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A Preferential Land Policy for Canada

By David Barrett Ross

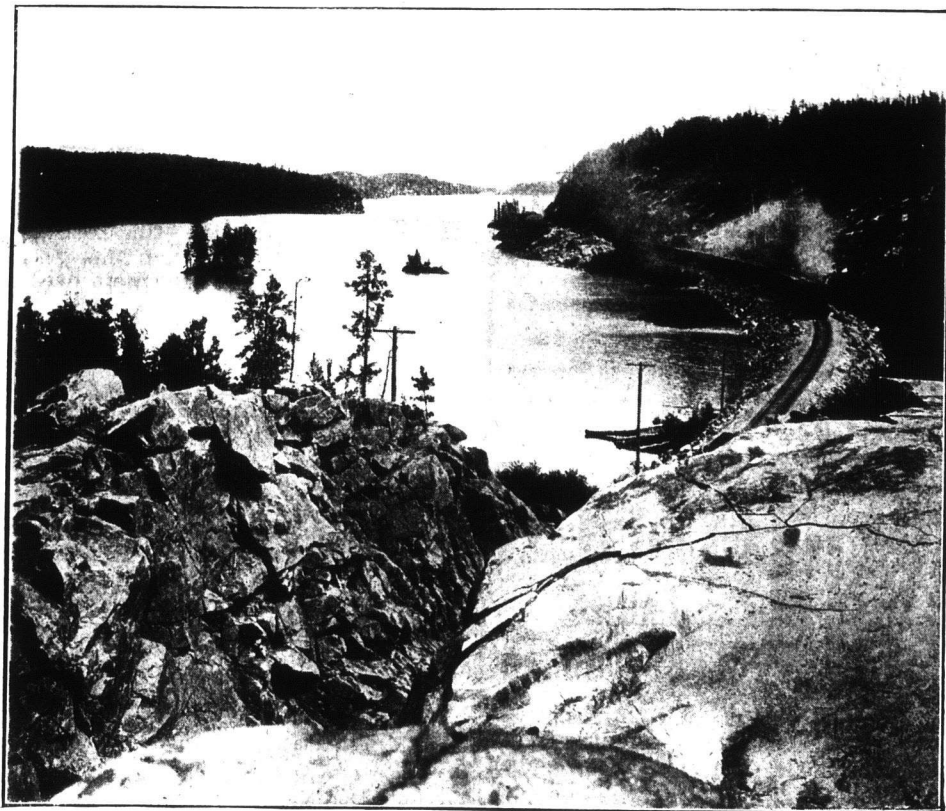
THE returned soldier problem is one that is now uppermost in the minds of our civilian public, and we all realize that the best we can give, and the most we can do is none too good for the gallant fellows who are now, or may yet be, engaged in the defence of our Empire whether they enlisted in Canada or in any other part of the Empire.

This brings to mind something which I have often thought of even before the war began, namely that since we have in our Tariff Policy a sub-policy granting preferential treatment to the Mother Land in the matter of duty on imports, why should we not adopt a similar policy in the administration of our public lands; thereby granting a preference not alone to the Mother Land, but to all British subjects over the subjects of foreign countries.

My idea is this. The law in reference to the granting of homesteads in the Canadian West might be amended so that a grant of land may be made to British subjects on the basis of the family instead of, or rather, in addition to that of the individual as at present. For example, a British subject in the Old Land could make application to the immigration authorities in the Old Country and secure a grant of land in Canada on a basis of one quarter section for each

to reconstruction work there, while at the same time they could send out small quantities of money, periodically, to their representatives in Canada to be expended in improving their holdings. The other members of the family could come from time to time as circumstances warranted, and when a comfortable home had been established in Canada the family circle could be completed by the parents, with the younger members of the family, leaving friends in the Old Land to find friends and hospitality in the new. This would tend, on the one hand, to curb to some extent the inevitable rush of immigration from the Old Country to Canada on the conclusion of peace and, on the other hand, would provide means and profitable employment for those who do come here, and would mean that the money invested in future improvements here would be "real money" instead of borrowed money as in the past. In addition it would preempt for Canada that portion of British immigration which, in the rush of readjustment, might be driven off to the United States and elsewhere.

Inasmuch as the principle of the preferential tariff in favor of the Mother Land has never been assailed by any political party in Canada, I do not believe that a preference in favor of British subjects in reference to the disposal of our



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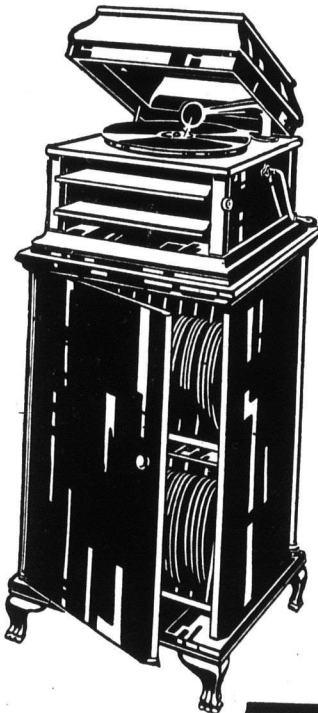
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member of the family, both male and female, over a certain age, say fifteen years, and on the following terms: one or more members of the family shall move on to the land and erect certain buildings, and cultivate a certain portion of each quarter section in much the same manner as is required by the present law in that behalf. All members of the family to be given ten years in which to take out patents for their land instead of the three years as the present law requires. Provided, however, that each member of the family, except in case of death, shall ultimately move on to the land and be in constant residence thereon for three years before the end of the ten years from the date of the grant. It might also be provided that certain portions only of each township, say one-third of the number of sections in each township, shall be homesteaded under this system. The remainder, less school lands, etc., to be homesteaded in the usual way. Thus distributing British subjects in a more or less methodical manner amongst the future population; thereby assuring distinctly British preponderance and corresponding influence in municipal and educational affairs.

Some of the effects of this system would be that a family in the Old Country when the soldier boys come home could send one or more of these, with possibly a sister, out to Canada to manage the family estate. The other members of the family could remain at home for a considerable time thus leading assistance

crowns lands could reasonably be found fault with. In my opinion such a preferential land policy should have been inaugurated in this country several years ago, and if such had been done, we would not now have to contend with the serious question of all foreign settlements in relation to our educational and social affairs. This is something which our educational and social reformers should ponder. It would also, if put into effect, tend to greatly relieve the stress of circumstances which will be upon us directly the war is over and readjustment commences.

The homestead law, as it has been, and is at present, although recognized as being impartial, in point of fact holds out a preference to the foreigner as against the British born. The foreigner as a rule comes to this country in extreme poverty and satisfied to allow his wife, with the younger children, to hold down the homestead in an improvised shack for three years while he earns a living for himself and family by working on the railway or elsewhere. If some of the family are grown up, the boys likely go with their father, and the girls find work in hotels and restaurants or in similar employment. This does not, in the mind of the Galician or the Hun, form an untoward state of affairs, but it does to the Britisher to whom, if he is compelled to live on the homestead for six months each year for three years, it practically means, for a man with a family, permanent residence for that period, and if he is without means to (Continued on page 24)