

The Day of Opportunity

THE PRIMATE'S CHARGE AT THE GENERAL SYNOD, 1918

Right Rev. Brethren, Rev. Brethren and Brethren of the Laity:

My first word in formally opening our meeting will be an expression of our warm appreciation of having with us our esteemed brother from the sister Church of the United States. Dr. McCormick gave us an admirable opening sermon this morning, just what we needed—a message which struck the right note—a note that, we trust, will remain not only tuneful but inspiring throughout our whole meeting. When I invited him to preach, he sent his reply from Paris, France, where he was doing the work of the Church and God's work among the overseas Forces. That fact sent a thrill of fraternal affection coursing through my veins. Before, he was an ecclesiastical brother, the representative of a sister Church with which we have been in the habit from time to time of exchanging courtesies. Henceforth he was to be a brother in another way, a brother in contending along with us for the civil and religious liberty wherewith Christ has made us free—the representative of noble citizens, no longer our American cousins but our brothers and sisters in one of the noblest struggles and military enterprises the world has ever seen, our comrades in arms in maintaining for the world the best things in it, liberty, honour, humanity, mercy and Christly tenderness against a combination of malignant powers which have set these precious possessions entirely at naught. We welcome Dr. McCormick with us, then, not only on account of his own personality but on account of the nation he represents, and we thank him heartily for the strong and helpful words which he has addressed to us this morning.

As you are aware, we arranged three years ago that this meeting of our Synod should take place in Winnipeg. Owing, however, to the withdrawal by the Railways of all concessions and special convention rates, it was found that the increased cost of meeting in the West would be very serious. Indeed, the question of having a meeting at all this year owing to war conditions was quite generally raised. After taking counsel, by correspondence, with the Synods or Executive Committees of the various Dioceses, I discovered that the preponderance of opinion was in favor of holding the meeting, but not in the West on account of the added expense. For the second time, the Church people of Toronto came to our rescue and consented on short notice to extend hospitality to us in having us meet here. Those of us who know the expense and labour involved in providing accommodation and hospitality for a large body of delegates such as our General Synod calls for, can appreciate what we owe to the Bishop and to our friends in Toronto for this great kindness. It is not simply, therefore, the customary courtesy of a resolution of thanks that we should extend to them, but the expression of our genuine gratitude for their exceptional and oft-repeated kindness.

As to the propriety of meeting at all this year, personally, I was never for a moment shaken in my conviction that just because of war conditions we should meet. That the Church should stand aside as if it had nothing to do with it when the very foundations of our modern civilization are being made to tremble and quake, that the supreme council of our Church should suspend its foregathering and should simply watch, wait and not have its

united voice heard and its corporate action taken, seemed to me unthinkable. If the voices clamant out of the dreadful circumstances through which we are passing are crying out to the Church and its various agencies, "Now is your chance, now is your opportunity, now is the day and now is the hour for specially aggressive action, now is the time to remedy defects in your system or your methods which this awful upheaval has revealed." I repeat, if such voices are coming to us and we know they are, is it a time for the Church in her supreme legislative capacity to wait and see? My heart and my soul kept saying to me, "No, but let us prepare and be ready for prompt action lest the Church's part in reconstruction be swallowed up and overwhelmed by the avalanche of all the other after-war needs and necessities. I shall refer to this more fully later on, but I simply mention it now to show why I never wavered in my hope that our General Synod should convene just now.

It is fitting that I should refer to some of the losses by death which we have sustained in the personnel of our Synod since its last meeting. Bishop Mills, after long and fruitful service to the Church, which he gave without stint or sparing of himself, has been called to his rest. Before the time of our last meeting, he had a serious breakdown in health but in the most unexpected way he rallied and was able to return to his work with almost all his old-time vigour. As the late Dr. Collins, the saintly Bishop of Gibraltar, remarked in regard to the first collapse in his health, he had then "the chance to die but kept on living for the sake of his work." So did Bishop Mills, to the surprise of all his friends. Of commanding and fine presence and of as fine a personality, we shall miss him much. Upon Bishop Bidwell who had the right of succession to the See of Ontario, has fallen the mantle of our departed friend.

Bishop Scriven, after an all-too-short occupancy of the See of Columbia, was called home with what seemed to the world tragic suddenness, but after a day's devoted work at an outstation in his Diocese, God's hand "touched him and he fell asleep." We welcome to our meeting his successor in the person of Dr. Schofield, who is no stranger to us as an effective colleague in the work of the Synod.

Without trenching upon the prerogative of the Lower House in recording its losses, I cannot refrain from referring to the loss which the entire Synod has sustained in the death of the honoured and esteemed Prolocutor of that House. For two successive sessions, Canon Powell was elected by his brethren to preside over their proceedings. He did so with marked ability and impartiality and yet with a genial courtesy. The Canadian Church will miss him, not merely in its counsels but as an educationist, a faithful Parish Priest and a useful contributor to its literature and publications. One feels in recalling his personality and power that but for his failing health and early demise, there would certainly have been in store for him some of the most exalted and most responsible positions in the gift of the Church which he loved and served so well.

We regret the absence from this meeting of the two Bishops from the Foreign Missions of our Canadian Church. They have both written to express their regret and explain that owing to the reduction in their staff arising from departures to the war, they were unable

to leave their posts. Their presence would have been most helpful to us in discussing our missionary problems.

Our Indian Missions.—Closely akin to foreign missionary work and of as paramount importance is that among the Indian tribes within our own Dominion. As is known to the Synod, that work in the Dioceses of the Canadian West has been maintained in the past largely by the Church Missionary Society of the Mother Land. Its support for a period of years has been undergoing a gradual diminution and in two years it will cease altogether. In preparation for that contingency our Missionary Board has been devising methods and means by which our Canadian Church may be able after 1920 to assume the maintenance of this work. With that end in view, deputations have been appointed to visit and to report upon the conditions, needs and prospects of these various missions. Up to date, only part of this inspection has been completed. What has been done, however, has been most excellently accomplished, and the masterly reports already presented by our General Missionary are not only voluminous and exhaustive, but so valuable to the work of the Church in that field that they should be preserved in permanent form for the use of the Church. When the full field has been covered and all the reports presented, it seems to me that they should not only find a place in the printed journals of our Board of Management, but be bound together in a volume and kept for reference among the historical records of our Canadian Church. The assumption of the entire cost and the requisite improvement in the equipment of our Indian Missions will constitute one of the biggest undertakings that the Missionary Society of our Canadian Church has ever faced. But my ardent hope is that with God's help we shall have the courage and the grace to cope with it and that successfully. It would be to the lasting discredit of the Church of England in Canada if it allowed the work upon which a noble Society in England has for a hundred years expended such a wealth of both men and money and a work which has had shed upon it and laid upon it the lustre and the labours of some of the noblest heroes and heroines of the Cross of Christ that ever endured hardness and loneliness for His sake. I say it would be to the lasting discredit of the Canadian Church to permit that work to fail or be abandoned to be taken up by others.

I know whereof I speak when I assert this, for I have had the privilege of growing up amid most of it and for over half a century have been an eye and ear witness of what has been done. In October, 1920, the Church in the Ecclesiastical Province of Rupert's Land hopes to observe the Centenary of its life and of its work in North-West Canada. At that date, if God spares us and if our brothers from the East will honour us with their presence and their prayers, we can take you to the sacred spot where John West first planted the Ensign of the Cross and where he erected his first little building into which he admitted his first Indian boy as a pupil, a boy who afterwards became a Priest of the Church of God and a missionary to his own people. We can show you how that little building on the banks of the Red River has grown into hundreds of Churches and Parsonages, and Parish Halls, over the length and breadth of that vast land, and how that one missionary has multiplied into hundreds and hundreds, including Bishops, Priests and Deacons, and how that one little Mission centre has grown into ten Dioceses. Do gracias. We shall want our brothers and sisters in the East and the rest of Canada to rejoice with us then, and to thank God with us then. But we will want them to do more.

(Continued on page 589)