

To the Young Men of Western Canada

Prof. W. F. Osborne, University of Manitoba

A Letter

I received a long and interesting letter a few days ago with respect to my remarks on Conversation in the last issue. I shall be glad at any time to receive communications about the matters touched on in this column. The art of conversation can be consciously developed. As a general thing the Latin races are better talkers than the Anglo-Saxon. Equally generally, Europeans in this regard exceed Americans and Canadians.

King Coal

I have just read Upton Sinclair's book with this title. It is a savage indictment of conditions in the western mining camps of the United States. I wonder, by the way, what an investigation of Canadian mining conditions would disclose. I sincerely hope that there is nothing analogous in Canadian conditions to what Sinclair alleges with respect to American mining camps. Such conditions, in so far as they obtain anywhere, are a standing menace to the stability of existing institutions. They constitute an open sore. Employing classes are playing with dynamite in so far as they allow such circumstances to continue.

Murmurs of Discontent

It is surprising how many quiet and well-balanced men confess privately that they fear that revolution in a great many countries will be the inevitable outcome of social conditions as they now exist. Faulty government is bound in the long run to provoke reprisals. A thing that we forget too habitually is that the present war is going to teach great numbers of men to think in terms of force. That psychology had almost disappeared from the consciousness of Anglo-Saxon peoples at any rate. The close of the war will release hosts of men accustomed to the appeal to force. Social amelioration will henceforth have to proceed more rapidly if society at large is to be saved from anarchy. One man of sixty said to me the other day: "I'm glad I'm sixty. The next twenty-five years are going to be terrible." On the other hand, a young man said to me a few days ago: "I believe we are in for a half century of disorder." The way to meet this danger is, assuredly not, ostrich-like, to put our heads in the sand. We must reckon with the facts and try, by wise action, to forestall disaster. You will recall Tennyson's line about England, "where Freedom slowly broadens down from precedent to precedent." The present temper of the world calls for the accelerating of the pace.

Mediation

The remedy for many social ills lies in a wise mediation. The gap between classes must be kept from widening by mediation based on mutual knowledge. The trouble is that many capitalists refuse to try to enter sympathetically into the needs of employees. Equally dangerous are the rabid representatives of the employed who refuse to take cognisance of the difficulties of employers.

American Ideality

In the best American life to-day there is a fine note of ideality. For this President Wilson is much to thank. Conspicuously he thinks in terms of ideality. The basis on which the United States is participating in the war has given tremendous impetus to this tendency. The American people are not fighting for anything material. They want not a dollar of money, not an inch of territory, as the price of their participation. Their grand object is, in the great phrase of Woodrow Wilson, "to make the world safe for democracy." History has never seen anything so magnificent and inspiring as this. I heard Reed Smoot, a banker, say in the American Senate: "If the President of the United States wishes to make a loan of a billion to steady the cause of democracy in Russia, without any prospect of return, I hold up both hands." An American railway president I heard say in the Council of National Defence: "American railways are badly run down. They need rolling stock sorely. They need new rails. But for years we must build nothing for ourselves. We must labor to reconstruct the lines of Russia and France." This is superb altruism. This is the spirit of applied Christianity.

Russia

We know very little of what is really going on in Russia. The news of the evening denies the news of the morning. When the veil is lifted we may easily find that the worst excesses of the French Revolution have been re-enacted.

Our Foreign Populations

It is highly desirable that the public of Manitoba should know what the Provincial Government is doing by way of providing educational facilities for our

foreign fellow citizens. I recently heard the Minister of Education speak on this subject before a convention of school teachers at Emerson. I understood him to say that within two years one hundred new schools have been erected in Manitoba districts settled by foreigners. These hundred new schools are providing for about forty-five hundred pupils. An important feature of the policy is the erection, in connection with these schools, of homes for the teachers. This makes possible the securing of English speaking teachers for these districts. This policy is imperative if the future is to be safeguarded. It represents a fine experiment in nation-building.

Woman Suffrage

The triumph of woman suffrage in New York state is an event of the first consequence. The prestige of the movement on this continent will be enormously enhanced. Tennyson says: "For woman is not undeveloped man, but diverse." It is because she is "diverse" that woman is needed in politics. Her grand public function is to breathe the human element into legislation. Man emphasizes property. Woman emphasizes life. She, better than man, knows what life costs. The old argument that because woman cannot fight she should not vote is untenable. One of the finest books I ever read on the woman question is Olive Schreiner's "Woman and Labor." She reminds us of the fact that, for every child that is born, some woman goes down to the gates of death. The vote is one return for this vast and inevitable peril. The New Republic, speaking of the victory of the women in New York state, says: "The enfranchisement of women on the same terms and to the same extent as the enfranchisement of men deserves to be incorporated in the fundamental law of the American nation as a vital principle of the American democracy." No state is really a democracy that is trying to get along with the votes of simply one-half of its population.

Japan

One of the gratifying features of the war is the wise restraint practised by Japan. Many of us were afraid that she would take advantage of the situation presented by the preoccupation of the great powers in the world war. Precisely the opposite has apparently been the case. She has performed the tasks assigned her. She drove Germany from the Kiao Cho peninsula. She assisted Britain in sweeping the Pacific. She has recently reached an agreement with the United States with respect to China that goes far toward removing the possibility of trouble with the American Republic. We have apparently every reason to be satisfied as to the wisdom of the British-Japanese alliance. The old bug-bear of the abyss between the East and West is pretty well exorcised.

Cosmopolitanism

The war is dealing a heavy blow at old prejudices. Prejudices are the fruitful source of danger. Class prejudices breed revolution. National prejudices breed wars. Charles Lamb said there were certain nations that he could not abide. Half-jocularly, half-seriously he named in this connection, Jews, Scots and negroes. Almost everybody cherishes certain national antipathies. These are usually the result of ignorance. Burke said it was absurd to indict a whole people. Think of the motley host fighting under the banners of the democratic allies. Comradeship in the defence of democracy must generate a new sympathy, a new cosmopolitanism. India has raised a million men for Britain in the present war. This must profoundly affect the attitude of Britain to India. This war gives tremendous emphasis to the word "God has made of one flesh all the nations of the earth." The war should generate a great company of citizens of the world. Over-exaggerated nationality has been one of the banes of society. That is precisely what Germany is suffering from.

Partisanship

The campaign eventuating in the formation of a national government must deal a heavy blow at partisanship in Canada. It will certainly be a strange phenomenon if it ever revives in its old intensity. "Partisan" is to-day in Canada a term of disparagement. It is not likely ever again to recover good repute. Anglo-Saxon countries at any rate have not yet discovered a good equivalent for party government, but the health of the state demands a large body of detached and independent opinion.

Venice

It is with a shiver that one hears that the Germans are within fifteen or twenty miles of Venice. The city of the Doges exercises an almost unequalled witchery over the minds of men. Only the very most celebrated cities of the world surpass her in fascination. There are vast numbers whom the fall of Venice would

depress terribly. Every traveller and reader has his own group of associations that her name suggests. I think of ten golden days I spent there in 1898. After a hot ride across the luxuriant plain of Lombardy we were greeted by her refreshing breezes as by a benediction. Never shall I forget my first ride in a gondola, that dark rakish craft that moves almost like a swan over the waters. I remember what a shock it was to me when I read—was it in 1906?—of the fall of the campanile of St. Mark's.

An English Campanile

How surprised I was in 1904 to find a campanile in England. The campanile is a bell-tower. That is what the famous Leaning Tower of Pisa is. That famous structure is simply the bell-tower of the Duomo or Cathedral of Pisa. Cathedral, baptistery and campanile form a trio of buildings familiar in Italian cities. The celebrated Tower of Grotto at Florence, over which Ruskin expatiates with such enthusiasm, is the bell-tower of the cathedral of the Tuscan city on the Arno. But to come back to the English campanile of which I commenced to speak. I found it in the cathedral town of Chichester. This English building is a simple wooden structure. I was told that there was one other in England. Where it is situated I have forgotten.

Venetian Memories

I said above that every visitor to and reader about Venice has his own set of associations suggested by her name. I for my part think first of all of Shakespeare's "Merchant of Venice." There is not much local color or allusion in Shakespeare's famous play. Save for the Rialto and the fact that Antonio is a merchant of a maritime city, the scene might just as well be laid anywhere else. The Rialto is the noble old bridge that spans the Grand Canal, the main street of Venice. The question "What news on the Rialto?" means just about "How are things on the Exchange to-day?" Then I think of J. Fenimore Cooper's "Bravo," a tale of assassination and intrigue. In the Doge's Palace one may still see the Lion's Mouth in which charges were dropped by those who wished to get rid by foul means of those whom they chose to represent as enemies of the Republic. Then in my memory stands Byron's "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage," with its famous allusion to the Bridge of Sighs. If I remember rightly the scene of Shelley's "Julian and Maddalo" is laid in Venice. One of my chief pleasures in Venice was a visit to the Palazzo Rezzonico where Robert Browning died. Asolo, the scene of Browning's "Pippa Passes" is not far from Venice. Of all the cities of Italy the two that Ruskin loved best were Florence and Venice. The two volumes of his "Stones of Venice" are magnificent. I repeat that it will be distressing in the extreme if Venice should fall into the hands of the Austro-Germans.

The Vast Task of the Allies

Talk about consulting the Imperial Government as to how many more men it needs from Canada is absurd. We know perfectly well that the most we can supply will be none too many. I recall a conversation I had with a very intelligent officer last summer. He said, "We have a first-class battle over practically every village held by the Germans in the occupied territories of France. And there is a village every few miles." This is the herculean task that has to be performed on the Western front. Add to this the enormous labor of moving heavy guns and all the munitions of war over land torn by shell explosions as by so many earthquakes. The New Republic in its last issue confirms this picture when it says: "The territory behind the present line consists of one series of strong positions after another. When the Germans are ousted from one series, they fall back to another, and so slow is the movement of this kind of warfare that the new positions may be as carefully prepared as the old." In other words the Allies have the ascendancy on the Western front, but it is impossible to capitalize this ascendancy rapidly. Meanwhile, in all the other theatres of war, with the possible exception of those in Asia, the Germans are in the ascendant. There is nothing to do but clench the teeth and go on. Our grand hope lies in the approaching application to the war of the mighty resources and the clear determination of the United States. Russia is paralyzed. Roumania is prostrate. Italy is reeling, though we trust rallying as well. Britain is at the peak of her power. France is past that point, in all probability. If we can hold on till America gets into her swing it will be a horse of a different color. The one hundred millions of the American Republic will not be wasted. It is Canada's duty to do her part to keep Britain's forces up to strength until the matchless resources of the United States are fully deployed.