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THE AMERICAN SPIRIT

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THE AMERICAN SPIRIT

The strong and unequivocal utterances of Sir Wilfrid Laurier at Chicago, couched in the sympathetic eloquence of a master of English speech and backed by the impressive personality of the man, have had a distinct effect upon American opinion, and will at least do something to mellow the tone and improve the temper of international relationships. But while we may look with some confidence to an early reference of the Alaskan boundary question to arbitration, beyond that we shall receive no concessions from the Washington Government. The word is, perhaps, badly chosen, for we do not seek concessions, and an agreement to arbitrate is not a concession upon the one side or the other. We desire only international good neighborhood, rational trade relations, and a frank recognition of our right to make our own position on this continent. Whether the principle of freedom or of restriction shall dominate in our commercial relationships rests with the United

States. We do not ask the Government at Washington for privileges in American markets for which we cannot give compensation in Canadian markets. We do not ask for privileges for our transportation agencies that are not fairly earned by services rendered to the border communities of the United States. We do not seek through deliberate unneighborliness to deny the American people fair access to our natural resources, and we do not expect that they will quarrel with Canadian legislation that is designed to preserve for Canadians the largest benefits from these resources, or that they will expect us to welcome American legislation that may be designed to make our resources tributary to the progress and prosperity of American communities.

For the moment we cannot think that Canada exercises her fair share of political or of moral power on this continent. The masses of the American people know only that our population is small. They know nothing of our great extent of territory and rich natural resources. They know nothing of our growing influence in the great empire to which we belong. They are so enmeshed in their own affairs, so proud of their wonderful growth and expansion, so con-

vinced that their stature fills the earth, that they have no thought for other communities, except when a conflict of interests or a clash of sympathies turns them momentarily from the supreme consideration of their own great concerns. It is from this standpoint that the speeches of Sir Wilfrid Laurier at Chicago will turn attention toward Canada, develop interest in Canada, and do good for Canada. His position at the banquet at the Auditorium was difficult and delicate. The occasion was social. His words must be within terms of the strictest courtesy. He could introduce no jarring note. He could not be aggressive, hardly controversial. Yet he spoke with clearness, firmness and decision. He put no varnish on the existing relations between Canada and the United States ; and, while now and then he sobered the company to very serious, if not to ominous, silence, the final issue of his argument compelled their assent, and they doubtless respected Canada more than ever before because of the resolute candor and courage of its eloquent spokesman. He kept his head, he made no appeal to the mob, he uttered no cheap rhetoric, and it is to the credit of the American press that it understood the man and his motive, and that a manly man and a manly speech have found

esteem and appreciation among all the better journals of the United States.

Still the dominant note of the festivities at Chicago was that of aggressive, invincible Americanism. There is the arrogance of numbers and the very insolence of power in many of the utterances of American politicians. However it may be in the south and north, it is manifest that in the west the expansion feeling has taken possession of the people, and the speeches of Mr. McKinley and of his Ministers were direct appeals to the spirit of the masses. They were militant in tone and jingoistic in essence, and the way they were received proves that the war spirit, the lust of conquest and the vanities of power and possession are as native in the American democracy as in any despot-ruled, war-making empire that the world has ever seen. It would be folly to deny that there is danger in this feverish war spirit, in this pride of material prosperity, and that to many millions of the American people aggression could easily assume the disguise of a crusade for liberty, and that to these a satisfactory definition of freedom is the royal will and pleasure of the American Republic.

While this is true, one cannot but admire the exuberant and aggressive patriotism of

the American people. Their love of country is a passion. They reverence their flag. They believe that it stands for freedom and for the most sacred causes of humanity, and they honor it and cheer it and exalt it with an invincible enthusiasm. Most characteristic of all, they take the Pole and the Swede and the Frenchman and the German and the Irishman, they receive all the tribes of the earth into the great American household, and they put them into the crucible of American ideas and aspirations, and make them as aggressively American as the native-born descendants of the men of Bunker Hill and Massachusetts Bay. They have made their country a land of refuge for the oppressed and down-trodden of the old-world communities. They have touched their hearts with the rhetoric of freedom and baptized them at the altar of American institutions. While our greatest need is population, some of our western politicians treat the immigrant as a party issue, exaggerate his poverty however nobly incurred, meet him with insult, and advocate an enduring disfranchisement. The attitude is unspeakably foolish ; it is treasonable and criminal. We cannot afford to be indifferent as to the character of the people we invite to Canada, but we have room here for millions of the

northern races, and we should be tender of their poverty, we should be zealous for their settlement under satisfactory conditions, and we should nurture them with care and consideration into a stalwart Canadianism.

Again, we should not by exaggerated alarm over every temporary ebullition of feeling in Quebec rush into frantic denunciation of the French-Canadians, and so tend to drive them into a solid mass of dissentients, and set up the mischievous anti-national idea that there is room for only English-speaking people in this free country. We want more of Canadian and less of French-Canadian, or even of English or Irish Canadian. We do not blame the Scotchman if he still loves Scotland, or the Englishman if he still loves England, and why should we make it a reproach to the Frenchman if he still loves France? Speech is as free in Quebec as in Ontario. We would quarrel if the man of Quebec sought to make us into French-Canadians, and so long as he is a loyal subject of Canada cannot we afford to be patient with his inherited sympathies and so win him to greater community of feeling and interest with ourselves and to fuller partnership in all the ambitions and concerns of this new commonwealth? He has as much right here as we have, and by reproach, insult and

attack we can only make him feel as an out-cast in his own land, and disrupt, divide and distress our common country. One comes out of the presence of such vociferous and aggressive Americanism as was witnessed at Chicago, and turns with something like despair to the petty bickerings and village squabbings of Canadian politics. Surely we can find higher aims and larger issues for our people. We are at last on the highway to nationhood. There was hope that racial and religious quarrels had been put behind us for ever. But again the sky is overcast, and many of our journals and politicians are seeking local popularity and party success through the mischievous and dangerous incitement of racial passions. We have had three years of peace, and these have been the most fruitful and the most splendid years of all our history. They who would disturb this happy condition and revive the miserable feuds and paltry quarrels of darker days take a great responsibility, and must answer for it to the Canadian people. If we keep our feet in the true paths of progress we shall in ten years have ten or twelve millions of people in this country ; we shall have a numerous commercial and industrial population in Ontario and Quebec ; we shall have great mining communities in the east, in

northwestern Ontario and in the Pacific Province; we shall have another great through railway in the west; we shall have a numerous and prosperous population in the rich Saskatchewan country, and shall have settlement spreading away out into the Peace River Territories; we shall have perfected our channels of water transportation, and be carrying an enormous volume of the products of the west over Canadian routes, and sending them out to the ultimate markets from Canadian ports; and, best of all, we shall have won the right to speak on more equal terms with our neighbors, and have vastly enhanced our moral and political power on this continent. For this great task we need all our energies, we need all our enthusiasm, we need a united people, so full of their mission and so determined in their purpose that they will see only the best in one another, and will enthusiastically absorb and assimilate the streams of immigrants that will come to us from across the border and from over seas. Give us more hope, give us more faith, give us more toleration, give us a sterner and more aggressive patriotism, and let us have done once and for all with domestic feuds that divide and impede, that make us contemptible at home and impotent abroad.

J. S. WILLISON.

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