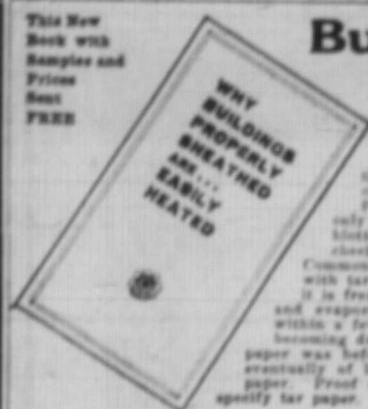


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Order of Merit vs. Nobility

Continued from Page 3

a title must both forfeit her citizenship and deplete her country's revenue to the extent of her wealth, which in general must be large to attract a peer. It may be noted in passing that a considerable number of these must be exiled every year, for an Oxford Don in lecturing on the Balance of Trade was wont to regard the dowries of American heiresses as an important factor in accounting for England's ability to import more than she exported without becoming financially un-sound. On the whole, America has been the better without a titled nobility and one cannot help feeling that Washington and Hamilton, Lincoln and Wilson would be less dear to mankind if they were separated from them by an absurd feudal title. One can hardly imagine the garbled hands of Lincoln being held up in horror against the slavery of the aristocratic South if he had been a knight of the bath and a noble lord.

View of Our Forefathers

But our Canadian forefathers, though they adopted some of the features of the American constitution, were too skeptical of democracy to abolish titles for all time. This lack of faith in the people is well illustrated not only by Macdonald's boast that not one of the Canadian representatives were in favor of universal suffrage, but also by Cartier's elaborate contrast between the respective aims of Canada and the United States in forming a federation. "They had founded federation for the purpose of carrying out and perpetuating democracy on this continent; but we who had the benefit of being able to contemplate republicanism in action during a period of 80 years, saw its defects and felt convinced that purely democratic institutions could not be conducive to the peace and prosperity of nations. We were not now discussing the great problem presented to our consideration in order to propagate democratic principles. In our federation, the monarchical principle would form the leading feature, while on the other side of the line the ruling power was the will of the mob, the rule of the populace."

If our forefathers were thus skeptical of democracy, we can hardly afford to imitate them in this respect. With 50 years' experience of its success both in America and in France, we need not so much faith in an ideal as observation of what is practically a fact. Let us pledge our faith both to preserve this fact and realize the ideal. Let us swear by the red blood of our countrymen which is pouring into the North Sea through the canals and sluggish streams of Flanders that none of us shall henceforth be allowed to purchase distinctions from our country's necessities or to transmit to a self-indulgent posterity the glitter of a bastard aristocracy.

The Meritable Appetite

This determination that Canada shall not have a titled nobility gives rise to the question whether she ought not to have something to gratify the meritable appetite for public recognition in our present state of national development. Now is the accepted time, when a new nation is being born into the spirit of world-wide endeavor, when a new spirit of service is being demanded and discovered, and when the sordid spoils-system is receiving its death-blow. Henceforth, the motto for the individual should be not what can one get out of the state through the local representative or party-heeler, but what can one do for the state, and it is desirable that an order of merit should be created in order to give a stimulus to this kind of service. The rigid moralist may object that service rendered with a view to recognition is not deserving of recognition, but he must not mistake the problem nor forget the facts of human nature; for the statesman has to consider not what is ideally best under favorable circumstances but what is best in a given set of conditions and in view of human frailties. After all, it is by no means ignoble to strive after a distinction for merit bestowed by the

voice of a nation, for in the world of conflicting desires we must judge a man not by his lack of baser desire, but by his preference for noble ones, and the Canadian who prefers national recognition for national service rather than ignoble ease, self-indulgence or the pursuit of personal property is a more noble specimen than the carping moralist who thanks God that he is not like other men; and indeed is not.

It may be objected also that an order of merit is not democratic unless the democratic watchwords "liberty, equality and fraternity," mean liberty to acquire a decorated equality at the expense of the fraternal mob whom one serves in order to rise above them. But this is to misread democracy, which is merely a career open to talent, even-handed justice, and equality of opportunity to make the most out of one's talents be they one or ten. In a word, democracy asserts that each personality is an end in itself, and must have its opportunity to realize that end.

Napoleon's "Legion of Honor"

During the democratic movement known as the French Revolution, the problem of rewarding merit arose and was solved by Napoleon through his "Legion of Honor." In 1790, all hereditary titles had been abolished though "Arms of Honor" were to be granted those who performed distinguished military service. Napoleon decided that the merit of both soldiers and civilians was equally deserving of recognition. In fact he replied to one of his critics that the merit of the civilians was superior to that of the soldier. "If strength and bravery," he said, "made the general, every soldier might claim the command. The general who does great things is he who also possesses civil qualities. The soldier knows no law but force, sees nothing but it, and measures everything by it. The civilian on the other hand only looks to the general welfare. The characteristic of the soldier is to wish to do everything despotically, that of the civilian is to submit everything to discussion, truth and reason. The superiority thus unquestionably belongs to the civilian."

Napoleon, it will be seen from the above excerpt, wished to stimulate the energies of his people in all directions. Though he relied upon his army and treated it well, he knew that if he satisfied the honor of France his armies would be easily filled, and that if the nation as a whole was stimulated to common effort it would become more united than he could otherwise hope. In this way those of the Ancient Regime and those of the revolution would be one in the new order. To this end, each member of the Legion of Honor, swore "to devote himself to the service of the Republic, to the maintenance of the integrity of its territory, the defense of its government, laws and of the property which they have consecrated, to fight by all the methods authorized by justice, reason and law, against every attempt to establish the feudal regime, or to reproduce the 'titles' and qualities thereto belonging; and finally to strive to the utmost to maintain liberty and equality."

Has Survived Nobility

In spite of all the sneers at this Legion of Honor, as a device to lead France back to aristocracy, it has survived both the old nobility and the family of Napoleon; and is regarded by the French today as of prime importance in recognizing the legitimate aspirations of a great democracy, and there is no reason why we in Canada may not be able to reap equal advantage from a similar order.

We must be careful, however, not to sow the weeds of nobility amongst the new flowers of merit by introducing ranks or grades and feudal trappings into the new order. All members should get the same decoration whether their service be military or civilian, agricultural or industrial, literary or ecclesiastical. The reward itself should be valuable not from a monetary point of view but only as a national recognition, and the officials who will be necessary for ceremonial purposes should be

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