

(November 29th, 1915.)

The Aftermath of the War.

By MR. J. E. ATKINSON.*

AT a meeting of the Club on the 29th November, Mr. Atkinson said:

Mr. President and Gentlemen,—I am in the position of that parrot in the old story in a cage or out of a cage, that came to after a tussle with a cat, and said, "I know what is the matter with me—I talked too much to Mr. Deacon last evening!" (Laughter.) And I know to-day what is the matter with me: I was too easily taken by Mr. Deacon's pleasant ways. As Mr. Barron remarked a week ago: "Nobody seems able to refuse Mr. Deacon anything." He did not know why Mr. Deacon doesn't do all the brokerage business in Toronto; it must be because he doesn't want to. (Laughter.) I am lacking too in imagination, because if I could have imagined last evening there would be such an attendance at this meeting as I see before me I would not have dared to try to fill the breach here to-day in the absence of Sir George Foster, one of the most splendid, finished, public speakers in Canada. (Hear, hear and applause.) But I thought, as I came in and saw this audience, that if the joke is on anybody, it is on you rather than on me, because there are more of you! (Laughter and applause.)

I don't know whether I may expect such a verdict from you as I once got—I am afraid not, because all people are not as generous,—even you, I am afraid, will not be as generous—as a farmer I met down in Peterborough County during the late lamented Reciprocity campaign (laughter); I had been occupying the greater part of an evening before an audience in the village of Norwood, there being no other speaker on that occasion either available. (Laughter.) Afterwards, at the hotel in the village, I was introduced to a group of farmers who had attended the meeting. They seemed mildly interested in the stranger and one of them said, "Well, after you got going to-night, I says, 'He's better than he looks!'" (Laughter.)

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Somebody told me that an announcement appeared in the *Globe* newspaper this morning that Sir George Foster would not be able to be present to-day. I never knew that the *Globe* had so few readers in Toronto! (Laughter.) And, by the way, I think the Executive, at this meeting which has been called—it is an emergency, a hurry-up meeting—at the conclusion of this address,—should decide to give out rain checks to all, so that you may return when the Chairman of the Waterways Commission comes to fill his engagement later on. (Laughter.)

During the few minutes that I am going to trespass upon your good nature and generosity,—and may I say to you that I have the utmost diffidence and the greatest misgiving with reference to what I am presuming to do to-day, for I feel that it is a presumption for which I must ask your forbearance, and forgiveness, at the very outset;—I am going to put what I have to say to you in the form of an appeal that we should take to heart certain reflections and considerations that must have occurred to many people with reference to the period following this struggle in which the whole world is engaged.

Before the war, materialism appeared to be the key note in the politics of all the nations of the world; the nations and their statesmen seemed to be almost entirely engrossed in the problems of having to do with national advancement and prosperity and in purely material things, those things that are connected with the development of a nation's national interests. The whole world appeared to think that the beginning and end of politics was national development, national expansion, national commerce and national strength, and those things which have to do with the aggregate of human beings, rather than with the individual units of the nation. There were, it is true, a few gleams of light in the world of politics, as during the past few years Lloyd George's policies had to do with the betterment of the conditions of the common people. But these exceptional pieces of legislation served, it seems to me, only to accentuate the fact that during generations and down to the present time, our politicians and statesmen have allowed their attention to be engaged with national aims rather than with the needs and claims of the human beings who compose the nation.

The building of transcontinental railways in this country and the discussions of questions of trade and commerce, our exports and imports and such—these matters seemed to be the end of a Parliament's existence. It is a strange thing

that in this Canada of ours we have had—and in what I am about to say I am not transgressing the rule of the Club with reference to partisanship, because I am coupling both parties together whatever may be their party labels—we have had for thirty years more Conservative government than in any other part of the British Empire. We have not in Canada been as much alive to the necessity and obligation upon us to consider the interests and the welfare of the common people as has been the case elsewhere throughout the Empire. And whether the Liberal party has been in office or the Conservative party, I think we must all agree that national materialism, meaning that which has to do merely with the upbuilding of the Dominion as a Dominion has occupied too large a share of our politics.

The Germans have carried this kind of materialism to its ultimate and logical conclusion. The State to them has been the beginning and the end of all political activity and discussion. We in the British Empire have preserved our belief that the State should exist for the individual, and that the State's activities should be for the betterment of the conditions of the individual. (Hear, hear.) But we too have given most of our thought in politics to nationalism as contrasted with individualism.

But now what is the state of affairs? As by a cataclysm, a tremendous upheaval of nature, the minds of all people in all the nations of the world have been turned to the consideration of other than material things. We have entered upon a period of sacrifice, of service; the principle of national sacrifice, of service, being recognized in a way in which it has never been before in the history of the world. Three millions of our fellow subjects of the British Isles have enlisted, have stepped out of their civilian lives with the offer of their service, of their lives if need be. Two hundred thousand of our fellow Canadians, an equal number of our fellow citizens in Australia—these hundreds of thousands, these millions of men have stepped voluntarily out of the civilian ranks to give their service, their lives if the need be, for a principle;—and what principle? The principle, the greatest which has come into the world, that people are put upon this earth to do their duty, to protect the liberties and rights of all peoples, to liberate those who may be in conditions of bondage, to free men from bondage whether their bonds be political, religious or industrial. The war is a war for liberation and freedom, just as certainly as any war in the past was a war to free men.

During the war, as I have said, the spirit of sacrifice, of self-forgetfulness, the spirit in which men leave their own interests, their own selfish pursuits to devote themselves to the interests of the commonwealth, this is the spirit which has swept over the British Empire, has swept over poor, devoted, noble Belgium (applause), has swept over France, revivifying her. (Applause.) And this is the spirit which will prevent the world from ever being the same after this war, and let us hope will prevent any of us from ever being quite the same selfish, self-centred people as we were before. (Applause.)

And out of this war what will come to us? Out of this crusade in which men have engaged, a crusade which is as much a crusade, nay, a higher one and more so than any crusade in mediaeval times, because those crusades you will remember, were for the possession and securing of the holy places of the Christian religion, whereas this crusade is to secure the possession to mankind of Christianity itself. (Hear, hear and applause.) What will be the lasting result of this titanic struggle? Not the result as it may affect the boundary line of nations, not the result as it may affect national interests in Europe, and all those things which have bulked so large in the past, but the effect upon individuals, upon you and me and all who live within the Dominion of Canada?

I am speaking to-day to men who represent a class in the community which has always shown itself abundantly able to protect itself in a political sense, men who require no protection other than that which their influence gives them. But may I not appeal to you to consider that there rests upon you an obligation which is thus placed upon you, in consequence of the events of this war in relation to the men who are fighting your battles? When the war is over, what will be its effect, not as I have said upon the world at large, not upon the map of Europe, but upon ourselves and upon our political consciousness and upon the social and industrial problems that confront us day by day in our community here and in our Dominion?

May we not hope and look forward to this result coming out of the war, that when it is over, having during these months and years given ourselves up to the service of a great principle, to the protection of a great principle, that we may be able to bring into our domestic affairs, politically speaking, some of that same sense of service, some of the spirit of unselfishness (hear, hear and applause)

and make for ourselves in this country a better country for the masses of the people to live in?

Thinking about this, there occurred to me the lines of the "Battle Hymn of the Republic," and it appeared to me that they were extremely suitable to the sentiments which I have endeavored to express. As you will remember, Mrs. Ward Howe wrote, and how fitting her words are in the present day,

"Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath
are stored;
He has loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword;
His truth is marching on!"

He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat;
He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment
seat;

Oh, be swift, my soul, to answer Him! be jubilant, my feet!
Our God is marching on!"

And how will that marching on show itself in Canada and here with us? Two hundred thousand of our fellow citizens, chiefly from the ranks of labor, chiefly, almost entirely, of course, representing the common people, the masses of our population, have left our shores voluntarily. It is the pride of the British race that never has the appeal come to Britons since they were freemen to defend their country and their own freedom, that armies did not flock to the colors at the call of the King. (Hear, hear and applause.)

We do not, I fancy, realize what a tremendous thing has been done in connection with the raising of these armies in the British Empire. We as a people always belittle and disparage what to do. But never before in the world's history has anything approaching what we have done in raising these armies been done by any other people. Whether or not the voluntary system may prove equal to the tremendous demands of this war, whether or not the unprecedented, unimaginable strain shall require force, this glory at least will never be detracted from, that the Anglo-Saxon people, the people of the British Empire, have, to numbers which previous to this war would be unimaginable, voluntarily offered themselves to fight their country's battles and defend the principles of liberty and human freedom. (Applause.)

And thirty per cent. of the men who are voluntary in Toronto are married men. I ask you to-day what do we

owe them? Do we cancel our debt to them when they draw their pay, or when we take care of their wives and families in their absence? Or when to those who come back we pay a pension upon the inadequate scale which has been adopted? Do these things square our debt to them, or remove our obligation? I venture to say, we have obligations toward them we never can discharge. Measured by the advantages we enjoy, we who are here have much more to lose by the losing of this war than have the men who have gone abroad to fight for us. And when they return, the men who in the fulness of time will come back seeking places again in the industrial life of the country, and let us hope not too long hence,—have we no subsequent obligation toward them? Shall the old conditions of their lives be unaffected, those conditions which can be altered to improve them by legislation? These men who have been fighting to liberate the world, shall their sacrifices not also result in bettering in some respect those conditions under which they have lived in the past?

And as these thousands of men return at the conclusion of the war, it may be but a year from now, there will be three hundred and fifty to four hundred thousand men enlisted—may I appeal to you—and it is for the opportunity of making this appeal that I have ventured to speak to you to-day—to give to the problems that have to do with the daily life of the masses of the people, more attention and more sympathetic attention. We have not in this country very much legislation directed for the betterment of the social conditions of the masses of the people. The Workmen's Compensation Act was passed a year or more ago, and in my judgment it is the most liberal measure ever passed in Canada, although passed by a Conservative Government. (Laughter and applause.) But that measure is only a beginning. Clouds of doubt regarding their future hang over the head of every working man, fear of want and poverty darkens the future for the masses of the citizens. These misgivings, doubts, distrust, may be in a measure removed. There are legislative measures which should follow the Workmen's Compensation Act. It will be the merest justice to pass them. Measures which have to do with protecting the old age of the industrial army of workmen. Old Age Pensions have been adopted in England, sick benefits and non-employment benefits have also been adopted in England. Such measures as these, I hope, when our soldiers come back, they will find we appreciate what they have done for us enough, to put on the statute

books. So that not only the soldiers who have fought and have come back disabled will find their future insured, but also the whole army of fighters, whether disabled or not, whether unable to work or whether they are able to work, will find in Canada such a spirit of grateful acknowledgment that having saved freedom and having saved the Empire, they will find in our future legislation that while they have been nobly sacrificing themselves in securing liberty and freedom for the weaker peoples of Europe, they have also been securing for themselves as a result of this war greater security, as a result of which they as citizens of the great British Empire shall enter into wider opportunities and into economic conditions more favorable to them and their families than hitherto they have enjoyed. (Applause.)
