

(November 27th, 1912.)

Our Present Duty Towards Toronto's Future.

By MR. R. HOME SMITH.*

AT a regular luncheon of the Club on the 27th November, Mr. R. Home Smith said:

Mr. Chairman, and Gentlemen,—I had intended beginning my remarks in the conventional manner, by paying a few graceful references to the Canadian Club and to the kind introduction of the President, but when I came to consider the matter this morning, I found that I was distinctly nervous, and so I went over my remarks that I propose to give. I read them over twice: the first time I found that it took me ten minutes, but the second time it took me an hour and a half. (Laughter.) If it takes me only ten minutes I will try to be as graceful in my finale as the President, but if it takes me an hour and a half there won't be anybody here to care how I finish.

I know of no more engrossing topic than Toronto's future. It is engrossing because to a certain extent it is indefinite. Before we can determine what our duty is, and each and every one of us has a duty, we must have some clear conception in the minds of all of us as to what that future is. Now it is one of the signs of the times in this city that everybody is now satisfied that Toronto has a future. We forget that there was a time when the majority of the citizens were not satisfied that Toronto had any future whatever. For twenty years we had been living in the shadow of the boom and the collapse of years ago. I think the majority of the business men during that time thought that Toronto had come up on a wave, and that the wave had receded, never to come up to high water mark again. Only within the last three years has there been absolute unanimity of opinion that Toronto has a great future.

* Mr. R. Home Smith is a young Canadian financier who is not afraid of heavy undertakings either on his own account or on behalf of the community. As a forceful member of the Harbor Commission, he has served Toronto effectively, and it may be hoped that he will yet enter the City Council.

But that unanimity of opinion is not sufficient: we must have something more; we must have a clear idea of what type of city Toronto is to be. We have here wealth; we have population. We shall have a million people in this city inside of fifteen years. We shall quadruple and quintuple our wealth. That means we may become a large city, rich and populous, like Birmingham or Pittsburgh.

That future is not entrancing to me. Surely there is something better than population. I want to place before you what my ideal is. It may be a ridiculous ideal; it may be just a dream and a vision and you will laugh it away. But if we take ourselves seriously there is a chance that our future will develop along large lines; if we do not, it will surely develop along narrow lines.

I am absolutely certain this city has a great future before it. It was only a few years ago when no one dreamed that this could be true; when men doubted of the future of this city; as there were men who doubted of the future of the British Empire; they thought that Empire had reached its zenith and was on the decline. Now there is none who does not believe that the British Empire is destined to be greater yet in magnitude and in influence. It may be very soon that this will be fully realized. There is a new idea of the British Empire, not perhaps the general idea, or one yet meeting general acceptance, but one which sees the dominant mother country and the colonies closely linked together in one great Empire. There is another idea of the British Empire that appeals to me, where each part of that British Empire will secure the place which it is entitled to by reason of its wealth, its population, its intellectual standing and power; and I firmly believe, gentlemen, that the dominant partner in the British Empire will eventually be the Dominion of Canada.

Now, gentlemen, if that is so, what is to be Toronto's future? As I say, it may be a vision, it may be foolish, but I believe Toronto is to become the dominant city in the dominant partner in the Empire, and to be a great city as judged by world's standards. (Applause.)

Now, we have a beginning of that to-day. Toronto is a great city in education, as a place of residence, in sports, and in music, and in these matters we judge what we do by world standards. It is not enough that we want to do the best in Ontario, we have to take high standards, and say to each one in every activity that he must be judged by world standards. Now as for the University and music, and other activities,

they are in good hands and will be well taken care of. But we the citizens at large have the duty of providing for Toronto the site for a great city,—we haven't it to-day. We must have a system of local parks and playgrounds, to take the children off the streets, and to provide local breathing centres. We must have a great park system, and a great boulevard system, and it will not take Toronto more than ten years to secure these improvements. (Applause.) Now, gentlemen, applause won't do; talking won't do. Some of us, I think, who are in this room, have been agitating for years for these improvements. It is up to us to do it now, because the time will soon be gone when we can act.

There is property such as the Garrison Creek ravine and the Don Valley that could have been acquired a short time ago at small cost, but to-day you can't get it; if we had acquired these lands they would have been to-day a part of an inside system of boulevards, for the city has since extended far beyond that property, and now we are as it were thrown on our second line of entrenchments. There is land to be had now for an outside boulevard system: we should have it, and we must have it! (Applause.)

We must have it for more than one reason. It is a mistake to look upon parks as only for recreation. A great park system can be evolved by combining the best architectural genius and the best landscape artists' skill, a great inspiration, which will aid every man, woman and child to attain high ideals and a nobler life. Another reason is, that if we are to be a great world city, appealing to every man of international standing, we must have such a city that no tourist who comes to this continent can afford to pass; he must be compelled to come to Toronto. And the one thing that will attract tourists will be a great park system.

Up to two years ago the outlook was hopeless. We had talked much, but done little. Now you have the Harbor Commissioners' plans. (Applause.) We debated a great deal as to whether they should include a park system or should concern themselves only with the commercial and industrial area. We came to the conclusion that the people of Toronto had put the matter in our hands in order to arrive at a complete solution of the problem, not a patchwork scheme, but one to include the whole water front. The citizens and the press have taken this to heart, and we have begun, and have not only the plans, but if our financial program is accepted, for it is going to be largely a problem of financing, I believe that within ten years we shall have in

actual use one of the most magnificent water fronts on the continent of America. (Applause.)

Now, gentlemen, we have done more than that. You have another addition to the park area and this water front boulevard scheme. Partly by accident, partly by design, and partly by the exercise of a good deal of patience, we have a park boulevard practically completed on the western limits of the city. So that the western end of the city is looked after. And the city of Toronto is committed to the program of the water front improvement. Now all that is required is that we provide an eastern boulevard. The eastern part of the city has been neglected in this respect. It is time to acquire a system of parks and boulevards also in the north end of the city, thus connecting the two sides.

Just one other point I should like to mention in that connection. This generation cannot allow Scarborough Cliffs to remain in private ownership. That must be taken up and dealt with. (Applause.)

We can if we will settle one of the requisites in the site of a world city, for if our park system is completed on the lines outlined, it will compare with anything in the world. But what makes me at times almost frantic, is this sending men to other countries to see things, who come back and say, not "We will do as well as the best," but "What will just suffice for this city." We have the opportunity for making a great park system, and all we have to do is to take it.

The next thing we need is a proper system of street communication. The rectangular plan is the one on which Toronto is laid out, and this plan we have to change. We hear that the city of Paris is spending a hundred millions on street widening. We have made some progress in this direction, in the widening of Bloor Street, Danforth Avenue, and St. Clair Avenue. And there has been the agitation to widen Yonge Street, and Teraulay Street, and to put through Victoria Street. We have to do more than that. And it is a difficult problem of finance. But we have to solve the problem of street intercommunication. One practical solution, in the large sense, is by diagonal streets.

There seems to be in Toronto a tradition that everything has to go north and south; but the fact remains that this city has grown each and west: it stretches for twelve miles along the water front. Yet every time you have to go down town you must follow two sides of a triangle. I should like to have some statistician figure up what is the loss in dis-

tance to the people of this city by going along the two sides of the triangle instead of on the one side, the straight line. That is the reason for the congestion on Yonge Street. Every butcher's boy—I suppose he is the worst offender in traffic, (Laughter) who has to come down town from the northwest part of the city—does he come down Spadina Avenue or some other street west of Yonge? No! he pikes east to Yonge Street, and comes down Yonge.

Now, gentlemen, wide Yonge Street; widen Teraulay Street; but surely the best way to relieve Yonge Street, is to take a large part of its traffic off, and bring it down as the crow flies, bring the east and west traffic down by diagonal streets. (Applause.) You can't widen all the streets to relieve the congestion, but you can build diagonal ones. And I make this statement—and I have spent weeks and weeks and weeks upon the study of this problem, if not "months and months and months" (laughter)—going into it very thoroughly: you can build diagonal streets as a business proposition and make money on them. I stake my reputation on that, because I have gone into it, I have drawn plans, I have got the names of the owners and the assessment, and I say you can make a profit after deducting the cost of the construction and the value of the property taken, by the sale of the frontages on the new thoroughfares at the enhanced prices that they will command. That is the second point in the question of site, you must improve the street intercommunication, as well as provide a system of parks.

And the third necessity is a proper railway system both of steam and electric service, one that will compare favorably with those of other cities on this continent. You remember, years ago, when the Toronto Railway wanted loops down town, we nearly all opposed them, but they have gone on and they have done better by reason of them. Probably, if not altogether, our traction difficulties have come from absence of plan. It is much easier to get good results when everything is correlated and corresponds to some plan. It is time we had a plan for our steam railways with common entrances, and that we secured the very best possible entrances for radial and local electrics so they can reach the centre of the city. You will never have a great city as long as you have merely chance location of railway entrances and routes. No doubt the future of Toronto that appeals to everybody is that of a city of homes. If your city had only two or three hundred thousand people a number could walk to their homes; but if Toronto is to be a city of homes, when

it is a city of a million, you must have far-flung suburbs, that can be quickly, cheaply, and comfortably reached by steam or electric railways.

I want you to have patience with me, as I am going to propose a solution. It may be all wrong; at any rate it will be called all wrong. The program I have outlined has nothing new in it: it has been discussed before. I understand that a program of that kind is called "getting big eyes." I don't like the term: there is a suggestion of amazement, of wonderment, perhaps of hysteria. I'd rather get a clear eye. What is wanted is a calm, clear, deliberate eye, to see and plan for the future. And what we do want more than big eyes are big, lusty arms to carry out our plans. We have barely made a start. In two or three years it will be too late, the city's destiny will be fixed. Are you going to have a Birmingham or a Pittsburgh here? It is no laughing matter: I am forestalling perhaps some mirth over this prospect: You can have a city the equal of London or Paris in world-wide influence, right here on the shores of Lake Ontario in the city of Toronto.

Now, gentlemen, what I have to propose with reference to these matters—is this: I do not believe that the constitution of the City Council, under the present arrangement and legislation, is going to carry out a program such as I have indicated. I am not referring to the personnel of the Council, but to the structure of it. I don't believe that structure will allow of our creating a really great city of Toronto.

At the same time, I don't believe—this is only my personal opinion,—I don't believe in Commission Government. You may make any changes you like, by cutting down the membership of the Council, or by election by the whole city instead of by wards. But one thing I think is necessary: you should strengthen the heads of Departments; and pay them decent salaries! (Applause.) You can't get men to run a big city on five, six, or seven thousand dollars a year. I say that any man at the head of a Department who is not worth \$12,000 a year is not worth being at the head of the job!

And in addition to that I would make two Commissions. Perhaps you may think that is because I am on the Harbor Commission! But one thing is sure—I am not hoping to be on any other: it means hard work, and a great deal of time, so I will let somebody else have the honor of being on these others, that I propose. I would appoint two Commissions: one, which I understand is already on the books of the

Council, a Civic Utilities Commission, to manage the water-works, the street railways, the Hydro-Electric, and every other civic business. We have tried to do it through the City Council, but we can't do it. And I would, secondly, suggest a strong Civic Improvement Commission. We have one Commission already, but it is only a Commission for planning. And we have lost interest in planning. I think the work of the Harbor Commission has appealed to the people, not by reason of the plan that it has put before the citizens—the plan of itself would have fallen flat—but by reason of the substantial assets in the hands of the Commission, and its financial powers, which will quickly carry the plan into effect. Action is the only way to interest the public. My proposed plan would be only waste paper unless there were given to Commissions power to carry them into effect.

I would appoint a Civic Improvement Commission, and I would say, that the most important thing is the personnel of such a Commission. I would give that Commission power, to plan a great park system, to take the plans as we have them to-day, and to lay out new plans for a system of boulevards.

In the same way this Commission would plan the widening of old streets, and the construction of new streets. I have touched on this point already, but I am talking of permanent street widening and construction, with power to finance. I would give the Commission power to plan steam and radial entrances and terminals. Power to purchase lands necessary for improvements should further be given it, and to purchase lands abutting on these improvements for resale at a profit.

I would give the Commissioners power to issue their own debentures as securities for the improvements. And I would set apart from $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ a mill on the dollar as a revenue for that Commission. Now that would amount on this year's assessment to \$38,000, and on this revenue the Commission could raise at least the sum of \$2,000,000 next year, to start that work of purchase. Until we put our hands right down into our pockets,—for the future of Toronto and are prepared for some self-sacrifice, we are not in earnest.

I would give that Commission ample financial powers to carry out its work, and in addition to that, gentlemen,—it may not be a popular matter, but I would seriously consider placing in the hands of the Commission the establishment of a small increment tax for revenue. Our means of revenue are nearly exhausted, and it is time we considered an incre-

ment tax of 5 or 10 per cent., to be allocated for capital expenditure and for that alone. I know with a great many men such a proposal is not popular. Every dollar I have in the world is in real estate, and if that idea should be enforced I would be heavily taxed. But if I had to pay an increment tax of \$200,000, I should be well able to do it, because if that were ten per cent. I should have made \$2,000,000, and \$200,000 would be little enough for me to pay into the civic treasury. And if that money went into parks and boulevards, I would be more willing to pay it. I think most men would rather put money into expenditure for such visible improvements than into an intake pipe outside the island which you never see unless it floats (laughter), or into underground sewers or water pipes.

I believe we should take up this matter of an increment tax. We have to get new means of revenue. We have to sacrifice. Real estate owners will get the benefit. We will accept an increment tax as long as the people see that it is earmarked for capital expenditure on improvements.

It may be that this work of improvement can be worked out by the City Council. But it seems to me that new machinery is needed to work out a plan that is extraordinary. If Toronto is to have an ordinary future, then ordinary machinery will do; but if, on the contrary, we have a future before us which demands extraordinary machinery, we should take extraordinary means to see that the plan is properly carried out.

Now, gentlemen,—it may be you wonder what I am coming at; it may be I have not been very clear. Sometimes the more keenly a man feels on a subject, the harder it is to explain himself on it.

Even if a city has paltry wealth and squalid surroundings, it is already great if it has a great spirit, noble aspirations, and high courage to accomplish them. That is the touchstone. Toronto has sufficient wealth and population to be a great city, if we will simply make up our minds that the destiny of the city of Toronto is a great one, and that we intend to be worthy of it!" (Applause.)
