

Sir Robert Borden*

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Robert Laird Borden, when he was born at Grand Pré in Nova Scotia on June 26th, 1854, was of mingled English and Scottish stock. On his father's side he could trace his ancestry back to Henry Borden, who was living at Headon in the county of Kent in England towards the end of the 14th century. In 1638 one of his direct descendents, Richard Borden, emigrated to New England and settled at Portsmouth in Rhode Island. The great-grandson of Richard, Samuel Borden, born in 1705, visited Nova Scotia and, acquiring some land there, bequeathed it to his son, Perry Borden, who transplanted a branch of the family to Canada. His son, Andrew Borden, marrying Eunice Laird, became the father of Sir Robert.

The grandfather of Eunice Laird was a Scot, who had reached Nova Scotia via Ulster and New England, and he prospered sufficiently as a farmer to give his son, John Laird, a good education. The latter was for many years the schoolmaster at Grand Pré and he seems to have been a good classical scholar and mathematician, and a man of broad culture, who accumulated a considerable library. But he died before Sir Robert was born. At the time of his birth his father, Andrew Borden, had a substantial farm, but he neglected it to dabble unsuccessfully in business

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affairs, and after middle life he had to be content with the post of stationmaster at Grand Pré on the Windsor-Annapolis Railway.

It was, however, on the farm at Grand Pré that Robert Borden spent his childhood and early youth. In some respects the district was just emerging from the pioneering stage of society, but Borden always maintained that the general level of education was higher than it was half a century later. It was probably due to the influence of his scholarly grandsire, John Laird, that his maternal uncles and other relatives had a reasonable acquaintance with the classics and with English literature of the 17th and 18th centuries. In his old age Borden would recall the keen delight with which as a very young lad he had listened to one of his uncles reading from Pope's Iliad stories of the combats of the Homeric heroes, and he remembered, what would be almost unthinkable today, Nova Scotian farmers capping quotations from Horace and Virgil. So it was in an atmosphere far removed from barbarous rusticity that Robert Borden was reared. He got his first education from a local schoolmistress, but, before he was nine, he was sent as a day boy to a private academy called the Acadia Villa Seminary in the adjacent village of Horton. Its headmaster, Arthur Patterson by name, was no great scholar, but he was a firm disciplinarian and his school provided a good grounding in the common branches of elementary education. Its staff included one excellent scholar, James H. Hamilton, who helped to kindle intellectual interests in Borden, and to whom he always acknowledged a great debt. But suddenly in 1869 Hamilton, after a bitter quarrel with Patterson about the pronunciation of a Greek word, left the school in a temper never to return, and Patterson installed his most promising pupil, then just short of his fifteenth birthday, in his place. It was something of an ordeal for a boy of fourteen to handle classes, in which some of the students were older than himself, but he gave complete satisfaction to his headmaster.

At that time the financial affairs of his father were so embarrassed that his salary as a schoolmaster was a very welcome reinforcement to the family exchequer, but its allocation for this purpose made it impossible for young Borden to save money for a university education. So he set himself to secure by self-study in his spare time an equivalent for it and arranged a regular timetable with hours assigned to different subjects. It left him no leisure for games and sports, but such was the success of this disciplined plan that nobody, who knew Borden in later life, could deny that he had all the hallmarks of a well educated man.

In the summers he took his fair share of work on the paternal farm, but without enthusiasm, for in his memoirs he records that he had "no pleasurable recollections" of such tasks as gathering stones off a ploughed field or hoeing potatoes. Meanwhile, Mr. Patterson had migrated from Horton to take charge of the Glenwood Institute, a school at Matawan in New Jersey, and his appreciation of young Borden's merits as a teacher brought an invitation, which was accepted, to join his staff. Borden was still only 19 and, when he arrived at Matawan, he was "astounded and horrified" to find himself described in the school's calendar as "Professor of Classics and Mathematics". Apparently he enjoyed his work as a teacher and found congenial friends in Matawan. But he had by this time decided that the law was a better profession for him than teaching and so in the summer of 1874 he resigned his post and returned to his native land to become at the age of 20 an articled law clerk in the office of Messrs. Weatherbe & Graham, one of the leading law firms in Halifax.

Under the terms of his articles, he was entitled during the four years of his apprenticeship to "be instructed in the knowledge and practice of the law", but he recorded in his memoirs that the two partners in the firm were much too busy with their professional duties to give any attention to the promised instruction. At that time there was no law school in Nova Scotia and so, like other students, he had to acquire his legal education by practical experience and by reading law books in his spare time. He had to work laboriously in the office from 9 to 6 and the only remuneration he received was a trifling weekly sum for keeping the account books. During the last part of his apprenticeship he was constantly in financial straits and he was glad to earn a hundred dollars in 1877 through some work for a Fishery Commission, but he completed his training for the bar without owing a dollar to anybody.

He was a self-taught lawyer, but during his four years apprenticeship he had got such a good grounding in the principles of law, and acquired such a thorough knowledge of its practice, that in his final examination in 1877 he was first in a class of some 30 law students, some of whom subsequently rose to positions of distinction, either in the legal profession or in public life; among these were Sir Charles Tupper and Mr. Arthur Dickey, who became members of the federal cabinet, Mr. Justice James J. Ritchie of the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia and the Hon W. B. Ross, who was for some years leader of the Conservative party in the Senate at Ottawa.

Borden had to wait until he reached the age of 24 before he could be admitted to the bar of Nova Scotia and so he spent the winter of 1878 attending the Military School at Halifax, which brought him the sum of fifty dollars, and he was among the first to receive a certificate that he had completed the prescribed course satisfactorily. He continued to work in the office of Weatherbe & Graham until he was called to the bar in 1878, and then he started in practice in Halifax with Mr. John T. Ross as partner. In the first case in which he appeared, in the County Court, he was opposed by another future Prime Minister of Canada, Sir John Thompson, who was then Attorney-General of Nova Scotia. Apparently this first law partnership did not turn out happily for in 1880 he moved to Kentville, the county town of his native county, King's, and there until the summer of 1882 he was the junior partner of Mr. John P. Chipman, who afterwards became a county court judge. Through this partnership he got wide experience as counsel in the County Court and he also appeared frequently before the Supreme Court, which visited Kentville twice a year on circuit.

Meanwhile, changes had occurred in the firm, in which he had been a law student. In 1878 Mr. Weatherbe, its senior partner, had been appointed a judge by the Mackenzie Government and Mr. Graham had entered into a partnership with Mr. John Thompson. They were joined soon afterwards by Charles Hibbert Tupper, who had lost his partner, Mr. Samuel Rigby, from a similar cause, elevation to the bench. The firm of Thompson, Graham & Tupper promised to be a strong combination, but after seven months it lost Thompson, when he took a judgeship in the summer of 1882. A competent successor for him as counsel had to be found immediately and Mr. Graham, who had formed a high opinion of young Robert Borden's legal abilities and had kept in touch with him, invited him to enter the firm, which for the next six years was styled Graham, Tupper & Borden. In his memoirs Borden describes Graham as "a man of great ability but peculiar qualities, combining a keen sense of humour with a manner which could on occasion be extremely abrupt and often provocative". To his young partner he showed what the latter called "remarkable generosity", because after Borden had been six months in the firm and proved his value to it, Graham gave him the same share of its earnings as he took for himself. The firm's practice was good and, as a result, Borden found himself at the age of 28 in receipt of what was counted, in those days in Nova Scotia, a large professional income.

But he earned it thoroughly, since Mr. Graham was often absent from the office and Charles Hibbert Tupper became deeply involved in politics. So the main burden of the firm's legal work fell upon Borden's shoulders and, after the election of 1883, it was aggravated by at least eight election petitions, which he had to handle. About that time a brilliant young lawyer in Halifax, James N. Lyons, who died young, came to see Borden in his office and found him groaning under a load of work. Looking at Borden quizzically, he said, "Cheer up, Borden, you'll have a nice long rest after you are dead".

His prestige as a counsel grew steadily and his work still further increased when in 1886 Mr. Tupper left the firm to become the Minister of Fisheries in the government of Sir John A. Macdonald, which Sir John Thompson had also joined as Minister of Justice. It happened that Sir John needed a Deputy Minister and so he bethought himself of Borden and offered him the post. Borden was tempted to accept, but he knew that Mr. Graham had come to lean upon him heavily for the efficient conduct of their joint practice and, when he found that his partner was going to be greatly upset if he went to Ottawa, he declined the post. It was given to another Nova Scotian, Robert Sedgewick, who later became a judge of the Supreme Court of Canada. At that time Borden had no thought of a political career, his great ambition being to reach high rank in the judiciary. The post offered him at Ottawa would almost certainly have led him to the Supreme Court, as it did Sedgewick, and in his memoirs he wrote: "Often I have pondered upon the remarkable contrast between the career I then desired and that which with some reluctance I afterwards pursued".

After he had been seven years at the bar, Borden was greatly encouraged when he heard that Mr. Justice Samuel Rigby, of the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia, who was considered its ablest member, had expressed to a friend the opinion that Borden possessed to an unusual degree the faculty of using all the knowledge he possessed and that, although there might be more learned men at the local bar, he would prefer to entrust to him any case in which he was personally interested.

By his middle thirties Borden was recognized as one of the leaders of the bar of Nova Scotia and his services were in constant demand for important cases. But his great success in his profession did not arouse any jealousy among his legal brethren and during his more than twenty years of practice in Halifax his relations with them were uniformly happy. He was always genial and

friendly, he never presumed upon his headship of an important firm, and he was invariably courteous and helpful to younger members of the profession. Fortunately in those days the bar at Halifax was a happy family and its atmosphere wholesome; by Borden's account important arrangements in regard to professional matters were frequently made by word of mouth without a scrap of writing.

One of Borden's most important clients was the Bank of Nova Scotia, he also acted for leading business and shipping firms in Halifax, and he had numerous retainers from the Crown. So from 1880 onwards he was constantly pleading in the courts of Nova Scotia and, after 1885, he began to appear in appeals to the Supreme Court of Canada. It will have to suffice to cite a few of the outstanding cases in which he appeared before the Supreme Court. In 1888, in the case of *The Queen v. Chesley*,¹ he, with the Crown as his client, persuaded the Supreme Court to pronounce valid a bond of guarantee on behalf of a defaulting civil servant, in the execution of which there had been a slight flaw. In 1892, in *Nova Scotia Central Railway Co. v. The Halifax Banking Co. and Wade and Eisenhauer*² he appeared for the last named individuals and helped to get the Supreme Court of Canada to uphold a decision of the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia, which had invalidated an injunction of a trial judge to restrain the bank and his clients from selling bonds of the railway held as security. In 1893 he appeared for the County of Cape Breton in a case against the Intercolonial Coal Co.³ and had to admit defeat when the Supreme Court of Canada upheld the company's claim for exemption from taxation. In 1894 the case of *The Nova Scotia Marine Insurance Co. v. Robert Stevenson*⁴ hinged upon whether there had been misrepresentation in describing as built in 1890 a ship for whose construction many of the basic materials had come from an earlier ship launched in 1868, and Borden did not succeed in persuading the Supreme Court to pronounce that there had been no misrepresentation. Today none of Borden's legal contemporaries are alive to give testimony about his methods in court, but the tradition of the bar of Nova Scotia is that, while he was never a master of forensic eloquence, he was a very skilful advocate, who had a great capacity for marshalling his facts and references in orderly fashion and driving home his arguments with compelling logic.

His chief recreation he found in visits to his family at Grand

¹ 16 S.C.R. 306.

² 21 S.C.R. 536.

³ *International Coal Co. v. The County of Cape Breton*, 22 S.C.R. 305.

⁴ 23 S.C.R. 137.

Pré. He seems to have led a rather solitary life, but a beneficial change came for him in 1889 when at the age of 35 he married Miss Laura Bond, who was to be his devoted helpmate for nearly fifty years. Borden continued to lead a laborious life and he had reached the age of 37, in 1891, before he felt that his financial circumstances justified a real holiday. In the summer of that year he paid his first visit to Europe and he and his wife enjoyed their experience so much that they spent at least ten weeks abroad in each of the years 1893 and 1895. These holidays in Europe broadened Borden's outlook and were a useful preparation for the rôle of statesman towards which fate unexpectedly began soon afterwards to point its finger.

Until he was nearly forty, he was preoccupied with his large legal practice and he contemplated a judgeship as his eventual goal. He had inherited the Liberal political faith of his family and worked for the Liberal party with a mild enthusiasm; the late Hume Blake of Toronto once told the writer that among the papers of his grandfather, Edward Blake, he found an address from the Young Liberals of Nova Scotia, which had been read by Robert Laird Borden. But party ties sat lightly upon him and the friendship he had formed with Sir Charles Hibbert Tupper, when they were associated as partners, had modified his early zeal for Liberalism. It happened that, when the general election of 1896 occurred, the Conservatives of Halifax, which was a double-barrelled seat, had in sight no suitable Protestant running-mate for Mr. Edward Kenny, a Roman Catholic. They were aware of Borden's Liberal antecedents, but they offered him the vacant nomination and he accepted it. There is no evidence that his preference for the Conservatives' position on the Manitoba school question, the main issue of the election, was responsible for his first definite adhesion to them, and the chief factor in his decision to enter politics was a sense of public duty. His debut as an active politician was highly successful, because in an election in which the Conservatives were badly defeated he was returned as the senior member for Halifax with a Liberal colleague, Mr. Benjamin (later Mr. Justice) Russell.

After he took his seat at Ottawa on the back benches of the opposition, he demonstrated his ability as a parliamentarian so rapidly that within two years he was promoted to the front bench. When Parliament was in session his political duties absorbed all his time and energies, but during the recesses he resumed his law practice and was constantly employed in important cases, making frequent appearances before the Supreme Court.

Every session increased his prestige as a parliamentarian and at the end of his first term at Ottawa he had become the rising star of the Conservative party. So when Sir Charles Tupper, after a second defeat in the election of 1900, decided that he ought to make way for a younger man, there was no serious opposition to the choice of Borden as his successor in the leadership of the Conservative party. In the party hierarchy he was junior to Sir Charles Hibbert Tupper, but the Liberals had used the slogan "Too Much Tupper" with deadly effect in the election and nobody else could match Borden in intellectual gifts and parliamentary skill.

When Borden took over the leadership of the Conservative party in 1901 its fortunes were not prospering. The alluring personality, political skill and fine oratory of Sir Wilfrid Laurier had captivated the imagination of the country and the success of his Ministry's vigorous policy of immigration and colonization of the West had lifted Canada out of a slough of economic depression and produced the first well diffused prosperity she had ever enjoyed. It was no easy task to wage political warfare in and outside Parliament against a successful ministry headed by a commanding personality, but Borden shouldered it with shrewd skill and tireless industry. He was never factious in his opposition to ministerial measures and chose his ground carefully for attacks upon them; he was also very skillful in picking out weak joints in the Liberal armour and driving the Laurier ministry into difficult corners.

But in face of the mounting tide of prosperity, which kept the country satisfied with the Liberal policies, he was unable to achieve much headway at the general election of 1904; indeed he lost his own seat at Halifax and his province returned a solid bloc of Liberals. However, he found immediately a safe seat in Carleton County in Ontario and, undismayed by his reverse, resumed his warfare with the Laurier ministry. When the election of 1908 was looming up he gave free play to his natural reforming instincts in a programme known as the Halifax Manifesto. It supported a protective tariff, but it called for the reform of the Senate, the nationalisation of telephones and telegraphs, a closer supervision of immigration, the establishment of a public utilities commission which would control the operations of corporations with national franchises, and the transfer to the western provinces of their national resources. Naturally, such a programme did not make much appeal to the sterner sect of Tories and in the election of 1908 Borden experienced another bad defeat, although he had

the personal satisfaction of getting himself and another Conservative elected for Halifax.

The election of 1908 had revealed a certain erosion of the popularity of the Liberal party, but, so long as Canada's prosperity was being maintained by the development of the West, there seemed little prospect of ousting it from office. Moreover, the radical features of Borden's Halifax programme had alienated influential figures in the Conservative party and he was soon faced with mutinous cabals, which aimed at his ejection from the leadership. The favourite candidate of the malcontents as his successor was Sir Richard McBride, a flamboyant politician, who was Conservative Premier of British Columbia, and Borden showed great shrewdness in coping with this threat to his position. He encouraged an invitation to Sir Richard to address a banquet organized by the Conservative party at Ottawa and the oration Sir Richard delivered to this gathering convinced even his warmest backers that his qualifications for the national leadership of the Conservative party had been grossly exaggerated.

So all talk of replacing Borden died quickly down and he continued to lead the opposition with skill and good temper. He opposed the policy of the Laurier ministry about a new trans-continental railway and argued that, since 250 million dollars, or nine-tenths of the total cost of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway, had been provided by the government, the only proper course was its complete expropriation, which he lived to see accomplished under his auspices.

It was in the session of 1909 that the aggressive policies of Imperial Germany and her construction of a large navy brought to Canada her first involvement in the manoeuvres and conflicts of the international arena. When the British Liberal ministry of Mr. Asquith suggested that it was entitled to some help from the Dominions for the maintenance of Britain's naval supremacy, the response of Sir Wilfrid Laurier, when he returned from the Imperial Conference of 1909, was a plan for a Canadian Navy on a small scale. Both Laurier and Borden found themselves faced with dissensions in their party on this issue. In Quebec Henri Bourassa organized a Nationalist party to fight the proposed naval programme, and his charges that it was dictated by British Imperialists and would drag Canada into the maelstrom of Europe's feuds, won the sympathy of a substantial number of French-Canadian Liberals. When, following on a rousing speech by Sir George Foster on behalf of the Conservative opposition, Laurier moved a resolution giving assurances to Britain that Canada

in an emergency would make any sacrifice required to preserve the naval supremacy of Britain, Borden supported it and thereby displeased both the French-Canadian isolationists and some extreme Imperialists among his own following, who thought more immediate and direct help was called for.

In the session of 1910 the Laurier ministry submitted a naval defence bill providing for the construction of 11 ships at a cost of 11 million dollars and, since the European situation had worsened by this time, Borden opposed the plan as inadequate. However, the bill passed the House of Commons by a majority of 41 and a start was made with a Canadian Navy by the purchase of two cruisers, the *Rainbow* and the *Niobe*, from Britain.

Then suddenly in the following year there emerged a new issue, which opened the door to power for Borden. When Laurier in the summer of 1910 undertook a tour of the western provinces he was severely heckled at almost every stage of it for his failure to keep the pledge of the Liberal platform to establish something like free trade for Canada. Foreseeing that the discontent of the western farmers with his government's fiscal policies would spell disaster for his party at the next general election, he eagerly accepted proposals from the administration of President Taft for an improvement of trade relations between Canada and the United States. Early in 1911 there was negotiated at Washington a trade treaty known as the Taft-Fielding reciprocity pact, whose basic feature was complete free trade in natural products between the two countries. It was a goal for which many years before an earlier Conservative administration had striven, and when its terms were announced, they seemed so favourable to Canada that a substantial number of Borden's supporters were disposed to offer it no opposition. But it was exceedingly unpalatable to the manufacturing interests of Canada, which feared that it would be a prelude to complete free trade, and also to the Canadian Pacific Railway, which foresaw a great loss of traffic, if there was a diversion of trade to a north-south axis. Banking interests were equally hostile and prominent Liberals signified their opposition. So the decision was reached that the Conservative party should resist the treaty and a long controversial debate developed in Parliament, until the Laurier Ministry terminated it by securing a dissolution of Parliament to test the verdict of the voters.

When the campaign opened, Borden seemed committed to a losing battle, but fortune favoured him. Sir Clifford Sifton, an able Liberal, who had not been reconciled to Laurier since his resignation, took to the platform as a very effective ally of Borden,

and his speeches caused the defection of many Liberals. An equally valuable ally was Henri Bourassa, and his Nationalist party, who ran candidates in Quebec and, treating the reciprocity issue lightly, fanned French-Canadian discontent with Laurier's naval policy. Then indiscreet utterances by President Taft and other American politicians, which suggested that the treaty would eventually lead to the absorption, or at least the domination, of Canada by the United States, aroused the apprehension of many Canadians, who saw distinct merits in the economic aspects of the treaty, and brought grist to Borden's mill. He himself gave a skillful lead to his party in the campaign: he laid chief stress upon the absence of any time limit for the treaty, which meant a danger that its sudden repeal by a different type of administration at Washington would have ruinous consequences for Canada, and, while he did not endorse the extravagant pronouncements of some of his lieutenants, emphasized in moderate language the dangers of the treaty to Canada's connection with Britain. He was able to convince a majority of the voters that the Laurier Government, composed as it was mostly of tired elderly men, did not deserve a fresh mandate, and the Conservatives were placed in power for the first time since 1896 with a comfortable majority.

In the formation of his cabinet Borden was willing to recognize the valuable contribution made by his Nationalist allies to his victory by giving them representation, but, as the Conservative leader would make no concession to them in point of policy, they preferred to retain their independence. Borden selected as the representatives of French Canada three regular Conservatives, Mr. F. D. Monk, Mr. L. P. Pelletier and Mr. W. B. Nantel. When the session of 1912 opened the menace offered by German aggression had become more serious and the Borden Ministry, having decided that the most effective way of strengthening the British Navy would be to provide funds for the immediate construction of three battleships, introduced a bill to secure authority for the contribution. It had fortified itself for the adoption of this policy by a memorandum, prepared at its request by Mr. Winston Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty, which urged that a contribution of three first-class battleships of the "Dreadnought" type was the most practical and valuable method of helping Britain in the emergency. Obviously this plan meant postponing the creation of any substantial Canadian Navy and inevitably it met with violent opposition from the Liberal party. Under the experienced leadership of Laurier the Liberals were a formidable opposition, well equipped with debating power, and one of the bitterest parlia-

mentary battles in Canadian history was joined. Every aspect of the question was thoroughly threshed out and at intervals a number of extraneous issues were introduced into the controversy.

Borden used the resources of his party to maintain the debate with great skill and showed admirable forbearance when faced by Liberal taunts that his power was derived from disloyal Nationalist allies, who were nearly all against him on this issue. But when the Liberals, having exhausted all the legitimate arguments, resorted to obstructive tactics designed to spin out the debate and postpone a division, Borden used his majority to secure the application of closure, which had never before been employed in the federal Parliament of Canada, and this weapon enabled him to drive his naval bill through the House of Commons. But he had still to face the hurdle of the Senate, in which the Liberals during their long tenure of power from 1896 to 1911 had accumulated a commanding majority. The Liberal senators, determined to make the will of their leader, Laurier, prevail, rejected the naval bill by a large majority and Borden saw no profit in reintroducing it until the operations of mortality gave him a majority in the Senate. So, to his great regret, he had to resign himself to seeing any effective contribution by Canada to the support of Britain withheld and letting his government occupy itself with some minor domestic reforms until the war with Germany began in August 1914.

After the outbreak of war, Borden, now Sir Robert (he had been knighted earlier in the year), had to shoulder a heavier burden of responsibilities than any of his predecessors. In his cabinet he had some able colleagues like Sir George Foster, the Minister of Trade and Commerce, and Sir Thomas White, the Minister of Finance; and, after he promoted Mr. Arthur Meighen to be Solicitor-General, he found him an invaluable lieutenant. But the quality of his ministers was not uniform and he had to cope continuously with the vagaries and eccentricities of Sir Sam Hughes, who held the key post of the Ministry of Militia, and, as the war proceeded, they became so extravagant that Sir Robert had to demand his resignation. There was also brought to the Ministry of External Affairs, of which Sir Robert had charge, a variety of complicated problems, which were outside his previous experience, and it was fortunate that he had been able to enlist from the State Department at Washington an able Nova Scotian, the late Mr. Loring Christie, who served as his right hand man in matters of foreign policy throughout the war.

The Borden Ministry, starting from scratch, was able to organize for Canada a very impressive and effective contribution to the common war effort of the allied democracies. It despatched to and maintained in Europe an expeditionary force, which ultimately consisted of four divisions, it arranged for Canadian industries to produce large quantities of shells and other munitions, and it stimulated the farmers to increase enormously their production of foodstuffs. In the first two years of the struggle the voluntary system of enlistment produced sufficient recruits for the needs of the Canadian army, but towards the close of 1916 it became plain that the inflow was drying up and that only by the enforcement of conscription could the Canadian Expeditionary Force be maintained at efficient fighting strength.

Sir Robert knew that in French-Canada there was a deep seated prejudice against conscription and that he could not rely upon his French-Canadian followers to support it. Before he made any move in Parliament to impose it, he sought earnestly the co-operation of Sir Wilfrid Laurier in the formation of a coalition ministry, which would have unchallengeable authority for the necessary measures. There is reason to believe that Sir Wilfrid was not hostile to the idea of compulsory service in such a crisis, but he knew that, if he were to endorse it, Henri Bourassa would be able to persuade the majority of his compatriots that he had betrayed them. The old veteran could not bear the idea of losing the affections of his own people and seeing Bourassa replace him as their political idol. When he refused Borden's offer and intimated that he must oppose conscription, Borden had no alternative but to bring into a coalition ministry a group of influential Liberal leaders headed by Mr. N. W. Rowell and Mr. Hugh Guthrie, who favoured conscription, and the new ministry proceeded to pass a bill for compulsory military service and secure a popular mandate for its policy by an overwhelming majority in the election of 1917.

The charge has been made that Borden "split" Canada by his policy of conscription, but it cannot be sustained. The fundamental racial fissure had existed since 1763 and, while it was quiescent for long periods, it was prone to emerge under very slight provocation. Borden laboured strenuously to prevent its emergence during the critical struggle with Germany, and the rejection of his overtures by Sir Wilfrid was a bitter disappointment. Few men have been so free from racial or religious bigotry: he had a great liking for the French, he spoke their language fluently and he was well read in French literature. He hated to incur the odium

of the French-Canadians, and the following passage in his memoirs shows that he had a sympathetic understanding of their attitude towards conscription:

The comparative failure of recruiting in Quebec [he wrote] was due, like most human events, to a variety of causes and it would be difficult, in fact, impossible, to assign to each cause its proportionate influence.

The Canadian of French descent is essentially a most desirable and useful citizen. He is devout, industrious, hardworking and frugal, thoroughly devoted to his people and his province and deeply attached to his family, his friends and his neighbours. To leave them for military service beyond the seas, to cross the ocean in unknown adventure, made no appeal and seemed undesirable, and indeed desperate. Naturally, his vision was not very wide and sometimes it did not extend far beyond the boundaries of his parish. He had an unbounded belief in the invincible power of Great Britain and regarded the co-operation of Canada as useless and futile as well as burdensome. It was no lack of courage that held these people back from enlistment. Those who went overseas proved themselves worthy of their descent from a fighting and heroic race.

One might suppose that the savagery of German warfare against the French people would have aroused their kindred in Quebec, but the clergy had been alienated from their natural sympathy by confiscation of religious houses and property and by the growth of atheistic outlook and tendency in France.

In 1916 David Lloyd George invited Borden to join the Imperial War Cabinet and thereafter until the close of the war Sir Robert spent considerable periods in London contributing his wisdom to its deliberations. Lloyd George in his *War Memoirs* testifies that it was no mean contribution and that Borden's judgment was held in high respect by his colleagues in that Cabinet, the first and last of its kind.

Sir Robert was fond of recalling an episode that occurred in the spring of 1918, just before the Germans made their final bid for victory by attacking the Fifth British Army. Borden had received from Sir Arthur Currie, the Commander of the Canadian Corps, very disquieting information about the military situation in France and the weaknesses of certain British generals and their staffs, which in his opinion exposed the Canadian Corps to unnecessary danger. Armed with data furnished by Currie, he presented very forcibly his case against the delinquent British generals to the Imperial War Cabinet. Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson, who was then Chief of the British General Staff, was present at the meeting at which Borden made his indictment and, when he was finished with it, Wilson, greatly annoyed, replied that it was grossly unfair and did not deserve serious attention. But Lord Milner had been impressed by the evidence Borden submitted and, when he said that cognizance must be taken of it, Lloyd George backed

him up. Thereupon Wilson in an obvious bad temper said that he would submit within twenty-four hours a memorandum showing how nonsensical the charges were and flung himself out of the room muttering something about "amateur strategists from the Dominions". "But", said Borden, "at the end of twenty-four hours the promised memorandum had not appeared and it never was produced".

Borden had started life as a Liberal and openly professed this political faith until he reached middle age. He never, however, held any doubts about the value of the British connection to Canada and, after he became leader of the Conservative party, he adopted what was called in those days the Imperialist viewpoint. He combated vigorously the tenets of the nationalist school of thought, which under the leadership of men like Bourassa and J. S. Ewart, K.C., was gaining many converts, and he advocated consistently the closest possible co-operation of the partners of the British Commonwealth for the purposes of mutual defence and trade. There was no spirit of colonial subservience to Britain in his outlook, but he was quick to resent unfair criticisms of Britain and her governments. He had a cousin, Sir Frederick Borden, who was Minister of Militia in the Laurier Government, and they were very good friends. It happened that Sir Frederick, after he returned from the Imperial Conference of 1909, which he had attended with Laurier, indulged in some highly critical observations about the attitude of the British Government. Borden felt that they were unfair and would put ammunition in the hands of the extreme nationalists. Meeting his cousin one day, as he told the writer, he ventured to chide him gently for his observations and to suggest that they might do a lot of harm. Thereupon Sir Frederick said, "I don't mind your criticisms, but I want to tell you this. The day will come—I hope it won't be soon—when you will be in power. As Prime Minister of Canada, you will go to London to represent her at one of these Imperial Conferences. You will be given a great welcome and showered with hospitalities. But you will soon find that these pleasant gentlemen in Whitehall will expect you to regard them as the only fount of wisdom about matters of common concern, and to have no will of your own. You will be angry, far angrier than I have ever been, and after a few of these visits to London you will become more of a Canadian nationalist than I ever was." And Sir Robert added, "He was right, that was exactly my experience".

His experiences in the Imperial War Cabinet sealed his growing conviction that the time had come for Canada—and the

other Dominions—to acquire full autonomy and assume the management of their foreign as well as their domestic policy. So in 1917 he took the lead in insisting upon a new deal in the organization of the British Commonwealth.

The best account of the important part Sir Robert Borden played in the achievement of Dominion status for Canada is found in a book called *In Smuts's Camp* by Mr. Basil K. Long. English born and a graduate of Oxford, Long spent most of his adult life in South Africa, where he was editor of the "Cape Times" and a member of the South African Parliament. But in 1917 he was in London holding the post of Dominions Editor of the "Times", and he recounts how he was able to be present at the birth of Dominion status, "a good deal nearer" he says "to the actual accouchement than any of those authorities who have been so prolific in dissertations about the adolescence of the infant then brought to birth".

At that time, as members of the Imperial War Cabinet, Borden had come from Canada, W. M. Hughes from Australia, W. F. Massey from New Zealand, and Smuts deputised for General Botha, who could not leave South Africa. It was the job of Long as Dominions editor to get on confidential terms with these ministers from the Dominions and keep in touch with them. One day he got a message from Borden inviting him to lunch at Claridge's Hotel, and he recounts the meeting with him in these words:

I went and was shown up to his suite. He was a large man, slow and deliberate in his way of talking, evidently not in the habit of saying anything without thinking it out beforehand. I had a lot of questions to ask him about Canada. He answered them very frankly. A good deal of what he said was confidential. Then Borden began to talk about the Dominions. He said he thought it was time they stood on their own feet. They had sent their men to fight for France and their contingents had greatly distinguished themselves. After the war was over, they should not just go back to being colonies of Britain. They had proved their right to 'full nationhood'—that, I am pretty sure, was the exact phrase he used—and they ought to have it. Now was the time to work out the plans that would be necessary. He had talked it over with Lloyd George and Bonar Law and both of them were in full agreement. He meant of course that they had agreed in principle as he had not talked out all the details with them. Smuts, Borden said, agreed too. He had asked me there so that he could explain the idea to me and he hoped that the "Times" would be favourable. A great deal would depend upon that.

Long thereupon said that he had no authority to pledge the support of the "Times" and that all he could promise was to make a report to the editor, then Mr. Geoffrey Dawson, who would

decide the line to be taken. Borden understood this and expressed his regret that Mr. John W. Dafoe, editor of the Winnipeg Free Press, had been unable to come to their lunch. He had wanted Long to meet him, because Dafoe had worked out in rough outline the new idea for Dominion nationhood. Borden then went on to explain the gist of the scheme, which was "in all essentials the idea which nine years later was to be embodied in the Declaration of the Conference of 1926".

Long went straight to the editor of the "Times" and told him all that Borden had said. Dawson, favorably disposed to the project, talked with Lord Milner, who "was from the first one of the most enthusiastic and constructive champions of the new idea", other British ministers and Smuts. Then in a well reasoned editorial he threw the great authority of the "Times" on the side of Borden's proposals, and they were discussed at meetings of the Imperial War Cabinet. According to Long, the representatives of Britain, Canada and South Africa all favoured the new plan, but Hughes of Australia and Massey for New Zealand manifested no enthusiasm for it, and had to be pacified by an assurance, says Long, that the powers and privileges of the new status were permissive only and that no Dominion need avail itself of them unless it wanted to. So the idea of Dominion status received the unanimous endorsement of the accredited representatives of the nations of the Commonwealth.

Long expresses the view that Dafoe had been the pioneer in political thought on the subject and that Borden, when converted to the idea, had undertaken the task of preparing the ground by talks with leaders in Great Britain and other Dominions.

"The 1917 meeting", writes Long, "of the Imperial War Cabinet gave him his opportunity. He was a born negotiator. The most sceptical and cynical of men could not hesitate to trust him implicitly. His instinct was invariably towards the greatest possible frankness, but he was the reverse of being overblunt or tactless as so many very frank people tend to be. His mind worked cautiously, but when it was made up, he moved toward his object with firm deliberation."

Here therefore is the first-hand evidence of an eminent journalist that Sir Robert Borden was the prime architect of full autonomy for the Dominions, and nobody can gainsay his claim to the distinction. The Balfour Declaration of 1926 was merely the formal registry of his plan, and Canadian ministries which have subsequently removed what were construed as badges of political subordination to Britain were always kicking at an open door.

When the representations of the British nations at the Paris Peace Conference were being arranged, Sir Robert rejected the suggestion that there should be a single panel for the whole British Commonwealth, on which he would represent Canada, and insisted that Canada and the other Dominions should each have a separate delegation. During the Conference he did not function as a peacemaker on the same level as President Wilson, Lloyd George and Clemenceau, but he was far from a passive participant and his advice was sought on most of the major problems. Sir Robert was immensely attracted by Woodrow Wilson's project for a League of Nations, designed to end the international anarchy which had produced the war, and give the world some guarantee of security and peace. But he was dubious about the wisdom of the severe penalties imposed upon Germany by the peace treaty and would have preferred a milder settlement, which would not leave the German people with a sense of unjust treatment and pave the way for a revival of Prussian militarism. He also disliked the provisions in the Covenant of the League, which laid upon its members the obligation of maintaining indefinitely the territorial adjustments of the peace treaty, and he made an effort, without any success, to have Canada's obligations in this connection whittled down. He had a great admiration for the character and idealism of Woodrow Wilson, but no high regard for his skill as a politician, and he watched with dismay Wilson's stubborn refusal to make any conciliatory gestures, which might win the acquiescence of his Republican opponents for the terms of the treaty, and support of the League. However, his considered opinion was that the treaty embodied probably the best settlement possible in the circumstances and that the establishment of the League of Nations was an immense step forward. He signed the treaty for Canada in a mood of satisfaction, and returned to Ottawa to undertake the difficult task of readjusting the economy of his country to conditions of peace and carrying out certain reforms he deemed essential for its good government and prosperity.

Not the least of Borden's contributions to the welfare of his country was the reformation of its federal civil service. When he entered public life, political patronage was in full flower, with the approval of both parties, and a change of government at Ottawa was invariably followed by the wholesale purge of officials. Borden's observations of the workings of patronage in Halifax had convinced him that it was an unmitigated evil and after he became leader of the Conservative party he determined to work for its abolition.

Accordingly, after persuading his chief associates that their party should make a clearcut pronouncement in favour of reform of the federal civil service, he embodied his ideas on the subject in his "Halifax" platform. After reviewing the manifold evils flowing from patronage, he proposed as a fundamental plank in the Conservative programme:

A thorough and complete reformation of the laws relating to the civil service so that future appointments should be made by an independent commission acting upon the reports of examiners after competitive examination.

He, however, made the reservation that appointments to the judicial bench and a limited number of other offices must remain the responsibility of the Cabinet, but he made crystal clear his own preference for a competitive system of appointment to the great majority of posts in the civil service.

Meanwhile the Laurier Government, sensing that the system of political patronage had a growing number of critics, had appointed a Royal Commission to examine and report upon the workings of the existing Civil Service Act and correlated legislation, and the report, which it submitted to the House of Commons in March 1908, had disclosed very grave abuses. In the discussion of the report on April 20th, 1908, Borden gave an account of the history of civil service reform in Britain and argued that the recognition of merit must lead to the cultivation of individual initiative, which would help immensely to raise the standards of administration in Canada. He then moved a resolution which after pronouncing the investigation of the Commission "confessedly partial and incomplete", urged that immediate steps be taken to reform and redress "the deplorable extravagance, waste, inefficiency and maladministration" revealed by its report and that the public interest demanded imperatively the appointment of an independent commission fully empowered to make a thorough investigation into the several departments of the civil service.

Two months later the Laurier Government introduced a Civil Service Reform Bill, whose avowed aim was to place what was called the "inside" civil service under the control of a professedly independent commission. But Borden, while welcoming the bill as a move in the right direction, declared that the independence of the Commission was vitiated by the fact that its members were to hold office at the pleasure of the Government and not during good behaviour. He deplored the failure of the bill to provide that "the members of the Civil Service Commission

shall hold office during good behaviour and be liable only to removal on a joint address of the Senate and House of Commons" and the exclusion of the "outside" civil service from its jurisdiction. The Government agreed to his demand that the Commission should be given real and not fictitious independence, but it would only accede to Borden's second proposal to the extent of inserting an amendment authorizing the Cabinet to bring by order in council the whole or any part of the civil service under the control of the Commission. This power, however, was never exercised.

There the situation remained until Borden took office in 1911. He now had a chance to carry out his ideas about the reform of the civil service, and to secure guidance about it he enlisted the services of the Rt. Hon. Sir George Murray, K.C.B., who had crowned a distinguished career in the British civil service by reaching its highest post, the permanent secretaryship of the Treasury. The elaborate and voluminous report Sir George produced did not exactly please Borden since it went far beyond the terms of reference and proposed a programme of sweeping reforms, whose full implementation would have been impossible for any Canadian government at that time. Before Borden had time to decide on the best course to follow, the outbreak of war in 1914 confronted him with more pressing problems and the reform of the civil service had to be postponed. But Borden always kept it in mind and in drafting the manifesto about its policies with which his newly formed coalition ministry opened its election campaign in 1917, he gave the following paragraph a prominent place:

Civil Service Reform.—With a view to extending the present Civil Service Act to the 'outside' service and thus to abolishing patronage, and making appointments to the public service upon the sole standard of merit, the Civil Service Commission has already been directed to make a report to the Prime Minister about the steps necessary for that purpose. Such arrangements will be subject to the existing regulations, which give preference in appointments to returned soldiers, who are duly qualified for them.

In a second manifesto he denounced patronage in the strongest terms as "the root of many political evils", "incompatible with the national welfare" and "injurious to the nation's service", and he laid stress upon the fact that a ministry, in which both political parties were represented and special spokesmen of agriculture and labour were included, could mobilise more popular support and act with greater vigour than a purely party government for the abolition of "trading in patronage" and for reforms which would enable public offices to be filled by merit and not by favorit-

ism, and establish open and honest competition in the awarding of contracts and the purchase of supplies.

Borden made his ministry live up to these pledges. Under the authority of the War Measures Act it passed three orders in council in February and March 1918, which gave effect virtually to the policy subsequently embodied in the Civil Service Act of 1918. These decreed that, pending legislation, all future appointments in the civil service were to be made only upon the recommendation of and with the approval of the Civil Service Commission, based so far as possible upon the results of competitive examinations, but the responsibility for appointments to ships and railways under government ownership was left with the government owing to impending changes in their management.

The drafting of the act, which was to give permanent authority to the proposed changes, was entrusted to the Hon. A. K. MacLean, an enlightened Liberal politician, who was later head of the Exchequer Court. In framing the act he obeyed cheerfully Borden's injunctions to destroy every vestige of patronage in the civil service and he guided its passage through the House of Commons with exceptional skill and ability. There was a natural reluctance on the part of many members of the House of Commons to deprive themselves of a power of recommendation, which was virtually a power of appointment, to offices like postmasterships, but public opinion was so strongly in favour of Borden's policy that it was suppressed and, after two minor amendments had been disposed of, the bill received the unanimous approval of Parliament.

Borden counted its passage one of the greatest achievements in the field of domestic reform and, when he served as President of the Canadian Historical Association in 1931, he ventured to include in his presidential address the following passage:

The Civil Service Act of 1918 was a tremendous step in advance. Mr. MacLean properly characterized it as revolutionary. It is not within the purview of my purpose to discuss subsequent amendments. The principle and the purpose of the Civil Service Act of 1918 have not been materially modified or departed from. Its enactment removed at one stroke the evil of patronage. It may be that its scope was too far-reaching in respect to minor employees but, if so, the error was in the right direction. A very competent judge, who was for many years President of the National Civil Service Reform League of the United States, has described it as the most advanced measure of Civil Service Reform that any country has adopted.

The claim can therefore be made for Sir Robert Borden that among Canadian politicians he was the most successful promoter

of civil service reform. When by the Halifax platform he committed the Conservative party to a policy of reform in the civil service, he impelled the Laurier Government to pass the Civil Service Act of 1908, and it was his pressure, when it was under discussion in the House of Commons, that procured genuine and not fictitious independence for the Civil Service Commission. Then ten years later the Civil Service Act, which he himself inspired, completed the process of reform.

Borden had made no bones about accepting a knighthood, but he set little store by it and it fell to his lot to have a major responsibility for imposing a ban upon titles of honour in Canada. In the later stages of the war the bestowal of titles upon some unworthy recipients had stimulated an agitation, which had considerable support in the press, for their abolition, and Borden felt it wise to take some cognizance of it. In 1902 the Laurier Government had challenged in a minute-in-council the claim of the British Government to determine the persons resident in Canada, upon whom titles should be conferred, but Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, then Secretary for the Colonies, had refused to waive completely the right of the British Government to be judge of fitness for titles, and the subject had been dropped. However, in March 1918 Borden secured the assent of his Cabinet to another order in council on titles. Calling attention to the Laurier Government's minute-in-council on the subject, it reasserted the principle that the Canadian Government must have the responsibility of recommendations to the Crown in regard to honours to be conferred upon persons ordinarily resident in Canada, but that the British Government should retain the right to determine the number and character of the honours to be conferred. The order in council then proceeded:

The Prime Minister is firmly of the opinion that the creation or continuance of hereditary titles in Canada is entirely incompatible with the ideals of democracy as they have developed in this country and that the time has arrived when their heritage, quality or effect should be abolished in this Dominion. The hereditary peerage as an institution can find neither historic justification nor scope for usefulness in a state structure and social tradition such as that which now exists in Canada.

The order in council then suggested that the Secretary of State for the Colonies be requested to take the necessary formal action to render effective the following proposals:

1. No titular distinction (saving those granted in recognition of military service during the present war or ordinarily bestowed by the Sovereign *proprio motu*) shall be conferred upon a subject of His

Majesty ordinarily resident in Canada, except with the approval or upon the advice of the Prime Minister of Canada.

2. The Government of Britain shall exercise the same authority as heretofore in determining the character and number of titles of honour to be allocated to Canada from time to time.
3. No hereditary title of honour shall hereafter be conferred upon a subject of His Majesty ordinarily resident in Canada.
4. Appropriate action shall be taken, whether by legislation or otherwise, to provide that after a prescribed period no title of honour held by a subject of His Majesty now or hereafter ordinarily resident in Canada shall be recognized as having hereditary effect.

There the matter rested until the session of 1919 when Mr. Nickle, a prominent Conservative member, moved an address humbly praying His Majesty to refrain from conferring hereditary titles of any kind upon British subjects ordinarily domiciled or living in Canada. The resolution was seconded by an equally prominent Liberal, Mr. Andrew McMaster, and it was supported in a brief speech by Sir Wilfrid Laurier. The lengthy debate that followed revealed a majority in all parties in favour of the resolution and, encouraged by this evidence, Mr. R. L. Richardson, a western radical who supported the government, moved a resolution advocating a complete ban upon all titles. This amendment evoked warm applause and would have passed, if Borden had not moved the adjournment of the debate. When it was resumed, he expressed his view that the Richardson amendment went too far and that it would preclude any Minister of the Crown from being appointed to His Majesty's Imperial Privy Council. Then he moved a sub-amendment to add to the Richardson amendment the reservation "except in accordance with the principles enunciated in the Order-in-Council approved on the 25th day of March, 1918".

Borden showed this amendment privately to Messrs. Nickle, McMaster and Richardson, and tried to secure their acquiescence in it, but Nickle at least remained obdurate against any concession. When, as the debate continued, Borden found the sentiment of the House still favourable to the Richardson amendment, he took the drastic step of intimating that, if his sub-amendment was rejected, he would resign at once. And such was his authority in the Commons at that time that before this threat the opposition to his compromise melted away and in the end Mr. Nickle had only two supporters for his objection to it.

Other important accomplishments of Borden and his coalition ministry were the inauguration of women's suffrage and the laying of the foundation of the Canadian National Railway

system by the acquisition of the Grand Trunk Railway for the state. When after his return from the Peace Conference he had spent a year coping with domestic problems he found that the strain of the war years had impaired his physical vigour. So, when he realised that a holiday in the shape of a longish sea voyage had not restored it to his satisfaction, he announced his resignation.

Sir Robert had a wonderfully happy evening to his life. His comfortable income from his savings and successful investments freed him from financial worries, but he accepted a few directorships and gave the duties connected with them careful attention. For the partisan warfare of politics he had never had much liking and he eschewed it for the rest of his days. He could not, however, be completely indifferent to the fortunes of his own party and his counsel was always available to Mr. Meighen, his successor, but only when it was sought. So far as is known his voice after 1920 was only once decisive about an important issue. In 1926, when the late Mackenzie King, after being refused a dissolution by Lord Byng, the Governor General, resigned as Prime Minister, Mr. Meighen took office. His temporary government, after carrying several divisions on issues raised by the opposition, was defeated by a majority of one after a few days in power. A serious problem then confronted Mr. Meighen: he could either ask for a dissolution or hand the government back to Mr. King. He himself was giving consideration to the view of some influential supporters that the wise course would be to give back the reins of power to Mr. King, thereby depriving him of the constitutional issue he had raised and forcing him to fight the impending election on the awkward issue of grave customs scandals, which he was anxious to smother. There was good ground for their argument that the Liberals could be easily beaten on this issue.

Sir Robert happened to be present at a conference in Mr. Meighen's office at which this problem was being discussed and he insisted that Mr. Meighen must not hand the government back to Mr. King but must appeal to the voters for a mandate, even at the expense of sacrificing an obvious advantage in the campaign. His argument was that the country must not be left without a government and that, since the decision of Lord Byng had been challenged by Mr. King, who was known to be vowing that, if he were returned to power, his first act would be to procure the dismissal of the Governor General, the representative of the Crown, whose conduct had in the view of Sir Robert been perfectly correct, must not be exposed to the risk of such a humilia-

tion. Therefore the Conservative party must try to protect Lord Byng even though it meant forfeiting the advantage of fighting the election on the customs scandals. He argued this case forcibly and confirmed the original inclination of Mr. Meighen to resist the pressure for the alternative course. So a dissolution was sought and, although the outcome was disastrous for the Conservative party, Sir Robert was unrepentant and always held that his party had taken the only honourable course.

Previous to this episode he had at Mr. Meighen's request undertaken to represent Canada at the conference on naval disarmament and problems of the Pacific which was held in Washington in 1921 and, although his rôle in its deliberations was secondary, it was far from unimportant. Before he left office he had given considerable thought to the diplomatic representation of Canada in foreign countries, which had hitherto been left in the hands of Britain's diplomatic service. He had proposed that the British Foreign Office should recruit able young men from the Dominions, who had the requisite qualifications for its work and that, after such a plan was in operation, the British Embassy at Washington should always have a substantial number of Canadians on its staff. But this eminently sensible suggestion found no favour with the Marquess Curzon, then Foreign Minister of Britain, who intimated that he did not want any rude colonials invading preserves kept exclusively for members of the British governing class. This problem was not part of the business of the Washington Conference, but during its course Sir Auckland, later Lord Geddes, the British Ambassador at Washington, when asked his views at a press conference about the appointment of a separate Minister for Canada at Washington, poured cold water on the idea and said that all she needed was a special trade commissioner attached to the British Embassy. Borden was greatly irritated by the contemptuous attitude of the ambassador and told Mr. Albert Carman, the editor of the *Montreal Star*, that it had turned him into an enthusiastic advocate of a separate diplomatic service for Canada.

But, after his retirement from office, his dominating political interest lay in the promotion of world security and peace by strengthening the system of collective security embodied in the League of Nations. He gave a great deal of time and energy to fostering the growth of the League of Nations Society of Canada, of which he served as president for a term. He was a regular attendant at meetings of its branch in Ottawa and he was always ready to journey to Montreal, Toronto and other places to deli-

ver addresses. He was also its vigilant defender against the attacks of both rabid imperialists and isolationists and, when he was moved to wrath by one of these assaults, he would write a vigorous editorial exposing its fallacies and denouncing the villifiers of the League as ignoramuses or worse. When the editorial was completed to his satisfaction, he would take it in person to the Ottawa Journal, which invariably published it. His time was always at the disposal of what he deemed good causes. He served as President of the Canadian Historical Association and took great pains with his presidential address. In 1921 he delivered under the auspices of the University of Toronto what are known from the name of their founder as "The Marfleet Lectures" and chose as his theme "Canadian Constitutional Studies". And one of the happiest experiences of his last years came in 1927 from an invitation to deliver the Rhodes Memorial Lectures in Oxford, for which his subject was "Canada in the Commonwealth". During his stay in Oxford he enjoyed himself immensely as the guest of All Soul's College, whose distinguished band of fellows foregathered to do him honour. Then in 1930, after his party had returned to power under Mr. R. B. Bennett, he undertook his last important public duty, when he represented Canada with credit and distinction as the head of her delegation to the Assembly of the League of Nations.

Sir Robert was not by disposition a cloistered recluse but a very sociable man and in his later years he had time for a number of pleasant recreations, from which the claims of his law practice and politics had barred him in earlier life. He had never had enough of fishing, his favorite sport, and after 1920 it was his habit to make expeditions in the spring and fall to the Echo Beach Fishing Club, in the company of his old friends, Sir George Perley and P. D. Ross. He was a keen, if not too skilful, player of golf and he loved a quiet game of bridge with congenial friends. He and Lady Borden made their fine home on Wurtemberg St. a centre of pleasant hospitality and, when some distinguished visitor arrived in Ottawa, Sir Robert liked to give a small dinner party for men in his honour. At these gatherings, to which invitations were much prized, he was an admirable host, and he would give free play to his great gifts as a raconteur, of which only his intimates were aware.

One of his favorite stories concerned an old character in a village in Nova Scotia called "Si". One evening a party of local worthies had foregathered in a store to hold high debate as was their wont. The discussion turned upon politicians and divergent

views were expressed. One opinion was that all politicians were natural born crooks, intent chiefly upon feathering their own nests, and only concerned under pressure with the desires and needs of the voters. But others held that the average politician was a well meaning and honest individual, who tried to serve his country according to his lights. During this debate "Si" had remained grimly silent. But he was counted a local sage and so the question was put squarely to him, "Si, what do you think of politicians"? Thereupon "Si" ejected a quid of tobacco into an empty barrel and thus delivered himself: "You ask me about politicians. I'll tell you what I think. They are just like my old sow Sue's litter of piglets. When they ain't sucking, they're squealing, and when they ain't squealing, they're sucking." He was also fond of telling this story against himself. One day after Borden's retirement, a man from the Peace River country, under the belief that he still possessed a great deal of political influence, appeared at his house to solicit his help in obtaining an appointment as post-master. When he arrived Sir Robert was just stepping into his car to drive to the Royal Ottawa Golf Club where he had arranged to play in a foursome. So he suggested that the suppliant for his help should drive with him to the golf club and tell his story en route. This invitation was accepted and, when the man explained his aspirations, Sir Robert informed him gently that with the Liberals in power he was not in a position to further them. Having wished the man good luck in a friendly farewell, he entered the club house, changed his clothes and came back with his partner and their opponents to the tee. The rest can best be told in Borden's own words:

"I had been playing rather poor golf for some time, but on this occasion I achieved what I thought was a very fine drive. I then became absorbed in the drives of my partner and our opponents. So you can judge of my dismay, I might almost say disgust, when I suddenly discovered that this wretched individual from the Peace River, whom I had noticed lingering near the tee, had, presumably with a view to ingratiating himself with me, dashed off and retrieved my ball."

He mellowed gradually into a charming old man, upon whom his years sat lightly, and his gracious manners, his friendly consideration for everybody and his complete lack of pomposity made him a general favourite in Ottawa. He had a multitude of friends in all classes of the community, and not a single enemy. He was the best beloved figure in the capital, and deeply mourned, when death claimed him peacefully on June 10th, 1937.

There is considerable ground for the claim that, taken all in all, Sir Robert Borden was the best Prime Minister who ever governed Canada. Only four of our Prime Ministers have enjoyed prolonged tenures of power. Upon the escutcheon of Borden there were no blots of grave scandal such as have defaced the records of both Sir John Macdonald and Mackenzie King. He had not the alluring personal charm and the magnetic eloquence of Laurier, but he had a more realistic mind and was an infinitely better administrator. During almost half of his period in office he was preoccupied with the problems of a world war and its aftermath, but he managed to achieve a creditable list of domestic reforms. He believed firmly that a government could have no better advertisement of its merits than a record of efficient and economical administration and he laboured strenuously to achieve this by the elimination of waste and corruption. He set a high standard of integrity to his followers and once during the war he startled the country by the unusual move of reading solemnly out of his party two Conservative members who had been convicted of making profits out of war contracts.

He was never a gifted orator, who could move audiences by the power of his eloquence, and, as a parliamentary debater, he was inferior to Laurier, Meighen and Foster. As a party and national leader his preeminent virtues were his even temper, his steady judgment and his consistent courage. Only when deeply provoked could he be moved to real wrath, and he was always wary of its consequences. Whenever an abusive letter moved him to draft a crushing reply, it was his habit to consign it to what he called "the limbo file" and, after he had slept over it, it was rarely sent. He was slow to make up his mind on difficult issues but, once he had chosen his course, he pursued it with persistence, disdainful of the jibes of opponents and murmurings of disgruntled supporters. Moreover, while he styled himself a Conservative, he was essentially a liberal in his outlook and there was no reform he would not consider on its merits. At the close of his life Gladstone said that Sir Robert Peel was on the whole the greatest man he had ever known. Sir Robert Borden had many of Peel's qualities and he will rank with Peel as one of the great Conservative reformers of the British Commonwealth.