

A SCOTTISH CENTRE

(By G. Duncan).

The Editor has asked me to say a few words—no writer ever says more—on societies in general, Scottish Societies in particular, and the "Scottish Society of Vancouver" in chief particular. Societies are like classes; they imply something like a common level—in the one case, of bank accounts in the other, of ideas. Both in bank accounts and in ideas there may be a wide range of variation. That is what adds zest to the game, but in class or society there is one condition indispensable. The highest must be within reach of the lowest; my pocket must stretch at a pull—if only for a moment—to meet my neighbour's. I must be able to understand and take interest in my comrade's ideas. If I do not feel pleasure in the reciprocation of minds, I may be in the society, but not of it.

In these days when the commonest weapon of the seeker of notoriety is to question accepted ideas, no one, I think, has ever doubted man's instinct for society. The hermit or the fakir is a pervert of humanity, whom fear or self-distrust has separated from his kind. We will no doubt be enjoined by some enthusiasts to love mankind as a whole and not to spend our affections on the fetish of nationality. Those broad-minded philosophers tell us that the principle of nationality is wrong and ought to be obliterated as quickly as possible. But whatever may be the warmth with which these citizens of the world advance their attacks upon the nationalists, the affection which they shower upon the world at large has always seemed to me a very thin and washy fluid. It is, at all events, nothing that a man would die for, and that is the ultimate test of our value of ideas. The world is too large for us to feel at home in unless we have made a part of it in a measure our own. The natural order of life settles that for the most of us beyond thought of dispute. The village or the town where we were born, the seas, the rivers, the mountains, which our childish eyes have gazed on, the language which first sounded in our ears, the faces which lighted those dimly remembered days were all the round earth to us once, and we see or hear them still, not in the clear light or unromantic accents of today, but through a transfiguring glamour which holds the magic of nationality. Nor is it, I think, when truly considered, a dwarfing sentiment. The man who feels a passionate devotion to his country is likely to have as much affection left over for the outside world as has the loudest tongued cosmopolitan of them all.

Scotsmen, they say, have always formed themselves into societies. In some parts of the country they called them clans, and at times I have heard it urged against them as a charge that they are "clannish." The statement is quite true. The same charge was made against the early Christians—"Behold how these Christians love one another." The Roman pro-consuls, too, did not regard this feeling of brotherhood as a virtue but as evidence of a combination which might have serious political dangers. And the Scotsman, far from his own country, will often feel his heart warm only to hear the accents of his native land once more and instinctively he will know that between him and this nameless stranger there is a bond of union which was forged before either of them was born. It is not, as I have said, a bond which severs him from unrelated peoples and the Scotsman, never forgetting or losing his sense of origin, readily adds another nationality to his possessions. Thus it comes that when a Scottish society is proposed in Canada there

can be no limit to the membership for almost every Canadian one meets will tell you of at least one Scottish ancestor.

But there, as everywhere, it is true that a wide interest is apt to be a weak interest. We must concentrate in order to be strong. Friendship is the most lasting bond that unites human beings. On what qualities it is founded may be disputed but we know at least under what conditions it is likely to be born. The deepest and most lasting friendships have their origin in boyhood or early youth, and always arise from a forced or voluntary combination, so that to ensure the best results some opposition is probably necessary. In later life we can seldom reproduce the conditions, but in a society or club where there is a common interest and a limited combination, there is offered to us at least the outskirts of friendship, a favoured position from which an advance into the land of friendship is, if not likely, certainly least improbable. A Scottish society starts with the strong tie of blood, and let us hope at least some recognizable accent carried over the high seas and saved up for common comfort when the winter days are dull and the rest of the company alien.

As for the Scottish Society of Vancouver, that is a child not yet born, but we hope to see it come to life strong and healthy next Friday night, a wise child with a mind to compare with its physical frame, and likely to grow quickly with an equal balance of brain and body. We hope it will interest not only Scotsmen who are Canadians and Canadians who are Scotsmen, but all who feel the attraction of a small but virile race, all who have buffeted a north-easter on the streets of Edinburgh, or smelt the sweet blooms of the heather on the highland hills. We wish to give all who are interested in Scottish literature, history, and social questions a forum where they may explain their views and clarify them by comparison with the opinions of others. We trust that every member who has a special interest in by-paths of Scottish literature will find an outlet for its expression as well as those who have more Catholic tastes. We believe we will have cranks and faddists in the society and we will welcome them too. If they do not awake our affections they will at least save us from dullness, the worst fault of too much peace and harmony.

We expect that every evening's meeting will have its peck of soberness and seriousness to witness the solidity of the Scottish character, and its lippie of laughter to tell that humour is always waiting at the corner of Scotland's puritan

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