

A National Debt

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"If ye break faith with us who die,
We shall not sleep, though poppies blow,
In Flanders Fields."

—Lt.-Col. John McRae.)

A noble comment from a noble son of the Empire, urging us to a full appreciation of our citizenship, our responsibilities, our tremendous debt to those who have, to those who are now doing so, and to those who for the next fifty years will pay the supreme price of Empire building. That challenge comes direct from the battlefield of Flanders, from the lips of one whose poetical inspiration, life, and death, were consistently Imperial and ennobling. It comes to us as a waft from the "Melting Pot" of nations now being moulded into a new code of international ethics, and it binds and points us to an irrefutable truth, that each nation that claims for its present condition of belligerency the fundamental principles of the human race, owes an incomprehensible debt of gratitude to those who have sacrificed the one thing most dear to all, **the life they offered in humanity's interests, and for the welfare of generations yet unborn. How can we repay this debt?**

As the purpose of this article is to direct and arouse public attention to one phase of the many answers to that complex question, we intend to confine our remarks to **that one in particular, while not forgetting the other and more material phases, for our subject, if less material, is of incalculably more importance from a fundamental standpoint to the nation, it forms the basis on which the Laws of Nations have been founded from time immemorial, it is sentiment — national sentiment — that which launches us into war, or frames our codes of conditions of peace—that which above all other things should be consistent, if necessarily more or less complex and mythical.**

Our standard of national ethics is based upon **Sentiment**, in times of trouble we appeal to **National Sentiment** to 'stand to arms' in defence of what we as a nation consider to be **Justice**, and in times of peace **we trust to the nation**, that made the appeal, to see that justice is done towards those who answered the appeal, and in so far only, as the nation responds to its self-imposed responsibility, is it worthy of the name of a **Nation**.

Let us pause for a few moments and consider the consistency, or otherwise, of our past and present code of national ethics, as applicable to those of our fellow citizens who having answered the national call of duty, subsequently fall on evil times and in the extremity of death become a **public charge**. What is the nation's gratitude in return for their services? Is it possible, citizen, that as a "**Christian nation**," as an empire on which the sun never sets, we have no other answer than **A Pauper's Grave**? Yes, it is not only possible, but **it is true**. That is the phase of our national indebtedness we desire to arouse your interest in the one phase that, in the words of a distinguished Canadian—"**should take precedence of all others**." Let us give you his version:—

"The indifference with which the peoples of all times have accepted the services of those who fight for our liberties, and permit them to sink into oblivion, reflects very gravely on the ingratitude of humanity. To provide honourable burial for a soldier or sailor who has faithfully served his country should not be left to the chance generosity of the individual, **it is a duty that should take precedence of all others**. To honour and protect in death, seems but a small return to him who **has protected the nation's honour in life**."

Your movement is one having my heartiest endorsement, and I consider it worthy of the best and highest support."

A famous British General expressed himself as follows:

"From the dead, no return, not even gratitude or thanks, can be expected, and it is this that in my humble opinion, ennobles your aim, and **puts it on a higher, if less material basis than any ordinary charity**."

What is the "movement" and "aim" that these two distinguished men refer to in such eloquent and forceful terms? It is the primary "aim" of an association known as the "**Last Post**" Imperial Naval and Military Contin-

gency Fund, which justifies its existence under the three following "aims and objects":—

The Primary Object—is to prevent the ignominy and ingratitude of the abandonment to a pauper's grave at death, of any man of whom it can be proved that he had served his country honourably, either in the Army, Navy or Auxiliary Forces.

For the past ten years, within the Province of Quebec, it has been made absolutely unnecessary for any friendless ex-service man to reach a pauper's grave, through the existence of this organization, and by legislation obtained and put into execution by this Fund, though the fact is not fully realized by the general public.

The Fund receives no Federal, Provincial, or Civic grants, and, has no salaried officials, nor does it pay any gratuities for work accomplished, and its work is unique throughout the whole of the British Empire.

This national obligation, of respectful interment of our defenders, the Association seeks to eventually place — where it rightly belongs—with the government.

The Secondary Object—provides the privilege of interment in its burial plots, of any honourably discharged deceased soldier or sailor for whom request may be made, —not through pecuniary, but for military and sentimental reasons—on condition that those applying, contribute to the funds of the Association and abide by the regulations governing the burial plots; thus the Fund renders a public service of which ample evidence of appreciation has already been given.

It will be noted in the last paragraph of the primary object, that it is desired to place this national obligation where it rightly belongs—with the Government—but it has been very truthfully said by someone, that "Governments and Corporations, have no "soul," and realizing the veracity of that remark from experience, it is desired to remove the stigma and ingratitude of "charity" by placing the financial responsibility there—where it rightly belongs—while retaining a measure of executive supervision and control.

Citizen, if you are worthy of that appellation, stop for a few moments and give this matter your consideration and support consider the inconsistency of our profession of gratitude to those of our fellow men who through loss of life, limb, and health have made the nation what it is.

Next to the Creator of the Universe—whose incarnation is reflected in the sacrifice of humanity on the altar of war—we owe all that is of any value or importance in this world to those who have participated on the battlefield in the world's purification, and yet should death overtake one of these in the hour of adversity, we abandon them, we don't know them, we cast them aside, we relegate them to an unknown pauper's grave, we deny them six feet of the soil they proffered their lives in defence of—and **we call ourselves a Christian nation**.

Where is the consistency of our national ethics? where is the national sentiment we boast of? Where is the national gratitude? Are we justified, as an idealistic nation? Is there one logical argument in support of such ingratitude? We most emphatically say **NO**, and nothing short of national financial parsimony is the cause, or else our philosophies and theories of national grandiloquence, are an empty hypocritical farce.

Then, citizen, where do we stand to-day on this subject? It is for you to study the subsequent explanatory articles, and by your expression of opinion, your influence with your fellow citizens, and your united support of your supplication with the Government to assist in bringing about the desired end.

Our immediate policy is to test the sincerity and consistency of the Government's pledge of loyalty to the rights of our Empire builders.

During the ten years of existence of that worthy association known as the "**Last Post**" Fund they have on six different occasions definitely approached the Federal and Provincial Governments by deputation, to take the subject up—officials of the very highest rank in the land, from the Prime Minister down, have committed themselves to the justice and worthiness of the cause, but as yet no definite action has been taken, and the matter remains one of "**consideration**."