

CANADA AFTER THE WAR— A VETERAN JOURNALIST'S FORECAST

The other day Mr. J. S. Brierley gave an address to the Canadian Club in Montreal which, it is evident, produced a strong impression in that city and which deserves to be taken note of all through the Dominion. For thirty or forty years he was a prominent figure in the Liberal journalism of the east. It is about twenty years since he left the St. Thomas Journal, an influential newspaper under his direction, to assume control of the Montreal Herald, when his party felt that it was necessary to have a strong organ in the principal city of the Dominion.

Up till a few summers ago, when the Press Conference took place in London, Mr. Brierley had much the same ideas on imperial questions as those which are found today in the Liberal press of this country. But that visit changed his ideas altogether, and he is not the only Liberal journalist to admit that this is the case. But, unlike some others, he is fortunately now in a position where he can talk boldly, and his changed viewpoint he is presenting with uncommon clearness. A more timely utterance, coming from a man of his record, than that in Montreal could not have been desired. The conclusion which he draws cannot be avoided by anybody who values the British connection and wishes it to continue.

Mr. Brierley described the futility of the discussion of the past on the imperial problem, quoting Omar very effectively. We have had long-winded speeches on Canada's future

“And heard great argument

About it and about; but evermore

Came out by the same door wherein we went.”

But after the action that we have taken in this war there must be definite action. “Some good citizens” have warned us against plunging into “the vortex of European militarism,” but it cannot be denied that we have made the plunge and must accept the responsibilities of the situation. In the future we cannot leave it to the Motherland to make peace and war on our behalf. We must have our share of the political control.

“Can you envisage a Canada through the long years to come ploughing its fields in bucolic contentment, asking no share in the responsibilities of Empire, but ready at any time on a call from the men of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales, to drop the plough handles and rush to arms? You cannot, and I cannot.

“Rather can we see, as the logical, the natural; the inevitable, and the desirable destiny for Canada, a people far advanced in the arts of peace; taking high place in the common council of the Empire-nations; doing what it may to preserve the continuity of British history and the perpetuation of British ideals, and taking a wide, intelligent and influential interest in the affairs of the great world.”

It is very gratifying to those who for many years have been urging that this was the logical conclusion of Canada's imperial feeling, which Mr. Brierley has no doubt regard to, and who were confronted with so much unexplainable apathy regarding the question, to have such plain language used as this and the following. Readers of The Journal know that, long before the war, these things were said on this page over and over again:

“We must abandon” declared Mr. Brierley, “our talk of absolute autonomy, for that is but a smooth word for national independence. As an Empire state our exercise of autonomous powers must cease at the point where the interests of the whole Empire become involved. I fear centralization, but not so greatly as I fear disintegration, and if experience proves that we must draw closer in order to exist, so be it.

“The men who brought order and power out of chaos by uniting Canada and Australia and South Africa; the men who appreciate the world tendency towards consolidation of kindred peoples for the furtherance of common objects, need not be frightened at the word centralization when consolidation may in time be shown to be compatible with a large measure of national autonomy, and to imply an extension and a development of our powers as a people. The Anglo-Saxon genius for finding a way is not bankrupt, but can be depended upon to achieve the desired ends without making the dominions serfs of a centralized bureaucracy.”

The case could not be better put, and we commend these burning words of Mr. Brierley's to the careful attention not only of his own former party associates but of the followers of Sir Robert Borden, who has given Canada and the Empire the lead towards these new ideals.