

## MARGINAL NOTES

SIR ROBERT BORDEN.—When the Rt. Hon. Sir Robert Laird Borden, P.C., G.C.M.G., K.C., died at his home in Ottawa on the 10th of June last the genuineness of the regret at his passing so widely expressed on both sides of the Atlantic established unquestionably that he ranked among the distinguished men of his time.

Of his dominant position at the Bar when practising his profession in the Province of Nova Scotia, where he was born, it is not necessary for me to speak. Success there was merely prelusive to the distinction that became his when he entered political life. It is what he did in that larger field that won for him the enduring homage of the Canadian people.

As a statesman holding the office of Prime Minister of Canada, Sir Robert was privileged during the earlier part of this century to assist in remoulding the political structure of the British world. His share in bringing into being the British Commonwealth of Nations placed his name on the pages of current history some years before his death. Professor Zimmern's "The Third British Empire", published in 1926, affords proof of this. In the course of comment on the support furnished by the Dominions to the Empire in the Great War, the author says:

I remember, some time about the middle of the war, listening to a conversation in which Sir Robert Borden, at that time Premier of Canada, took part. Some one had remarked to him that this impressive demonstration of the loyalty of the Dominions to the Empire would surely pave the way for a project of Imperial Federation. I well recall the Canadian Premier's reflective reply. 'I am not so sure,' he said; 'the result may be exactly the opposite of what you are imagining. It may be that the spirit of national pride which the war is evolving will create psychological conditions unanticipated by you in Great Britain and favour processes of decentralization rather than of centralization' . . . . . The Canadian Premier knew his people better than the British Imperialist. Nationality is a force that knows no frontiers. . . . . It is Ypres and Vimy which have made Canadians conscious of their proud place in the world and set Canada among the peoples who are nations in their own right.

In this incident we have a demonstration of the clarity of thought and sound judgment exhibited by Sir Robert throughout his public life. What actually happened showed that he was right. It was not in the form of a federation controlled by a central government that the chief units of the British Empire emerged from their co-operation in the Great War, but as a composite State consisting of a group of autonomous nations

with the same King over each and all functioning as a symbol of their unity. Such a bold experiment in statecraft—such a new conception of a Commonwealth—would have astonished the political thinker of old Rome who said that *Non posse bene geri rempublicam multorum imperiis*. Finding no parallel in history, it stands as a splendid adventure upon the domain of that more perfect order of internationalism into which the whole world must enter if civilization is to endure.

\*\* Thus far I have spoken of Sir Robert's career as a statesman. I would now speak somewhat of his attributes as a man.

Those who were privileged to enjoy intimacy of friendship with Sir Robert learned to know and to value the sterling qualities of his character. Possessing rare gifts of mind, their cultivation was the constant aspiration of his youth. That aspiration had its origin in a loftier motive than the urge to fit oneself for a gainful life. In him survived those ideals and standards that made life worth the living in the century that gave him birth. He was modest in his bearing. The distinction that was rightfully his did not provoke him to pride. He was kindly and helpful in all his contacts with his fellow-men. Even after failing health demanded his retirement from public life he did not cease to concern himself with activities pertaining to their welfare in the mass. His belief in the preponderance of good over evil in the hearts of men made him a confirmed optimist. Thus he qualified himself to walk with joy in the garden of life from youth to age.

In speaking of Sir Robert's personal qualities one is reminded of a discussion between Charles Lamb and a small company of his friends touching eminent persons of the past whom they wished to have seen. To a declaration that the "two greatest names in English literature" were Sir Isaac Newton and John Locke, Lamb replied "Yes, the greatest names but they were not persons—not persons, not *characters*, you know!" In commenting on the incident Hazlitt explains that what Lamb meant was that while Newton and Locke attained eminence by their writings, they were not personally interesting as men. Now I venture to say of Sir Robert Borden that posterity will think of him as we who are living think of him to-day, namely, as one whose life-story not only affords an example to be followed by all who may be qualified for high public service in their day and generation, but also abounds with interest for those who are disposed to study the personal qualities of notable men.

THE IRISH CONSTITUTION.—The Constitution of the Irish Free State, as it appears in the draft recently published in Dublin, occupies a unique place among organic documents of the kind. An outstanding feature of it is that it purports to provide a system of government for the whole island—a gesture of arrogance towards Northern Ireland which is hardly atoned for by the declaration that until “reintegration” is effected and Northern Ireland as a separate political unit disappears this new constitutional frame shall only apply to that portion of the island at present controlled by the Free State Government.

There is to be a President, a Council of State and a bi-cameral legislature. The President is to be elected by the direct vote of the people at the polls, and will hold office for the long period of seven years. In these respects the presidential office is sharply distinguished from that obtaining under the Constitution of the United States. The President is to be advised by two bodies: the “Government”—which closely resembles the English Cabinet—and the “Council of State”. The advice of the latter body is only to be sought by the President on designated occasions, in respect of which he is not required to act on the advice of his ministers. The Council will consist of certain members of the government, the Chief Justice, the Speakers of the two Houses of Parliament, the Attorney-General and such persons who, having formerly held these offices, may be disposed to serve on the Council after retirement. The Council is not to be responsible to Parliament.

In these aspects, and others of which lack of space prevents mention, the draft Constitution of the Irish Free State is assuredly *res nova* in the domain of statecraft.

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