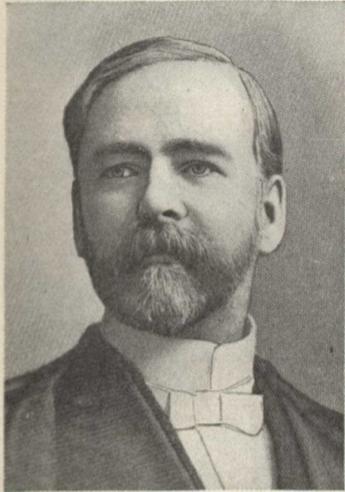


THE MISSION OF NORTH AMERICA

By THE HONOURABLE W. A. WEIR*

THE development of two democratic peoples on this part of the North American continent, living side by side in perfect peace and harmony, is a matter of the greatest interest. We Canadians are happy to read of and watch the marvellous growth of our friends and



Hon. W. A. Weir.

and cousins across the international boundary and to take note of their expansion to imperial greatness. We wish to them and their children in the most hearty and fraternal manner the fullest measure of success in all their high aims, and the happy achievement of a magnificent destiny. We feel that the best interests of the two peoples are indissolubly linked together; that the problems of government which you may be called upon to solve must, in the process, be of invaluable help to us; that the achievement by you of social reforms and intellectual development cannot but have a preponderating influence upon our own destinies.

From this point of view, sir, I may be allowed, with all due humility, to refer to some conditions in the development of the United States and Canada of minor and yet considerable importance.

Fundamentally, the growth of a people depends far less upon its material wealth than upon its sincere adherence to ideals. Carlyle pointed out the notable fact that the Arabs, once they had sincerely adopted the message of Mahomet, changed from the insignificance of wandering tribes to a race of conquering heroes, whose power spread within a century from Spain to Delhi. Their subsequent decadence is undoubtedly due, in a large measure, to the diminution of their devotion to the ideals that once governed them. It is, sir, perhaps not impertinent to say that every sincere American and Canadian should occasionally pause in the great struggles of modern life for wealth or honour or happiness and ask himself this question: Is my country remaining sincerely attached to the noblest ideals? For true is the saying of holy writ that

* These sentiments by the Treasurer of the Province of Quebec were expressed in an address by him at the Banquet of the International Association of Accident Insurance Underwriters at Niagara Falls, on July 15th.

many shall not live by bread alone, and this applies to nations as well as to individuals.

In one respect, at least, the United States has earned the applause of all thoughtful students of history, viz., in regard to the maintenance of its public schools and institutions of learning. Vast sums of money have been expended thereon, for the people have realised that in the education of their children was one of the strong safeguards of liberty and good government.

And yet even in regard to our schools, certain dangers exist. For example, do we teach history of the broadest and most unbiased sort? I fear that in many instances what is called history in our schools frequently inculcates in the minds of our children the germs of national and even personal prejudice. This state of things could and should be promptly remedied.

Again, do we give to the status of teacher all the importance it deserves? What is there of more grave import to the future of the world than the qualities and character of the teachers of children? Bulwer Lytton has well said that the youth of a nation are the trustees of posterity, for a nation lives in its children. And yet we will pay far more remuneration to the curator of an insolvent estate than to those who form the minds of the children that are soon to control the destinies of the state! One result of this is that the teaching profession is shunned by many who are best qualified for it. Men who devote their talents to this work are becoming scarcer and scarcer. The work is falling more and more into the hands of young women, who in spite of all the aptitudes lack some of the qualities that are requisite for the education of the boys of a nation. The Scotch dominie during the last three centuries has been a great source of the development of Scotland and Scotchmen. In Canada, the dominie has disappeared from our rural schools and to my mind we have thereby lost an important factor in the production of moral and mental force in the rising generations.

The sanctity of family life must ever be a strong factor in the growth of a nation. It is attacked in our days most fundamentally by our loose laws of divorce. Herein surely is matter enough for consideration by all good citizens.

Have our newspapers developed along healthy lines? In many instances it seems to me that the moral force of the newspaper is controlled by the counting-house and circulation department. The people want news of crime and rapine, of scandal and wrong-doing, and many papers who aim at large circulation yield to the desire. Is there not in this also, matter for consideration in reference to the ideals and tendency of the age?

The growth of corporations is a marked feature of the last and present century. Our mines, our manufactures of every sort and kind, our trans-

portation facilities, whether by land or sea, are practically all under the control of corporations, to whom extravagant powers are sometimes given by our legislatures. Immense wealth is thus controlled by a few men. Corporations are soulless and their actions often prove it. Men will do things for a corporation that they would scorn to do for themselves.

Will anyone maintain, for example, that the relation of corporations to our legislatures through their eminent counsel and friends will merit the approval of the future historian of our times? Have our legislatures gained thereby in public esteem? Do our best men now, as a rule, find public life inviting? I fancy that a consideration of these questions will bring conviction to many minds that the moral tone and public spirit of this continent is still susceptible of improvement. What we sow, that shall we also reap, is a lesson ever applicable to peoples as well as to individuals. A nation cannot afford to be careless in the preservation of its ideals.

But I do not want you to think that I am entirely a pessimist. I yield to none in my appreciation of the work accomplished by the manhood and the womanhood of this continent in developing its resources and building up its communities.

The magnificent temples of worship, the splendid institutions of charity and philanthropy all through our vast territories prove the existence of sturdy moral elements.

We have taught and are teaching to the world by our democratic customs and institutions the best lessons of liberty, fraternity and equality.

The strong adherence to the policy of peace that is characteristic of the United States and Canada shows also the broad humanity of our countries. The growing influence of this continent will ever be, I am confident, both diplomatically and in every other way, exercised to prevent the horrors of international war.

It is our glorious privilege to work for the dissipation of prejudice, hate, discord, racial greed and spoliation and for the recognition of the mutual rights and obligations of all classes of the children of men who live under the same broad canopy of the eternal skies. It is possible for us to place less and less importance upon the purely local or national interest and to act and legislate so as to advance the common, cosmopolitan and fraternal good of humanity. In this way can the people of the American continent become more truly great and thus shall we do our part in ushering in the glad time foreseen by the poet Tennyson:

"When the war drum beats no longer
And the battle flags are furled
In the parliament of the nations,
In the federation of the world."

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