

To the Young Men of Western Canada

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A Noble Beginning

One of the most interesting episodes, if one may so say, of the world war is the conquest of Palestine, now almost completely wrested from the detested Turks. Of course what gives this consummation special interest in our eyes is the fact that it has been achieved preponderantly by British generalship and British arms. The achievement of General Allenby is one of the cleanest and most decisive chapters of the war. But there is another element that gives the event great significance: it opens the door to the realization of Zionism. After years of education and propaganda Zionism came within the field of practical politics in the larger sense when Foreign Minister Balfour declared that the British Government gave its official adhesion to the program of the settling up of an autonomous Jewish State in Palestine. On July 24th of this summer an event of striking import took place at Jerusalem: the corner-stone of a Jewish University was laid on the Mount of Olives. Representatives of three great sects participated in the ceremonies: the Jewish, the Mohammedan, and the Christian. The foundation of a Hebrew University under the circumstances actually obtaining was a stroke of insight and genius. The early establishment of a national Hebrew University on the site in question will exercise a great influence on Hebrew national development. It goes without saying that the Jews have both the brains and the money to develop a notable university. The event pledges the nascent state to intellectuality from the outset. One remembers in this connection that the founding of Harvard in 1636 influenced profoundly the whole history of New England. The intellectual predominance of New England in the American Republic may in no small measure be attributed to the presence of the puritan founders of Harvard. A brilliant young Jew, forwarding to me an account of the ceremonies which attended the laying of the corner-stone of the University at Jerusalem, closed his letter by saying: "The new state begins its career by building not a fortress but a University."

Balfour's Oratory

The mention of the name of Mr. Balfour in the foregoing reminds me of something. During my visit to Washington a year ago I had the opportunity of hearing him speak several times. In the course of letters written by me at that time I took occasion to analyse the elements of his remarkable power. A friend of mine the other day took the ground that I had presumed to question the fact of his being an orator. What I did try to say was that his achievement as a speaker is due to his at least apparent spontaneousness and ease. There are some men that attest themselves obviously as orators. Viviani is of that type. When you think of Viviani you think first of the orator. When you think of Balfour you think first, and most of the gracious personality and of the accomplished mind. His oratory is a by-product, as it were. His richly-stored, highly-trained mind adapts itself to the occasion. If it calls for a great sentence, the great sentence is forthcoming. If it calls for nonchalant, easy utterance—that is what you get.

Sweeping Judgments

Sweeping, inclusive judgments are nearly always dangerous. Burke, for example, said: "I do not know how to lay an indictment against a whole people." The case of Lloyd-George illustrates this point. Years ago I read Matthew Arnold's analysis of the genius of the Celtic races. It is piquant, by the way, to realise that the Prime Minister of Great Britain speaks Welsh in his own family circle. At any rate, Matthew Arnold, in the essay in question, declares that the Celtic genius always stops short of the greatest achievement. It is, he says, full of promise, but the promise is never completely realized. The Celt, according to Arnold, dreams great dreams, but never quite fulfils them. Surely Lloyd-George pretty well disposes of that contention. He has undoubtedly been the Savior of Britain in this mighty struggle. He has been first, with, one may say, no second. His spirit has never quailed. I heard Mr. Rowell say a short time ago that to watch Mr. Lloyd-George at close range is a sort of perpetual miracle. No matter who is cast down, the premier is always full of spring and resiliency. His abounding vitality has been a marvel. Who would have said that the Celtic temperament would have sufficed to carry him through what he has traversed since 1905? The absolute storm centre of the fiery Budget struggle of 1909, in the forefront of Britain during the ten years that preceded the war—by all odds the stormiest period in the social

history of Britain—he has since the outbreak of the struggle been successively Chancellor of the Exchequer, Minister of Munitions, Minister of War, and finally Premier and all but Dictator of Britain. On the tomb of Goldsmith in the Middle Temple one reads, if I am not mistaken, the Latin words: "Nihil tetigit quod non cœvit—He touched nothing that he did not adorn." One might adapt these words to Lloyd-George, and say "He has touched nothing that he has not energised." His policies are instinct with life. He has the vital touch. They talk of "the Nelson touch" in naval strategy. We might speak of "the Lloyd-George touch" in politics and national direction.

Venizelos

We all ask ourselves, what have been the outstanding disclosures of the war? There would, no doubt, be general agreement with respect to some of these: the wholesale perversion of the German national character, the constancy of France, the monumental achievement of Britain, the sagacity and soundness of Wilson. But, although not cast in so large a mould, perhaps, one feels like adding, the judgment and fidelity of Eleutherios Venizelos. Through thick and thin he has never wavered in his adhesion to the cause of the Allies. The temptation in the Balkans was undoubtedly strong to jump with the apparent winners. That of course was what Bulgaria thought she was doing. Venizelos has had a terrific uphill fight. The pro-German Constantine was evidently popular. His court was pro-German. His Queen was German. The military establishment was staffed with pro-Germans. The King was apparently well-enough liked to carry at least half his people with him. But Venizelos never wavered in his conviction that the Entente Allies must win. The eventful success of the Saloniki venture is a splendid vindication of his judgment. When we remember what a blow the Bulgarian surrender has been to the cause of the Central Powers, we are justified in saying that the world owes a great debt of gratitude to Venizelos.

Topography in War

I have just read a most illuminating book by a Columbia University Professor on "Topography and Strategy in the War." I wish I had come upon it much earlier. It throws a flood of light on a lot of things that were most mysterious to me. The author shows for one thing that the whole French strategy has been based absolutely on the physical configuration of the country. The location of the great fortresses that stud eastern France—such as Belfort, Verdun, Laon, Soissons, and the rest—has been so to say determined by geology. Again, not till I read this book did I begin to understand the early campaigns of Grand Duke Nicholas in the east. His objective was Berlin. His starting point was Poland. But Poland was simply a Russian promontory thrusting itself into the heart of enemy territory. North of this lay east Prussia. South of it lay Galicia, that is to say, Austrian territory. Before Nicholas could move into Germany he had to protect his flanks. Hence the Galician campaigns, and hence, also the immense forays into the hill and lake country of east Prussia. The vastness of the scale of operations in this war staggers the imagination.

Old Age and Childhood

I have just heard a mother coming up the stairway with a little boy who needed to be put to bed. My thoughts ran to a little old woman whom years ago I used to go and turn down the covers for, when, for her too, the day was over. Between the two terms of childhood and old age, how short and feverish the course we run! Childhood has to be fostered; old age has to be helped and protected. For just a little while we strut and bustle about for ourselves. I often think of a word spoken by Macbeth about dead Duncan: "After life's fitful fever he sleeps well." How strange and pathetic our febrile activity must be to the olympian gaze of God! I often think the world must look to God pretty much as an ant-hill does to us. As you look down at ants do you not wonder, what in the world are they toiling and moiling for? I suppose they too love and hate, fight and are at peace, do business with each other, are distinguished and obscure, aspire and are cast down. What must God have thought of the world of men and women during these last four years? What rushings hither and thither; twenty millions of men transported over all the seas; vast armies moving over three continents; huge fleets upon the seas; grim

struggles underground; navies fighting in the clouds; battalions dying in the swamps; cities sacked, children murdered, women ravished, towns burning, the air torn with detonations rivaling the thunder, clouds of gas creeping along the face of the earth. What hideous irony it will be if all this does not eventuate in a new world made safe for children, for women, for small nations, for honest, laboring men and women. Surely mankind will now have learned its lesson! What punishment is too severe for the men who let loose this horror upon the earth?

Autumn Thoughts

Autumn has come again. Each season in the revolving year has its quota of suggestions for the mind of man. Nothing about autumn is so suggestive as the yellowing and falling leaves. They inspire a strange pensiveness. They bring to us the message of the frailty and the futility almost of terrestrial things. If man becomes too absorbed in things material, it is surely not because Nature does not do its best to remind him that he is but a sojourner and a pilgrim. Probably no race has had so acute a sense of the fragility of human existence as the Anglo-Saxon. Of this sentiment Shakespeare is, as usual, our chief interpreter. There is a wonderful passage on this theme in "The Tempest," the last of his plays. Prospero, the magician, has called up the spirits that wait upon his call, and has exhibited them as a sort of pageant for Miranda and Ferdinand. At a signal from the wizard the spirits vanish, and then Prospero says: "These our actors, as I foretold you, are all spirits, and have vanished—into thin air. And, like the baseless fabric of this vision, all will vanish. The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces, the solemn temples, the great globe itself, yea all which it inherits shall dissolve, and leave not a track behind. We are such stuff as dreams are made on, and all our little life is rounded with a sleep." Anyone who knows this famous passage will see that I have not quoted it exactly, as my mind falters a little in quoting it. But anyone can see what a high, grave spirit pervades the lines.

What Have We to be Thankful For?

The second Monday of last month was selected by the Dominion Government to be Thanksgiving Day. With the whole world under the shadow of the Great War, which has brought bereavement to many Canadian hearts and grief to every heart that, though not knowing actual bereavement, pulses in sympathy with human agonies and human sorrows, we Canadians can truly feel, as a nation, we have many things to be thankful for. While our own land has not known what invasion by hostile armies means, Canada's sons have proved their manhood by their rallying to the cause of humanity and freedom and acquitting themselves in battle with a spirit that has won the admiration of all the world. Our land is blessed with abundance of all good things; but the lesson of this war-time Thanksgiving Day to us is surely not to associate our giving of thanks with material blessings. The real blessings of life are not what the hands may grasp, but what the heart may hold. These are the greatest and deepest things of life—the joys of children, the happiness of youth and love, the privileges and duties of parenthood, of bringing up healthy boys and girls to be noble men and women, the serene influences of home life, the aspirations of manhood and of womanhood, and our national ideals and our duty to our country and to ourselves to do our part to let nothing destroy those ideals and high purposes for which true Canadianism stands.

A Boyish Humiliation

The citing of that Shakespeare incident reminds me of another incident of the vanished past. I went to the university when I was sixteen. I had been fond of reciting, in the small village schools in Quebec that I had attended. Shortly after my arrival at college an elocution contest was announced. I entered the lists. There was much talking about who was going to win. "Brer rabbit lay low." I thought to myself: "I'll be the dark horse. I'll show them a wrinkle or two." The fateful night arrived. My hopes beat high. I selected Felicia Hemans' "Marius in the ruins of Carthage." I have long since forgotten all but the first two lines:

"'Twas noon, and Afric's dazzling sun on high
With fierce resplendence filled the unclouded sky."
On some word in these two sounding lines I faltered. My memory broke, and all the rest of the piece was a night-mare. I vanished in a cloud of mortification, and never recited in public again.