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WAR TIME EXPERIENCES OF CANADIAN CITIES¹

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IN THAT intercommunication which is of late years constantly taking place between the municipalities of the United States and those of Canada, largely through the National Municipal League and the Union of Canadian Municipalities—which I represent—our cities of Canada usually look to yours for experiences. But in the case of experiences of the present war we find the rule reversed. No sooner had you come

¹ Opening remarks of Mr. Lighthall as chairman of the session of the National Municipal League meeting at Detroit, November 23, 1917, on "War Time Experiences of Canadian Cities."

into the conflict than your military leaders appeared at our review grounds and at our officers' training corps; your gallant soldiers were seen fraternizing with our kilties on the streets; we lent you military instructors of all ranks and services familiar with actual fighting at the front, and our returned soldiers were frequently called to your public meetings to describe the situation in Belgium and France. And to-day some of us dwellers in the larger communities in Canada have been asked to come here and try to tell something that might help your communities from what we have seen and felt during these last sad but glorious three years and a quarter.

FIRST EFFECT OF THE WAR

The first effect of the war upon us is something you will never have,—a stunned sense of disastrous surprise. You also were surprised at that time, but you were not yet struck. You had some stock exchange panic, it is true, but we had far more; we knew we were actually plunged into a stupendous conflict, for which we were absolutely without preparation. For months our banks shut down on even the most ordinary enterprises. One banker expressed it—"We may all go to pot together." A well-known capitalist sat in tears in a leading club of Montreal after vainly trying to raise a few thousand dollars to save hundred of thousands of good property. "I have lost everything: I am entirely ruined," he moaned. And he was but a type of many. But the general commercial panic—fortunately soon surmounted—was but secondary to other things, the military anxiety over the fateful fighting in France, the possibilities of invasion at home, of explosions, of destruction of our canals, railways, and buildings, and above all the anxiety over our sons and other relatives destined for the front. But the blood that runs in our veins and yours is not given to fear or loss of will. We immediately gathered thirty-three thousand eager young men in khaki and shipped them to England, with the pledge of more. We were pleased to learn that you watched their progress as kinsmen. There were not a few of you among even those immortal first crusaders. They could not resist the call of chivalry and liberty.

Then first we knew what war, though far off, meant in our cities. The wench of the heart of the mother, and then her noble pride in the sacrifice of her son; the young wife's fears, but her trust in her brave man; the father's silent consent; the forebodings and excitements of parting. Afterwards the feverish interest in every incident of the war affecting in any way "our boy." All these you have lately had like ourselves. And here I can say something that will help each anxious parent. Do not read the news of every fight with the thought that your boy may have come to harm. On the contrary you may conclude that nothing has hurt him. Because, assuming that your war department system is like ours, the earliest news of a casualty to him will come to yourself by a govern-

ment telegram before the newspapers get it. Unless and until, therefore, a telegram has come to you, assume that all is well.

WAR TIME CASUALTIES

Another fact may also help you. We read in the newspapers of many accidents every day. But in actual life serious accidents are rare. So it is with war. One reads the lists of killed and wounded, but forgets that the vast majority of the army survives. The deaths andcrippings are bad. I do not wish to minimize them. But they are apt to be overestimated and make us unduly depressed. The total deaths of our first contingent (the 33,000) are about 8 per cent in three years. In civil life about 3 per cent of them would have died anyway. Their deaths by the war were therefore one in twenty in those three years. Should the war last another year, then at the same rate your first contingent might lose one is sixty. And during the winter it ought not to be one fourth of that, because winter is not a fighting season.

Yet with all these deductions, we have had sad and grave times. To send 400,000 (soon to be 500,000) men overseas has made a drain upon our manhood equal to five or six millions from the United States. Consequently, the daily list of casualties mean much to every community. Blow after blow falls every few days. Some bright and generous youth, who a short time ago was our happy neighbor, dies in some heroic effort. We shudder at the fall of the stroke upon the unhappy mother and father. We reverence them and their signs of mourning. But each time the carrying on of the war becomes in us a deeper and deeper religion, so that the lives of our heroes shall not have been laid down in vain. We have come to regard earthly things as mattering little, and to live for glorious ideas, like the resolves of men of former great days. Our feelings, we think, resemble those of the height of your Civil War. Your present generation have yet to fully understand these stern and solemn feelings. Your oldest G. A. R. men understand them. Our churches are decorated with allied flags and "Rolls of Honor." Alas, too, memorial tablets are increasing. At the end of each service the congregation standing at attention sings a stanza of "God Save the King"; and at times, the new stanza:

God save our splendid men,
Send them safe home again:
God save our men.
Send them victorious,
Patient and chivalrous;
They are so dear to us,
God save our men.

ORGANIZING FOR THE WORK

Our experiences in the way of organizing to meet the various demands of the war have been many. Let me give a sketch of what has been done

in the city of Montreal, whose population is about 800,000. Montreal differs from most of our places in that it is not the city hall which is the center of patriotic action but the Canadian club. It is in this ever active body that are hatched the whirlwind campaigns for the Canadian patriotic fund, for the Red Cross, and for the war loans. The Red Cross and the war loans you are familiar with—but the work of the Canadian patriotic fund is unique. It is an immense voluntary organization which keeps the wife and family of the soldier in comfort during his absence. Its whole management is perfect down to the smallest detail and it is a treat to go into the large offices and watch the despatch of innumerable applications, complaints and inquiries under the leadership of a wonderful woman, Miss Helen Reid. It has collected and administered in Montreal alone over \$3,500,000. An interesting fact is that it is entirely managed by women, none of whom had previous business experience. The problem of affording club homes for the numerous uniformed men in the city is attended to by the khaki league, a voluntary institution peculiar to Montreal, and which runs many departments very popular with the soldier. Hospitals are chiefly provided by the government by means of the hospital commission, but volunteer aid detachment nurses (V. A. D.'s) have done a great deal in private institutions, together with professional nurses, some of whom have gratuitously given their time and skill.

The large numbers of returned men give rise to several other problems—such as re-educational classes for those whose wounds and mutilated limbs unfit them for their former employment. Those gassed and shell-shocked also present serious questions. They start at sudden sounds, fight battles in their dreams and require very sympathetic treatment. One question of deep importance has been how to see to it that the soldier, his sacrifices, and his war aims shall not be forgotten in the years after the war. Some of us thought the solution to have been reached by your Grand Army of the Republic. We have, therefore, aided in forming The Great War Veterans' Association which now numbers between twenty and thirty thousand and will probably when peace arrives contain four hundred thousand. It already promises to be one of the most powerful of the new influences in Canadian life. It has been imitated in Australia, and ultimately the hope is that all soldiers of the allies will be linked together in The Great War Veterans of the World. The most precious of all honors is to wear the gilt wound stripes and the button of the returned soldier.

With all our losses, our anxieties, and our stern and serious days, no Canadian worthy of the name will ever regret that our boys sprang by instinct to the help of the oppressed and took up the battle for the common liberties of mankind. You also, men and women of our blood, were bound to be there. We felt you could not keep out of it, although the

stupid Hohenzollern, true to type, took your long tried patience for fear of his might.

Throughout all these conditions the place and office of municipal authorities is plain. It is to lead and to co-operate in all movements of relief and action.