

ALUMNI ESSAY

Read by Richard G. Ellsworth at the Commencement Exercises, May 28th, 1924.

"CANADIAN CITIZENSHIP"

A brief review of the history of our native Canada carries us back, in imagination, to that memorable day, almost four hundred years ago, when Jacques Cartier first planted the Cross and Fleur-de-Lis on the summit of Mount Royal as a symbol that he claimed the new found country for Church and King.

Let us pass quickly over the various stages of development through which our country has passed since that eventful day. We see it first as a vast, and apparently boundless wilderness, peopled with savages; then as a colony of France; later as the disputed territory of the two great rival powers of Europe; next as a disunited group of British colonies; till finally we come to the great dominion as we have it today, extending from sea even to sea.

The wonderful changes that have made a wilderness into a free and independent nation must fill us with admiration and wonder when we pause to consider the many vicissitudes of fortune, the many disadvantages and impediments that have stood in the way of national growth and development.

Since the coldness of Canada's winters presented a less inviting prospect than did the warmer climate of the territories to the South, our country received a small share of those who first came to make their homes in America. This, at first sight, might seem to have been a great disadvantage, and so it was in point of numbers; but since only the hardest and bravest people chose this country as their home, Canada received only the choicest and best of those who first came to carve their homes out of the wildernesses of the New World.

Champlain's dream of a New France, though it never materialized, has borne its fruits. The early French settlers laid the foundation of our country, and to them we should be ever thankful. The pioneer settlers, explorers and statesmen, and above all the brave missionaries who sacrificed their lives to carry the sweet message of the Cross to a pagan people, have left us an example of dauntless courage and heroic fortitude, which well might

adorn the annals of any nation. Through their efforts, and through the efforts of those who came after them, has Canada become the beautiful and prosperous land of today.

Surely Canada has a noble heritage! In the veins of her children flows the best blood of Europe, the blood of martyrs and heroes, to whom no obstacle was too great to overcome, no danger too formidable to face. Is she going to prove a worthy child of so great an ancestry? Is she going to continue the work so nobly begun? Or are her children going to fail, to betray the trust they have inherited? No, we dare not break faith, we dare not prove unworthy.

History attests that the progress of civilization has ever moved westward and northward. It should therefore reach its culmination in this land of ours, which is truly the land of the setting sun. If this is to be so, if we Canadians are to achieve this perfection of culture and refinement, if we are to carry on the work for which our ancestors laboured and died, we must find the solution to our problems in a true, honest, and loyal Canadian Citizenship.

And what does citizenship mean? or rather what is a citizen? A citizen is usually considered as one who owes allegiance to a government or a country, and who expects the protection of that government. This definition, meagre as it is, comprises two things, first, the rights and privileges accruing from the homage paid to the government; secondly, the duties and obligations accompanying those rights; for no right exists without its corresponding duty, no privilege without its attendant obligation. He who can claim the right of protection from a government is obliged to obey that government himself, and to see that it is respected and obeyed by others. He who is permitted to enjoy certain privileges in a country is in duty bound to contribute to its maintenance and welfare.

The symbol of citizenship as considered in this narrower sense, is the right of exercising the franchise, a right which presupposes a very important duty, but a duty that is, alas, too often superseded by selfish and unworthy interests. It is the duty of every citizen of Canada to know, and to be interested in, the public affairs of his country, and to give his support to that party which he honestly believes will best promote the public good,

irrespective of his own private concerns. It is manifest, then, that the term citizenship in its true sense connotes a great deal more than the mere right of suffrage. It must be based on the more substantial foundations of unity, loyalty, patriotism, and a deep sense of moral obligation. Love of country is one of the noblest passions with which man is endowed. It is the impelling force which makes men sacrifice all for the fatherland; it inspires men to superhuman deeds of valour; it is the very source of national life. With it, nothing is impossible of achievement in the way of national greatness, without it, nations fall and crumble to ruin. Canada's past record leaves little to be desired in regard to the patriotism and loyalty of her sons. Several times in her short history has Canada had to summon her sons, either to repel the attacks of a foreign invader or to defend the integrity of the Empire, and never once have they failed to respond as true sons of Canada should. In times of peace, however, the people of Canada are prone to drift apart. There are several outstanding influences which tend to prevent that unity which is so much to be desired. It is our purpose to deal with a few of these, and to suggest a possible remedy.

From several causes, particularly because our country is still in its infancy, and because we are scattered over such a great expanse of territory, we are inclined to forget that we are citizens of the same country, owing allegiance to the same government, sharing common interests, facing common difficulties, and bound by common ties of kinship, and nationality.

This undesirable state of affairs is most apparent in a none too friendly rivalry of provinces. The two old provinces have not yet entirely settled their differences; the Maritimes are sometimes looked upon by the other provinces as of very little importance, a slight which they are not slow to resent; easterners are considered almost as foreigners by the people of the west. It is pleasing to note that this spirit of jealousy is gradually dying out, and giving place to a nobler feeling, the spirit of broad Canadianism, a Canadianism that is big enough, and unselfish enough to include the length and breadth of Canada.

This is the spirit we need to make our nation strong.

It was this national pride that welded together the scattered, and at one time unfriendly states of Italy, under the leadership of Rome, that enabled them to extend their

sway over almost all of the then known world. It was the very lack of this unity that retarded the progress of Western Europe during the troublous times that followed the breaking up of the old Roman Empire.

Another serious drawback, closely allied to, but entirely distinct from the former, and one that is not easily overcome, because we are not yet far enough from its source to look upon it disinterestedly, is the difference in race. Some of our families came out in the days of French occupation, others at various later periods, in fact we are still receiving a fairly large annual quota of immigrants from Europe. Consequently, we are still inclined to look upon ourselves as English or French, Scotch or Irish, or of some other nationality as the case may be. Certainly, we have reason to be proud of our ancestry, and of the heritage they have left us, a heritage of blood and ideals worthy of our deepest respect. But we should not carry our pride of ancestry to such an extent as to include the national prejudices which were excusable in them, since they came of different, even hostile races, but which we should not entertain or tolerate in ourselves. We are a new nation. It is time now to foster a national spirit of our own; time to put aside those old animosities, that spirit of petty jealousy and suspicion that has kept us apart for so long. It is time to call ourselves Canadians, citizens of the fairest country in the world, of a country of which we have good reason to be proud, upon whose glorious annals there is as yet no stain to cause the blush of shame to rise on the cheeks of its children. "United we stand, divided we fall," is an old saying, as true today as it always was, and one which we in Canada might well apply to our own needs. Wherein lies the solution of this problem? How are we to achieve this national concord, this brotherhood so much needed? The solution may perhaps be found in the education of our citizens; a strong, pure government; and a selective immigration policy.

The first duty of every man is his duty to God. He who is faithful to God can never betray any trust that may be imposed upon him. Religion must therefore play its part in the education of our children, that they may be well equipped to fill honestly and conscientiously whatever position they may occupy when they come to take their places in the world. It is evident that the first and

most necessary quality of a good citizen is a good moral character.

In addition to a well grounded religious education, a secular education is becoming more and more necessary as the years go by. In pioneer days people were too much occupied with the struggle for existence to have time for study. Then, each settlement was a little world in which the people moved about and lived; their wants were few and their pleasures simple. But as time goes on, as the battle for existence becomes less of a serious problem, as the advances in science and invention call more and more for skilled labor, the demand for an educated body of citizens increases proportionally. The time when illiteracy was a necessary evil has passed forever. If Canada is to keep peace with other nations she must endeavor to raise the standard of education in her citizens. Every good citizen is deeply and personally interested in the welfare of his country and the happiness and prosperity of his neighbors. Every one cannot do wonderful things, but each can contribute his share by the conscientious performance of his every-day duties. It is not the individual efforts of the talented few that make a country great, we cannot measure the standing of a country by the numbers of its poets, heroes, or other famous men. These have a far extended influence, it is true, but the real criterion of a nation's greatness is the moral standard of the average citizen. It is the character, culture and refinement of the so-called man in the street, that determine a nation's standing in the eyes of the world. A good Canadian citizen is one who can think broadly, and consider the rights of others, one who is great enough to rise above all that is narrow and provincial and partial, one who is upright and honest, with himself, with his neighbor and with God. Such a man is an educated man in the true sense of the word. Canada needs more of them. In regard to government there is little need to say more than a passing word, for the character of a people is reflected in its government. The people form the government; if they are what they should be, the government cannot be otherwise than pure and incorruptible.

A serious question in Canada today, and one that demands immediate consideration, is that of immigration. Canada has room for thousands more people, especially in the new and undeveloped sections. She extends the

hand of welcome to those people of Europe who are glad to emigrate to new lands that are not crowded, and where opportunities are offered to those who have the courage and ability to undertake the responsibilities that accompany any new enterprise. The class of people needed are those who will readily assimilate with our own population, for the purpose of changing a foreigner into a real citizen of Canada implies much more than the technical formality of granting him the franchise when he has lived sufficiently long in Canada. The process must be one of assimilation, attainable only by education and an infusion of love and patriotism into the heart of the prospective citizen. He must be taught to look upon his adopted country as his own; the duties which he owes to the land that has offered him a home should be impressed upon him, and this not by coercion and legal processes, but by teaching him to love the land whose subject he has become. This is impossible unless we first rid ourselves of the very ideas we are trying to correct in our new citizens. Unless the fires of love and patriotism burn brightly in our own breasts, we can never hope to inculcate that sentiment in the minds and heart of our adopted countrymen.

The problem of retaining the people we have is even more complex and makes a more imperative demand than does the question of immigration. We cannot afford to incur the expense of bringing people to settle in Canada, only to have them leave again, still less can we afford to lose our native born population. The question resolves itself into that one mentioned above, namely the question of loyalty and patriotism. Until love of country become a part of our very lives, the question of maintaining a steady increase in population must remain unsolved. Let every man boost instead of knocking. Let him think Canada, talk Canada, and act accordingly.

“Let Canada our watchword be,
While lesser names we know no more;
One nation spread from sea to sea,
And fired by love from shore to shore;
From sea to sea, from strand to strand,
Spread our Canadian Fatherland.”

There is no country in the world where the field is so uncrowded as in our own. We have the land, the resources the climate, everything that, materially speaking, goes to

make a country attractive. What other country presents such a varied wealth of scenic beauty as Canada? The giant mountain fastnesses; the seemingly boundless expanse of fertile prairies; the network of beautiful rivers with their cataracts and rapids; the broad, luxuriant forest belts;—these make Canada a paradise for the lover of nature. Nature is here at her best. Every season brings with it new beauties, new wonders, to attract the eye and delight the soul. To him who is more concerned with the matter of fact, the material things of life, what stronger inducement can be offered than the wealth of her mines, her forests, her waters and her farms, which are waiting only to be developed. The immigrant in search of a new home, or the native Canadian in search of a broader scope for his energy, will find in Canada an open field, with unlimited possibilities, possibilities which honest diligence should, in reasonable time, convert into tangible realities. With an industrious people, living in the midst of an abundance of nature's gifts, it is not unreasonable to expect that Canada may one day become the leader among the nations. We may never succeed in making a veritable Utopia of our country, but we can at least make an earnest effort to approach as near as possible to the ideal. The future of Canada lies, under God, in the hands of its citizens. It is for us to say what its destiny shall be. If we but cherish our birthright as a sacred trust, as a precious gift that cannot be bought or sold, but to be handed down from generation to generation, as pure and spotless as it was left to us, there need be no fear for the future. Then shall we hear voices calling to us from the dim mists of the past, not in terms of disappointment and reproach, but swelling into a mighty chorus, encouraging us as we toil on:

“Young is she yet, her world task but begin,
By you we know her safe, and know by you
Her veins are million but her heart is one.”

THE WORLD OVER

In vain we call old notions fudge,
And bend our conscience to our dealing;
The Ten Commandments will not budge,
And stealing will continue stealing.

—Lowell.