

SHOULD DEAD MEN VOTE?

NOW that votes for soldiers' wives is on the programme in Canada, should there be adopted a new principle of suffrage, more revolutionary even than votes for women? Should there be votes for the dead?

We do not refer to unpleasant political charges in regard to illegal votes impersonating men who have died, but whose names still appear in the voters' lists. What we mean is an idea which has not been referred to in Canada as far as we know, although the general principle underlying the suggestion was expressed by a member of the Anglican Synod meeting at Hamilton, when, in opposition to the proposal of a referendum on conscription, he complained of its injustice because those who had fallen in defence of our liberties would not have a voice in the decision.

This raises in Canada a question which has been proposed in all seriousness in France—should there be a "vote of the dead," a vote for soldiers who have been killed in the war?

It is Maurice Barres, the famous French writer and publicist, who has made the proposal, which, in its simple terms, is as follows: The wife or mother of a man killed in the war should be given a vote for him, and the father of a son killed in the conflict should be given a supplementary vote.

Barres' belief is that such a step would graphically and specifically express by law the debt owed to the dead sons of France. It would emphasize even more than at present the necessity that the thought of those who have died for their country should dominate its deliberations, inspire its acts and regulate its conduct.

As far as his suggestion relates to women, Barres, speaking before the "Mutual Society of War Widows," rendered his homage to the courage, endurance and clear-sightedness of the French women. He admitted that formerly he had not fully realized their true position. The war had revealed to him, in an unexpected way, the problem of feminism. "In the days of peace," he said, "there will be much for us to do for the women; we must give them in law the place which they themselves have taken in duty." In the meantime, wives and mothers of the dead heroes should be given a vote. Fathers also should vote not only for themselves, but also for their dead sons.

THE cult of the dead does not rest in Barres' mind alone, although his proposal is the most detailed. Anatole France, who, before the war, represented different ideals and a different school of thought from Barres, on one of the anniversaries of the war, wrote a thesis, mystical and exalted, entitled, "What Our Dead Say." The Countess of Noailles has written a lyrical poem, "The Voice of the Dead." Emile Verhaeren, the Belgian, in one of the poems written just before his recent death, addressed himself to "The Young who are Dead," in which "La Patrie" speaks to them in the tenderest of loving terms.

It is not in France alone that such worship of the dead is prevalent to-day; in different forms, it is appearing in the literature of all the belligerent countries. Rupert Brooke, himself dead now for his country, had sung a paean for men like himself in his poem, "The Dead," beginning:

"Blow out, you bugles, over the rich Dead."

"Blow, bugles, blow! They brought us, for our dearth,
Holiness, lacked so long, and Love, and Pain.
Honour has come back, as a king, to earth,
And paid his subjects with a royal wage;
And Nobleness walks in our ways again;
And we have come into our heritage."

The worship of the dead is not a custom of modern origin, but one of the earliest in human history, and one of the most persistent. The ancient Greeks, when they came to a tomb, used to stop and say, "Thou who art a god beneath the earth, be thou propitious unto me." They brought food and drink for the dead, rice and milk, herbs and fruits, the funeral repast. Pausanias tells of the part taken

FAMOUS French writer, Maurice Barres, thinks that men who have died for their country have a right to a voice in their country's affairs. He would give wives, mothers and fathers of dead heroes the right to vote on behalf of soldiers who died that their country might live. How would this do in Canada?

By DON HUNT

by the dead in the early public affairs of Greece.

"The Megarians," he tells, "asked the Delphic oracle one day how their city might be happy; the god answered that it would be so if they took care always to deliberate with the greatest number. They understood that by these words the god meant the dead, who are, in fact, more numerous than the living. In consequence of his advice, they built their council chamber on the very spot where their heroes were interred." It is such a consultation in a more modern method that Maurice Barres proposes for France.

Hindu Brahmanism, as interpreted in the Veda, includes the religion of the souls of the ancestors, and the Laws of Man refer to it. Shintoism, in Japan, is also ancestor-worship, the religion of the dead.

In philosophy, Auguste Comte was a predecessor of Barres, elaborating a complete doctrine upon the predominance of the dead, whose actions and influence continue to affect the living.

It is of interest, by the way, to compare these ranges of thought with the viewpoint of Marinetti and the Italian Futurists, whose watchword is "Long live the living; let us kill the dead." To-day, however, even in their own field, these futurists are rather past numbers and antiquated, replaced as they are by Ezra Pound, Epstein, Wyndham Lewis and the Vorticists, who, while following the forward look of the futurists, have at the same time returned to a sense of the continuity of history.

Although, before the war, we were accustomed, perhaps, to look upon Barres as an idealist rather than a logician, yet in his proposal of "Votes for the Dead," he is showing that typical French tendency to follow out an idea to its logical conclusion. War-France, he knows, worships its dead more than ever before; why not give these dead a direct participation in the determination of its policies and its destiny?

It is not a vision emanating from a mere dreamer. It is Barres who was the one of the leaders in the organization of the "National cause of the Mutilated." He has performed outstanding services for the wounded, and particularly for the blinded.

Maurice Barres, therefore, has a right to speak, and a right to be heard. On this proposal, however, he is not meeting with the same unanimity of approval as greeted his efforts for the care of the wounded. Louis Barthou, for example, an ex-premier of France, has addressed an open letter to Barres, in which, although he praises his humanitarianism and the splendid imagination and generous inspiration of this other ideal, he doubts its practicability and fears certain dangers.

As for the women, Louis Barthou represents the typical conservatism of the French regarding women in politics. Frankly, he doesn't like it, although he admits the value of their services. "But," he asks Barres, "will you go as far as to give them the right of the political suffrage? Not to all of them, apparently, to begin with. You would give it only to those from whom the war has taken a husband or a son. But, what if they are not worthy, if their life is false to their dead, whose lesson they have not understood nor followed? What if you confer a privilege on a woman whom public opinion, a witness only too familiar with her acts and her misconduct, finds the least capable of being worthy of it? I fear lest the feminine electorate, thus chosen by chance and by exception, without conditions and guarantees, should at the one time compromise both your

generous thought and the feminine cause."

As for the supplementary vote for fathers, Barthou raises what he considers a decisive objection.

"The father and the son," he thinks, "might not have had the same opinions or the same beliefs. How will the father vote? If he divides his two votes, he contradicts this very union in the name of which you have given him an exceptional right. If he votes twice for his own personal opinion, he betrays the cause of his son. If he gives his two votes for his son, he betrays himself."

This is the case for and against. Barres thinks the giving of an actual vote would symbolize the rightful power of the dead in a way which would emphasize and strengthen their salutary influence; Barthou thinks the plan impracticable, and fears it would be exercised unworthily by some women and that it would embarrass those men upon whom it would place a double responsibility.

What about Canada? Should we have votes for the dead here? Should there be this symbolic and yet specific appreciation of the heroes of Ypres, of Courcelette and of Vimy Ridge?

Or, both in France and in Canada, is there any need of such a mechanical recognition? Is not the love of our Canadian heroes so deeply embedded already in the soul and the personality of Canada and its people, that they never will forget, but always will deliberate with the interests of the glorious dead as a primary consideration?

It is probable that the majority of Canadians will take the latter view, and, although perhaps not for the same reasons, will side with Louis Barthou against Maurice Barres.

In our belief, however, the mere raising of the question is worth while, for, whatever we may think of the proposal, it emphasizes again the history-long worship of the dead, and puts Canada directly in the current of a psychological and historical development. Our people to-day are thinking thoughts and feeling emotions, in whatever way they may be expressed in action, such as the ancient Greeks used to think and feel; such, too, as the Hindus and the Japanese, such as the French to-day and the British, and such as the American soon will have.

Canada has these thoughts and feelings; she has a place in the line of history, because, like ancient Greece, like Britain and like France, she, too, has bred a race of heroes.

His Last Article

A FEW weeks ago we published a letter from Lieut. Wright, Principal of St. Mary's Collegiate Institute, then in the trenches. Some time before that Lieut. Wright had read in this paper an article by S. H. Howard criticizing the convention of the Ontario Educational Association held in Toronto. The comments made by Mr. Howard provoked Lieut. Wright to make a reply. It was probably the last thing outside of letters home to his wife and family that he ever wrote. A few days ago despatches appended to his name the laconic statement, Killed in Action.

The sudden death of the much-beloved Principal of St. Mary's Collegiate constrained a friend of his in that town to write the following letter, which in a small space tells a big story of sacrifice similar to thousands that never find their way into print:

St. Mary's, Ont., August 28, 1917.

Editor, Canadian Courier:—

Lieut. Wright belonged to St. Mary's, and got his education there. He appreciated fully his widowed mother's sacrifices in order to educate her boy. In time he got to the top and came back to his native town as Principal. Mr. Wright's fine personality and broad views soon made him a favourite and a success as a teacher. He adhered to what was highest and best and stood firmly for justice in his school. He enlisted from a high sense of duty. Having three single teachers on his staff who were all eligible to enlist, he felt that it was up to one or more of them to offer their services for their country. Although he had a wife and three small children, he nobly offered himself. He went out from home, position and family, to do his part in the fight for liberty and justice. We see plainly that it is the men and boys who have the highest ideals who make the supreme sacrifice.