzzled and shocked that the heartless reasoning of the Nationalist leader should seem to have had such an influence in restraining the French-speaking part of Canada from succouring the French-speaking part of Europe. Let it be said here that the translators do not share with the author the admiration he seems to have for the mischievous Nationalist leader.

J. S.

Toronto, December, 1917.

J. S. W.

THE CALL TO ARMS AND THE FRENCH CANADIAN REPLY

The writer of these hurried lines has never paid much attention to public affairs. He is one of those who, from predilection, stand aside and leave to others the care of guiding the ship of state but who, although they have chosen the easier part, or perhaps on account of that fact, are often the severest critics. But the war has come and changed his attitude of indifference. For, indeed, the play of politics, as is the case often with the human comedy, is turning to tragedy.

To his right, as a spectator, to judge of the play, of the author and of the actors, has been added a patriotic duty, that is, he must moderate, as well and as quickly as he can, the panic caused by the theatre in flames. He will speak to his fellow conscripts although this new rôle is a difficult one for him. His voice is feeble and the distracted crowd does not know him. Still, he will point out where the exits of safety are. He will ask those who turn their backs on these gates and hide them to open them wide.

But these are they who harangue crowds and know the art of leading them. They will laugh at the writer and will speak with louder voice and make wilder gestures. The poor writer will not be listened to, he may even be roughly jostled. But he will put up with it, for that is the ordinary fate attaching to his new rôle.

In the war drama he has a simple part to play. He lives in a country where two European nations, long hostile to one another, now allies, have planted deep roots, where two rival races divide the soil between them, where each, at home, cultivates its fields and gardens, harvesting and gathering in the grain and the flowers of its choice. The two have kept their own features, their own distinctive, ethnical virtues. The harvests of their culture are unlike. These races have not succeeded in loving each other. Heredity keeps alive in their blood the remembrance of age-long discord. And then, more than a century ago, the flag of the older one was changed, but her soul was not changed.

She was bound to live, and her rival, not believing her to be immortal, is envious of the ever-increasing number of her sons. The two are neighbours who readily quarrel.

But, one day, the enemy outraged the two motherlands, and that enemy is the Barbarian who would like to devour the world as his prey. The two hostile races, with a common enthusiasm, united their efforts and went to defend, each in the country of its origin, the threatened patrimony. But the struggle is long-drawn-out and more soldiers are needed to serve on the field of battle. A decree is passed, whose name is Conscription, and that is the fiery bond which joins our politics to the war drama.

The call to arms is made to the two races of this country: their internal divisions and the unlucky chance of the parliamentary game have unfortunately given to one the noble rôle of the volunteer who answers "present" and to the other . . . the other rôle. And this latter is the proud, valiant race, the maker of many an epos, whose sons, our cousins, have written the Marne and Verdun. Upon this race has been foisted the playing of a part which is not hers. It cannot be! It cannot be! The truth will be seen when the stage is better lighted, and when the noble race tears off the infamous costume in which she has been shamefully disguised. Then it will be seen that it is all a dream and that she will play no longer the false rôle.

Under cover of the dark night of politics, falsehood lies upon the country. The other race, on account of this falsehood lives one glorious moment of her life. Our race would die of shame if this lie were to endure. But talk will be vain to make it disappear. We need deeds, but not many,—only one is necessary. In order to return into the light of truth there is only one step to be taken, one word spoken, "We also are present!"

Without hatred for anyone, but having taken his place in the struggle, the author of these lines is simply fulfilling a command of the national conscience. If, in that torch race, he crosses the political arena, it is that he may bear to all the men of his blood the never-dying command of our motherland.

I

THE SITUATION

The French-Canadian race is passing through the gravest crisis of its existence. Those who might come to visit us at present would not find our house in order. Things are not in their place. The truth is that French Canada hesitates between two struggles and the problems which we have to solve puzzle our minds and rend our hearts. Two ideas, which are old enemies, are at strife in us, two opposite feelings divide our soul. We are a prey to the cruellest of perplexities. We are wondering where our duty lies at the very moment when we ought to decide and to act. And from our embarrassment comes confusion.

But we may after all see clearly, if we place things in their true light and give to ideas and the events which accompany them their real meaning.

It was the vote in Parliament on the Military Service Bill which rent the veil whose tissue hid from our eyes the real form of things. This it is which lights up the stage and, as it sheds its glare upon the characters arranged in two distinct groups, forces our mind, up till then hesitating between contrary currents, to see the real, the great danger, and from a sense of duty to choose the lesser evil.

What did this vote of the official representatives of the Canadian people reveal to us? (Whether their mandate was regular or not makes little difference to him who knows what universal suffrage amounts to—and who is there who has any illusion regarding it?) It revealed this: a war measure was proposed which makes military service obligatory. The English Canadian members were in favour, the French Canadians were against. There is no mistake about it; a few exceptions on one side or the other do not signify. Our French Canadian ministers, compromised by their past and their election promises, are unanimously disowned by their fellow French Canadians. The few English-speaking members who followed their leader are considered renegades by their fellows.

That is the important fact which stands out to-day in the great tribunal of public opinion, and whose historical accuracy can never be disputed. When the government in power asks for men for the common cause, the English by their members say "yes," the French Canadians say "no."

Of course, in form, the answer was not so blunt as that. To what was perhaps really only a political manoeuvre, i. e. the conscription bill, a retort was made which was perhaps only another political manoeuvre, i. e. the device of a plebiscite. But whether for or against the referendum, whether for or against the principle of conscription, the two camps are distinguished by their difference of race.

And perhaps too this referendum would show that the people, English as well as French, do not wish to prolong the effort in the matter of the sacrifice of men.

But will anyone tell us at what time or in what country the popular will has been intelligently pronounced, by plebiscite or otherwise,—I mean with a clear vision of its immediate material interests, often magnified by the talk of demagogues, not to speak of those other interests which, although apparently more remote, are often of greater significance?

When did the more intelligent classes, except for reasons known only to themselves, ever honestly ask the crowd for guidance?

No, the referendum may be a clever piece of tactics, but the vote on the principle of conscription remains what it is. It separates the representatives of the country into two camps: those who consent to the tribute of blood, the English Canadians, and those who refuse it, we the French Canadians.

That is the awful situation which has been made for us.

And yet we are not as bad as that. A hasty judgment, based on this fact, would not do us justice. Now, how did we come to put all the appearances against us? What is our excuse, what explanation is there? (However good they are, they will be too long to be understood.) What road has brought us to this pillory? Who led us into this road, and then urged us to follow it?

Racial hatred and politics have done us all this harm. Under cover of the European war, the English of Canada—and once for all,

I mean by English not the noble minds who are numerous amongst them, but all the others—the English have shamelessly accentuated their anti-French struggle; the leaders of our two parties have carried to the highest—or lowest—point of opportunism the policy of extreme concessions in which they have been exercising themselves for twenty years. Hands were joined in high places to lead us, consciously or not, to the brink of the precipice.

What really happened? And why shall we lose the benefit of the noble attitude of August 1914? For, at the start, our conduct was perfect. The participation of Canada in the European war was accepted, without one voice being raised in opposition. Civilisation was at stake in this war. France and England were allies in resisting the menace; all were unanimous. And in the first contingent we French Canadians had our fair proportion of really Canadian soldiers.

But it was not merely popular enthusiasm; our leaders, all our leaders, shared in it. The two parties agreed to a truce, our bishops sent their blessing and encouragement to those who enlisted, and the Nationalist leader, whilst holding in abeyance the solution of all political and constitutional questions (as it was wise to do), acquiesced “in a national intervention inspired by regard for Canadian interests solely.” (1)

It was a grand sight to see these young nations flying to the help of their motherlands. And, our reason was not shocked by this sentiment. To participate in the war, on which depended the fate of the human race, our own fate included, all our faculties were in agreement.

The virtues of our race were bearing their fruit, but persecution and politics were soon gnawing at its core.

1 Henri Bourassa, *Le Devoir et la Guerre*, p. 17.

II

ENGLISH PERSECUTION

The truce was just as short between our English fellow-citizens and ourselves as it was between the political parties. To tell the truth it was not observed for a single day.

People were unwilling, as Mr. Bourassa desired, "to participate as a nation, bound to England by political ties and to France by reasons of sentiment and self-interest, without compromising in any way the national status and without disturbing too much our economic equilibrium." (1) On the contrary, there was a determination to make use of the great war, as a new weapon, to complete in our country the victory of that British imperialism whose consummation may turn out to be so disastrous for us. Our Confederation which at once had made giant strides towards a normal development in a country free to act and to live its own life, saw itself quickly melting into the great mass, which the British Empire is, and destined to lose therein its own individuality.

Nor was any care taken to preserve for our contribution of four hundred thousand men its unity as a Canadian army. Our Canadian soldiers were over there only as so many English soldiers. Canada reserved for herself merely the right of equipping them and paying their wages.

The same voracity, which, in England, robbed us of the very name of Canadians, was found here too amongst those puny Imperialists who wish to blot out everything having French characteristics, until the time when the Empire shall swallow up its colonies. Was not everything possible done to make the recruiting of French Canadians impossible? And recruiting was no easy thing. We had to receive orders from allies who never for a moment ceased to act and speak like masters. We were commanded by English officers, in English, and it is well known that amongst these officers there were some capable of railing publicly at our recruits as

(1) Henri Bourassa, *Le Devoir et la Guerre*. p. 18.

Campbell

"stupid fellows" because these volunteers spoke only that unknown tongue called French. Nor was this mere coarse, soldierly rudeness.

Moreover, solemn promises were violated. Our regiments, officered by French Canadians, were broken up overseas, our officers were humiliated and their men scattered amongst the regiments from other provinces. On all hands advancement and recognition of signal service were refused.

And that is not all. After mature deliberation and discussion and in spite of the request of some clear sighted people amongst their fellow citizens who protested, saying "Let us do ourselves no harm," the government and the legislature of the chief English Province tore up the Charter which guarantees the use of our language and drew upon themselves and their persecuting methods the reproach of "Prussianism" made even in the press of London.

You may say that this is an old and merely constitutional quarrel. But the Executive at Ottawa invented new grievances. As if to indicate clearly in what contempt we of this French and Catholic Province were held the man whom our government appointed as director of recruiting was an English, Protestant pastor.

The racial war that had always been carried on quietly against us was now openly declared. All the guns were unmasked.

We French Canadians were pushed farther into this war. As early as April, 1916, I said in Paris, and repeated to London journalists, that we had two wars on our hands. I said our civilisation, was threatened just like French civilisation, for it is the same, by the Germans, and also by the Imperialistic, Francophobe Englishmen of Canada. Whilst we were going to help put out the conflagration that was raging in Europe, our own house was set on fire.

And the Canadian nation, the daughter of France, but a mother herself, was driven to ask herself—and this is what makes the bitterness of these times—whether she should sacrifice the ancestress or her two millions of descendants.

Is it to be wondered at that under these circumstances we ceased to enlist? Particularly when—and this is a point which as our justification cannot be too much insisted on—particularly when men were successful in creating the impression amongst our people

that to enlist was to go and fight for England. Could anything have been more clumsy or more perfidious?

At all events, that is what the English authorities did, perhaps what they wanted to do. They blocked and made impossible all voluntary enlistment amongst us. So, it is not to the insults directed from these spheres that we shall take the futile trouble of replying. We shall look for the esteem of honest men.

III

POLITICAL ERRORS

And what were our leaders doing during this time? One would think that they saw nothing. With one exception they, by their conduct, ratified these tactics. They followed like sheep. They gave their approbation to the government which carried on the war in Europe so badly and which favoured so strongly the Francophobe war in Canada, and they voted to themselves the prolongation of their own political mandates. They did even more. They made the law of conscription inevitable. With their eyes constantly fixed on London, and trembling lest they should displease the protagonists of the Imperialism which has become so dear to all of them, they have made or approved of the same mistakes. When the First Minister, without asking himself whether it would be possible, with the system of voluntary recruitment, to pay that "hypothecation of blood," promised on New Year's day his half million of soldiers to England, the leader of the Opposition did not disapprove and with his party voted the necessary measures and the money required to redeem this promise.

And these things, as well as others, took place not at the beginning, when the stupendous magnitude of this war was not yet suspected, but in the year 1916 when on every hand people realised that voluntary recruiting could not furnish the required numbers.

But another thing was also evident. The economists had spoken. They had shown how much unreality there was in the seeming prosperity which was making so many millionaires out of mere war industries. The common people, with the exception of

the farmers, learned how dear and difficult living was becoming. All this was well known, I say, and when a minister of the crown light-heartedly declared that he would bankrupt Canada to save the Empire our political leaders neglected the opportunity of putting a rein on that oratorical exuberance which expressed itself also in prodigious budgets and scandalous extravagance.

And the breakdown of voluntary recruiting which had been foreseen and predicted for a long time came to pass. Parliament had thoroughly committed us to the war and we had now but one resource which in the beginning might have been accepted by public opinion, properly influenced. But public opinion in 1917 had been misled by solemnly-delivered and imprudent promises and was disposed to be suspicious of deception and refused to accept guidance. It kicked over the traces and the nation found itself in a very awkward position.

Of our political leaders some, more guilty than the rest, had led us into this difficulty and others, mere accomplices, had allowed us to be misled.

But there was one exception. Amongst our leaders of opinion, amongst those whose part it is to direct important groups and to lead the race in working out its destiny, Mr. Bourassa quickly raised the cry of alarm. His vigour of thought, his readiness with tongue and pen, his wide information, his ability and temperament were sure, in these critical times, to give him a powerful influence over his fellow citizens. That influence is his by the force of the admiration which flows towards him from all sides.

This admiration for the Nationalist leader whose work, up to the war, contains the necessary and essential things which should be said for the French-Canadian race and which, if it had not been for him and Olivar Asselin, would not have been said—this admiration I say, and the prestige which attaches to his work are the things which may have perhaps hindered many from getting sooner a clear view regarding the regrettable facts of which we are to-day the victims. One does not easily decide to separate himself from a man in whom one has been accustomed to see the champion of his race, the brilliant defender of his rights and whose uncompromising pride and noble behaviour still continue to have influence. One

hesitates long before coming to the conclusion that on such an essential point this man may have made a mistake, has certainly erred. Hesitation takes time to clear itself. But his work, being thoroughly sincere, demands as great frankness from his opponents. His courage inspires bravery even to the point of bringing us to combat his ideas whilst continuing to respect the man.

In that brilliant campaign which Mr. Bourassa has been carrying on since 1914, in what he has said or written against those whom he combats,—and these are the two political parties who are fighting for power—one hardly finds anything to criticise except certain excesses of language which are often excusable, and in any event of no great importance. Crushing also is the attack he has made on the champions, great and small, of Imperialism, and unanswerable is the analysis he has made of the false directions taken by our leaders during the past fifteen years, attempts to enter new paths which have upset our compass and slackened our course towards any secure haven.

But the width of the conflict exceeds the narrow horizon of Canadian politics and even that of Imperial. It is clear that both at London and at Ottawa we have been led on, since Chamberlain's day, towards participation in the wars of the Empire. But what purpose did it serve to prove the point again in connection with the question of obligatory service? Even without this far-off preparation might we not have taken part in this war, and that too with the approval of Mr. Bourassa himself?

That, however, is but an incident in this discussion. The fundamental error in Mr. Bourassa's argument is that, in such an onset of the nations, he attempted to hold himself altogether above the dust of the battle, and he often discussed the failures and errors of the combatants, of friends as well as of foes, as if we were neutrals, and neutrals unfriendly to the Allies at that. He often preached too strongly in favour of a wrong principle of selfishness, which I know is practised in other countries, but which becomes impossible here if we take a true account of the fact—and it is a fact—that we in Canada are of two hostile races and that ours is the weaker one numerically and hence should be the stronger morally. It was an error of his to have cherished the illusion that from these two in-

fusible, ethnical groups one can ever make a homogeneous nation which should seek to attain the same ideal. He was also wrong in aiming at the utopian idea that we can do without French influence and live a really national life wholly on our own resources. With his implacable demonstration that we owed nothing to England he insinuated that neither do we owe anything to France. It was his great mistake never to speak of the present war except as England's war, into which we have been led by politics, to speak of a "foreign cause" when really now, as in 1914, the cause of civilised humanity, menaced by Prussianism, is at stake. What is at stake, as Mr. Bourassa admitted in 1914 and 1916, is the existence of our two motherlands which have been directly attacked, by an enemy that seeks their destruction, and to which "we are, as a nation, attached on the one side by political ties and on the other by reasons of sentiment and self interest."

Since what time has this cause become a foreign one to us? When did we cease to be at war with the common enemy, Germany?

Of course, not any more than Mr. Bourassa, must we allow ourselves to be snared by the cry of "saviours of the small nations." Ireland, French Canada and the Transvaal make short work of this pretext and it must be laid aside. But the error consists in emphasising the impression that we are fighting for England alone and for her declared war aims, and in losing sight, whilst analysing the causes of the war, of its real width and of its menacing results. It is menacing for us, as for all the nations of the world, and more certainly, for example, than for the United States which nevertheless — and this is a proof of the world-wide fear—have just espoused our cause without any desire of conquest or any fear of the menace of invasion.

It is this wrong conception of the meaning of the war which has hindered Mr. Bourassa for two years from being quite the real champion of French Canadian interests. It has paralysed his arm as a sower of good seed, and has forced him to repress in his own bosom, and in the hearts of his fellow French Canadians, just and proper sentiments. His horror of sentimentalism, which may often work as a principle of enlightened action, has led him to interpret wrongly their true interests and to prevent them from fulfilling their real mission.

Certainly, Mr. Bourassa was the only one in our Province who might have corrected the mistakes of the Tory or Grit leaders and preserved his race from the affront it must now endure. The clergy too might have helped, but they in great part, even if they have not said so officially, are perhaps of the same way of thinking as Mr. Bourassa.

And this is quite natural. Drawn by the attraction of a journal whose superior editing satisfies their taste from a literary standpoint, prone in political matters to accept guidance rather than to give it—for one must be ignorant of our life and doubly a slanderer to represent us as bowing down under their rod—our clergy may have been charmed by the uprightness of the fearless and incorruptible man, may have been restrained by the complete confidence which in a moral way he inspires and deserves. But this faith in a prophet, who is not vain enough to claim infallibility, should not be a blind faith, and reason preserves her right to examine carefully his theories, which are not dogmas, and to judge whether his doctrines, logical as they may be, at one and the same time captivating and dangerous, by reason of the appeal they make to our racial hates, may not be based on error.

If we are fighting for England alone, then of course Mr. Bourassa is right, we have done enough. If we are fighting for ourselves, if the stakes of war are our civilisation, our culture, our real patrimony perhaps also our liberty, then Mr. Bourassa is wrong. We too must see it through, and if a wrong estimate was made of what we in Canada can do, we French Canadians must not be the first to complain.

And that is how, while trying to get us out of the aimless drifting in which the other parties left us, the Nationalist leader, the only one certain of his course, lost his way in the fog also, and out of Charybdis led us into Scylla.

But, strange as it may seem, there is a political situation, other than ours, whose delinquencies have contributed a share in making possible the state of mind of which we have too much, and that is the pre-war political condition of France. I have just

said that our clergy, in part, accept, at least on trust, that so-called Nationalist doctrine that we now have no duty to fight for France (forgetting of course that we are fighting both for France and for ourselves). How does it come about then that our priests, accustomed to cultivate in the soul of our people the fruitful plant of real patriotism, have been led, as they have, to do violence to the noble sentiment of the memory of France? How has it come that they, fighting against their heart and the voice of race, do no longer wish that our peasants, in order to fulfil their destiny, should continue, while ploughing their fields, to cast frequently a loving and invigorating look towards France? Whence comes that mistrust, not always declared, but which cannot be denied?

There is more than one explanation. The chief one is that the French have been the authors of their own destruction, or, at least, of the diminution of their own prestige in New France. France is paying the price of being the nation towards which the other nations, attracted by the din of her ideas and the fire of her passions, always have their eyes turned. Now, these ideas are not all healthful, nor are these passions all good. The stern logic of her nature, even in faults and mistakes, forbids her from not showing herself as she really is in the broad light of day. And of her sons those whom we hear most are the noisy ones, those whom we see most are the conspicuous ones. We have seen and heard the politicians of France, we have seen the literature made for exportation and have heard the songs of the Paris that lives to amuse itself, and we thought it was the voice of France.

Now we know our mistake. But the ill-fated political activity, particularly the policy of harassing the national religion—national there, and national here—has borne its fruit. In our rural parts, distrust was aroused—and should we blame our clergy too much for not having made the necessary discrimination?—distrust, I say, was aroused regarding the influence which ideas of fanatical intolerance might exercise. The good name of France suffered and estrangement set in.

In other quarters also efforts have been made to strengthen this tendency towards widening the breach between the Canadian soul and that of France.

Without speaking of certain new arrivals who have been busy spreading round about them the nasty odour of the ideas or conduct of the evil places which they frequented in France; without speaking of our home-bred snobs, belated Voltairians and scholars in a school of narrow fanaticism, who have done great harm to French ideas, whose champions they dared to call themselves, and passing to another order of ideas, have we not, since the attraction of London has dazzled our politicians, seen anglomania become fashionable and claim its victims even outside the social circles where plutocracy, that nobility of our day, had hitherto injected its virus? And amongst our public men, are they rare whose oratory, inspired by that absurd belief in the superiority of the Anglo-Saxons, has made small effort to magnify the qualities of the French nation?

Is there any cause for surprise that French sentiment should have fallen asleep in the mind of the people, when so much was done to destroy it? But it will be realised that the experiment is not to be repeated. This sentiment, already aroused by the roar of the Marne and Verdun, and by the still more impressive silence of the trenches, where French resistance hides its strongest virtues, can, even if weakened, be no longer put down. It is too clear now what its slumbering has cost us.

And that is how in this labyrinth of near and distant faults and mistakes, public opinion amongst us lost its way; that is how we explain the sight of a Canadian Parliament divided on a war measure into two-racial groups.

IV

OUR ATTITUDE

At the risk of being severe upon ourselves, after having tried to show that we are victims less of a fault on our part than of a mistake, it is essential that we explain the full meaning of this attitude. And before asking ourselves by what means we are to rectify the position, we must point out again how this position is false and unacceptable.

What sort of spectacle then do we offer to the world at present ?

In the first place we have already seen what our representatives have done. This conscription bill which was the logical, necessary outcome of the measures which Parliament had unanimously voted since 1914, as Mr. Bourassa has shown, has been rejected by our French members. And in Parliament they were the only ones, or almost so, to fail. For, suffering punishment for the illogical character of their previous conduct, what our representatives call up in our minds to-day is the image of our people going to the field of battle and in the middle of the fight turning in presence of the enemy. We know indeed that all idea of cowardice in anyone should be rejected, but the significance of their refusal, despite all their efforts, destroys, and will perhaps forever destroy, the import of their good intentions.

To be the only ones in the Parliament of Canada to say "no" when such a question arises is to be in the wrong, even if the English majority is not in the right. The uneasy conscience which oppresses us comes from this isolation.

Then, while our representatives at Ottawa were cutting such a sorry figure, how were the least solid, the least enlightened, the noisiest of our town populations conducting themselves ?

Hardly was the bill proposed when, apparently seized with panic the working people were stirred up, immense meetings were held, leagues with high-sounding names were formed, a riotous spirit develops. And those who thus threaten to rush to the attack of safe shelters are the foremost in making for the rear, those who wish to give the popular agitation its direction are the youngest amongst us, are those who will be called first to arms. And this sort of thing has gone on here and there all over Canada, but it was in our Province that it began, it was here that the first monster meetings were held, modestly called "patriotic"—for the purpose of proclaiming non-participation in the war. And these young men—there are amongst them some who are of high intelligence and culture, who are destined to play a brilliant part in our politics, and politics has led them astray—do not act, we know, from base cowardice. Whatever they may say to the crowds, we know that in reality they are better than their speeches, that their eloquence

is not true to their honest feelings, and when they declare that they are ready to fight, but only in Canada and that in civil war, we know that they defame themselves. We do not believe what they say and we predict that they will be the first to start for the front.

But meanwhile we must endure the sight of their incomprehensible attitude and of the sorry results produced by their example. For the crowd that follows them, exaggerates their foolish conduct.

And we have seen municipal councils, in full and regular session, losing their heads in the midst of this uproar,—and in order to obey the commands of an excited, window-smashing populace skilful in attacking peaceful citizens and in frightening women and children—we have seen them, I say, vote resolutions against national military service and close their ~~tearful~~ session by singing the national anthem!

But what do the best people of an earlier generation think and say in private of these noisily sorry gatherings? Well, thank goodness, not only do they stand aside but they condemn, although with that indulgence which the errors of the agitators demand. The cruel irony of those manifestations of topsyturvy patriotism and inverted courage do not escape the notice of even the least perspicacious. In private people deplore this disturbing conduct which aggravates an already painful situation. But common sense is reasserting itself, the fundamental stock of dignity which is the heritage of the old races has been disturbed; from the blood there rise to the brain protests which disturb the conscience.

But people hardly dare to speak, because we are still perplexed as to where the core of the difficulty is. We hesitate, we feel our way, we go on repeating to ourselves all the arguments by which it can be shown that conscription is an evil, a great evil, that it is a poor, political dodge, suggested perhaps by a minister of ill-repute, compromised and compromising, and perhaps a device purposely directed against us; that it is not a necessary evil, that there are more efficacious ways of helping our allies, that it will lead us to bankruptcy, that English Canadians themselves do not wish it.... People say all this to themselves, but in reality they feel and admit that, in spite of all, our opposition to this evil measure puts us in a

shameful position, that we are not doing the noble thing, that we are slipping down an inevitable slope towards a precipice. . .

But I ask of those who, without prejudice or passion, are investigating the problem and are looking for a worthy and reasonable solution, such persons as might be the leaders of opinion, if they would, I ask of them to reflect upon the serious nature of the evil which a more prolonged resistance to the law or to its application may do to our nationality. Of the two evils which threaten us I beg of these persons to consider which is the worse.

The insult, written, spoken, or flashed from the eye, which we must wash out is that we alone in Canada have refused the toll of blood. As far as our reputation is concerned, it matters little whether the insult is with certain of our adversaries merely a form of blackmail. The distance between the French and English in the matter of the terrible vote of the other day, emphasised by the mobs in the street, is still the fact which I have described. I have also spoken of the excuse of our people for having been led, without fully realising the fact, to play the rôle of disorderly rebels in time of war. But the insult lies in this, that we should be reminded of the mere fact; and when it is hurled at us, what are we going to do? Will people listen to us when we try again and again to stammer out these long explanations of persecutions, political mistakes, bad leadership?

Or in presence of those whose eye is upon us, enemies, allies or neutrals, and for whom we shall be deserters, shall we be content to raise our eyes no more, to bow our heads in disgrace? Shall we endure the cruel cuts of the English of this country, the anxious and sad look of our overseas allies, the flood of insults which already our neighbours, the Americans, are beginning to pour upon us? And do you think that our children will not see the horrible thing? Shall our generation swallow all this, and shall we French Canadians live with this nightmare upon us? Is this the legacy which we will leave to our sons, we, who have been so proud to claim descent from our great ancestors?

Terrified at this conclusion I almost doubted of my reason, I looked round me for some one to contradict me, I sought for proofs of a possible exaggeration of my powers of sight. An eminent

prelate replied to me:—This crisis is big with all manner of possible woes. When men's minds are in ebullition, when the evil instincts of the people are aroused, they are poor guides. Posterity may find perhaps, for our exculpation, some truth which in the mists of to-day is hidden from us, and will restore our honour. But this remains true: we cannot avoid being harshly judged. Your question must be asked openly, and the answer you wish and which I cannot give, others may give it to you perhaps.

And thus, with all veils torn off, others too may see the precipice.

V

WHAT IS OUR DUTY?

Since then our position is bad, it is our duty to change it. We must get out of this equivocal situation. Since, whether of our own doing or not, the current which carries us away is bearing us towards the fatal reef, we must at least attempt a vigorous turn of the helm, which will send us out to sea, and, if need be, face the tempest and the threatening shipwreck. We must make our choice. And since the French Canadian race is seeking to know its duty, it is necessary to remind ourselves of its mission and its rôle in the world. Whence do we come, what are we, whither are we going?

Let us think seriously about this matter. It is not in the traditions of our blood or of our history to refuse any sacrifice necessary for the defence of an idea, an idea that is vital to us. Now the refusal—though it may be more apparent than real—the refusal to participate in this war, suggests an epithet which, it may be repeated, "is not French in any language whatever". Our boorish opponents, the Boches of Ontario, keep repeating that our speech is nothing more than an incomprehensible jargon, having no connection with "Parisian French." Let our scorn be our only reply to such a charge. But when the time comes to write the history of these days when the nations of the world are revealing themselves in their real worth, when the French historian, let us

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say, will want to refer to us as evidence of the persistence of the virtues of his race, will it be possible for him to restore to their appropriate places the fragments of the pedestal from which we have hitherto looked upon the world with a certain pride, but which we are levelling to the ground?

Are we or are we not—we French Canadians—a testimony to the virtues of that race which alone distinguishes us from the English and from the Americans by whom we are surrounded and with whom we refuse to be confounded?

Here someone will stop me to repeat what has been said before: "That is just it. The difficulty is that you have an excessive enthusiasm for France. France is the source and direction of all your thought. Our first duty is to think of ourselves." Very good. Let us accept this statement and try to understand what it means since the objection applies not only to myself but to a great many others.

In the first place I do not deny that we should exercise a "holy egoism" and, as a people, seek our own good before that of others. If need be I should carry this principle still further. I should say that it is our duty to seek our own good and to work for our own happiness as a French Canadian nation first and foremost, before pursuing the chimæra of happiness as a "Canadian" or "French English" nation, which is at bottom no nation at all. Is it a fact that the two families which share Canada between them, snarling all the time, have the same ideals, the same origins, the same manners?

Everybody is quite well aware that we are partners, nothing more, who do not undersand each other any too well and who are held together only by the legal contract that binds them. The bankruptcy of the firm, pending for the last three years, had no need of the official confirmation given to it by the celebration of fifty years of Confederation in order that it should be generally recognised.

But we shall return in due order to this question of selfish patriotism.

As for my admiration for France, of which we are the representatives on this continent, no courage is required now to proclaim

it. The days of detraction are past. It goes without saying that my admiration, which has often been shown, has survived the reading of the saddest pages of the history of this country of Louis XV, of the Convention, of the Commune and of the burglarious plunderers of the sacristy; it is certain that it has survived the unpardonable mistakes of French politics and the indifference and forgetfulness of Frenchmen, who despised us for so long, and that it will not fail even in presence of the harsh truth that France would not fight for us—and that is one of the harshest and weakest of Mr. Bourassa's arguments. But my attachment to France is the fruit of long cultivation. Its roots stretch back to ten times my age as a conscript of the tenth class. On this profoundly essential point I shall not change my views—at least not until a nation shall have arisen for the humiliation of the land of my ancestors that is her equal in age and has not been guilty of greater mistakes. There is no need that I should rehearse those further reasons, profound or merely sweet and exquisite, upon which my love is based and by which it is maintained in the face of everything. These reasons have been stated. Asselin, for one, has developed them at length.

Is this admiration for the motherland a sufficient reason for mistrust? Perhaps, if it is an emotion of such potency as to disturb our judgment. But if, leaving sentiment out of account, reason shows us clearly and distinctly that we are under obligation to perpetuate in this country the French tradition, shall we close our minds to it? Can we not think justly, even if we do love?

Now, who is he that needs in these days to be convinced by logic, that, even if we do not love her, France is essential to our life? Must we labour to show that, too young as yet to provide for ourselves the food necessary for our intellectual nourishment, the rejection of the influence of her culture would be to condemn us to submit, for our certain ruin, to the baleful influence, not of the culture, but of the customs of England and America, which flow in upon us from every side and impart to us the defects of Anglo-Saxons while our Latin temperament makes us unequal to the assimilation of their admirable qualities?

Is there any one for whom this indisputable truth requires demonstration?

Certainly not for our clergy, the artificers of our higher and secondary systems of education and who have no other crucible in which to renew or to retemper their tools.

Nor do we need to demonstrate the truth of this statement for Mr. Bourassa. He himself, to the sentimental reasons to which he appealed in 1914, added that of the interest, "the vital interest," we had in defending France as well as England. And who is there to challenge the testimony of this polemist, more insensible, as he is, than most men to the claims of sentiment? Who is there to maintain that it is only out of sentiment that we fight, the English for England, the French for France, when he who is a rampant "Canadian" wrote in 1914 and printed in 1916 as follows:

"Canada, a French-English nation, bound to England and to France by a thousand racial, social, intellectual, and economic ties, HAS A VITAL INTEREST in maintaining the prestige and the power and the world-influence of both France and England."

Now whether we admire France or not, does this interest, which was once ours, exist no more?

It does and for us it is doubly imperative. In this to-day all men are agreed: if France perish, civilisation will never leap the chasm that marks the place of her downfall. There are races, and the French race is one of them, upon whom God has set such a seal of character that without them humanity would be pitifully reduced. That is the general interest in the defence of which, in my opinion, our nation and other nations have the right, if not the duty to participate. What is more we have our peculiar interest, national and personal within the meaning even of this "divine egoism" in preserving the continued existence of France, with "its prestige, its power, and its world-influence." Our life depends on hers. France dead, we, as a nation, die also.

You charge me, perhaps, with exaggeration. But is this not a very old truth that has served for one hundred and fifty years as a basis for the direction of those who have been our safest guides? Would our integrity as a people have survived persecution without this framework? The episcopate and the French Canadian clergy have always drawn their inspiration from the Catholic idea and the French idea, seeing in one flag the symbol of both. It is in this way

that they have retained intact that control over the minds of men which was so valuable for us, but which is being disputed with them to-day by those who have forgotten our history and who have strayed from the traditions of our people.

Since men neglected to take the perspective necessary to obtain a just view of a history that extends over ten centuries and since detestable political policies required but a short ten years to oppress and impose a bastard ideal upon a nation which for the last three years has succeeded in bearing the heaviest burden of this super-human war, it seemed necessary to recall these essential truths and to point out, at the same time, what is and what must always be our mission. And we are forced to the conclusion that, if we were not fighting for ourselves, even if we were not fighting for France, since as a matter of fact we have entered the war, our self-interest bids us remain in it and accept the sacrifices which it demands.

In short our mission is to be what we have always been, to be what we are, French Canadians, not simply Canadians, not simply Frenchmen, but French Canadians.

And what for us are the objects of this war? What are our objects in peace? What are the objects imposed upon us by this conception of our mission?

What do we owe to England? Just what allies owe each other in time of war.

What do we owe to Confederation? To be its dupes.

What do we owe to France? Life.

What do we owe to this Province, the daughter of France? To preserve in our hearts and to translate into acts its motto: "I remember". To preserve intact the patrimony that we inherited and to hold fast its honour.

Now it is just the honour of the Province that is at stake, that is tottering as a result of the new situation created by the division of opinion concerning a law of which in our heart of hearts we can never approve. By what means may we still save ourselves?

VI

THE WAY OF SALVATION

If we are not to fail in our mission, we must rehabilitate ourselves. That is our plain duty. Along with our excuses and explanations, we must present before the bar of public opinion acts of no uncertain nature. How are we to do this? It is worth while for each of us to reflect and to find and to suggest a solution. Our public men have resources which I lack and upon which they might draw, to the advantage of all. Nevertheless I present my conclusions entirely lacking as they are in competent authority.

But, beforehand, to be quite sincere, I must say that of the two ways of which I shall speak, the first, necessarily involving the second, as it does, seemed at first to be the only one, the sole means by which we might achieve complete and striking rehabilitation. Friends of mine, to whose judgment I gladly subordinate my own, have almost succeeded in convincing me that the second is the only practicable one, and although less flamboyant, would by itself amply meet the situation. Let us hope that it will do so. The first method was developed as follows:

The accusation hanging over us is this: French Canadians, through their official spokesmen, have declared themselves to be against forced enrolment, against the war measures adopted by the leaders of the English majority of their country; having consented to the war, they will not fight; they desert the field of battle.

Our reply was this: The accusation is based only on appearances. That we are not deserters is proven by the fact that reasonable discussion of the question having been made impossible and useless by racial division we shall not wait until the bill shall become law, nor until it shall be enforced, but shall enrol at once and voluntarily. Here we are, equip us.

Such an attitude inspires in those who share my thought a fear that is clearly not without foundation. You must be practical, they say. One isolated case or a hundred would be quite sufficient to quiet the consciences of those who accept this watchword. The enrolment of a regiment would only emphasise the abstention of

the mass, and the mass will abstain for the very reasons that you give and because there is too much justifiable anger in its soul against those whose manœuvres have succeeded in making us bear all the odium of an opposition, of which they themselves secretly desired the triumph. This intestine strife has lasted too long; it has become too hot and bitter. Too many atrocities have been committed against us to expect that an embittered people should have a complete understanding of this great war, or a vision, sufficiently distinct in such a vast horizon, of the misfortunes with which the dishonouring cloud is pregnant. It was desired that voluntary enlistment should become impossible amongst us and that desire has been satisfied. Of voluntary enlistment we must think no more. These are cogent reasons. So, let us cease talking of this method—unless, indeed, men's minds should change, which is possible after all, for it is difficult to apprehend thoroughly the state of the minds of men.

The other method neither so effective nor so simple, is inspired by the end we are pursuing and answers as well to the aspirations of sane opinion which is calling for order. It is certainly practical and will be understood by everybody.

The Borden bill will become law to-morrow. When these pages appear, it will have passed its third reading in the Commons. The Senate will follow the example of the Lower House. Now our first duty is to accept this law of our land, so as to correct the unfortunate impression created by racial cleavage and by the clamour of certain bodies. We ought at least to accept the law without vain recrimination. We should submit to it without peevishness. We must answer this call to arms, sounded in the name of Canada by the governing majority, with eagerness and, in any case, with the serious and plain determination to go honourably to the combat and there to add to the glory that our volunteers have already carved out for themselves. And when it comes to claims for exemption or to the possible methods of the application of the law, our duty is to refrain from such conduct as will again make it appear that we want to dodge and slide out.

In a word our people, by their faultless attitude in these grave circumstances, must give manifest and indisputable proof that above all others it has preserved the primordial virtues of dignity and courage. We must give ourselves the satisfaction of seeing the "slackers" in the other camp if there are any such at all. And when we are lustily singing our national hymn and evoking the memory of that "proud race" whose sons we are, the subtlest ear must not be able to detect the slightest discord.

This attitude is a merely honest and manly one with nothing of the martial in it as yet, and it must be taken at once before the rally is sounded. Our most urgent duty is to put an end to this campaign which, conducted in a moderate and reasonable way, and led by those who are our elders in years and wisdom, would not perhaps, have been blameworthy, but which when undertaken and carried out as it has been, brings pain to the heart of the most zealous among conscientious anti-conscriptionists. When it has become plainly futile, such a campaign ceases to be a mere mistake and becomes a fault, perhaps irreparable. Do these men know what they want? Do they know where they are leading us with their constant appeals, made in the street and reproduced in the newspapers, to the basest instincts of our people? Does anyone believe that we deserved such treatment, that we should be forced to read in the report of a mass meeting the warning hurled "at the race that is determined to save its skin"? It would seem that we receive hard enough knocks from other quarters without doing ourselves harm in that way or inflicting such buffets upon ourselves.

But think of it. To continue this campaign no other reason could be alleged than one and it is a mere pretext. It is this: the elections are at hand, the bill is a government act of which our consciences do not approve and it is our right, our duty to fight it, to overthrow the government that has made such a mistake and has deceived us.

Well and good. But there is one fact that you are not taking into account. It is a fact the truth of which you affirm. About it no elector entertains a doubt. It is that the Borden Ministry is undone already, is absolutely defeated in our Province, where not

a single one of its candidates will be able even to conduct a campaign. Is there any one who thinks differently? Then you have been too eager to skin your knuckles in battering down doors that were already wide open.

How maladroit you are! Are you not taking the very best course to enable the Tory party, with its formidable contingent of Francophobes, already swept out of this Province, to rally against us the immense majority of English votes? No! Opposition to the bill was justifiable. Agitation against the law is not justifiable.

So our last plank of safety is acquiescence in the accomplished fact, just because that fact is a law and as such carries with it obligations which in honour and even in law no people nor even any man can avoid without reproach.

Let us take a step further. To undertake at this point the education of the masses whose minds are being turned in the opposite direction, to check this flood of evil passions and make a bold appeal to the good, will be difficult. But it is not impossible if it is undertaken by those who are the real masters of sane opinion amongst us. Among the leaders of the nation there are many in the pulpit, on the platform and with the press whose voices will be heard when they proclaim the shining truth or when they stir the fruitful emotions. Enlightened by those who, whether they are in politics or elsewhere, have long had influence over them and in whom they are accustomed to repose confidence, the minds of the French Canadians will soon observe where their duty lies and it is well known that once they see their duty in order and dignity and honour their hearts will not fail in the performance of it.

VII

SOME OBSTACLES TO OVERCOME

It is not difficult to foresee the reply I shall get in those quarters where people boast of preaching resistance even up to the point of sedition and also there where tenacious but honourable convictions cannot bring themselves to see the complete difference of aspect presented by the situation growing out of the discussion

of a proposed measure and the situation in which we are placed by the fact of the measure being carried by English members only.

People will say that this law, which you considered vexatious as a bill remains bad now that it is adopted. It is mathematically demonstrated that it is inopportune. If we resisted it yesterday, can we be wrong in resisting it to day, even with constitutional weapons? What does logic say?

We reply that logic has no occasion to be offended. True logic in this sort of conflict of ideas, of opinions and sentiments bows to the facts. And it is a fact which is the outcome of the passing of the law. It is also another fact that the vote put us all in one group against the law. Willingly blind or not our English fellow citizens to whom you offered your arguments say by their vote that these arguments, however strong they are, have not convinced them, and I am taking account of these facts, as well as of the fact that this will become a racial question and that the thing at issue is not the saving but the risking of our skin, of remaining true to our blood and our culture.

As far as this law is concerned you may continue to condemn it; you are not obliged to think it good, but if you agree to its enforcement, for the reason that this new situation is imposed on us, you do not depart at all from logic, you merely take another view of two facts, and you remain without shame in the logic of our history.

It will be said that the preservation of our national reputation is not a sufficient reason for going into war. What difference whether others judge us wrongly? Do people risk their lives for the sake of mere gossip? Let us live our life, with our conscience at peace, and let people talk.

I answer that we have no such right. In the first place, if we persist in our resistance, the other nations, although judging us wrongly, will not be far from right. It is not correct to say that our conscience is at peace, for we are forced to judge ourselves with severity. And even if our conscience were at peace we have no right to destroy our reputation; a dishonouring name is too heavy a burden to bear. The life you would like to live, stripped of honour,

is not worth living especially by a race of Frenchmen which has a stainless past and which can dream of a future. Delicacy is one mark, cynicism is another.

But, let us be, if you will, practical people. Independently of all idea of honour, the present agitation is perhaps destroying our material interests also. Our English-speaking adversaries will urge on more than ever even to the point of cruelty their jealous struggles. Is there not talk of reprisals and of taking away from our Province its position in Confederation, is there not talk of changing our constitution in order to restrain our autonomy? And do you think that London will protect us against our adversaries, when we have no longer anywhere in the world any sympathy on which we can rely? People are saying, "What nation would come to defend us, by force of arms?" None, unless, like Belgium, we should be, some day or other, the reason for an open attack by some or the pretext on the part of others. But diplomacy will not disappear. Before resuming war the nations will have conferences and alliances will continue to be useful. Then when an effort is made to change our destiny for the worse, will there be anybody in the diplomatic offices who will dare to speak for the little, over-pacific nation? Are we not doing injury to ourselves in every possible way?

It will be said, reviving the objections made against the bill, that our real duty is to prevent our contribution from exceeding that of the other nations at war, and force the government to stay within reasonable limits. But the Government is taking us too far and we have warned it against such exaggerated sacrifice.

For as early as September 1914, Mr. Bourassa, after having given our reasons for fighting alongside Englishmen and Frenchmen, made these reservations:

"So it is her national duty (i. e. Canada's) to contribute, as far as her strength permits and in the way most suitable for her, to the triumph and particularly to the persistence of the combined effort of France and England. But in order to make that contribution efficacious, Canada should first resolutely look her real situation in the face, realise exactly what she can or cannot do and make herself secure at home, before beginning or continuing an

effort which perhaps she will not be able to carry through to the bitter end."

We cannot say anything in opposition to this. This advice, wise in the main, was not followed, and these pessimistic predictions, already largely come true, may indeed be completely realised. The Government, aided by the approving silence of the Opposition, has wasted our strength, in men and money, has compromised the success due to our efforts and has brought us face to face with the tragical question of obligatory service.

But the war is not over. England herself is bankrupt, panting France is exhausted, the Russians. . . . And is this the time when we are going to step aside and to show that we are right regarding a question of effective ways and means and put ourselves in the wrong on the question of principle?

And is it quite certain that our effort is greater than those of our allies? According to Mr. Bourassa (1) our army of 420,000 men would correspond to a French army of 2,400,000 men. But was it not 6,000,000 men that France had to raise? The figures are against us. It is asserted that our army costs more than any other. But it is men and not money that is the point at issue. And what then?

Then, the right remains to you of attacking the Government and blaming the whole parliament which has, as we have seen, heaped up mistakes upon mistakes; you have the right of keeping your conviction that from the economic point of view conscription *was not* the wise step to take. But the question of the opportuneness of a measure which *becomes* a law does not give us the right of not observing it.

But, regarding the expenditure of money people are insistent and, all idea of meanness aside, from the reading of our balance sheet they come to the conclusion that we must live in order to pay our debts and if we cannot, either we shall have a tariff war with the United States or England will hand us over in order to pay her own debts, which means annexation.

And all this will happen perhaps. And amongst us there are a good many of our most bitter anti-conscriptionists who

(1) *New York Evening Post*, July 12, 1917.

wouldn't care much whether our flag were changed and whether we, a little sooner or later, were to become Americans. But it is not the obligatory recruiting of a hundred thousand or two hundred thousand men which will cause that change nor indeed will it be the chief instrument in that inevitable operation. The adoption of conscription in spite of us puts us in face of a certain and imminent danger. It will not hasten much the other one which is doubtful and distant. Let us be practical, let us first put out the fire which is destroying our property, and when the flood, which people have been expecting for more than a century, shall have driven away our English governors, we shall see whether our fate will not attain a fuller development because we have our full patrimony, plus our pride.

People, perhaps, will say, it is at least our duty to continue to protest "for the sake of principle."

But we will ask you to be precise and be kind enough to tell us what principle you mean. It cannot be the "principle of non-participation in the wars of the Empire". Common sense and the facts have rectified the error that we are fighting for England only and not also for ourselves. Nor can it be the principle from which comes anti-militarism. For in that case we shall never fight, not even in our own defence. Or we shall be in the case of those who, when war is declared, will wait for the enemy to land on their own soil and who will let slip the advantageous opportunity of going to vanquish him on other soil where allies stay his progress. Ah we know the fate of invaded territories! Moreover it is a little late to be speaking of anti-militarism after three years of a war not yet finished. Of course, we are peaceful people, but let us beware. Those, who are pacifists to the peril of their country, run a certain risk in all countries. Another placard may be put on their backs.

No, we shall act in virtue of no principle in resisting this law. We had good, strong, political, and particularly economic reasons to show in opposition to the bill, but they did not prevail. They appear to have convinced only our own minds. From this failure of discussion arises the only recognised, vital, real, undeniable principle which is now worth saving. The law of conscription, even

with all its implications, loses some of its intrinsic importance, and falls into the background. An infinitely superior interest takes its place and national honour forbids us, who with the rest have agreed to all the obligations of war, to refuse to pay, as well as the rest, the tribute of blood. It is more than a point of honour—there are unreal ones, and others that are born from mere vanity and subsist only under cover of foolish custom; it is more than a sentiment, although it be a sentiment which no soul may flout without debasing itself; it is an idea, the grand idea, by which man is distinguished from the beast and civilised nations are distinguished from savage tribes. Nay, that mark of divine destiny is seen even in the savage.

VIII

WHERE SHALL WE GO?

There you have, all obstacles being cleared away, the paths to be taken in order to secure good order. We know where they lead and that we may always walk in them with head erect. Shall we enter them and at once? We shall know tomorrow.

But if, turning our backs upon the goal which our mission indicates, we persist, in the midst of the tumult, in advancing in the path into which we have been led, do we know at all whither we are going?

Do not our orators openly preach armed resistance and will not this popular agitation bring us to civil war? Do we not know right well that the horrors of such a war are worse than all others? And in order to escape a German bullet on the soil of devastated France for the defence of a holy cause which is our own, shall we give the English of Canada the satisfaction of destroying our houses and of killing us in the streets or of hanging us? Do we really wish that instead of being in Flanders our lines of defence should be dug in our own Province?

Or again and still more pitifully, when our classes have been called out, will it be necessary that English hands should be laid on our conscripts to lead them to Valcartier? Shall we see our people

hide themselves in holes or take refuge in the tangled thickets of exemption procedure? Shall we willingly accept forever the insult of being in the eyes of our adversaries an inferior race which goes to battle only when urged at the point of the sword? Well, it may be that they are the chief artisans of our woes and that they have not waited till the present to hurl the insults at us without cause. But, are we going to give them reason to insult us?

Still what else but these shameful things can come from the doctrines preached at our street corners at the present time?

Ah well, however feeble my voice may be, however difficult it be for it to ring out before a public which hears it for the first time, along with all those—and they are numerous even outside the circle of my friends—who keep “their heads on their shoulders” and their hearts in the right place, in the name of our well understood interests I protest and proclaim that we will not accept that humiliation.

We repeat again, we must by acts, by a manifest change of attitude, sail out of the whirlpool of absurdities into which we have been driven, get footing on the solid ground which is near and not allow ourselves to be swept away bewildered, undecided, like chips adrift. And again, as soon as the madness is over, if other means of salvation are known than resolute swimming, even against the current, towards the shore, we ask that they be pointed out. Those who have ideas, at such a time, and keep them to themselves, rob their country. When the conflagration demands it, all men take their place in the bucket line, even though their trade is not that of firemen.

And that is why I have come out of my reserve, in order to tear off the bandage which blinds our eyes and I make bold to propose that my compatriots come to themselves again and redeem themselves. Let other ways be chosen; if better can be found that is the wise thing to do. But let us do something.

Before anyone comes to fetch us, waiting for the law, which has been passed in principle, to come out of the labyrinth of parliamentary procedure, round which undignified struggles are carried on, it should be tempting for us, the possible conscripts, to go and volunteer and to force open the recruiting offices. But if this act should be premature or compromised in advance, if on account of

the complexity of the facts it should be rendered an object of suspicion, and should miss its point and lose its real meaning; if it must be given up or in any event postponed, let us at least stand erect even if we cannot march at once; may our names in French, sonorous, glad and proud be the first to be heard at the call to arms.

You say, "Shall we march to suicide?"

No. You give fantastic proportions to the sacrifice demanded of you, it is you who exaggerate. No. If you say, "march to peril." I grant it; if you say, "rush to danger," if some fall to rise ennobled in immortality, let it be so; but number us carefully and you will find no justification of your alarms.

No. it is not towards national suicide that we are marching, it is not to death that our race is going. No! we must look, not with misty but with clear eye into our past and above all, forward, far into the future. The life of nations is reckoned by generations; do we not live to-day upon the sacrifices made cheerfully by previous generations? If in order to avert eternal opprobrium, our generation gives freely of the liberating blood, the blood of our descendants will be only the purer for it.

Regenerated, with soul intact, the French Canadian race, ever herself, valiant and magnified will have resumed its course towards life.