

WHEN ANNEXATION WAS IN FLOWER

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TO Americans, the annexation of Canada and the absorption of Mexico are questions of occasional interest. For Canadians, annexation might be described as a sort of an unpopular perennial. To be sure, at the present, this particular bloom is not exactly welcome in the political garden patch. But like matter, as John Stuart Mill defined it, it is perhaps "a permanent possibility of sensation."

In one form or another, it appears from time to time in the columns of the daily press or the pages of some magazine. The most recent references found place in articles published, the one in a leading periodical of London, and the other in Chicago's largest newspaper. It was interesting to find two such widely separated media, representing such different points of view, the one so essentially British, the other so essentially American. Yet both were agreed, and this is significant, that there was but one destiny for Canada—annexation or absorption by the United States. In each instance it was maintained that this would eventuate through peaceful penetration.

Canadians of to-day may indignantly, even vociferously, resent and reject such a possibility. They may say, as did a fervent opponent of Reciprocity, in the famous election of 1911, "Canada for Us, not for U. S." But there is no burking the fact that already the great republic to the south has a financial hold on the industries and resources of the Canadian Commonwealth. Already it has a strategic grip, calculated at more than two and a half billions of dollars. In spite of this undeniable fact, it would indeed be a bold politician who ventured to make annexation an issue before the electorate of Canada.

There was a time, however, when annexation was in flower: when indeed it was freely canvassed, not only in parts of Canada, but also in no less a place than the Congress of the United States. It will be news to most of the Americans and Canadians of the present generation to learn that, at one time, this question was so prominent that a Bill was actually formulated and introduced

into the House of Representatives at Washington for the admission of Canada into the American Union. This amazing measure was presented in 1866. But the question of the incorporation of British American colonies in the American Union had been mooted on various occasions previous to this date. Indeed, according to the historians, it was a recurrent subject for political consideration from the time of the War of Independence.

The question of preferential trade and reciprocity, as far back as 1849, gave birth to a movement for annexation in Canada. This agitation collapsed, largely because it came at a critical period in the domestic relations of the United States. There was, in consequence, no disposition on the part of either political party in the republic to respond to these impulsive advances. The revival of this question came about in 1866 for two reasons: 1—The conditions that had arisen among the settlers in the great territories of the Hudson's Bay Company, west of the Great Lakes, and north of the forty-ninth parallel. 2—The approach of the date of the termination of the Reciprocity Treaty between Canada and the United States.

As is well known, the vast region between the Great Lakes and the Rocky Mountains was, at that period, and for two centuries preceding, owned and administered by the Hudson's Bay Company under the Charter for fur trading granted by the British Crown in 1670. Relations between the officials of this great company and the half breeds and new settlers in the Red River region of the North West had become very strained. The half breeds had learned of the discussions in Eastern Canada concerning the possible acquisition of the western lands to provide outlets for population in the future. As wards and employees of the great company, they resented the influx of newcomers. On the other hand, the small body of settlers recently domiciled in the country which is now the southern part of Manitoba was exasperated because of the way the West was administered by the officers of the Hudson's Bay Company.

J. W. Taylor, a special agent of the Treasury Department of the United States, an authority upon the resources of the North-West, and an ardent advocate of annexation, in reporting at that time upon this territory, declared as follows:

West of the Great Lakes—from Lake Superior to the Pacific Coast—there are only three isolated points where civilized society is established, namely, Selkirk Settlement, north of Minnesota and south of Lake Winnipeg; a few miners from Montana on the source of the Saskatchewan; and the colony of British Col-

umbia, including Vancouver and Queen Charlotte Islands. Over this immense area, large enough to make five States equal in all respects to Minnesota, the European population does not exceed 30,000, nine-tenths of whom desire annexation to the United States. The press and people of British Columbia make public demonstrations in favour of the American connection.

Following this report and based upon it, General Banks introduced a Bill into the House of Representatives on July the 2nd, 1866, providing "for the admission of the States of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Canada East and Canada West, and for the organization of the territories of Selkirk, Saskatchewan, and Columbia."

Subsequent to the second reading of this measure, it was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs of which Banks himself was chairman. No definite action, says a recent historian, resulted; yet it precipitated a volume of interesting newspaper discussion both in Canada and in the United States, particularly in relation to the question of reciprocity and annexation. This Bill was characterized by Sir Edward Watkin, a prominent British M. P., as "an insulting document." In vigorous fashion he hurled his opinion—"I challenge the quotation of any similar outrage on the part of any civilized nation at peace with the Empire attacked. Had a similar Bill, as applied to the Southern States, been introduced in the British House of Commons, the United States Ambassador to the Court of St. James's would have been promptly recalled."

Some of the provisions of this measure, in the light of later parliamentary happenings, are very arresting. The Bill provided that as soon as the governments of Great Britain and the provinces indicated their acceptance, the states and territories should be admitted. The conditions of admittance were set forth in twelve articles. In the first two, provision was made for the taking over of public works, and the assumption of the funded debt and liabilities of the provinces. In the apportionment of the latter, about one half of the total amount suggested is offered to Canada West—a key to the whole curious proposal. Articles Three to Six made provision for organization, representation, and territorial divisions of the proposed state and territories. The next article proposed the assumption of the expenditure of \$50,000,000 to improve the navigation of the St. Lawrence and the Great Lakes. Land grants of twenty sections per mile were next suggested, to aid in the construction of a railroad from Truro, Nova Scotia, to some point on the Pacific Coast north of the 49th parallel, by way of

Riviere du Loup, Ottawa, Sault Ste. Marie, Bayfield, Superior, Pembina, Fort Garry, and the valley of the North Saskatchewan. An offer of ten million dollars was proposed to be made to the Hudson's Bay Company for all their rights in North America. The last section of the plan ingeniously provided that if Prince Edward Island declined to enter, the benefits offered it should be omitted, but for the others all the provisions would be retained. Similar omissions were to be made in case Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Canada declined to accept. There remained then the Northwest Territory and the Pacific provinces, to which was offered aid in the construction of a railway from the western extremity of Superior to the Pacific Coast, by way of Pembina, Fort Garry, and the valley of the Saskatchewan—and this was the heart of the proposition.

As already pointed out, this measure provoked a storm of caustic and diverting comments from press and publicists on both sides of the line. "The door is open, and a gentle rap will let them in" said the *Utica Telegraph* of that date. "It is the best anti-Fenian measure that could be devised," said the *Detroit Post*. "It is probably intended to serve as the handle of a basket into which the fruit, when fully ripe, may drop," wrote the *Troy Whig*—and a large number of similar explanations were offered in other American newspapers.

By the Canadian press the Bill was received with condemnation or ridicule. "Mr. Taylor might next try his hand on a plan for the annexation of the moon," said the *Toronto Globe*. In the opinion of the *London Review*, however, the ridiculous side disappeared when improvements in navigation were considered, and it declared, "Canadian politicians may be turned away from their bickerings and intrigues to consider a policy which will advance every interest in the province and will give a healthy stimulus to trade..." Sir Edward Watkin regarded the bill as an illustration of the "consequences of vacillation and delay in the vigorous government of the Hudson's Bay Territory, and in all distant parts of the Empire." A writer in a Winnipeg newspaper, ascribing to the Bill an influence that may truly be ascribed to the abrogation of the treaty, wrote that it "proved a powerful motor in advancing Confederation and assuring the marvellous achievement of a Canadian inter-oceanic communication."

But this was not the end of the story. On March the 6th, 1868, we learn from the records of the legislature of the State of Minnesota that a memorial to the President and Congress read as follows:

We regret to be informed of a purpose to transfer the territories between Minnesota and Alaska to the Dominion of Canada, by an order in council at London, without a vote of the people of Selkirk and the settlers upon the sources of the Saskatchewan River, who largely consist of emigrants from the United States; and we would respectfully urge that the President and Congress of the United States shall represent to the Government of Great Britain that such action will be an unwarrantable interference with the principle of self-government, and cannot be regarded with indifference by the people of the United States.

This resolution was presented with the suggestion that the cession of British Northwest America might balance the account between Great Britain and the United States.

The same year, Senator Ramsay of Minnesota introduced into the Senate, in revised form, a resolution based upon Taylor's earlier Bill, the main provision of which was that the committee on foreign relations should take under consideration the advisability of a treaty between Great Britain and the United States, providing for the cession to the United States of British America west of longitude 90'. Speaking to this resolution, Senator Ramsay was reported thus: "He believed that the people of Selkirk Settlement and British Columbia preferred admission to the American Union, and therefore he regarded it as advisable to indicate the terms and conditions of such admission. He felt that such an arrangement might not only result in a desirable extension of our institutions in Northwest America, but would go far to remove all grounds of offence and antagonism of interests between the communities planted in the valley of the St. Lawrence."

This short historical sequence of events and opinions on the perennial issue of annexation may serve, in some measure, to link the past with more recent attitudes and utterances in the same connection.