

THE ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF EMPIRE DAY

It has been a special pleasure to me to bring together the data which follows regarding the conception and evolution of this important Imperial celebration. Throughout the British world in 1909, Empire Day was observed by 55,000 schools, with an attendance of 7,500,000 scholars, while it is estimated that 16,000,000 British subjects came under the influence of the movement as a whole. To Senator George W. Ross—then Minister of Education in Ontario—would appear to be due the honour of having originated this idea, put it into practical form, and initiated the details of observance in a great movement which has since traversed the length and breadth of the Empire.

No man in Canada was more naturally fitted for such a work than Mr. Ross. An aggressive lover of Imperial unity, while, at the same time, a devoted believer in Canadian greatness; an eloquent exponent of the sentiment and higher ideals of British connection at times when practical considerations of material prosperity seemed to, momentarily, point in another direction; a vigorous and consistent advocate of everything in steamship and cable communication, in tariff preference and trade discrimination, in education through the schools and upon the platform, in defence of common interests upon sea and land, which would help in unifying the Empire—it was eminently appropriate that the future Provincial Premier and Dominion Senator should have developed this useful and vital element in the solution of a great problem. Others may have urged the idea in part, or discussed it publicly in some vague form, while Mr. Ross was quietly working it out in the Ontario schools as a result of his 1893 instructions. Mrs. Fessenden, of Ham-