

QUEBEC TRICENTENARY

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Behold I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert. Isaiah xliii, 19.

The occasion commands not the letter, but the spirit of this text. Here is the heart of God going out in the providence of God to execute the purpose of God in history. God does not work mechanically, but vitally, in grace and flower and human kind—in the individual, the family, the state and international destiny. His way is in the sea. His footprints are on the land. He worketh all things after the counsel of His will and none may stay His hand.

The philosophy of history assures us that in effecting a settlement in this new world, God had in mind a forward step in the higher well-being of the race. Since the beginning of creation, lower material has been ground up to produce higher forms, the inorganic to build the organic, and the lower organic to construct the higher. The decomposed rocks feed the vegetable, the vegetable the animal, the animal cerves the intellectual, the intellectual the moral, until it is conformed to the pattern set by the Architect in His own Son, who is "the fulness of the Father's glory." All that does not serve this end is rejected, as the spalls that fall from the statue under the sculptor's chisel. And the law of the individual life obtains in the social life of men. To further human well-being, men are led, and even forced of God, as the eagle stirreth up her nest, to break their rest, and by strenuous struggle over height and depth to bring their feeble pinions into power. Men are compelled to sacrifice lower thoughts to higher ideals, to grind up systems, and rebuild constitutions until humanity finds a way to realize this excellence divine. The Father breathes the spirit of a nobler life to burst the clod that oppresses it. God is the God of life, and the outshining that perfects life. As the mists of the third epoch of creation gave place to the resplendent sun, so must all mystifying superstitions lift their clouds, and every binding bigotry cut its ruthless cords. Geographic boundaries will be broken, and continents exchanged to give the inbreathed life of God an environment in which to unfold. Such was the spirit that was quickening Europe in the sixteenth century. Life was seeking to realize its own fulness.

And for this, saith God, "I will open a way, even in the wilderness. The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice." Here is the heart and mind and will and power of the Almighty opening a way for men. And whatever the fault, the failure, the weakness and meanness of men, that fret and rag and tear the more seemly developments of history, it is a comfort to feel that God is with us in the storm at sea and struggle of humanity.

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God opens the way through the hard rock of tradition. Even the soil settles into hardness, and must be broken up to yield its substance to higher ends. The less reasonable of men, who fail to catch the prophetic spirit, settle down to reverence only the past; to idolize their own conceptions, and repress every forward movement. To them the universe is a mechanism. They forget its vital relations, and its vital powers—that God is the living God, and that in Him we live and move, as well as have our being. And the very Church of Him who said: "I am come that ye might have life and have it more abundantly," had conformed its policy to im-

perialistic repression. And the spirit of the great Apostle who said: "Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy," had been changed into a spirit of curing every soul that would not bow to unreasonable dogma. They made void the life-giving law of God by their tradition. A new arena of human development was necessary, even though it had to be opened in the wilderness, the new wine required a new bottle, the new spirit of life a new land, before it could find a normal development.

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In a new land alone, free from the stubborn standards of thought, feeling and habit, that, like warp and woof, were interwoven in the life of centuries, could there spring up sufficient grace of tolerance to allow souls in their struggle for light to sit together at the table of God. But through the tangleweld of thought and thorns of human passions, God, like a good father that hath tender pity on the bickerings of ignorant children, says, "I will open a way even in the wilderness."

He opens it even at the cost of blood. Tradition grew into bigotry, and bigotry to slaughter. O, France, land of the father's pride, how many of thy noblest sons laid down their lives to en throne a reasonable mind and a free conscience! Thy lot was hard. Thine the battle front! Thy blood flowed free. But the Master asked no more of thee than of Himself. By way of Calvary the throne of love he reached. And by this sacrifice he broke down the middle wall of partition, and joined the hearts of De Monts, the Huguenot and Champlain, the liberal-spirited Catholic, in the common love of their kind to set up at the base of this old God-built citadel an open door to better things for the race.

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This leads me to impress upon you that God opens this way by the agency of men, that we may not forget our duty. He that by sun and rain inspires the land to burst the oppressing clod, inspire the heart of Abraham to burst the bonds of Oriental polytheism, and turn westward to establish a nobler monotheism in which all nations of the earth were to be blessed. And He that heard the cry of His people by reason of their taskmasters, and came down to deliver them, did so by the hand of Moses. God inspires men with devotion to truth, and enable them to stand for the truth. So it is through men that God reveals Himself to the world, and works His purposes therein. He fills men with a sense of what is needful for their fellow-men, and inspires them to pursue it, even through the wilderness of adventure and toil and suffering and death, counting not their lives dear unto them, if they might finish their course with joy and the ministry they had received of God. This is the prophetic spirit, whether in priest or people; the spirit that, in greater or less degree, impelled Columbus and Coligny, De Monts and Champlain to open some highway of escape for men out of the worse into better conditions of life. And it was a happy thing for us that, while the storm of repression raged in Europe, the spirit of De Monts, the Huguenot, and Champlain, the liberal Catholic, could rise above their age and plant here a colony with tolerance for faith's opinion. So only could deliverance come to the growing soul. Therefore, as we meet today in happy remembrance of all the way God opened for our fathers in the wilderness, we ought to bless His name for the spirit of these men,

and for those British and Canadian-American institutions that, so beginning, have fostered a kindly feeling between Catholic and Protestant, French and English, that bids well to initiate what my beloved master Guyot used to say, would be the gathering together again on this continent of the nations that were scattered abroad. It is to me a fact of great significance that twelve years before the Pilgrims landed on Plymouth Rock, here at the base of this old natural citadel, the French forefathers, representing a more peaceful spirit than that which drenched the homeland with such noble blood, anchored their little ships at the gateway of the new world, and inspired with new sentiments and new hopes, broke their bread together in the peace of God. It is something to be thankful for. It is something worth gathering to celebrate. And something worthier still, if we can make it a stronger bond of Christian fraternity, to bless the land in which we live with increasing light and redeeming love. This leads me to follow the way of God into the future. Men die, but man lives. Thrones are destroyed, but governments remain. Empires are broken, but national life continues. When the poems are sung to those in their graves, the Muse will not forget her art. We go on to see and feel defeat and triumph, as our fathers did: only under new phases of life. If there is not so much need, like Champlain, to find our untrodden way through rivers, lakes and forests, there is need to better navigate our waters, and to cast up highways in the land. The voyager must give place to the engineer to tunnel our mountains and open avenues of commerce for coming millions. If our problems are less imaginative, they are no less arduous. King Edward has more to do in the complicated problems of international relations than the Saxon chiefs, whose glory gone, loomed from tribal fight, and the triumph in which they drank their wine from the well-dried skulls of their foes. From the simple to the complex is the course of life and thought. The problems that will meet our children will be harder to solve than those which met our fathers. The battle of the giants did not end when Titans fought on fabled fields of yore. Canada is young yet, has never felt the struggle of independent life. She has reposed on the maternal bosom and safely rested 'neath Britannia's shield. But will this always be? The child must feel the thrill of growing life. And the parent does not wish to see the child grow old in swaddling bands. Independence, or self-respecting partnership in the parent's firm, is but the normal course of life. The latter is to me the wiser course, for Britain and for Canada. Indeed, the English-speaking world should form an eternal pact of peace. I have studied ethnic science in vain, if I have not found that such a course is needful to the highest common weal. All that is best in Christianity has its highest hopes and base of power in such a trend of history. And in this Canada, if guided aright, will play no insignificant part: 1. Canada has abundant bread and therefore strength. All life goes to its appropriate feeding grounds—so the winged insect and the flying fowl. Man is no exception to this law of life. The great migrations known in history were in search of bread. The Sons of Israel went down into Egypt because there was corn there. Canada is

A land by God's good bounty fed
Upon the sweetest of His bread;
The land that never will deny
To toiling hands a full supply;
Nor from their children ere remove
The fondest hopes of home and love.

Canada in all probability can produce nine hundred millions of bushels of