

(December 28th, 1911.)

The Sikhs in Canada.

By DR. SUNDER SINGH.*

AT a special meeting of the Canadian Club held on December 28th, Dr. Sunder Singh said:—

Mr. President and Gentlemen of the Canadian Club,—It is a great pleasure to be here with you. It is a great privilege to speak to so many men who are interested in the British Empire, which fills the world. The President has spoken to you about the position; in fact, has passed very flattering remarks about the Sikhs' service to the British Empire in India, as well as outside of India.

Before speaking of the Sikhs in Canada I will speak of them in general. They are all one man's disciples, *i.e.*, followers of Baba Nanak: the word "Sikh" means a disciple. The Sikhs originated in Northern India, in the Punjab,—the land of the Five Rivers. They were disciplined by the oppression of the Mogul tyrants. In the 5th century there arose a reformation. Just as there was a reformation in Europe, so there was one in India. It was started by Guru Nanak and Guru Govind Singh. It was a social reformation, and they taught that all religions are one; that humanity,—men and women,—are all one; that sin could not be atoned for by asceticism and idol worship. That teaching could not fail but meet with opposition in a land where there was so much idol worship and superstition to cause the people to be up in arms. The Guru or the teacher went to Arabia and to all parts of India. He taught that there was no caste in the eyes of God; that all people were one. We had ten teachers altogether but the Mohammedans persecuted these poor Sikhs, put prices on their heads, and their children were flayed alive.

The ninth teacher, the Guru Tegh Bahadur, was asked by the Mohammedans to profess the Mohammedan religion. He said the Mohammedans and the Hindus were all one in the sight of God, so there was no difference. He was finally crucified. His son, Guru Govind Singh, made this church a

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church militant. He taught the Sikhs to help the weak and the fallen. After the death of this Guru, Govind Singh, came the tenth and greatest Guru, who consolidated the Sikhs into a religious and political power; his teachings spread all over India. When he died, some of the Sikhs who forgot that spirit got into trouble with the British and fought with them. They were valiant foemen but they lost their cause and soon after that they helped to keep British power in India. In fact, the history of India would have been different if it had not been for the Sikhs.

The righteousness and piety of the Christian brothers Lawrence helped to win the hearts of these people, and regiment after regiment of Sikhs raised to help the British in India and they scaled the walls of Delhi and won that day. (Applause.)

Now, as to the movement of the Sikhs into Canada:—The first Sikhs who came were the troopers who came over from the celebration of Queen Victoria's jubilee at London. They passed through this country; they saw this wonderful Dominion, and when they went home they spoke of the prairies which were just like the plains of the Punjab. Some enterprising men wanted to come to Canada. They are not like other people in India,—their idea of God is different from that of the Hindu people. They started to come over here. In 1905 a few came over; in 1906 a few more; in 1907 and 1908 a further number; but in 1909 all immigration from India was stopped. When they came over, a few went into different laboring occupations but not many as they are originally farmers and their intention was to settle on the land. Most of them in British Columbia and Alberta have bought land. The intention is to put them on the land so they may, as farmers, help to develop the country. Some of them clear the land and they do the roughest work as laborers. We find them engaged as dairy farmers, market gardeners, growing fruit, etc. They have adapted themselves to their new surroundings,—how well they have done is expressed by Colonel Davidson, of Davidson and MacRae,—one of the biggest employers of labor there,—who says these Sikhs are the most efficient men he has. He employs three hundred and fifty men at Westminster, B.C. When they came they were unskilled; now they are getting responsible positions. Every time he goes to see them he finds their sheds far cleaner than before; and they are improved, are better physically since coming into this country. Their standard of living is higher, and they have made good. And I make this appeal to you,—

the people from Southern Europe, from Italy, the Chinese, the Japanese, are accorded better treatment. Is there any process of law or regulation which can be directly or indirectly used to strip a loyal British subject of his inherent right to travel or dwell in another part of the British Empire? The Sikhs reason that they can travel in the Sahara, in India, in China, in more or less every country of Europe,—and why not in Canada? They go back to their villages and temples and they tell of Canada and how they are treated here. These are the people who have upheld the Union Jack, the flag which stands for equality and justice to all the races in the wide-flung domain of the British Empire. They are a people who are law-abiding and loyal; and their loyalty is not lip-loyalty, but is proven on the battlefield by their willing sacrifice. Bear with me, Gentlemen, when I say that a people who have been so loyal as the Sikhs might surely expect some deed of gratefulness from the other side. Other Orientals get better treatment. A Japanese has to show only \$50 on coming into Canada, while the Sikh has to show \$200. The "continuous journey" clause which was passed some time ago and which required that the Sikhs must come out by one boat all the way from India to Canada, is causing a lot of hardship, because there is no boat which comes direct to Canada from India. That law was meant to shut out the Japanese from Honolulu in 1908, but it is applied to our people. These people go back to their villages and tell their relatives,

"We have been to Canada, and, though the Canadians can come to India as officers or into the civil service or as missionaries here, we can't have our children and wives come to us. We want to get our children educated, but owing to the indirect and invidious laws we cannot have them come to us."

The Sikhs have fitted into the situation, and the prejudice against them is passing away. They have \$2,000,000 invested in British Columbia; they have put every cent they had into land there,—not like foreigners who come in to make a lot of money and go away with it; they are here to settle down and develop the country.

The Sikhs have shown their devotion to the British Empire in Tirah, in Tibet, in Afghanistan, in East Africa, in the Soudan, in Somaliland, and just at this moment Sikh troopers are being sent to fight your cause in Persia and the Abor country on the Northeast frontier of India. A people who show loyalty like this,—surely Canada would not accord to them the same treatment as to those who are of different stock and

character. They expect better treatment than foreigners. To lump them together with Japanese and Chinese as Orientals is absurd. They have the same thoughts and feelings as you and are not like the Orientals. You will bear with me, Gentlemen, when I say that this ill-treatment of the Sikhs in Canada is helping, in fact fanning, the unrest in India.

To show that there is so manifest a link between the Sikhs and the rest of the British Empire, let me read from this book I have in my hand what the author, Bagat Lakshman Singh, writing of the life and work of Guru Govind Singh,—the tenth and last Guru of the Sikhs,—says in telling the story of the Durbar held at Delhi in honor of the coronation of King Edward VII., in January, 1903. He quotes an extract from the report of the celebrations published in the Times of India, Bombay, saying:

"To-day was the birthday of Govind Singh, an anniversary held sacred by all Sikhs, when they meet in their temples to offer prayers to his memory. It was decided by the leading Sikh Maharajas, now at the Imperial assemblage, to go in solemn procession to the shrine of Tegh Bahadur and to do homage to the name of Govind Singh and renew their vows of loyalty to the King Emperor upon that venerated spot. For the little prison is now a temple and place of pilgrimage, hallowed by the people, for whose sake the saintly Guru died. The ceremony was witnessed by about a dozen Europeans, for it had not been publicly announced. But thousands of Sikhs from all over Northern India were there, drawn together by a common motive. It was one of the most dramatic events of these eventful gatherings. For this Durbar makes the final fulfilment of the prophecy. Here in Imperial Delhi the monarch of the 'White race from over the Sea' has just proclaimed his right to rule over a vaster empire than the Moghuls ever knew. By the aid of the gallant Sikhs the prediction has been fulfilled to the letter. It was a sight worth seeing,—that of the Sikhs flocking to do homage to the King-Emperor upon the very spot where their leader laid down his life for his faith. It was something that a patriotic Englishman, remembering how completely the vision of the Guru had been realized, could not contemplate without a thrill of pride. When you thought of the martyred ascetic, of his vision of the White Race from over the ocean, of the gallant Sikhs fighting for Great Britain in the streets of Delhi;

and, last and strongest of all, of the Sikhs themselves saluting their sacred book that morning with the British National Anthem, you felt that there was a moving picture which, could they but see it, might well give pause to the enemies of England."

Well, Gentlemen, these are the people who ask for justice at your hands. (Applause.) They are a people who, as I have said, have shown time and again, not once but many times, their loyalty, and if a call came to-day would go and fight on a moment's notice.

Your President was telling me that Sir Andrew Fraser was lecturing here four or five weeks ago, and he told a newspaper that the treatment received by the Sikhs in Canada was scandalous; that it was outrageous for them to be accorded the same treatment as the Japanese and Chinese. We hope that by bringing this question to the notice of the business men of Canada they will see that some justice is done to the Sikhs. Canada has a great future and it behooves the people of this country to have amicable relations with India. The two peoples should understand and know each other, so that this prejudice should be done away with.

At the Imperial Conference, Lord Crewe, Secretary of State for India, suggested that it was possible for the Dominion Government, working within the limits laid down for the admission of immigrants, to make the entrance of East Indians more easy and pleasant. If it became known that within those limits East Indian subjects would receive a genuine welcome and would not be looked upon with suspicion, a great deal might be done to bring about better relations between India and the Dominion. Until pleasant relations exist between the Dominions and India we are far from being a United Empire.

As Lord Crewe said, we are far from being a united Empire until the relations are more amicable than they are at present. Canada is to show the lead, because Canada has a great future. Canada is going to become the centre of the British Empire. (Applause.) And for the safety of the British Empire it behooves Canada to accord to these loyal people the same rights as are accorded to any other British citizen. The Empire is to be founded only on righteousness. This Empire has a great future because, as our ninth teacher said, there is a mystic link between India and Great Britain; between India and Canada,—we don't know what it is,—and the people of Canada ought to know by this time that the

people of India should be accorded the same treatment as is given to any other British citizen.

The Sikhs have all along believed in British fair play and justice, and if that idea, on account of this treatment, were lost then it would be a very bad day. The people of India have all the time believed that when all was said and done British justice would be done to all the people of India and all the various tribes,—that when they went to a British court they would get justice. In the same way it is for the people of Canada to see that justice is done in this case; that the wives and children that have been separated from these men are allowed to come. These men have been in this country six years; they worship the same God; they are law-abiding citizens; they have fitted into the situation here. It is well that the pledges given to the people of India by Queen Victoria should be remembered; that we hold ourselves bound to the natives of our Indian territories by the same obligations of duty which bind us to all our other subjects. These pledges were confirmed by the late King Edward, as well as by His Majesty King George V., who has won the homage and loyalty of all his Indian subjects by being crowned at Delhi. It is right and due that justice should be done to all these people. It would help to allay the present feeling in India; it would help to consolidate this great Empire. There are four thousand Sikhs over here in British Columbia in different occupations; they have adapted themselves to the work and to the different conditions in Canada.

You admit Galicians, Italians, Greeks and other Southern European people who are aliens; but our people have been British subjects for generations, almost as long as Canada has been a part of the British Empire,—for a hundred and fifty years. It is a household word among the Sikhs that England,—Great Britain,—and the Sikhs will hold together. I hope you will consider our rights and give us the same right as you give to any other people. (Applause.)