

The Period of Rapid Development.—The death of Sir John Macdonald had been followed within a year by that of the Hon. Alexander Mackenzie (April 17, 1892). The latter had not, however, been leader of the Liberal party for the last five years of his life, the Hon. (afterwards Sir) Wilfrid Laurier having been elevated to that position after the general election of 1887. On the accession to office of his Government on July 13, 1896, it was recognized that the business of the country had adapted itself to the measure of protection provided and that any abrupt change would be unwise. One of the earliest measures adopted was the reduction by one-fourth of the customs duties charged upon articles the growth, produce, or manufacture of the United Kingdom, or of certain specified British colonies, or of any others, the customs tariff of which was as favourable to Canada as the proposed preferential tariff to the colonies in question. An impediment to the immediate carrying into effect of this arrangement was found in the existence of certain commercial treaties made by Great Britain with Germany and Belgium; after this difficulty had been removed by the denunciation of the treaties in question, the reduced inter-Imperial tariff went into operation on August 1, 1898. From the application of this tariff, wines, spirituous liquors and tobacco were excepted. This "British Preference," as it was called, was further increased to one-third in the year 1900, but in 1904 this method of granting a preference was abandoned in favour of a specially low rate of duty on almost all imported dutiable commodities.

In a general election which took place on December 7, 1900, the Government was sustained. Shortly afterwards Queen Victoria died and was succeeded by King Edward VII (January 22, 1901). It had been suggested by the Colonial Secretary (Mr. Chamberlain), at the accession of the King, that advantage should be taken of the presence in London of the premiers and probably other ministers of the self-governing colonies of the Empire, on the occasion of the coronation, to discuss various matters of imperial import, and a conference at which he presided was opened on June 30 and remained in session till August 11. At this conference a number of important resolutions were adopted, including one recognizing the principle of preferential trade within the Empire and favouring its extension, and another recommending the reduction of postage on newspapers and periodicals between different parts of the Empire, to which effect was subsequently given.

The development of Canada during the last twenty years, in population, commerce and industry has been very marked, and has been especially conspicuous in her western provinces. The Northwest Territories, which at first were governed from Winnipeg—the Lieutenant-Governor of Manitoba being also Lieutenant-Governor of the territories—were organized as the provisional districts of Assiniboia, Saskatchewan, Alberta and Athabaska on May 17, 1882, under a Lieutenant-Governor of their own and with the seat of government at Regina. With the growth of population they rapidly advanced towards provincial status, and on September, 1905, the four territories were organized as the two provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta, with capitals at Regina and Edmonton respectively. Their subsequent progress has been even more remarkable, owing to the large volume of population they have annually received both from the United States and from European countries, in addition to settlers from eastern Canada. The discovery of gold in the Yukon country led to its organization as the Yukon Territory (June 13, 1898), and as such it returns a member to the House of Commons. The mining of gold and silver in Canada led to the establishment at Ottawa (January 2, 1908) of a branch of the Royal Mint, where gold, silver, nickel and copper coins are struck for circulation in the Dominion.