

# G. W. V. A. CONVENTIONS

The attitude of the Returned Man

To The Editor, Canadian Churchman.

Sir,—In your issue of April 1st, "Spectator" comments on the recent Provincial and Dominion Conventions of the Great War Veterans' Association, in a manner altogether lacking his usual spirit of fairness and in my opinion unwarranted and misleading. He charges, in effect, that so much time and energy is being expended by the returned soldier in seeking compensation that the larger questions and higher ideals of great national import are overlooked, and that the conventions were without indication of the spirit of patriotism and self-sacrifice exhibited by the soldier in the field.

As one who was present throughout both conventions, I desire to say that, while the returned soldier would be the last man to claim to be a paragon of perfection—he prefers to leave that to the man who was too good to fight for his country—both gatherings exhibited these general characteristics:—

(1) A sincere spirit of loyalty to King and Country, and a desire to promote the welfare of Canada as a whole.

(2) A general spirit of fair play, as well towards the fellow who was not privileged to serve "over there," as to the widow and orphan of the fallen.

(3) No uncertain disapproval of anything like Bolshevism, class legislation or class domination and the firm conviction that all reform must be by constitutional methods.

(4) And (at the Dominion Convention) a marked feeling of goodwill between the French and English sections of the association.

But a comparatively small portion of the time of each convention was spent in discussing compensation, and one of the first series of resolutions adopted at the Dominion Convention was a Declaration of Principles, of which I enclose you a copy for any use you may desire to make of it, and from which I will quote the first and last paragraphs only:—

"1. That the foundation principle on which this our association rests is national service, and that we unreservedly commit ourselves to a standard of service for Canada and the British Empire, in the work of national development, as full, as self-sacrificing, and as free from personal motives as that rendered by our Army overseas.

"11. We view with alarm the increasing love of luxury which permeates all classes of our community and the riotous extravagance everywhere shown in gratifying this mania, thus courting as a nation final disaster. Our Army fought and our men died to establish forever among us the ideals of sacrifice, unselfishness and brotherhood. We, therefore, protest with all our energy against the extravagance shown in dress and manner of living, against the spending of money on unnecessary social affairs, and against costly public functions which are of no real value. At this time of national stress when as a nation we are faced with enormous financial responsibility, we call upon our fellow-citizens for plain and economical habits of life. We summon our country to a return to Spartan simplicity."

The truth is, that the great majority of the people of Canada who were not privileged to share to any considerable extent in the service and sacrifice of the war, but who lived at home in comfort and unwonted prosperity, far from the agonizing anguish of the struggle and without knowing even the sacrifice and self-denial which the people of Great Britain so cheerfully endured, do not realize, and I fear never will realize, what the war meant to the world at large or to those who participated in it. In the result, they do not understand the returned soldier, who has had a vision of other and greater things than the enjoyment of life and the making of money. It is their smug self-sufficiency, prosperity and materialism that have produced the problem of the returned soldier; which is really not the problem of the returned man at all but the problem of the man who stayed at home, the problem of that intense and unconscious selfishness which is the besetting sin of Canada to-day.

J. A. V. Preston.

Orangeville, Ont.

To The Editor, Canadian Churchman.

Sir,—May I say a few words on the subject of "Spectator's" comments on the G.W.V.A. Conventions, published in your issue of April 1st?

"Spectator" mourns "with sadness of heart" over the selfishness of the G.W.V.A., and wonders if these so-called selfish people are the same noble lads who sailed away to war with glowing hearts. He makes them demigods in going, but idols with feet of clay in returning. Why? Simply because they insist upon looking after their own interests, now that their country's interests have been secured. The public was willing enough to yield them the first place in service. Is it so willing to hold back in their favour now? Is there not a touch of insincerity in demanding of the men who have served at the front an abandonment of that self-interest which the public did not through the war and will not apparently now also yield?

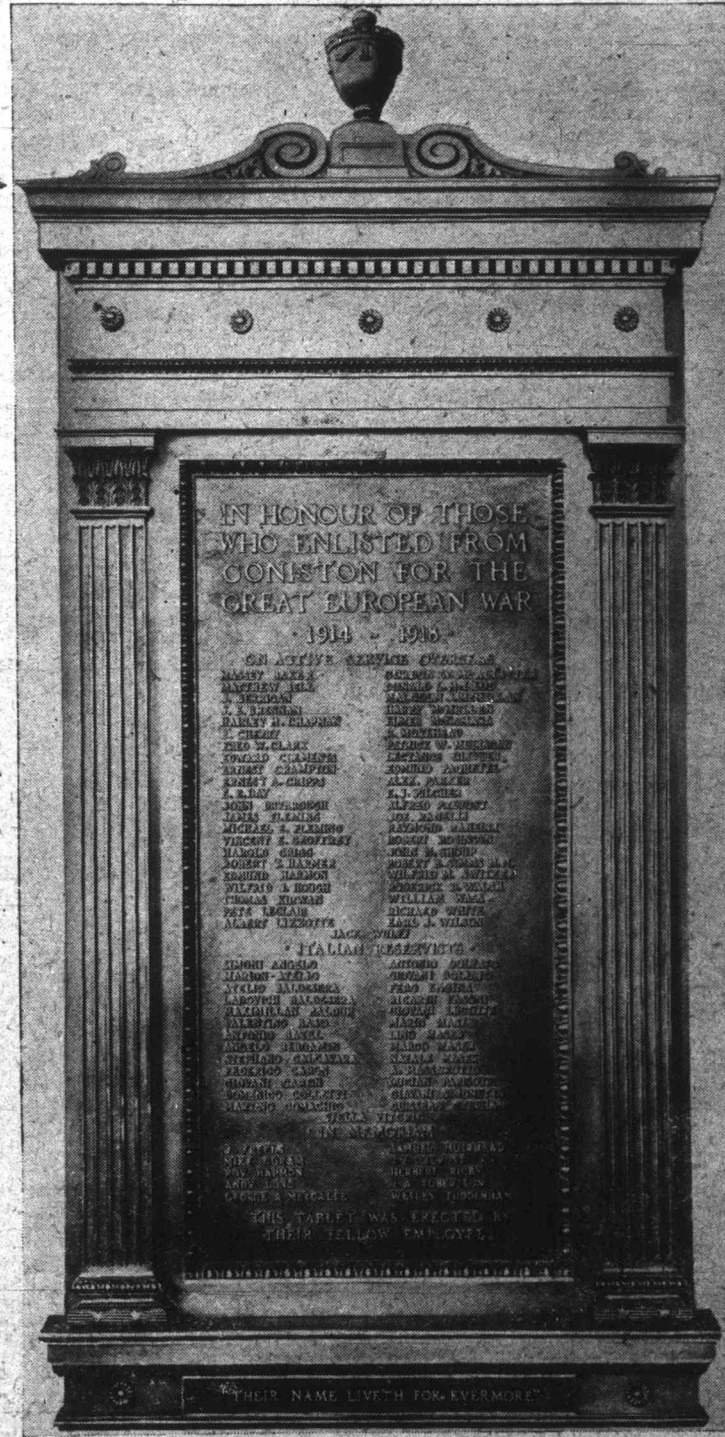
He complains of a lack of interest in the "bigger things" on the part of the Veteran, ignoring the fact that most of these men have suffered a loss in position, in education, in pecuniary advantage and a more serious one still in many cases, through their military service—a loss which has not affected the public at all. The so-called "compensation" (no such thing, of course, is possible) is not regarded as an equalization of advantage, but only a minimum sum to enable the Veteran to recover a bit of the lost ground. Money which

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