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## THE DRUMMOND-ARTHABASKA BY-ELECTION OF 1910

ON FEBRUARY 3, 1910, DEBATE OPENED ON the Naval Bill presented by Laurier three weeks earlier. On the day before had occurred the death of Senator Sir George Drummond. This event led to a Commons vacancy in the placid Quebec farming constituency of Drummond-Arthabaska, a vacancy which, coming in the heat of the naval controversy, produced one of the most bitterly contested and repercussive by-elections in Canada's history. Not the least of its many interesting aspects is the comment made years later by Sir Robert Borden: "The election created great excitement in the Province of Quebec, *although little was heard of it in the English-speaking provinces.*"<sup>1</sup> Yet, writing around the same time, Armand Lavergne, who had shared the platform during the campaign with Borden's Quebec members in support of the anti-Laurier candidate, had this to say: "The campaign raised considerable interest not only in our own province, but all over the country . . . . The English press, from Ontario and the Maritime provinces, were represented at all our meetings by an army of reporters and correspondents. . . ." <sup>2</sup>

One purpose of this essay is to determine which comment came nearer the truth.

### I

Since 1887, Drummond-Arthabaska had been firmly held by the Lavergne brothers, first Joseph, Laurier's old law partner, then Louis. True, in 1877 the twin counties had dealt Laurier his only personal defeat. By 1910, however, there was every reason to believe that "nowhere in Quebec would his personal prestige count for more"<sup>3</sup> when it came time to test his Naval Bill.

Sharing this hope was Lord Grey, a strong advocate of a Canadian navy and a sedulous worker for its unanimous support. When in March, 1909, Laurier had proposed a Canadian navy, there had been a general air of such unanimity. The original motion had been made by George E. Foster, and Laurier's resolution had

received Borden's assent, with the proviso that emergency direct contributions to the Imperial fleet be not entirely ruled out. Then in October, 1909, on returning from England, Borden delivered a speech at Halifax that seemed to lend unequivocal support for a navy built and manned in Canada. Lord Grey at once congratulated him:

I am so glad that you have flattened out, I hope for ever, that most unworthy argument that the contribution which Canada should make to the Imperial navy should take the shape of Dreadnoughts, in other words a subsidy, on the ground that Canada cannot be trusted to lay the foundations of an efficient fleet!<sup>4</sup>

But even if Grey had no premonition that Borden would soon switch to the very policy he most deplored, he could not but be aware of Borden's difficulties in leading a party ridden with factions that challenged his leadership and differed on the naval question. In the previous May, Grey had tried to smooth Borden's path by seeking the support of F. D. Monk, on whom Borden's support among the French-speaking Conservatives largely depended. To convince Monk of the danger involved in Germany's "feverish haste" to build up a navy, he wrote,

There is no part of the British Empire which stands to lose more than the Province of Quebec, from any naval disaster that may befall the British Crown . . . One German cruiser in the mouth of the St. Lawrence would put every Quebec farmer out of business.<sup>5</sup>

He suggested a conference in Montreal on June 3 with Monk and the prominent Quebec Conservative, Chase-Casgrain, over this question, with what results we shall see later. Unfortunately, Chase-Casgrain was more interested in urging Henri Bourassa to campaign actively against the proposed navy.<sup>6</sup> Bourassa needed no urging, for the whole project, notwithstanding Laurier's assurance that service would be voluntary, was from the first regarded by the Nationalists with alarm and suspicion.

Meanwhile, Borden was now insisting on an emergency grant to the Royal Navy, though, as Borden later admitted, Monk had "allied himself with M. Bourassa in opposition to any naval action for the time being."<sup>7</sup> As a result, Monk flatly demanded a plebiscite on the question. With this demand Borden, threatened by internal party dissension, virtually concurred. At the final reading on April 20, 1910, he too called for "a decision by the people themselves" on permanent policy.<sup>8</sup> Grey saw support for his great dream vanishing.

When the Bill passed, a sympathy demonstration was organized for Monk at which Senator Landry promised him the support of the Quebec Conservatives.<sup>9</sup>

Into the battle against a Canadian navy spearheaded by the newly formed *Le Devoir* Monk threw himself with enthusiasm. Throughout the summer of 1910 he spoke frequently in support of Bourassa's campaign. One amazingly successful meeting after another was held all over Quebec. The crowds were harangued not only by Monk and Bourassa, but by Nantel, Blondin, Paquet and other Conservative stalwarts.<sup>10</sup> *Le Devoir* observed that a new era had arrived: Laurier could be attacked in public in Quebec without arousing indignation.<sup>11</sup>

But while the campaign against Laurier raged, the Liberals remained complacent. Before leaving for Europe in August, 1910, Rodolphe Lemieux summed up the situation for Laurier, then touring the west. Bourassa, Lemieux wrote, "offends, wounds and paralyzes to our profit the Tory party in Quebec." The Nationalists' meetings had not stirred opinion against the government, he felt, nor were many people concerned for or against the Navy: "Let Bourassa rant and rave. So much the better for the Liberal party."<sup>12</sup> In turn, Lemieux was assured by Senator Dandurand that the present situation did not menace the Government, for both parties were being equally denounced by the anti-naval faction.<sup>13</sup> True, the "St-Eustache Resolutions" had censured Borden's policy as "*non moins néfaste*."<sup>14</sup> But the manifesto had been signed by the Conservative delegates themselves, under Monk's urging. Surely there were dangers to the Liberals implicit in such division within the opposing camp, and this should have tempered their satisfaction.

## II

The anti-navy campaign had been blazing for some months when, on October 13, Louis Lavergne, the sitting member for Drummond-Arthabaska, was at last named to the Senate. Less than a week after Senator Drummond's death the preceding February, Lavergne's friends had begun congratulating him (prematurely) on his elevation and recommending Joseph-Edouard Perrault, a young Arthabaska lawyer, as his successor. Perrault, bâtonnier and Crown Prosecutor, and, indeed, one of Laurier's protégés, promptly sent Laurier a somewhat naive letter of self-commendation.<sup>15</sup> Laurier's reply was guarded. "It seems to me," he wrote, "that there are still a few black clouds on the horizon. I would not want to open the county before having done everything possible to erase all traces of discontent in the party." The local disaffected group could, he knew, do the party serious harm, although he conceded its force had been greater a year or so before.<sup>16</sup>

Thus matters stood in February. But as the opposition gradually strengthened its hold on the countryside by fanning anti-naval emotion, Laurier remained intent on settling local differences. In May the curé of Drummondville reported on

Perrault's organization. It was "complete, strong and steadfast"; victory was certain "with a large majority against anyone at all." He disagreed with Senator Mitchell's objections that the county was divided; it had never been more united.<sup>17</sup> Laurier assured Abbé Tetreau he was "in a better position than anyone to consider the situation in its true aspect"—a comment not without ambiguity.<sup>18</sup> In July Abbé Côté of Arthabaskaville, with whom he had discussed the situation at length, wrote from London to urge an early decision.<sup>19</sup> Still Laurier delayed. After the Eucharistic Congress in September, Perrault reported anew on the local intrigues and the attitude of their supporters, declaring: "The navy frightens none of them."<sup>20</sup> Echoing his young ally's optimism, Lavergne wrote, "Sentiment is absolutely in favour of your Government as usual."<sup>21</sup> And a week later Perrault again promised the election would be won easily. "The naval question frightens none of them", he repeated. "We will not lose a leader on this question."<sup>22</sup>

Lavergne, Perrault, Abbé Tetreau, and others were all sanguine—and all had axes to grind. But at last Laurier gave way. "All the information I am getting confirms the impression you give", he told Perrault, adding that he had now secured Senator Mitchell's "cordial support."<sup>23</sup> On October 14 the by-election was announced, with official presentations to be held on the 27th and polling on November 3.<sup>24</sup> When Laurier came to the nominating convention on the 18th he denied once more that his navy would undermine autonomy and bring on conscription. Perrault himself announced boldly: "The present fight will be conducted on the naval question."<sup>25</sup> Next day Louis Lavergne wrote, "Everything is going fine and I would not be surprised at an election by acclamation."<sup>26</sup>

This was nonsense. Not everyone was content with Lavergne's hand-picked candidate, and what was more important, the Nationalists fully intended putting up the fight of their life. At their own nominating convention, held the same day, Monk and Sévigny admitted that a Conservative candidate would have no chance. Napoleon Garceau, the pro-Nationalist mayor of Drummondville, was out of favour with the clergy. Armand Lavergne, nephew of the newly-named Senator and an erstwhile protégé of Laurier, now Bourassa's chief lieutenant, dared not sacrifice his provincial seat.<sup>27</sup> At last the choice fell on one Arthur Gilbert, a young farmer of Stanfold. Though incapable of making a speech, he had a useful former Liberal background, an anti-navy record, an appealing occupation, and, best of all, money. Commenting on this event, the Saint John *Telegraph* described Monk's attack on the Naval Act under the headline, "Borden's Lieutenant Fires First Gun", thus setting the tone for the bitterly partisan press coverage to follow.

On October 20 in Montreal an immense crowd heard Monk, Bourassa, Sévigny, and Armand Lavergne hurl abuse on Laurier and Lord Grey. The demonstration seemed to create a greater sensation than the meeting held on the 10th by the Liberals. Without losing a day, Gilbert's army left for the battleground. Behind the lines they were assured of the support of Esioff Patenaude, the Conservative organizer, and Charles Beaubien, the wealthy Conservative leader, who arranged to send speakers.<sup>28</sup>

In turn the Liberals summoned a host of M.P.'s, including Dr. Henri Béland, the youthful Ernest Lapointe, and their organizer Jacques Bureau, then Solicitor General.<sup>29</sup> At first it seemed to Béland, a sagacious man, that they had an advantage. Writing to Laurier from Arthabaska, he described Gilbert as a "*petit candidat*." With short-lived optimism he added, "Your many friends here are of the opinion that Perrault will be named by a large majority especially if they keep Gilbert against him."<sup>30</sup>

But by the 25th, when Louis Lavergne and Béland reported separately from Arthabaska, they had had a taste of the highly wrought oratory with which Bourassa, Monk, and their followers were supporting this "*petit candidat*." Here Gilbert's committeemen were by no means confident, whereas the Liberals were prophesying a majority of 1,200 to 1,500 and promising to carry every poll in Drummond.<sup>31</sup> But privately Béland's confidence had been shaken, and even Lavergne warned that they must have more speakers.<sup>32</sup> Béland's concern was more over their quality than their numbers. "Our speakers are not as well trained as the Nationalists," who were, he added laconically, "not saying they will win."<sup>33</sup> His next report struck a sharper note of alarm: "It is a very, very serious fight that is being waged against Perrault." Along with ominous reports of neglect in Arthabaska's organization came the familiar warning: "From the first the farmers have accepted the navy badly . . . . Nothing remains but to oppose cold reason to sentiment and that is always a thankless task."<sup>34</sup>

Next day a large crowd filled the basement of the Drummondville parish church. Pointing accusingly at Bourassa and exclaiming, "They are raising French Canadians against English Canadians!" Brodeur, Minister of Naval Service, begged his audience "to have nothing to do with men who would lead us into civil war."<sup>35</sup> It was a rowdy, angry meeting, punctuated by cat-calls and sharp questions. To all appearances the Liberals had held their own, but Béland's report was pessimistic. His further complaints on the haphazard state of Arthabaska organization came now as no surprise. "It is a thankless struggle," he confessed. "Their cause lends itself

to demagoguery and their speakers are better trained and less scrupulous than our own."<sup>36</sup>

Undoubtedly the opposition speakers were skilled at rousing passions with "inflammatory" statements.<sup>37</sup> Up and down the twin counties the battle raged, with the navy dominating every discussion, and always the slogan: "A vote for Perrault is a vote for war; a vote for Gilbert is a vote for peace."<sup>38</sup>

As Armand Lavergne later affirmed, newspapers from far and wide paid close attention. On the 28th the *Halifax Chronicle*, a strong defender of the navy, declared that the Conservatives were not "merely onlookers" in the campaign. The *Toronto Globe* called the combination of Nationalists, Ultramontanes, and Old Bleus "the end of Conservatism as a political force in Quebec," adding with reckless assurance that "Borden by failure to put a candidate in the field has written finis across his own political career." Next day the *Saint John Telegraph* joined in the chorus of complacency. "There is little to fear . . . Sir Wilfred Laurier himself is taking an active part in the campaign."<sup>39</sup>

The enterprising *Montreal Herald* printed telegrams from prominent Conservatives in answer to its inquiry: "How do you advise Conservatives to vote in Arthabaska Election?" George E. Foster answered "As his intelligence and conscience dictate," adding, however, pointed reasons why the Laurier administration should be turned out. Premier McBride of British Columbia told the electors to follow "the advice of our leader at Ottawa." Borden himself disclaimed knowledge of the situation, having been in Virginia, but advised them to "vote according to the dictates of their own conscience." Robert Rogers was more explicit: "Every conservative and loyal Canadian, whether in Arthabaska or elsewhere, should recognize that his first duty to his country is to vote against the Laurier administration."<sup>40</sup>

On the 29th, in one of his most courageous speeches, Béland reminded his audience that England had protected Canada for 150 years and had asked nothing in return. Now Canada should build her own navy; if she were independent there would be no choice. He sounded confident. But writing from Arthabaska that night, he expressed added alarm over organization: "Everything was being allowed to drift, under the direction of a man who spent his time in bed . . . Nothing, nothing, is to be neglected. Drummond will have to save the riding."<sup>41</sup>

Next day joint meetings were held from end to end of the constituency in temperatures close to zero. Estimates of the Liberal majority had now shrunk to "several hundred," though the Nationalists for their part admitted that Gilbert would need a miracle to win.<sup>42</sup> That day the Liberals put some thirty-five M.P.'s in the

field, and next day used seventy speakers. But at Victoriaville Jacques Bureau is said to have remained at the hotel regaling himself and his cronies while Béland, Lapointe, and the others were on the hustings.<sup>43</sup> Here, Béland reported, Blondin had been very effective: "Baptise is against the navy . . . . Our opponents, who know this well, make it the sole issue and our job is to replace it. . . . As for that wretched Jacques we have not seen him again."<sup>44</sup>

To the end a Liberal victory was predicted not only in Liberal papers but in such Conservative organs as the *Montreal Star* and *Montreal Gazette* as well. Bourassa even prepared an editorial for *Le Devoir* in which, taking a Liberal victory for granted, he declared that it meant nothing, having been purchased by "drunkenness, debauchery, confusion . . . under the serene eye and with the tacit and complaisant connivance of the Rt. Hon. Sir Wilfrid Laurier . . . ."<sup>45</sup> But Gilbert's miracle came to pass, in the shape of a majority of 207 votes. Béland's forebodings about Arthabaska were justified; Perrault carried the town but lost the county by some 150 votes. But Drummond, over which even Béland had been hopeful, also went to the opposition.<sup>46</sup>

That night in Montreal, Monk and Bourassa appeared in triumph at the windows of *Le Devoir*. "It is the first sign of what will happen all over the province of Quebec," they declared.<sup>47</sup> Liberal leaders in Montreal unleashed a chorus of indignation. Opposition opinion ranged from the jubilant to the cautious. But in Ottawa, according to Bourassa, a group of Conservative M.P.'s hastened to offer Monk their congratuations, eliciting the remark, "They have become indecently polite."<sup>48</sup> Bourassa regarded the result as a "revealing bolt from the blue for everyone",<sup>49</sup> and, indeed, press opinion echoed the country-wide shock. The *Toronto Globe* protested that the lengths to which "Conservatives" had gone in arousing anti-British sentiment would "shock the country when fully disclosed." After quoting some examples, it decided that the "culpability" of Borden was "little short of that of Messrs. Monk, Bourassa and Blondin." Less waspishly though more portentously, the *Halifax Chronicle* warned that the election menaced "the peace and concord of the Dominion. . . ." The *Saint John Telegraph* blamed Borden for not repudiating Monk, but consoled itself by forecasting an "overwhelming victory" for Laurier at the next general election.

The extreme of anti-Laurier feeling was voiced by the *Quebec Chronicle*, which said "The historic Drummond election is over, and Sir Wilfrid is beaten at his own game." This retribution theme also served the *Toronto Mail and Empire*. "The disaster to the Government is ominous," it added. Conversely, the Conserva-

tive Ottawa *Citizen* found the campaign so distasteful that it voiced regret that Laurier's man had lost.

In Montreal the *Herald* took the view that Laurier might well be justified in retiring as a consequence. Farther west the *Winnipeg Free Press* lamented: "If there is Conservative rejoicing anywhere . . . surely it will make Sir John A. Macdonald turn in his grave that rejoicing over such a defeat should bear the name Conservative." On the coast the *Victoria Daily Colonist* displayed perhaps the most moderate attitude. Though it regarded the waning of Laurier's influence as not "unwelcome news to Conservatives generally", it saw at the same time that the fundamental issue was whether or not Canada should bear some share of Imperial defence: "We hope the situation is not as grave as may seem to be warranted . . . but if it is Canadians cannot understand it too soon."

Even overseas the election attracted notice. A mortified Abbé Côté heard of it in Rome. The *Times* of London devoted nearly a whole column to it on the 5th. On the 9th it reported that "party quarrel continues over the astonishing result . . . with the Liberals seeking to prove an alliance between Nationalists and Conservatives and the Conservatives calling it a natural result of Liberal teaching in Quebec." Again on the 11th, again on the 18th, and later during the embittered post mortems in Parliament, reports on the by-election appeared in "the Thunderer."

Borden soon established his party's attitude in a signed letter printed in the *Montreal Star* on November 4. Unleashing a *tu quoque* counter attack that was to prove remarkably durable, he compared the Nationalist campaign of 1910 with Laurier's in 1896:

The master has been beaten by his own disciples and by his own preaching. The pupils learned their lesson too well and refused to forget it. There is a homely English proverb that chickens always come home to roost. This has never been better exemplified in a political sense . . .

George Taylor, the veteran Conservative chief whip who was soon to be replaced by George Perley, sent a telegram congratulating Monk on his "great fight and success."<sup>50</sup> Perley affirmed that "The people of Quebec are opposed to the Government's naval programme, as are the great majority of all Canadians. . . . Laurier's paramount influence is practically at an end";<sup>51</sup> a view strongly endorsed by Senator Landry. Monk himself said merely that the event was "a triumph for the principle that the people should be given a chance to express their approval or disapproval of the Naval Bill."<sup>52</sup>

On the 7th he addressed the Y.M.C.A., stressing the same points made by



Perley and Ames: rural Canada as well as Quebec opposed the navy, but the minority would abide by the result of a plebiscite.<sup>53</sup> Even more reassuring was Bourassa's declaration to the Toronto *Telegram* the next day. Whether independent or not, he averred, Canada "should always remain an ally of Great Britain. . . ." Two days later a large victory meeting was organized in Montreal, at which the speakers, apart from Bourassa, were mainly Conservatives. Then on November 18, Armand Lavergne, clad in captain's uniform, addressed the University of Toronto. He assured the students the Nationalists were not anti-British, or even anti-navy; they merely wished to ensure Canadian control and popular consultation.

Clearly a spectacular and unexpected success had been achieved. The whole country was now aware that Laurier could be beaten in Quebec. And by their marked restraint in victory, the Nationalists seemed tacitly to be offering the English-speaking Conservatives a chance to join with them in exploiting this victory. Their gestures did not go to waste.

Writing George Perley on November 7, William Price, the powerful Quebec Conservative, related that he and Monk had discussed Perley's concern "over the peculiar political position of the Party in this province, owing to the naval question. . . ." Price believed that a common policy could soon be reached, though, "for the present," the French Canadians could avoid embarrassment by not attending caucus. He continued:

The result of the Drummond and Arthabaska election to my mind should change our position completely. Both Conservatives, Liberals and Nationalists admit that the Liberals will be utterly defeated at the next election . . . . It is therefore very important that some of us, at any rate, should keep on a friendly footing with our French Canadian members, and you will have to get the members from the other provinces into line so that there may be no break with the French Canadians.<sup>54</sup>

Much the same impact seems to have been made on Borden himself, for in writing on November 12 to Donald McMaster, a British M.P., he declared:

If there were an appeal to the people of this country at the present moment it is beyond question that the Laurier government would go down . . . . If Parliament were dissolved tomorrow I do not believe he would carry twenty-five seats out of the sixty-five. Probably nine-tenths of the remainder would be carried by the Nationalists . . . . The firm ground of a year ago has now become a treacherous quagmire in which he is already immersed up to the neck. You can hardly realize the dismay and consternation produced by the result in Drummond-Arthabaska. The campaign was not creditable to either party.<sup>55</sup>

Not all Conservatives, however, saw the result in so satisfactory a light. On

November 20, Herbert B. Ames warned Borden that if Laurier staged a whirlwind campaign he might charge the Conservatives with

secretly aiding and abetting the Nationalists in striving for his downfall. I am more than ever convinced that it will be necessary for us to make repeated pronouncements in all the English Provinces of our policy on the naval question, and to completely disassociate ourselves from the Nationalist movement.<sup>56</sup>

On mathematical grounds alone it is clear from the letter to McMaster that Borden did not make as sharp a distinction between members of his party and the Nationalists as Ames was doing. But the next day Parliament began a new session, and Borden's plan of attack soon took shape.

### III

Meanwhile, what of the Liberal reaction? The day after the catastrophe Perrault sent Laurier a lengthy analysis, blaming the defeat upon bad organization and treachery: "The appeals to prejudice and anti-English feeling, denunciations of England and fear of war have done their work, but I know that our adversaries had a stronger and more complete organization than our own. I believe that among the causes of defeat can be placed defects in organization and a lack of effort."<sup>57</sup>

Laurier tried to console the loser by assuring him that he had done his duty nobly.<sup>58</sup> However, his tone was much sharper with the "chagrined and humiliated" Louis Lavergne who wrote to express his sorrow and to thank Laurier profusely for having assured his old age.<sup>59</sup> Laurier answered,

I have your letter conveying your regrets, which should seem even to you rather late. You told me and assured me repeatedly that the county was ready, that Perrault would be elected by a large majority. I took your word; you can see the result.<sup>60</sup>

From all parts of the country came letters of commiseration and advice. Curé Tetreau of Drummondville assured him he still had some friends left and that all regretted the "unjust and disloyal battle. . . ." <sup>61</sup> Another clergyman wrote from Regina to say that it was a "national calamity . . . an almost disastrous blow to the cause of national unification. . . ." <sup>62</sup> To this Laurier replied that the results had the "good effects" of making the "bad element . . . retrace their steps and take a different attitude."<sup>63</sup> But from this reflection Laurier himself probably drew little comfort. In replying to the Rev. Dr. Charles Gordon, who wrote anxiously from Winnipeg, he called it "the indication of a movement which I have seen for some time coming . . . . It may lead to a somewhat serious crisis."<sup>64</sup> Dr. Béland confessed that the result came as no surprise. The rural population was, he said, "mad-

dened, frightened, terrorized by the demagogues. They were even saying on the hustings that secretly you desired Gilbert's election—so as to be able to justify the repeal of the law to Lord Grey."<sup>65</sup>

Ironically, Laurier had by now received the sympathy of Lord Grey "over the temporary rebuff that Bourassa, Monk, Lavergne and the Curés have been allowed to create for you." He hoped that the election "may prove a blessing in disguise," leading to a "campaign of enlightenment." With a touch of irritation he pointed out that "Bourassa & Co. have been allowed to run about too long setting fire to the heather."<sup>66</sup>

But Grey's real feelings that day were expressed in a seven-page letter to the lately crowned King George V. The election, he reported, "fought on the single issue of the Naval Policy of Your Majesty's Canadian Government has resulted in a severe and sensational defeat for Sir Wilfrid Laurier."

Grey related that the year before, as we have seen, he had summoned "the two leaders of the Conservative Party in the Province of Quebec" to meet him in Montreal so as to tell them

what a rare opportunity had been provided by the political situation then existing, for further consolidating the Dominion, and amalgamating in closer mutual sympathy and appreciation Canadians of French and British descent.

But although he had pointed out how British naval supremacy protected Quebec's liberty and religious privileges, Monk refused to co-operate because

he had been in opposition for 13 years and was tired of it, and that to ask him to abstain from action which might be the means of bringing about the downfall of Sir Wilfrid and the return of his party into power was to ask him something which he could not grant.

Grey said he then told Monk that he did not want to have to tell the King that

the whole of Canada from the Atlantic to the Pacific was ready to do its duty, with the exception of a small body of Quebec Conservatives who were determined to subordinate the interests of the Crown to the fancied interests of their party, and that I should feel personally humiliated if I were obliged to tell His Majesty that there existed in the Dominion any political party shamelessly animated by such disloyal principles. Mr. Monk shrugged his shoulders and candidly admitted that however shameful I might regard it, this would be the true position to lay before the King.

As to the election result, Grey affirmed that it was "not a very great surprise," for the "ministerial party appear to have been sitting in supine inaction" while

Messrs. Bourassa, Lavergne and Monk, assisted by the Curés, have been busy for about

a year in setting fire to the heather all over the Province of Quebec, with the inevitable result in absence of any organised movement to extinguish it, that the conflagration has devoured even the assumed fireproof Liberal majority of the constituency just contested.

Grey concluded with a warning that if Laurier were removed, Bourassa might "precipitate a crisis which might lead dangerously near to a racial and sectarian civil war."<sup>67</sup>

Undoubtedly, therefore, after Parliament opened on November 17, Lord Grey followed the debates with attentive interest. For when debate on the throne speech began on November 21, the battle broke out afresh. As a Quebec Conservative put it, "One would have said that the session had only been called to discuss the Drummond-Arthabaska election."<sup>68</sup>

To Borden's now familiar declaration that the campaign waged against Laurier was no different from that waged by him in 1896, Laurier replied:

I have only to say that history teaches us that defeats there are which are more honourable than victories. . . . That election was won by appeals so desperate that when the smoke of battle had cleared the public conscience was aroused to shame and indignation.<sup>69</sup>

After Laurier described certain anti-British statements, Monk immediately brought counter charges: Liberal speakers themselves had uttered disloyal propaganda to the effect that the navy could be used to "pound England." Tempers ran very high before Monk could be forced to name these speakers. He named one, a certain Bégin, "a well known political worker . . . [and] strong supporter" of the Prime Minister. Laurier disclaimed any knowledge of the man.

In the long and acrimonious debate that followed, the Government did not minimize the defeat. They admitted it was widely viewed as a "national disaster or national calamity."<sup>70</sup> Nor did Monk rely solely on the *tu quoque* argument. He justified the victory as a "manifestation of . . . the desire and will of the people . . .", and their tactics as the consequence of being faced with an unexpected election. He then produced an affidavit declaring that Bégin, identified now as a Windsor Mills notary, had stated that the navy "might be found very useful" in case of trouble between Canada and England.<sup>72</sup> (This was challenged later that day by a Liberal member who cited a telegram from Bégin denying all Monk's charges.)<sup>73</sup>

After denouncing Laurier's naval policy afresh, Monk concluded with his celebrated amendment:

The House regrets that the Speech from the Throne gives no indication whatever of

the intention of the Government to consult the people on its naval Policy and the general question of the contribution of Canada to Imperial Armaments.<sup>74</sup>

As Minister of Naval Service, Brodeur had found the defeat particularly bitter. With savage gusto he accused Blondin of having said "These very ones who disembowelled you on the Plains of Abraham ask of you today to be slaughtered for their sakes." Blondin insisted this was false, as was the charge that he had said "The only liberties which we enjoy have been snatched."<sup>75</sup>

Though Monk and Blondin defended themselves ably, Dr. Béland hit back hard at the plea of unpreparedness. There had been some sixty-seven speakers and thirty-three organizers at work for the opposition, he asserted, and also "some census officers":

Of these there were four, or rather would-be census officers, who went from house to house with metallic plates on their waistcoats, and asked the mothers the names of their husbands and sons, and when they were asked why they wanted to know, they would reply: "You have to answer in the name of the law, we are taking a census, and if this constituency decides in favour of the naval policy, the first sailors will be recruited here."<sup>76</sup>

Shifting the Conservatives' defence, Bruno Nantel and Paquet argued cogently on the constitutional aspects, but on the 24th Borden reverted to counter charges. He was in a delicate position. Only that day A. E. Kemp wrote to warn him of the anxiety felt in Toronto over possible support of Monk's amendment. He advised Borden to vote against it, for reasons not unlike those of Ames:

Any resolution which he [Monk] might move upon the Navy question, if supported by Conservatives generally, would seem to indicate that they were in sympathy with the campaign recently waged by the Nationalists in Drummond-Arthabaska.<sup>77</sup>

Hence it is, perhaps, that Borden now returned with such vigour to the counter charges of disloyal propaganda. Did he feel that Monk's amendment might seem less unpalatable in Toronto if they could be convinced that Monk, after all, had merely given the Liberals some of their own back? With great ease Borden established that certain of the offensive campaign cartoons had indeed appeared originally in *Le Canada*,<sup>78</sup> and challenged the Government "to point out one word said in the recent campaign in Drummond Arthabaska that was more discreditable than the appeals which were made in the newspaper to which I have just called attention." Borden then dealt with Monk's amendment. He was, he stated, in "absolute sympathy" with Monk's object. But because he was not "particularly satisfied with

the wording", he proposed a sub-amendment. This, after affirming Canada's intention to recognize her Imperial obligations, went on as follows:

We desire, however, to express our regret that Your Excellency's gracious speech gives no indication whatever of any intention on the part of Your Excellency's advisers to consult the people on the naval policy of Canada.<sup>79</sup>

Whether or not his object was, as the *Globe* had predicted two days earlier, to provide "some flag waving accompaniment",<sup>80</sup> it did seem to mollify Kemp. On the 26th, writing to commend Borden on his stand, Kemp conceded that if Conservatives outside Quebec had voted against Monk's motion, it "would not have been a very desirable position in which to find the Party." Borden's sub-amendment, he thought, gave opportunity for unanimous vote.<sup>81</sup> Whatever Kemp may have expected, Borden's sub-amendment was defeated 126 to 70 when the House divided on December 1. Voting in its favour were all the English-speaking Conservatives. But Monk remained adamant. He, with his followers, and Arthur Gilbert, voted with the Liberals against Borden. Then Monk's amendment came to the vote. Borden and his supporters now closed ranks with Monk and voted with him. The lone Conservative voting with the Liberals was Sam Hughes. Rather gloatingly, Bourassa later declared that the Conservatives "marched in step" with Monk,<sup>82</sup> and indeed made "a considerable evolution" on naval policy as a result of the by-election.<sup>83</sup>

Naturally Borden made no such admission. On the contrary, he seemed to try to disassociate himself from the by-election in several ways, first by maintaining that outside Quebec little was heard of it. But the evidence of the press, of Parliament, and of private correspondence on all sides suggests the very reverse.<sup>84</sup> His second method was to state that he declined to congratulate Gilbert on his victory and to censure the Chief Whip for doing so.<sup>85</sup> The fact that George Taylor's displacement by Perley as Chief Whip was announced in the House on November 17<sup>86</sup> might suggest that Perley's appointment had followed Borden's censure. This was not so. Perley's acceptance of the office had been published nearly a month before the election.<sup>87</sup> Finally Borden charged that anti-British propaganda was used on both sides, and that Monk declared that "prominent Liberals of the Government had justified the proposed naval service by emphasizing its importance as a means of defending ourselves against Great Britain."<sup>88</sup> Notary Bégin was hardly prominent, but he it was whom Monk specifically accused, and even this he could not prove.<sup>89</sup>

#### IV

As a result of the Conservative-Nationalist alliance in the 1911 campaign, the

choice of candidates in Quebec was left virtually to Monk. Nearly all the "autonomist" candidates were originally Conservatives, and they continued to attack Laurier's naval policy freely. And when the election had been won, the choice of Quebec ministers showed Borden's debt to Monk and his supporters.<sup>90</sup>

What clinched this understanding? Possibly Borden attached more significance to the by-election result at the time than would appear from his memoirs. But promising though the outcome had been, something else was needed to bring diehards like Kemp and Ames into line, especially in view of a disapproving letter by Ames on November 20. In a word, reciprocity—an issue on which Bourassa and Monk co-operated admirably.

Thus occurred the famous meeting of August 1, 1911, which may be regarded as the sequel to the by-election. Into the Outremont home of Charles Beaubien came four rather ill-assorted guests, ranging from the Imperialist to the Nationalist extremes, but all opposed to reciprocity: H. B. Ames, C. J. Doherty, F. D. Monk, and Henri Bourassa. Their common goal was the defeat of Laurier.<sup>91</sup> Henceforward, as Conservatives and Nationalists in Quebec marched side by side, money, which had been none too plentiful with the Nationalists,<sup>92</sup> poured in to such an extent that Bourassa could later affirm that "The Conservatives and Sir Hugh Graham subsidized the 'autonomist' campaign."<sup>93</sup>

The electioneering that followed has been called "the repetition of that of Arthabaska the year before, extended to the whole country."<sup>94</sup> In Laurier's prestige the Liberals still placed their trust. But it was no longer enough. C. H. Cahan said that Laurier was now "an old man who has seen the handwriting of defeat on the wall at Drummond-Arthabaska."<sup>95</sup> Did the disaster in the twin counties that cold November day give Laurier a premonition of his downfall? In a letter to E. H. Lemay a week after Perrault's defeat he wrote that

Governments cannot live forever, for governments are born to grow and die as well as men, and if I fall by the roadside not a murmur will pass my lips, but mark my words, whoever may take the reins of power will have to have a navy, as every nation with a seashore must have and has had in the past.<sup>96</sup>

In several respects this was one of Laurier's most prophetic utterances. And yet in the same letter he delivered this typical example of the Liberals' obstinately short view:

I made a grave error in opening the county. The navy is not popular, but that is not the main cause which defeated us. The chief cause of defeat was local dissensions amongst the party both in Drummond and Arthabaska.

The respective attitudes of the party leaders to the by-election show perhaps why Borden's star was in the ascendant while Laurier's was in decline. Borden, none too secure as party leader, merits full credit for skilful manoeuvring. Laurier's reactions, however, lacked assurance. The Liberals seemed to sense that anti-navy feeling had been fanned into actual war phobia, permanently fatal to their cause, but they were still mainly obsessed with purely organizational troubles. And this itself may have been one element in their defeat. Had Laurier followed local advice and opened the county right after Senator Drummond's death, much might have been gained and not much more risked. Ironically, poor Lavergne's excuse may have contained some sense; perhaps the county was ready at that point.<sup>97</sup> Perhaps, too, Lord Grey was equally right: Laurier had allowed the Bourassa bubble to expand to danger point.<sup>98</sup> Even if the organization then was shakier than the self-interest of Lavergne, Perrault, Abbé Tetreau, and the others dared let them admit, does not the evidence suggest that conditions never did improve significantly even after all those months of delay? A fatal delay, for an earlier election would have spared Laurier the devastating effects of the summer-long Monk-Bourassa agitation. When at last the election was called, the heather had indeed been set afire. By the time a concerted effort to quench it was begun, the Conservatives and Nationalists had been given a dangerous foretaste of success, to be exploited on a larger scale the next year.

Laurier's prestige had suffered an irredeemable and unnecessary smirching. And the alliance, till then a chancy thing, had been tested in the heat of battle and found good.

#### NOTES

1. Sir Robert Borden, *Memoirs* (Toronto, 1938), 1, 291. (My italics.)
2. Armand Lavergne, *Trente Ans de Vie Nationale* (Montreal, 1934), 167.
3. O. D. Skelton, *Life and Letters of Sir Wilfrid Laurier* (Toronto, 1921), II, 338. Of the 41,000 inhabitants in the riding, scarcely 9000 were townsfolk. Apart from a small English pocket around Danby, both counties were almost entirely French.
4. P.A.C., *Borden Papers*, Mem. Notes Add., Grey to Borden, Nov. 2, 1909, 6692-5.
5. P.A.C., *F. D. Monk Papers*, Grey to Monk, May 20, 1909.
6. Mason Wade, *The French Canadians, 1760-1945* (Toronto, 1955), 565.
7. Borden, *op. cit.*, 263.
8. *Canadian Annual Review, 1910*, 166. [hereinafter CAR, 1910].
9. Robert Rumilly, *Henri Bourassa* (Montreal, 1953), 356.
10. Nantel was M.P. for Terrebonne; from 1911 to 1914 he was in Borden's cabinet.



- Blondin was M.P. for Champlain; from 1914 to 1921 he occupied various cabinet posts. Paquet was M.P. for L'Islet.
11. Rumilly, *op. cit.*, 364 f. Laurier was referred to as "more dangerous to his faith . . . than the worst of the Orangemen."
  12. P.A.C., *Laurier Papers*, Aug. 11, 1910, 173811-6. Liberal retaliation was chiefly taking the form of articles in friendly newspapers.
  13. P.A.C., *Lemieux Papers*, Sept. 9, 1910, 1205.
  14. Published in *Le Devoir*, July 16, 1910.
  15. P.A.C., *Laurier Papers* (Microfilm), M.374, Perrault to Laurier, Feb. 12, 1910.
  16. P.A.C., *ibid.*, Laurier to Perrault, Feb. 15, 1910.
  17. P.A.C., *Laurier Papers*, Tetreau to Laurier, May 17, 1910, 171163-5.
  18. *Ibid.*, Laurier to Tetreau, May 21, 1910, 171166. One of Tetreau's friends was seeking an ICR patronage job; hence, perhaps, his support of Perrault.
  19. *Ibid.*, Côté to Laurier, July 9, 1910, 172958-60.
  20. P.A.C., *Laurier Papers* (Microfilm), M.374, Perrault to Laurier, Sept. 23, 1910.
  21. P.A.C., *Laurier Papers*, Lavergne to Laurier, Sept. 28, 1910, 175207.
  22. P.A.C., *Laurier Papers* (Microfilm), M.374, Perrault to Laurier, Oct. 3, 1910.
  23. *Ibid.*, Laurier to Perrault, Oct. 5, 1910.
  24. *Montreal Star*, Oct. 14, 1910.
  25. *Ibid.*, Oct. 19, 1910.
  26. P.A.C., *Laurier Papers*, Lavergne to Laurier, Oct. 19, 1910, 175914-A.
  27. Garceau had run in the Provincial by-election of March, 1910, as a Nationalist. Though losing to the Liberal candidate, the Nationalists regarded the loss as a moral victory. See Robert Rumilly, *Histoire de la Province de Québec* (Montreal, n.d.), XIV, 149.
  28. Rumilly, *Histoire*, XV, 151 ff.
  29. Béland was elected for Beauce by acclamation in 1902 and thereafter by large majorities; he briefly held a cabinet post in the dying months of Laurier's Government. Lapointe was then in his second term.
  30. P.A.C., *Laurier Papers*, 176030.
  31. *Montreal Star*, Oct. 25, 1910. This meant they were sure even of the English vote around Danby.
  32. P.A.C., *Laurier Papers*, Lavergne to Laurier, Oct. 25, 1910, 176125-8.
  33. *Ibid.*, Béland to Laurier, Oct. 25, 1910, 176129-32.
  34. *Ibid.*, Béland to Laurier, Oct. 26, 1910, 176190-3.
  35. *CAR*, 1910, 193-4.
  36. P.A.C., *Laurier Papers*, Oct. 28, 1910, 175249-52.
  37. For examples of these "inflammatory" utterances, see *CAR*, 1910, 196.
  38. Rumilly, *Bourassa*, 393.
  39. Despite Béland's repeated urgings, Laurier did not appear on the hustings, not even when he came to cast his own ballot.
  40. *CAR*, 1910, 198. Rogers was then Minister of Public Works in the Manitoba cabinet.
  41. P.A.C., *Laurier Papers*, Béland to Laurier, Oct. 29, 1910, 176289-91.

42. *Montreal Star*, Oct. 31, 1910.
43. *Ibid.*, Nov. 1, 1910. See also Rumilly, *Histoire*, XV, 158.
44. P.A.C., *Laurier Papers*, Béliand to Laurier, Oct. 31, 1910, 176297-301. As to the "sole issue" complaint, cf. Perrault's challenge at the nominating convention.
45. Rumilly, *Bourassa*, 393 f. Undoubtedly liquor flowed freely. The *Montreal Star* carried a Racey cartoon satirizing the "ginger ale" bombardment by Liberal "war-ships" on Arthabaska. The Hon. C. G. Power, who is said to have served his political apprenticeship in this election, never forgot the lavish distribution of "*whiskey blanc*."
46. *Montreal Star*, Nov. 4, 1910. Losing even the English vote was a particularly unpleasant shock for the Liberals.
47. Rumilly, *Bourassa*, 394.
48. P.A.C., *Borden Papers*, OC 37, Bourassa's articles in *Le Devoir*, 1913, No. 6, trans. See also Rumilly, *Histoire*, XVI, 160.
49. Henri Bourassa, *Que devons-nous à l'Angleterre?* (Montreal, 1915), 223 f.
50. *CAR*, 1910, 209.
51. *Montreal Star*, Nov. 4, 1910.
52. *Ibid.*
53. *CAR*, 1910, 202.
54. P.A.C., *Borden Papers*, Mem. Notes Add., 6877-9. Price was then M.P. for Quebec West. Borden asserts he was one of those who attacked his leadership in 1910 (Borden, *Memoirs*, I, 287 ff.) Nor was he to sign the round robin of March 28, 1911, urging that Borden continue as leader (*Ibid.*, 309).
55. P.A.C., *ibid.*, 6881.
56. P.A.C., *ibid.*, 6896.
57. P.A.C., *Laurier Papers* (Microfilm), M.374, Perrault to Laurier, Nov. 4, 1910.
58. P.A.C., *ibid.*, Laurier to Perrault. Perrault tried to continue the discussion about *cabales* and recounts at length, but Laurier soon wearied of it.
59. P.A.C., *Laurier Papers*, 176405-9, Nov. 5, 1910.
60. P.A.C., *ibid.*, Nov. 7, 1910, 176410. Lavergne tried rather feebly to defend himself. One protest stands out: he agreed he had said the county was ready—but that had been right after Drummond's death. *Ibid.*, Nov. 12, 1910, 176744-7.
61. P.A.C., *ibid.*, 176462, Nov. 7, 1910.
62. P.A.C., *ibid.*, Rev. Dr. McLaren to Laurier, 176467-70, Nov. 7, 1910.
63. P.A.C., *ibid.*, 176471, Nov. 12, 1910.
64. P.A.C., *ibid.*, 176751-7, Nov. 16, 1910.
65. P.A.C., *ibid.*, 176493-8, Nov. 7, 1910. Laurier admitted in reply that the "moral effect on the public has been disastrous . . ." Nov. 10, 1910, 176691-2.
66. P.A.C., *Grey Papers*, Nov. 4, 1910, 1469.
67. P.A.C., *ibid.*, Nov. 4, 1910, 4859-4865. See f.n.5, *supra*. In March, 1910, Borden wrote to Chase-Casgrain about a meeting of the Executive Council at which the members were, he reported, "in a very reasonable condition and anxious to do every-

- thing possible to avoid any split with our friends in Quebec." *Borden Papers*, Mem. Notes Add., March 12, 1910, 6815.
68. Rumilly, *Histoire*, XVI, 166. This was Georges Pelletier.
  69. *Debates*, 54-9.
  70. *Ibid.*, 95. This was Hugh Guthrie.
  71. *Ibid.*, 114-119.
  72. *Ibid.*, 118.
  73. *Ibid.*, 134. This was E. W. Tobin. There is no correspondence with Bégin in the Laurier Papers.
  74. *Ibid.*, 130-134, Nov. 22, 1910. Bourassa was to claim a hand in this. "The time being come, as we thought, to enlarge the scope of the debate, we drafted an amendment to the address." (P.A.C., *Borden Papers*, OC 37, Bourassa article No. 6, trans.) Further evidence of Bourassa's hand in drafting amendments for Monk to read in Parliament may be found in the Monk papers, in which an amendment affirming Imperial bonds, suggested by Bourassa in February, 1911, and explicitly designed to embarrass Laurier, Fielding "and all the old annexationists," was delivered almost verbatim by Monk. (*Debates* 1910-1911, 4057.)
  75. *Ibid.*, 146. The *Toronto Globe* had reported Blondin's statement as early as Nov. 4, 1910, commenting that it was not said "by some ignorant backwoodsman."
  76. *Ibid.*, 173.
  77. P.A.C., *Borden Papers*, Mem. Notes Add., Nov. 24, 1910, 6891. Elected for Toronto East in 1900 and 1904, defeated in 1908, Kemp was re-elected in 1911 and held various cabinet posts until 1921 when he entered the Senate.
  78. But this had been in 1904.
  79. *Debates*, 226 ff., Nov. 24, 1910.
  80. *Ibid.*, 240. Quoted by H. H. Miller.
  81. P.A.C., *Borden Papers*, Mem. Notes Add., 6893-4.
  82. Bourassa, *op. cit.*, 402. And in Article No. 6 (P.A.C., *Borden Papers*, OC 37, trans.) he says: "By this vote and this attitude the whole Conservative party was retreating from its first position taken in February, 1910 . . ."
  83. P.A.C., *Borden Papers*, OC 37, Bourassa's Article No. 7, trans.
  84. The general verdict was quite different from Borden's. The *CAR* said "There was a very wide discussion of its effect upon politics and the future." (*CAR*, 1910, 199) Bourassa's biographer wrote: "The impression was enormous all over Canada." (Rumilly, *Bourassa*, 394). Laurier's biographer called it "this most important by-election in Canada's history . . ." (Skelton, *op. cit.*, 339).
  85. Borden, *op. cit.*, 292. See also *CAR*, 1910, 29.
  86. *Debates*, 6.
  87. *Montreal Star*, Oct. 8, 1910.
  88. Borden, *op. cit.*, 291 ff.
  89. The House received a sworn statement from the chairman of the meeting where Bégin was alleged to have uttered his disloyal statement; he denied ever hearing Bégin make it. (*Debates*, 401 f.)

90. So Monk told Armand Lavergne. (Lavergne, *op cit.*, 205). A thorough analysis of this question is in Heath N. Macquarrie's "The Formation of Borden's First Cabinet," *CJEPS*, XXIII, No. 1, Feb. 1957, in which this conclusion is reached: "In bringing the Nationalists into his cabinet, Borden showed a realistic awareness of the forces and combinations which had helped to make him Prime Minister of Canada." (p. 100.) By the same token, he showed an equally realistic awareness of the possibilities opened by the victory in the twin counties.
91. Rumilly, *Histoire*, XVI, 70 f. A full and somewhat contemptuous summary of this interview with "two of the pontiffs of the Conservative Sanhedrin" is given by Bourassa in Article No. 8 (P.A.C., *Borden Papers*, OC 37, trans.)
92. See Lavergne, *op. cit.*, 194.
93. Bourassa's Article No. 10, P.A.C., *Borden Papers*, OC 37, trans.
94. Robert Rumilly, *Sir Wilfrid Laurier: Canadien* (Paris, 1931), 149. Tactics similar to those of the "census officers" mentioned by Béland are described by A. R. M. Lower, *Colony to Nation* (Toronto, 1946), 431.
95. Cited by Rumilly, *Laurier*, 150.
96. P.A.C., *Laurier Papers*, 176533-4, Nov. 10, 1910.
97. See f.n. 60 *supra*.
98. Reporting to Lord Crewe on Laurier's Oct. 10 speech, Grey wrote: "It is high time he went into the province of Quebec. He has allowed the Bourassa bubble to blow too big, and it is time it were plucked . . ." P.A.C., *Grey Papers*, Oct. 11, 1910, 4362-6.