

# An Open Letter On the Duty of the Hour

From the Rev. Dr. Chown.

*Following are extracts from a letter by Rev. Dr. Chown, General Superintendent of the Methodist Church in Canada, which will appear this week in The Christian Guardian:—*

Having been asked for advice as to how one should vote in the coming election, and publicly to give reasons for my opinion, I will, with your permission, speak with all possible frankness, sincerity and dispassionateness.

At the present time the supreme issue of winning the war so dominates the whole of Canada's present and future life, and will so affect the relation of our country to the world at large, that the old modes of political thought should be entirely superseded by loftier conceptions of patriotism, and our action as voters should be determined, not by parochial but by world-wide issues. The old bottles of party tradition must be burst with the new wine of national duty. To look at the issues to be decided in this election through party spectacles is like looking through a seven by nine pane at our own garden plot, instead of looking, as we should, at the whole world problem through an unobstructed plate glass window; it is to study the stars through the wrong end of the telescope.

## PLEGGED BY WORDS AND ACTS.

There was a breathless stillness in Canada for a moment after Great Britain bared her head to the mailed fist of the Teuton. But in another moment, almost as one man, Canada said, "Thank God, Great Britain is true to herself, and God grant we may be true to her." Then we sent thirty-three thousand men in seven weeks. We have sent hundreds of thousands since. We have spent millions upon millions of money, and are pledged, not only by words, but by acts, to the last man and the last dollar. If we fail now, we fail to carry out a contract which is sealed by the blood of thousands of our soldiers.

## A REDEMPTIVE WAR.

This is a redemptive war, and its success depends entirely upon the height of sacrifice to which our people can ascend. It is under this conviction that ministers of the Gospel feel in duty bound to enter the political arena. He who fears to express his convictions at this hour is akin to the slacker who would like to do his duty if his cowardice did not tell him it might cost him something. We shall fail, and fail lamentably, as Christian people unless we catch the martyr spirit of true Christianity and do our sacrificial duty between now and on the 17th of December. But if we do fail, I, for one, will never be sorry that I tried to bear aloft the banner of the Cross amidst the thickest fight.

## WILL BE WON BY NERVE.

This war will be won by the people who can keep their nerve longest. It is a contest of moral power, without which physical force will be found insufficient. If the Union Government is turned out of office, it will show that Canada has not the determination to go on, and this fact will cause our enemies to rejoice and triumph over us, and our friends to grieve to the very heart.

We may be sure of this, also, that when any nation concludes that it has done all it should be expected to do in a righteous cause and calls a halt, as Russia did, dry rot sets in and confusion follows. I cannot bear to contemplate the confusion which would confront Canadian life if the policy of "done enough" should be accepted by the majority of electors.

## THE DEMOCRATIC WAY.

For these and other reasons I have been led to accept the policy of conscription or the selective draft. I am not a new convert to the idea. Long before it was adopted by any party in Canada I publicly expressed my approval of that plan. I believed then, as I believe now, that under any conditions it is the fairest, most democratic, most expeditious and least expensive method of raising an army in this country, and under the present conditions it is the only possible way of fulfilling our obligations to Christian civilization. I also believe that, socially considered, it is the most moral and profoundly religious method of doing our national duty.

## TAKE WEALTH ALSO.

Of course I believe it should be accompanied by conscription of wealth, and the direction of the service of those who stay at home for the strength and support of those who go abroad in our name. If the whole of one man's life is drafted, the wealth of another, which can represent but a portion of his life, should surely be made available for the strength and defence of the State; and if democracy as a whole should do its best, every unit of which it is composed

must be used to the greatest advantage in such an emergency as this. We must, as "members one of another," serve according to our greatest efficiency. It is immoral to take the protection of the State and make no contribution towards protecting others.

## MUST PUT THE NATION FIRST.

I know that conscription is a most difficult programme to carry out to the satisfaction of mothers and fathers who have boys of military age, and who have remunerative work for them to do. Each parent emphasizes his own personal need, and is apt to resent the interference of the law with his peace and prosperity. If this personal view were permitted to prevail, it would deadlock any scheme for obtaining recruits. If we are to go forward at all, we must sink personal demand far below the level of the public need, and trust the Government, to see that a most difficult task is performed in the most impartial way possible. The assurances of the Minister of Militia that he would see to the honorable discharge of any young men actually working on farms, and willing to go back to increase production, must remove all objection to conscription in the minds of our patriotic farmers. Other employments necessary to the welfare of the country in time of war will be safeguarded, and I believe that when the conscription tribunals have done their work it will commend itself to every unprejudiced mind.

## DUTY TO UNION LIBERALS.

As Canadian citizens it would be vile ingratitude if we forsook the members of the Government and other Liberals who left their party so that Canada might be united in this supreme struggle. They have staked their future upon the only policy that will keep Canada in the war and save her from disgrace. It is already evident from the ostracism visited upon them by the partisan press that they have forfeited the favor of many of their former supporters. It is significant that Hon. N. W. Rowell, who a few days ago was the honored leader of the Liberal party of Ontario, and whose record is without a stain, is now charged with political degeneracy, because he has done the most patriotic thing any Canadian could do. Hon. F. B. Carvell, the watchdog of Parliament, the sworn and active foe of every species of graft, is deliberately charged with joining a Government formed to favor the big interests.

To permit such patriots to be defeated would doom all independence of political thought and action in Canada, and force the shackles of blind partisanship upon us, with its accompaniment of corrupt patronage and all that such a system entails for generations to come. Now is the time for Canada to strike for freedom from the system of political grafting.

## GET TOGETHER.

Why cannot we get together in Canada? Distrust, born of partisan selfishness, is the root of our trouble. It is said the majority of the members of the Government are followers of Sir Robert Borden. But what difference would it make if we were not still studying party interest or advantage? I would be satisfied in such a time as this if every member of the Government were a Liberal, or if every Cabinet Minister were a Conservative, or if they all belonged to neither party, so long as they would keep Canada in her true place in the ranks of the Allies.

Among the differences arising in this contest which every intelligent elector must grasp and decide for himself or herself is the possibility of one Province dominating the whole of Canada. It may be anticipated that if Sir Wilfrid Laurier is returned to power with a very strong following from the Province of Quebec, they will have a too decisive influence in the Government of the Dominion. Le Canada, Sir Wilfrid's French-Canadian organ, informs us that "the Catholic population in Alberta seems unanimous in supporting Laurier in this election." There is evidently grave danger lest one type of religion should obtain a preponderating influence in the councils of the Government of Canada.

I find I have written at greater length than I had intended, but my excuse is the persuasion I cannot repress of the immense importance of the issue of this struggle.

S. D. CHOWN.

Toronto, December 7, 1917.

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