

Conference on Soil Fertility and Soil Fibre

Winnipeg, July 14, 15, 16, 1920

UNDER the auspices of the Commission of Conservation, a conference was held at Winnipeg, July 14, 15 and 16, 1920, to consider the best methods of conserving soil fertility and soil fibre.

Dr. James W. Robertson, Chairman of the Committee on Lands, occupied the chair, and introduced Sir James A. M. Aikens, Lieut.-Governor of Manitoba, who welcomed the delegates.

In the course of his address, Sir James said: "There is an adage, 'He is welcome who brings.' On this ground you are welcome, because you bring to us something worth while, the useful thought and suggestions which will be expressed in this convention. We welcome you, moreover, because you are from all parts of Canada, your purpose is national, and not sectional, provincial or class. It is for unity and co-operation and not for severed thought and action. General Smuts well said, in respect of the war, that the battle front was in the soul of the nation. That truth is equally applicable in respect of the battle you are waging against wastefulness and for the conservation of our natural resources. We have need of an enthusiastic and sane directing spirit among us at the present time, when there is such a conflict of classes and such selfishness in individual effort. When there appears to be a disposition to follow the suggestion of 'everyone for himself and de'il take the hindmost' the strong probabilities are that the de'il has largely already possession of the one who thus endeavours to help himself in disregard of others.

"Any person studying the political and constitutional history of Canada sees arising out of its mists a national form of beauty and strength, requiring still development. At the present time, Canada is in a stage of self-consciousness, a stage in which egotism may develop to its injury, or where it may be guided by sane thought into safe paths. Its greatest dangers are selfishness and waste, a selfishness which does not rest simply on the present disregard of the rights of others, but a disregard for the rights and interests of those who are to follow us, and for whom as well as for ourselves this heritage was given. The selfishness lies in a sacrificing of the future for the present. We are told that that which is seen is temporal but that which is not seen is eternal, and the Canadians of to-day are not simply to act for the present moment, but to build for the future; they are to conserve and save, not to exhaust or destroy any part of its heritage.

"Nature has been very prodigal in giving us such marvellous natural resources, the greatest of which is perhaps the fertility of our soil, for Canada is essentially an agricultural country, whatever else it may develop into. If, from misuse and lack of care, the soil is exhausted, the country is going to suffer, and future generations will condemn us. It is to consider the conservation of this soil and the present proper use of it that you are now assembled.

"I see before me my good friend, Rev. Dr. George Bryce. He has often heard, and so have I, when a family assembled for their meal around an abundantly supplied table, this grace: 'Bless these creatures to our use and us to Thy service.' And well might Canada as a whole, so abundantly supplied with all the provisions necessary to sustain the life of many millions in happiness and health, with bowed head and lifted heart ask the same blessing, that our