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EDITORIAL

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CANADA—A NATION FIFTY YEARS YOUNG

AN EDITORIAL BY GEORGE M. WRONG

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I AM asked, without myself choosing the title, to write on the topic at the head of this editorial. There is no doubt that Canada is young, and it is well, when we are tempted to be depressed by our defects, to remember this truth. As a nation, indeed, Canada can hardly be regarded as fifty years young; fifty years ago few thought of Canada as a nation at all. It was a colony, and even its leaders were pervaded by what we may call the colonial spirit; something which we have not yet fully outgrown. Fifty years ago there was no murmuring in respect to the control of Canada's external affairs by Great Britain; and no complaint because no Canadian officer was deemed fit to command the Canadian forces. It was still true that a Governor-General might, of his own motion, pardon a criminal, even in opposition to the advice of his ministers. In a deeper sense, too, Canada lacked any real sense of nationality. Nova Scotians thought Ontario a remote country and, for years after 1867, spoke of "going up to Canada." There was no Canadian West; that part of the country was the property of the Hudson's Bay Company. There was no Canadian Province of British Columbia; to reach that remote land one had to cross interminable prairie land and mountains, and the connecting railway did not come until nearly twenty years later. A nation, like an individual, is, I suppose, as young as it feels. Canada assuredly has no right to feel old. Before her lies the hopeful, cheery view of life that belongs to youth.

Fifty Years Ago Canada was barely conscious of having any serious problems in respect to social evolution. She had solved the one great problem of linking together in a single state obscure and detached provinces. It was a magnificent achievement, worthy of all praise, and until it was performed great national questions could not be considered as they hardly yet existed. Toronto was in those days a small, quiet, pleasant city, with little more than fifty thousand inhabitants, a place about one-third the size of the present Vancouver. No doubt it seemed very backward to visitors from large centres. No doubt, too, it was thoroughly provincial in its politics, in its education, in its art, and in its literature. But, at least, it was free from some of the pressing problems which now confront all Canadian cities. There was no foreign population, bringing to the new world the type of social life forced on the common people by selfish oppression in Europe; there was no acute strife between labour and capital; capital was modest and labour was content, for, with cheap food and low rents, it was not hard to live decently. No doubt Toronto then, being thoroughly provincial in spirit, copied the social cleavage of the old world, and divisions in social standing were sharper than they are at the present day. Fifty years young, as we now are, in this and other great cities we are confronted with the problem of the foreigner, the problem of the slums, the problem of high prices and sometimes of low wages, the problem of enervating luxury, the problem of selfish capital and of not less selfish labour. Assuredly the fifty years have brought us enough to think about and enough to do.

A Young Nation should face its Problems in hope. Youth that is not hopeful is not youth at all. Hope is greatly needed, for it is melancholy to reflect that no civilization has as yet proved a real success. To be successful a civilization must, at least, provide for a decent plenty of the necessities of life for all classes of its people. Three hundred and fifty years before Christ, Aristotle said that in the society of his time there were really only two classes, the rich and the poor. The problem of society at that time was to soften this cleavage. In all the intervening centuries we have not solved it. The "Merrie England" of the Middle Ages was a country in which there were dire poverty, plague, and starvation. The England of to-day is a land in which one-quarter of the mothers who bring children into the world suffer from lack of food. It is not so bad as that in Canada. But in our youthful eagerness we must not forget the shadow

and we must have a firm resolve that it shall not darken our life as it does that of older lands.

We are Trying in Canada to Work Democracy. Democracy, I suppose, chiefly means that what the people wish to have in the way of government they will have power to secure. If they wish high things they will aim at them, if they wish low things they will fall to them. The young are often ready to take great risks. Youth has a buoyant confidence that, in the end, all will be well. No doubt mankind is very tough and can stand a heavy strain. Intellectual people, however, should remember that dangers lie in the path of every democracy, that ignorant people are never wise people and that if we leave our people ignorant we also keep them foolish. Education in right thinking will alone save a democracy. In Canada the greatest forces of education are in the hands of the women. Not only do women give the chief teaching in the home, but our schools are chiefly, in some districts wholly, dependent on woman teachers. By women will be determined, in large measure, the quality of the democracy which we mature.

Canada is a difficult country to govern. Scattered in a vast region, extending from the Atlantic to the Pacific, are living less than eight million people, fewer than are to be found in the State of New York alone. To create any kind of unity among these people, to instruct them in the vital problems of citizenship, to appeal to them in such a way that they will act together, is a problem of almost overwhelming difficulty. When we add to this, certain questions of race which stand in the way of mutual understanding, we shall need all the hopefulness that we can summon to our help. The French in Quebec, almost one-quarter of our population, speak a different language and have a different religion from that of the majority in other parts of Canada. In our North-West there are tens of thousands of aliens, reared in conditions totally different from ours. It is out of these varied elements that we are to create a united people. I am glad that women are to help in this work for, to perform the task, we shall need woman's tact united with man's strength and resolution.

Not Only is Our Future Difficult, but it is hampered by our past record. I hope that the women of Canada will realize that the politics of Canada are on a very low level. It is my conviction that in no other of the larger self-governing states of the British Empire are politics so degraded as they are in Canada. Here a few people divide among them vast natural resources, and there is a scramble for the good things which the Government controls. Determined men, by any methods that would work, have forced from Governments concessions that they required.

From the first, party feeling in Canada was bitter, and designing men have used the bondage of the people to party to further their own ends. Public charters, privileges which could only be granted by Government, appointments to office, everything that could be wrung from a party in power have been made the objects of political influence. This is one of the penalties of youth. In England, at one time, things were as bad, possibly even worse. England, however, as she has grown old and experienced, has invented safeguards against such abuses. One of the most urgent problems in Canada now is to do the same thing and to see that political influence is used for the public good and not for private gain.

The system which a young country tolerates is known as the patronage system. I invite women to make war on this system from the outset, now that they have political power. It is the most accursed thing in our national life. In every constituency in Canada the favours which lie within the power of the Government are placed in the hands of the sitting member if he supports the Government, or in the hands of the defeated candidate who would have supported it, had he succeeded. Purchases to be made for the Government, public works created by the Government, the building of roads, everything that the Government does, all are determined, not on the basis of efficiency, but on that of spending the money for the benefit of those who will support the Govern-

ment. Appointments to office, except what is called the inside Civil Service at Ottawa, are determined in the same way. Not the man who can best do the work is appointed, but the man who has best served party interests. It has happened that millions of dollars of the public endowment have been wasted because the patronage system forbade the appointment of an efficient man when an inefficient one had a party claim to the job. No country that is grown up politically would tolerate such a system. Truly Canada is fifty years young when she endures it.

The Confederation of Canada fifty years ago, has not cured this terrible evil, but it has cured some other things. Undoubtedly in a very real sense the Federated Provinces now constitute a nation with a vital sense of unity. Halifax, on the Atlantic, has a great many things in common with Victoria, on the Pacific—the same British ideals and traditions, the same interests in a great political system, a similarity of social conditions, religious life on the same lines, and many other evidences of a common origin. Toronto, Winnipeg, and Vancouver are in a hundred ways alike. The free movement from East to West has prevented isolation and resulted in the creation of a common type of personality which may be called Canadian. The statesmen of fifty years ago would be astonished if they could see to-day the consequences of their pioneer work. Perhaps we have not as many people as they hoped we should have, for they dreamed the dreams of optimists. Even so, one imagines that Winnipeg and Vancouver would startle them. As concrete realities of Confederation the most startling experience for them would be to know our thoughts at the present time. Plunged as we are in a great war, afflicted with grievous losses on the battlefields of Europe, we are confident and undaunted because we know we are fighting the battle of liberty for mankind. Detached provinces could not have done what Confederation has enabled us to do. We are playing a real part in a world movement. Our horizon is widened. We are thinking, as never before we thought, of the meaning of our British Citizenship. In this connection, the great Oriental Empire of India has come vitally within the range of our thought. We are pondering the meaning of the world Empire which the British peoples have created, we are wondering on what basis we shall stand together for the future, and are resolved that this amazing creation shall not perish. Fifty years of Confederation has done this for us. They have changed a colonial outlook into one Imperial, world-wide. It remains to us to rise to the full meaning of the change.

It may be that posterity will find the most momentous change in this fifty years to be that in the status of woman. This is the outcome of the struggle for liberty, the most striking political characteristic of the last half-century. To-day, over the greater part of Canada, woman is the political equal of man. How startled would the Fathers of Confederation be at this result! It is well, too, to remember that the final impulse in the movement has come to us from the new West, which the East so complacently thought to be its child. In the world of ideas it is now truer that the West rules the East than that the East rules the West, and as the first fruit of this rule we have the widespread prohibition of the liquor traffic and the emancipation of woman. The half-century which has done this has done much.

It Remains for us all, especially for woman, to turn opportunity into achievement. A new world of possibilities lies before us. If I might offer a word of counsel to woman as to her political duty, I would say, "Hold aloof from adherence to either Canadian party until that party pledges itself to the cure of certain existing evils." Woman is too dignified, too noble a creature to be the sport of political faction or a sharer in the evils of which our present party system is guilty. I hope the women will not undertake too much at the outset. To destroy the patronage system is a sufficient task for them until it is achieved. Let them concentrate on this far-reaching reform and decent Canadian citizenship will rise up and call them blessed.