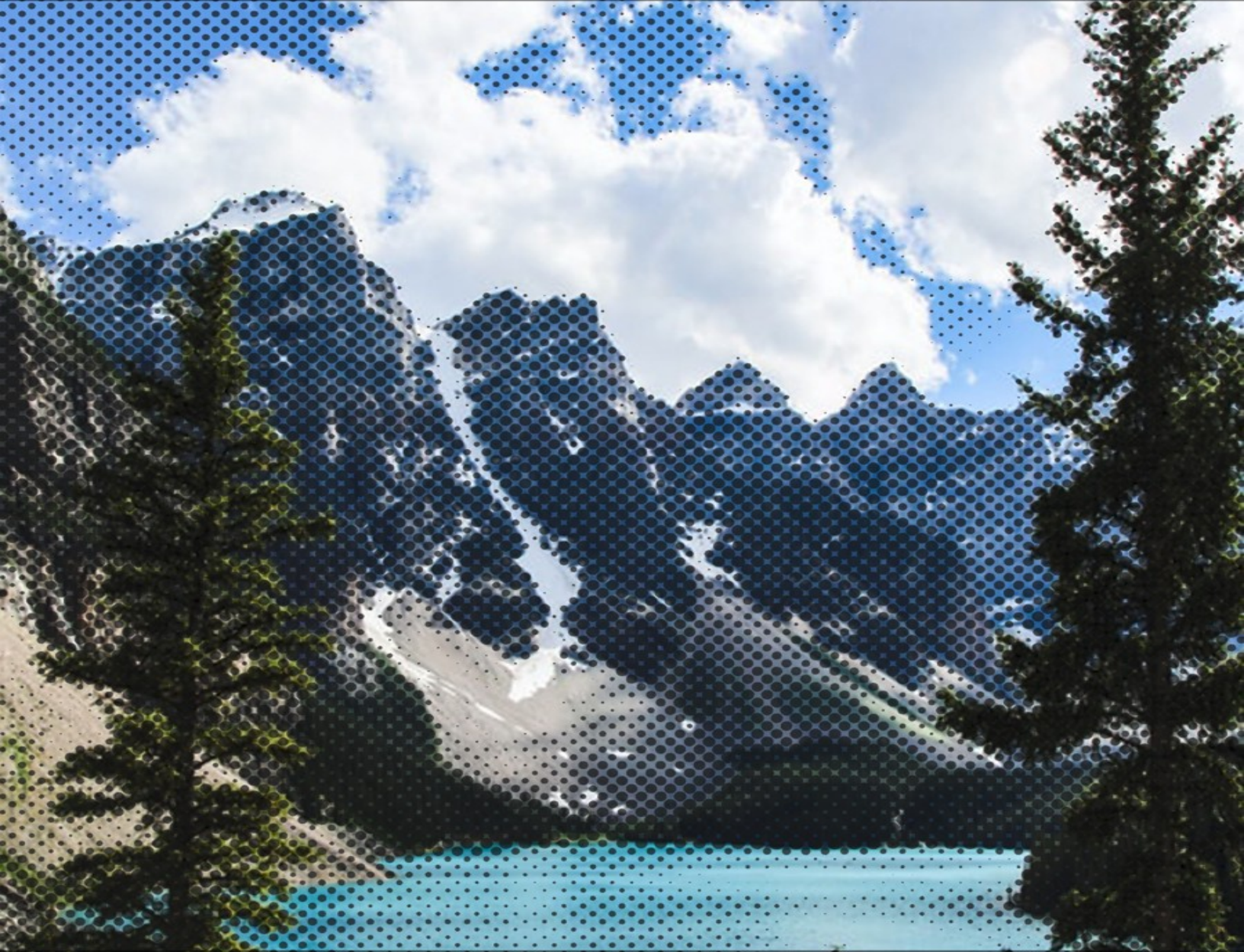


Oscar Douglas Skelton



*The Day of Sir
Wilfrid Laurier:
A Chronicle of Our
Own Time*

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CHAPTER I

THE MAKING OF A CANADIAN

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Early days at St Lin—Seven years of college—Student at law—Arthabaska days

Wilfrid Laurier was born at St Lin, Quebec, on November 20, 1841. His ancestral roots were sunk deep in Canadian soil. For six generations Quebec had been the home of Laurier after Laurier. His kinsmen traced their origin to Anjou, a province that ever bred shrewd and thrifty men. The family name was originally Cottineau. In a marriage covenant entered into at Montreal in 1666 the first representative of the family in Canada is styled 'Francois Cottineau dit Champlauriet.' Evidently some ancestral field or garden of lauriers or oleanders gave the descriptive title which in time, as was common, became the sole family name. The Lauriers came to Canada shortly after Louis XIV took the colony under his royal wing in 1663, in the first era of real settlement, and hewed out homes for themselves in the forest, first on the island of Jesus, at the mouth of the Ottawa, and later in the parish of Lachenaie, on the north bank of the same river, where they grew in numbers until Lauriers, with Rochons and Matthieus, made up nearly all the parish.

Charles Laurier, grandfather of Wilfrid Laurier, was a man of strong character and marked ability. In face of many difficulties he mastered mathematics and became a self-taught land surveyor, so that he was able to make the

surveys of the great Pangman seigneurie at Lachenaie. Early in the nineteenth century he settled his son Carolus on a farm just hewn out of the forest, near the little village of St Lin, a frontier settlement nestling at the foot of the Laurentian hills north of Montreal. He himself continued to reside at Lachenaie until far on in years, when he went to live with his son at St Lin.

Carolus Laurier followed in his father's footsteps, surveying and farming by turns as opportunity offered. He had not his father's rugged individuality, but his handsome figure, his alert wit, and his amiable and generous nature made him a welcome guest through all the French and Scottish settlements in the north country. That he had something of his father's progressiveness is shown by the fact that he was the first farmer in the neighbourhood to set up a threshing machine in his barn, to take the place of the old-time flail. It was his liberal views that gave the first bent to his son's sympathies; and he was, as we shall see, progressive enough to give the brilliant lad the education needed for professional success, and far-seeing and broad-minded enough to realize how great an asset a thorough knowledge of English speech and English ways would be.

Yet it was rather to his mother that Wilfrid Laurier, like so many other notable men, owed his abilities and his temperament. Marcelle Martineau, kin to the mother of the poet Fréchette, was a woman of much strength of character, of fine mind and artistic talents. She lived only five years after her son was born, but in those few years she had so knit herself into his being that the warm and tender memory of her never faded from his impressionable mind. The only

other child of this marriage, a daughter, Malvina, died in infancy. Carolus Laurier married again, his second wife being Adeline Ethier. She was much attached to his children and they to her. Of this second marriage three sons were born: Ubalde, who became a physician and died at Arthabaska in 1898; Charlemagne, a merchant in St Lin and later member for the county at Ottawa, who lived until 1907; and Henri, the prothonotary at Arthabaska, who passed away in 1906. Carolus Laurier himself lived on in his little village home forty years after the birth of his eldest son, and his wife lived nearly twenty years longer.

It was a quiet, strength-shaping country home in which the future statesman's boyhood was cast. The little village was off the beaten track of travel; not yet had the railway joined it to the river front. There were few distractions to excite or dissipate youthful energies. Roaming amid the brooding silence of the hills, fishing for trout, hunting partridges and rabbits, and joining in the simple village games, the boy took his boyish pleasures and built for his manhood's calm and power. His home had an intellectual atmosphere quite out of the ordinary, and it enjoyed a full measure of that grace or native courtesy which is not least among Quebec's contributions to the common Canadian stock.

He had his first schooling in the elementary parish school of St Lin, where the boys learned their *A-B-C*, their *two-times-two*, and their catechism. Then his father determined to give him a broader outlook by enabling him to see something of the way of life and to learn the tongue of his English-speaking compatriots. Some eight miles west of St

Lin on the Achigan river lay the village of New Glasgow. It had been settled about 1820 by Scottish Protestants belonging to various British regiments. Carolus Laurier had carried on surveys there, knew the people well, and was thoroughly at home with them. The affinity so often noted between Scottish and French has doubtless more than a mere historical basis. At any rate, son, like father, soon found a place in the intimate life of the Murrays, the Guthries, the Macleans, the Bennetts and other families of the settlement. His experience was further varied by boarding for a time in the home of an Irish Catholic family named Kirk. Later, he lived with the Murrays, and often helped behind the counter in John Murray's general store.

The school which he attended for two years, 1852-53 and 1853-54, was a mixed school, for both boys and girls, taught by a rapidly shifting succession of schoolmasters, often of very unconventional training. In the first session the school came to an abrupt close in April, owing to the sudden departure of Thompson, the teacher in charge. A man of much greater ability, Sandy Maclean, took his place the following term. He had read widely, and was almost as fond of poetry as of his glass. His young French pupil, who was picking up English in the playground and in the home as well as in the school, long cherished the memory of the man who first opened to him a vista of the great treasures of English letters.

The experience, though brief, had a lasting effect. Perhaps the English speech became rusty in the years of college life that followed at L'Assomption, but the understanding, and the tolerance and goodwill which

understanding brings, were destined to abide for life. It was not without reason that the ruling motive of the young schoolboy's future career was to be the awakening of sympathy and harmony between the two races. It would be fortunate for Canada if more experiments like that which Carolus Laurier tried were even to-day to be attempted, not only by French but by English families.

In September 1854, when well on in his thirteenth year, Wilfrid Laurier returned to the normal path prescribed for the keener boys of the province. He entered the college or secondary school of L'Assomption, maintained by secular priests, and the chief seat of education in the country north of Montreal. The course was a thorough one, extending through seven closely filled years. It followed the customary classical lines, laying chief stress on Latin, and next on French literature. Greek was taught less thoroughly; a still briefer study of English, mathematics, scholastic philosophy, history, and geography completed the course. Judged by its fruits, it was a training admirably adapted, in the hands of good teachers such as the fathers at L'Assomption were, to give men destined for the learned professions a good grounding, to impart to them a glimpse of culture, a sympathy with the world beyond, a bent to eloquence and literary style. It was perhaps not so well adapted to train men for success in business; perhaps this literary and classical training is largely responsible for the fact that until of late the French-speaking youth of Quebec have not taken the place in commercial and industrial life that their numbers and ability warrant.

The life at L'Assomption was one of strict discipline. The boys rose at 5.30, and every hour until evening had its task, or was assigned for mealtime or playtime. Once a week, on Wednesday afternoon, came a glorious half-day excursion to the country. There was ample provision for play. But the young student from St Lin was little able to take part in rough and ready sports. His health was extremely delicate, and violent exertion was forbidden. His recreations took other forms. The work of the course of study itself appealed to him, particularly the glories of the literatures of Rome and France and England. While somewhat reserved and retiring, he took delight in vying with his companions in debate and in forming a circle of chosen spirits to discuss, with all the courage and fervour of youth, the questions of their little world, or the echoes that reached them of the political tempests without. Occasionally the outer world came to the little village. Assize courts were held twice a year, and more rarely *assemblées contradictoires* were held in which fiery politicians roundly denounced each other. The appeal was strong to the boys of keener mind and political yearnings; and well disciplined as he usually was, young Laurier more than once broke bounds to hear the eloquence of advocate or candidate, well content to bear the punishment that followed. Though reserved, he was not in the least afraid to express strong convictions and to defend them when challenged. He entered L'Assomption with the bias towards Liberalism which his father's inclinations and his own training and reading had developed. A youth of less sturdy temper would, however, soon have lost this bias. The atmosphere of L'Assomption was intensely conservative,

and both priests and fellow-pupils were inclined to give short shrift to the dangerous radicalism of the brilliant young student from St Lin. A debating society had been formed, largely at his insistence. One of the subjects debated was the audacious theme, 'Resolved, that in the interests of Canada the French Kings should have permitted Huguenots to settle here.' Wilfrid Laurier took the affirmative and urged his points strongly, but the scandalized *préfet d'études* intervened, and there was no more debating at L'Assomption. The boy stuck to his Liberal guns, and soon triumphed over prejudices, becoming easily the most popular as he was the most distinguished student of his day, and the recognized orator and writer of addresses for state occasions.

Of the twenty-six students who entered L'Assomption in his year, only nine graduated. Of these, five entered the priesthood. Sympathetic as Wilfrid Laurier was in many ways with the Church of his fathers, he did not feel called to its professional service. He had long since made up his mind as to his future career, and in 1861, when scarcely twenty, he went to Montreal to study law.

By this time the paternal purse was lean, for the demands of a growing family and his own generous disposition helped to reduce the surveyor's means, which never had been too abundant. The young student, thrown on his own resources, secured a post in the law office of Laflamme and Laflamme which enabled him to undertake the law course in M'Gill University. Rodolphe Laflamme, the head of the firm, one of the leaders of the bar in Montreal,

was active in the interests of the radical wing of the Liberal party, known as the *Rouges*.

The lectures in M'Gill were given in English. Thanks to his experience at New Glasgow and his later reading, the young student found little difficulty in following them. Harder to understand at first were the Latin phrases in Mr, afterwards Judge, Torrance's lectures on Roman law, for at that time the absurd English pronunciation of Latin was the universal rule among English-speaking scholars. Most helpful were the lectures of Carter in criminal law, admirably prepared and well delivered. J. J. C. Abbott, a sound and eminent practitioner, and a future prime minister of Canada, taught commercial law. Laflamme had charge of civil law. Young Laurier made the most of the opportunities offered. While carrying on the routine work of the office, joining in the political and social activities of his circle, and reading widely in both French and English, he succeeded admirably in his law studies. H. L. Desaulniers, a brilliant student whose career came to an untimely close, and H. Welsh, shared with him the honours of the class. In other classes at the same time were Melbourne Tait, C. P. Davidson, and J. J. Curran, all destined to high judicial rank. The young student's success was crowned by his being chosen to give the valedictory. His address, while having somewhat of the flowery rhetoric of youth, was a remarkably broad and sane statement of policy: the need of racial harmony, the true meaning of liberty, the call for straightforward justice, and the lawyer's part in all these objects, were discussed with prophetic eloquence.

But even the most eloquent of valedictories is not a very marketable commodity. It was necessary to get rapidly to work to earn a living. Full of high hopes, he joined with two of his classmates in October 1864 to organize the firm of Laurier, Archambault and Desaulniers. The partners hung out their shingle in Montreal. But clients were slow in coming, for the city was honeycombed with established offices. The young partners found difficulty in tiding over the waiting time, and so in the following April the firm was dissolved and Wilfrid Laurier became a partner of Médéric Lanctot, one of the most brilliant and impetuous writers and speakers of a time when brilliancy and passion seem to have been scattered with lavish hand, a man of amazing energy and resource, but fated by his unbalanced judgment utterly to wreck his own career. Lanctot was too busy at this time with the political campaign he was carrying on in the press and on the platform against Cartier's Confederation policy to look after his clients, and the office work fell mainly to his junior partner. It was a curiously assorted partnership: Lanctot with his headlong and reckless passion, Laurier with his cool, discriminating moderation: but it lasted a year. During this time Mr Laurier was in but not of the group of eager spirits who made Lanctot's office their headquarters. His moderate temperament and his ill-health kept him from joining in the revels of some and the political dissipations of others. 'I seem to see Laurier as he was at that time,' wrote his close friend, L. O. David, 'ill, sad, his air grave, indifferent to all the turmoil raised around him; he passed through the midst of it like a shadow and seemed to say to us, "Brother, we all must die." '[1]



SIR ANTOINE AIMÉ DORION
From a photograph

In fact, Mr Laurier's health was the source of very serious concern. Lung trouble had developed, with violent hemorrhages, threatening a speedy end to his career unless

a change came. Just at this time the chief of his party and his most respected friend, Antoine Dorion, suggested that he should go to the new settlement of Arthabaskaville in the Eastern Townships, to practise law and to edit *Le Défricheur*, hitherto published at L'Avenir and controlled by Dorion's younger brother Eric, who had recently died. Largely in the hope that the country life would restore his health, he agreed, and late in 1866 left Montreal for the backwoods village.

The founder of *Le Défricheur*, Eric Dorion, nicknamed *L'Enfant Terrible* for his energy and fearlessness, was not the least able or least attractive member of a remarkable family. He had been one of the original members of the *Rouge* party and, as editor of *L'Avenir*, a vehement exponent of the principles of that party, but had later sobered down, determined to devote himself to constructive work. He had taken an active part in a colonization campaign and had both preached and practised improved farming methods. He had founded the village of L'Avenir in Durham township, had built a church for the settlers there to show that his quarrel was with ecclesiastical pretensions, not with religion, and for a dozen years had proved a sound and stimulating influence in the growing settlement.

When Mr Laurier decided to open his law office in Arthabaskaville, the seat of the newly formed judicial district of Arthabaska, he moved *Le Défricheur* to the same village. Lack of capital and poor health hampered his newspaper activities, and, as will be seen later, the journal incurred the displeasure of the religious authorities of the district. Its light lasted barely six months and then flickered out. This

left the young lawyer free to devote himself to his practice, which grew rapidly from the beginning, for the district was fast filling up with settlers. The court went on circuit to Danville and Drummondville and Inverness, and soon, both at home and in these neighbouring towns, no lawyer was more popular or more successful. The neighbouring counties contained many Scottish, Irish, and English settlers, who were soon enrolled in the ranks of the young advocate's staunch supporters. The tilting in the court, the preparation of briefs, the endeavour to straighten out tangles in the affairs of helpless clients, all the interests of a lawyer deeply absorbed in his profession, made these early years among the happiest of his career. Arthabaska was, even then, no mean centre of intellectual and artistic life, and a close and congenial circle of friends more than made up for the lost attractions of the metropolis.

But neither work nor social intercourse filled all the young lawyer's nights and days. It was in this period that he laid the foundation of his wide knowledge of the history and the literature of Canada and of the two countries from which Canada has sprung. Bossuet and Molière, Hugo and Racine, Burke and Sheridan, Macaulay and Bright, Shakespeare and Burns, all were equally devoured. Perhaps because of his grandfather's association with the Pangman seigneurie (the property of the fur trader Peter Pangman), his interest was early turned to the great fur trade of Canada, and he delved deep into its records. The life and words of Lincoln provided another study of perpetual interest. Though Montreal was intensely Southern in sympathy during the Civil War, Mr Laurier, from his days as a student, had been strongly

attracted by the rugged personality of the Union leader, and had pierced below caricature and calumny to the tender strength, the magnanimous patience, of the man. A large niche in his growing library was therefore devoted to memoirs of Lincoln and his period.

Congenial work, loyal friends, the company of the great spirits of the past—these were much, but not all. The crowning happiness came with his marriage, May 13, 1868, to Miss Zoë Lafontaine of Montreal. To both, the marriage brought ideal companionship and fulfilment. To the husband especially it brought a watchfulness that at last conquered the illness that had threatened, a devotion which never flagged—for Lady Laurier is still to-day much more a ‘Laurierite’ than is Sir Wilfrid—and a stimulus that never permitted contentment with second best.

The years of preparation were nearly over. The call to wider service was soon to come. The new Dominion, and not least Quebec, faced many difficult political problems. Aiding in their solution, the young lawyer in the quiet village of Arthabaska was to find full scope for all the strength of brain and all the poise and balance of temper which the years had brought him.

[1] *Mes Contemporains*, p. 85.

CHAPTER II

POLITICS IN THE SIXTIES

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Le Défricheur

The year 1841, when Wilfrid Laurier was born, was the year of the Union of Upper and Lower Canada as a single province. There followed, as he came to manhood, a time of intense political activity, of bitter party and personal rivalry, of constant shift in the lines of political groups and parties. The stage was being set and many of the players were being trained for the greater drama which was to open with Confederation.

Canadian political parties had originally been formed on the plain issue whether or not the majority of the people were to be allowed to rule. In Upper Canada the governing party, known as the 'Family Compact,' composed chiefly of representatives of the Crown and men who had inherited position or caste from their Loyalist fathers, had been attacked by a motley and shifting opposition, sober Whig and fiery Radical, newcomers from Britain or from the States, and native-born, united mainly by their common antagonism to clique rule. In Lower Canada the same contest, on account of the monopoly of administration held by the English-speaking minority, dubbed 'Bureaucrats' or the 'Chateau Clique,' had taken on the aspect of a racial struggle.

When at last self-government in essentials had been won, the old dividing lines began to melt away. All but a small knot of Tory irreconcilables now agreed that the majority must rule, and that this would neither smash the Empire nor make an end of order and justice in the province itself. But who were to unite to form that majority, and what was to be their platform? In the Reform party there had been many men of essentially conservative mind, men such as John Redmond before the winning of Irish Home Rule, who on one point had been forced into hostility to an order of society with which, on other points, they were in almost complete sympathy. Particularly in Quebec, as John A. Macdonald was quick to see, there were many such, quite ready to rally to authority now that opportunity was open to all. Other factors hastened the breakdown of the old groupings. Economic interests came to the fore. In the discussion of canal and railway projects, banking and currency, trade and tariffs, new personal, class, or sectional interests arose. Once, too, that the machinery of responsible government had been installed, differences in political aptitude, in tactics and ideals, developed, and personal rivalries sharpened.

As a result of this unsettling and readjustment, a new party developed in the early fifties, composed of the moderate sections of both the older parties, and calling itself Liberal-Conservative. It took over the policy of the Reformers, on self-government, on the clergy reserves, on seigneurial tenure. The old Tory party dwindled and its platform disappeared. Yet a strong Opposition is essential to the proper working of the British system of parliamentary

government; if it did not exist, it would have to be created. No artificial effort, however, was now needed to produce it. A Liberalism or a Liberal-Conservatism which stood still as time marched by soon ceased to be true Liberalism; and new groups sprang up, eager to press forward at a swifter pace.

In Canada West the 'Clear Grit' party, founded by Radicals such as John Rolph, Peter Perry, and William M'Dougall, and later under the leadership of George Brown, declared war to the knife on all forms of special privilege. Denominational privilege, whether the claim of Anglicans to clergy reserves, or of Roman Catholics to separate schools in Canada West and to ecclesiastical supremacy above the civil law in Canada East; class privilege, like the claim of the seigneurs to feudal dues and powers; sectional privilege, such as it was asserted Canada East enjoyed in having half the members in the Union parliament though her population had ceased to be anything like half—all these Brown attacked with tremendous energy, if not always with fairness and judgment.

In Canada East the *Rouges* carried on a similar but far more hopeless fight. The brilliant group of young men who formed the nucleus of this party, Dorion, Doutre, Daoust, Papin, Fournier, Laberge, Letellier, Laflamme, Geoffrion, found a stimulus in the struggle which democratic Europe was waging in 1848, and a leader in Papineau. The great agitator had come back from exile in Paris to find a country that knew not Joseph, to find former lieutenants who now thought they could lead, and a province where the majority had wearied of the old cries of New France and were

suspicious of the new doctrines of Old France. He threw himself into violent but futile opposition to LaFontaine and rallied these fiery young crusaders about him. In *L'Avenir*, and later in *Le Pays*, they tilted against real and imaginary ogres, and the hustings of Quebec rang with their eloquence. Their demands were most sweeping and heterogeneous. They called for a vigorous policy of colonization and of instruction and experiment in agriculture; for simplification of judicial procedure and the forms of government; for the election, on the American plan, of administrative as well as legislative authorities; for annual parliaments; for increased powers of local government; for universal suffrage; for the abolition of clergy reserves, seigneurial tenure, and church tithes; and for the repeal of the Union. They joined the disgruntled Tories of their province in demanding, for very different reasons, annexation to the United States. Many of these demands have been approved, some have been disapproved, by time. Right or wrong, they were too advanced for their day and place. The country as a whole wanted, and doubtless needed, a period of noncontentious politics, of recuperation after long agitation, of constructive administration, and this the Liberal-Conservative majority was for the time better able to give, even though corruption was soon to vitiate its powers for good.

The alliance of the *Rouges* with the 'Clear Grits,' who were ever denouncing French Canada's 'special privileges,' was a great source of weakness to them in their own province. It was, however, the hostility of a section of the Catholic hierarchy which was most effective in keeping

these agitators long in a powerless minority. In the early days of the party this hostility was not unwarranted. Many of the young crusaders had definitely left the fold of the Church to criticize it from without, to demand the abolition of the Pope's temporal power in Europe and of the Church's tithing privileges in Canada, and to express heterodox doubts on matters of doctrine. This period soon passed, and the radical leaders confined themselves to demanding freedom of thought and expression and political activity; but the conflict went on. Almost inevitably the conflict was waged in both the political and the religious field. Where the chief question at issue was the relation of church and state, it was difficult to keep politics out of religion or religion out of politics. It was to be one of the signal services of Wilfrid Laurier, in his speech on Political Liberalism, to make clear the dividing line.

The conflict in Canada was in large part an echo of European struggles. In the past Canada had taken little notice of world-movements. The Reform agitation in Upper Canada had been, indeed, influenced by the struggle for parliamentary reform in Great Britain; but the French-speaking half of Canada, carefully sheltered in the quiet St Lawrence valley, a bit of seventeenth-century Normandy and Brittany preserved to the nineteenth, had known little and cared less for the storms without. But now questions were raised which were world-questions, and in the endeavour to adjust satisfactorily the relations of church and state both ultramontanes and liberals became involved in the quarrels which were rending France and Italy, and Canada felt the influence of the European stream of thought

or passion. When in 1868 five hundred young Canadians, enrolled as Papal Zouaves, sailed from Quebec to Rome, to support with their bayonets the tottering temporal power of the Pope, it was made clear that the moving forces of Europe had taken firm hold on the mind and heart of Quebec.

In Old France there had been much strife of Pope and King. The Pope had claimed authority over the Church in France, and the right to intervene in all state matters which touched morals or religion. King after king had sought to build up a national or Gallican Church, with the king at its head, controlled by its own bishops or by royal or parliamentary authority. Then had come the Revolution, making war on all privilege, overturning at once king and noble and prelate who had proved faithless to their high tasks. But in the nineteenth century, after the storm had spent itself, the Church, purified of internal enemies, had risen to her former position.

Within the Church itself widely different views were urged as to the attitude to be taken towards the new world that was rising on the ruins of the old order, towards the Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity and other ideas of '89. One wing called for relentless hostility, for an alliance of altar and throne to set up authority once more on its pedestal and to oppose at once the anarchy of democratic rule and the scepticism of free-thought. This ultramontane attitude—this looking 'beyond the mountains' to a supreme authority in Rome to give stability in a shifting world—found able and aggressive exponents. De Maistre denied the right of individual judgment in politics any more than in religion,

insisting on the divine source of kingly power and the duty of the Pope to oversee the exercise of this power. Lamennais brought De Maistre's opinions into practical politics, and insisted with burning eloquence on the need for the submission of all mankind to the Pope, the 'living tradition of mankind,' through whom alone individual reason receives the truth. Veuillot continued the crusade with un pitying logic and unquenchable zeal. In this era the disputes turned most significantly on control of press and school, for, as the revolution progressed, it gave the masses political power and made control of the means of shaping popular opinion as important as control of feudal fiefs or episcopal allegiance had been in earlier days. Opposed to this school stood men like Montalembert, Lacordaire, and Bishop Dupanloup—men who clung to the old Gallican liberties, or who wished to make peace with liberalism, to set up a Catholic liberalism, frankly accepting the new order, the right of the people to rule themselves, and seeking to show that by liberty of thought and discussion the true interests of the Church would be advanced and its power be broadest based. Now one wing, now the other won, but in the main the current flowed strongly towards ultramontanism. Pius IX, liberal in sympathies up to 1848, completely reversed his position after that date. In the Syllabus which he issued in 1864 he gave no quarter to modern tendencies. The doctrines that 'every man is free to embrace the religion which his reason assures him to be true,' that 'in certain Catholic countries immigrant non-Catholics should have the free exercise of their religion,' and that 'the Roman Pontiff can and ought to be reconciled with progress, liberalism,

and modern civism,' he explicitly condemned as false and heretical.

In Canada these successive conflicts had found many echoes. During the French régime Gallican principles of the power of the king over the Church had been frequently asserted; governor or intendant had, in a few notable instances, endeavoured to bridle the Church authorities. When the English came, the Church lost its place as the state church, but it consolidated its power, and soon was freer from intervention than it had been under the Most Christian King of France. During the French Revolution Canada was kept isolated from contact with France, but after the Restoration, with ultramontanism in the ascendant, intercourse was favoured; and the most thoroughgoing principles of clerical supremacy, with the most militant methods of controversy, found lodgment here. In both private and public life, among clergy as well as laity, each of the opposing tendencies was stoutly championed.

When Wilfrid Laurier went to Montreal in 1861, the leaders of the Liberal or *Rouge* party had sobered down from the fiery radicalism of their youth, and were content to leave the authorities of the Church alone. But leading authorities of the Church remained suspicious of that party. Bishop Bourget of Montreal, one of the most pious and energetic of ecclesiastics, firm to the point of obstinacy, seemed determined to crush it out. And though many eminent churchmen held out for a broader and more tolerant policy, the ultramontanes, by reason of their crusading zeal, steadily gained the ascendancy.

The issues raised in Quebec were manifold. Among them were the right of private judgment, the authority of canon law in the province, civil or ecclesiastical control over marriage, clerical immunity from the jurisdiction of civil courts, and the degree of intervention which was permissible to the clergy in elections.

The first question, that of the right of private judgment, concerned the future leader of Canadian Liberalism and became acute in connection with the *Institut Canadien* of Montreal. This was a literary and scientific society, founded in 1844 by some members of the same group who later organized the *Rouge* party. It supplied the want of a public library and reading-room in Montreal, and a hundred branches sprang up throughout the province. The *Institut* soon fell under the suspicion of a section of the clergy. It was declared by Bishop Bourget that immoral or heretical books which had been put on the *Index* were contained in the library. Rival societies were founded under the auspices of the Church and many of the members of the *Institut* were induced to secede.

Nevertheless young Laurier joined the *Institut* shortly after coming to Montreal. In 1863 he was one of a committee of four who endeavoured in vain to induce Bishop Bourget to specify what books were under the ban, and in 1865 and 1866 he was a vice-president of the society. Like his associates, he was placed in a difficult position by the bishop's unyielding attitude, for he did not wish to quarrel with his Church. So far as he was concerned, however, his removal to Arthabaskaville in 1866 ended the episode.

The remaining members of the *Institut* struggled on until 1868, when they published a *Year-Book* containing an address by Mr L. A. Dessaulles, president of the *Institut*, commending toleration.^[2] A nice question of interpretation followed. Mr Dessaulles asserted that he meant to urge personal toleration and good-will. Bishop Bourget contended that the address meant dogmatic toleration or indifference, the attitude that one creed was as good as another. In spite of an appeal to Rome by Joseph Doutre the work was placed on the *Index*, and the announcement followed that members who persisted in adhering to the *Institut* would be refused the sacraments of the Church. After this blow the *Institut* dwindled away and in time disappeared entirely.

Meanwhile Mr Laurier's weekly newspaper at Arthabaskaville, *Le Défricheur*, had come under the ban of Bishop Laflèche of Three Rivers, in whose diocese the little village lay. Subscribers refused to take their copies from the postmaster, or quietly called at the office to announce that, in spite of their personal sympathy, they were too much afraid of the curés—or of their own wives—to continue their subscriptions. The editor warmly protested against the arbitrary action, which threatened at once to throttle his freedom of speech and to wipe out his saved and borrowed capital. But the forces arrayed against him were too strong, and some six months after the first number under his management appeared, *Le Défricheur* went the way of many other Liberal journals in Quebec. It was not likely that Mr Laurier's growing law practice would have long permitted him to edit the paper, but at the moment the blow was none the less felt.

[2] 'Is it not permissible,' Mr Dessaules asked, 'when Protestants and Catholics are placed side by side in a country, in a city, for them to join in the pursuit of knowledge? ... What is toleration? It is reciprocal indulgence, sympathy, Christian charity.... It is fraternity, the spirit, of religion well understood.... It is at bottom humility, the idea that others are not worthless, that others are as good as ourselves.... Intolerance is pride; it is the idea that we are better than others; it is egotism, the idea that we owe others nothing.'

CHAPTER III

FIRST YEARS IN PARLIAMENT

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In the Provincial Legislature—In federal politics—The Mackenzie government—The Riel question—Protection or free trade—The Catholic programme—Catholic liberalism—The clergy in politics—Political liberalism—In the administration

Less than five years had passed after Wilfrid Laurier came to Arthabaskaville, a boyish, unknown lawyer-editor, when he was chosen by an overwhelming majority as member for Drummond-Arthabaska in the provincial legislature. His firmly based Liberalism, his power as a speaker, his widespread popularity, had very early marked him out as the logical candidate of his party. On many grounds he was prepared to listen to the urging of his friends. His interest in politics was only second, if second it was, to his interest in his profession. The ambition to hold a place in parliament was one which appealed to practically every able young lawyer of his time in Quebec, and, thanks to the short sessions of the provincial assembly and the nearness of Arthabaska to Quebec, membership in the legislature would not greatly interfere with his work at home. Yet his health was still precarious, and it was with much hesitation and reluctance that he finally consented to stand for the county in 1871, at the second general election since Confederation. Though ill throughout the campaign, he was able to make a few speeches, and the loyal support of his friends did the rest. His opponent, Edward Hemming,