

By-Products of the Great War

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The Growth of Imperial Sentiment

By Rev. Peter Bryce

For many years Canada has been very largely self-centred. She has been engaged in laying the foundation of a great Canadian nation, and she has fostered and cultivated a national spirit. With the passing of the years she has become increasingly democratic and more decidedly Canadian. Men coming from the British Isles quickly absorbed this national spirit and became Canadians.

With the development of natural resources; the great period of railway building; the rush of immigration, there came a tremendous expansion of material interests. The financing of these projects and the growth of industries brought international relationships and international prominence. A sense of strength and a consciousness of the coming greatness of Canada became apparent, and she began to feel she should have some real part in international questions, to which the onward march of progress had lent new significance.

The fact that Canada was an integral part of the British Empire was not forgotten, however, and the prestige and safety realized by that relationship was appreciated. A certain type of Englishman might occasion uncomplimentary comment, and the uninformed person might speak in disparaging terms of "Old Country" ways, but the solid elements of thought in Canada estimated at its true worth the value of British citizenship.

A perception of the probable greatness of Canada led many to believe that the full status of nationhood should be sought, not by secession from the Empire, but by full participation in the affairs and responsibilities of the Empire. Canadians should participate in the Imperial economy, and have a voice in international and foreign policies and treaties. The British subject in Canada, as in the United Kingdom, should have the full privileges of citizenship.

Privileges and Citizenship.

It was conceded, of course, by those who thought about it, that if the people of the British Isles had privileges in citizenship not accorded to the colonies, they had corresponding responsibilities in financial matters, as the following statement will manifest. The figures are taken from the "Problems of the Commonwealth," by Lionel Curtis.

Contributions to Imperial Defence per capita in 1913-14:

Canada, 7.4; New Zealand, 13.10; Australia, 18.1; United Kingdom, 31.9.

Canada, then, if accorded that full participation in international affairs that many thought compatible with her growing strength and probable place in the Empire, must assume a far greater portion of the expenditure involved in Imperial Defence.

Then came the war, and the great test of the solidarity of the British Empire. Many thought the strain would bring about the disintegration of the Empire. The answer was complete and immediate, and the unity of action displayed by the component parts of the Empire filled the world with amazement and admiration. The magnificent response to the call of the Motherland sent a thrill of emotion through the hearts of Britons the world over.

New Zealand cabled to London, "Although New Zealand is but a small country, all we are and all we have is at the Empire's call." The little island of Niue, the tiniest dependency of New Zealand, sent a message from its chief, "To King George 5th. I am the island of Niue, a small child that stands up to help the Kingdom of George 5th. There are two portions we are offering: 1, money; 2, men." With a total population of only four thousand, the little island sent two hundred young men for active service.

The response of Canada we know. When the achievements of the great war are recorded, I venture to predict that among the greatest will be the fact that Canada raised and equipped an army of 23,000 men in six weeks. It was a remarkable undertaking.

I recall a lady remarking that "It was quite right for these Englishmen to go to the war, but it was

such a pity to see our Canadian boys go." She possibly expressed the thought in many minds. When all things are considered, it was but natural that the first contingent should be composed very largely of the British born. The subsequent response of the Canadian born has been excellent.

One Million From Overseas.

An army of nearly one million men bear the insignia of the overseas Dominions, an indisputable indication of the strength of Imperial sentiment. It is inconceivable that with such an army on the field the Dominions should be denied a voice in the conduct of the war. This was granted when the British Government invited the Dominions to send representatives to the Council of Imperial Defence, and there are indications that the Dominions will be represented when the great issues consequent upon the cessation of hostilities come to be considered.

The war will undoubtedly knit the Empire more closely together. Men from all parts of the Empire have fought and bled together on the battlefields of Europe, and the spirit of comradeship born there and the better understanding created will be most powerful in its effect upon Imperial sentiment. The Empire is welded together by a common purpose, a common sacrifice, and by the shed blood of countless numbers of her best sons.

Attitude Toward Liquor Traffic.

It cannot be gainsayed that many revelations have been made from time to time that have taxed the patience and faith of the British Empire in those who are leaders in the conduct of the war. It should be said, also, that a great and increasing host of loyal men and women, constituting, in many respects, a very strong element in the country, have viewed with dismay and apprehension and shame the attitude of the British leaders in respect to the liquor traffic. The Prime Minister of England has declared the liquor traffic to be as great a menace to the safety of England as the Germans, and yet it has not been destroyed. We are told that the situation is extremely difficult and complicated, but it is not easy to convince people that a Government which has enacted laws bringing to pass conscription of men and wealth in a democratic country like Great Britain cannot bring in a war-time prohibition measure. No Government can afford to deal lightly just now with great moral issues, nor condone a traffic that the best thought of the Empire denounces as infamous and destructive in the highest degree.

I doubt if ever again a Cabinet responsible only to a Legislative Chamber elected by some eight million voters, will legislate in international affairs for the four hundred and twenty millions of British people. Great questions and policies which concern and govern the issues of peace and war cannot in future be assumed by the people of the British Islands alone. War is no longer a matter of armies and navies, but threatens the whole fabric of human life as nothing else can do, and brings untold suffering in its wake.

The vast British Empire will be composed of autonomous nations, each nation participating in the diplomatic activities governing the Empire. The control of the foreign policy of the Empire will be vested in a body representative of the whole Empire. The formation of such a body, the exercise of its functions, its relation to the self-governing Dominions, combine to form a fascinating subject for discussion, but it does not enter into the province of an article of this character.

The solidarity of the Empire has made many things possible in this war. There are conflicting elements, of course, in a democratic and homogeneous population, and all must not be expected to appreciate fully the same things.

The near future will demand of us great things in the accomplishment of which the co-ordination of resources is vital, and because of this we must all be willing to sacrifice political tenets or other things much more important in order that we may have the superior strength and energy that will come from a United Canada in a United Empire.