

A STUDY IN CANADIAN CITIZENSHIP

Being an Outline in Canadian Institutions of Government Written Out at the Suggestion of the Immigration Committee of the Kiwanis Club of Montreal, by Ira A. MacKay, M. A., LL.B., Ph. D., of McGill University.

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THE MEANING OF POLITICS

There is a law in the Science of Language, or Philology, called the degradation of words. According to this law, while the form or spelling of the word remains unchanged, its meaning becomes degraded or debased by common use. Words are like coins. Language is but the currency by which men exchange ideas just as money is the currency by which they exchange commodities. It follows from this, that one of the very worst and most dangerous symptoms in the life of any people is the degradation of its coined words, especially words used in relation to matters of great public or national interest or importance. Now one of the words in our English language, originally derived from the Greek language, which has suffered most from the operation of this law is the word "Politics". The result of this degradation in meaning is clearly seen in the use, for example, of such expressions as the following: "Keep out of Politics"; "No honest man can enter Politics"; "Politics is a dirty business"; and such like expressions constantly heard at the present time. Even the most careful thinkers are apt now-a-days to use the word "Politics" as synonymous with "Party Politics," forgetting all the while that Party Politics properly understood is merely a device in parliamentary procedure and has very little indeed to do with Politics in the true, original sense of the word. Indeed, properly interpreted, the practice of party politics has no more to do with Politics as such than the contentions of advocates in a court of law have to do with the independent, impartial, scientific study of the pure science of law itself. Parliament is a court. The High Court of Parliament is its proper name, the highest, most dignified, oldest, noblest court of all; the party leaders are the advocates; the back-benchers their clerks and retainers, the plaintiff some proposed measure intended for the public good, the accused some threatened danger to the public welfare, the jurymen the electors of the country, who choose and employ the advocates in the first instance and who, just because they are jurymen, must, therefore, preserve constantly at least in some measure a critical, unselfish, independent unbiased attitude on all issues of public policy. So true, indeed, is this figure or conception of the place of the electors in politics, that it is quite safe to say that the success and safety of all forms of popular government depend upon its general recognition. Parties are for the politicians, not for the people. That should be our guiding principle.

By politics, then, we mean nothing more or less than the careful, impartial, orderly study of those forms of official organization usually called political institutions or institutions of government by which large numbers of individual human units living within the same geographical boundary lines, group themselves together for purposes of mutual maintenance and advancement. In this sense, as Aristotle says, politics is the highest employment of noble, cultivated minds. In this sense then, we shall use the word and its derivatives in this address. With Party Politics we are not concerned in any way. There is however great need at the present time in all democratic countries for some recognized agencies which will undertake the study and teaching of Politics in this truer sense. We need more real students of government and fewer party politicians. The obligation to meet this demand falls principally upon the colleges and universities, but the large number of public spirited clubs which have sprung up in recent years, of which the Kiwanis Club is one of the greatest, are indubitably destined to perform in the future a very

great and beneficent public service in this direction. With this aim in mind and with these words of introduction then, let us turn to our proposed outline study in Canadian Politics and first of all to:—

THE PRESENT POSITION OF CANADA IN WORLD POLITICS

For nearly half a century after the Act of Union, the British North America Act 1867, the Dominion of Canada or the Kingdom of Canada—for it may now quite properly be called a Kingdom—seemed to be making but slow progress towards any clear, distinctive goal. After the first fresh glow of enthusiasm, after the completion of the Union in 1873 from Cape North to Puget Sound and far into the frigid northern unknown, the completion of that quixotic impossible venture, the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1885 and the inauguration, for better or for worse, we dare not say, of the national customs union of 1878, the vision began to fade away. Nothing greatly constructive seemed left to be done except to wait for settlers to come, and settlers did not come as fast as we had hoped, and too many unfortunately came and refused to stay. Hard times followed from 1883-1900. Followed this, next in order, the great migratory movement, perhaps the greatest and most mysterious nomadic movement of men in human history, between 1900 and 1918 and promised new hope for Canada. Canada's day, Canada's century had come. Immigrants came to settle in hundreds of thousands annually, the long discouraging exodus to the United States turned in the reverse direction, and business boomed or seemed to boom far and wide, east and west. During the war and after, however, we seemed to have fallen back under the old spell. Immigrants are few and the exodus to the United States has, during the last two years, assumed the dimensions of a stampede which must be checked at any cost. Canada cannot afford to become a tutor or schoolmaster in methods of free government for people from Europe, who afterwards, their lesson learned, seek out new opportunities of fortune and favour in the great commonwealth which lies south of her.

Sometimes we used to think, or at least some of us used to think in the dark days to which I have referred, that possibly our position of political dependency upon the Mother Country was in some way, perhaps unconsciously, undermining or debilitating any distinctive independent sense of destiny, which Canadians might otherwise hope to entertain. The problem arising out of our allegiance to Great Britain on the one hand and our affiliations with the United States on the other was never quite laid to rest. Was our status as a self-governing colony, but a colony, nevertheless, of Great Britain, preventing the people of Europe, including even the people of Great Britain herself, from coming to Canada with intent to make new homes here? If not, why did they settle so much more freely and hopefully in the United States? Was this because they wished to break finally away from all oppressive European traditions and memories? If so, what should Canada do? Should she remain loyal to Great Britain, or become an independent nation, and if she became an independent nation, would she not inevitably be soon drawn into complete political annexation with her friendly southern neighbor? These and many similar questions perplexed our minds then and were feely discussed among our people in all the provinces. Canada's ultimate destiny still remained a doubtful quantity.