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Some Tendencies.

BY GEORGE TATE BLACKSTOCK, K.C.



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ADDRESSING the Canadian Club on the subject, "Some Tendencies," Mr. George Tate Blackstock, K.C., said:

Mr. President and Gentlemen,—I have to thank you for the opportunity you have accorded me of meeting you in such large numbers, and the distinction granted in including my name among those who have addressed you. Let me express also my sense of the value of the organizations to which you belong. These clubs are a useful ingredient in national life. It is within their province to deal with matters which find no part in the forum, in the press, in the Legislature, and even in the pulpit, matters which I sometimes think do not get ample and sufficient exploitation. Yet in these unauthorized parliamentary matters muzzled elsewhere may be given untrammelled vent. I must further express my appreciation of the terms of commendation in which I was introduced by the President, although they were largely undeserved. In your disappointment I trust you will remember that it is not the first time in history that the conduct of the war has not been up to the lofty and high-sounding phrases of the manifesto.

I was out in the country attending an assize when I received the message from your Secretary requesting me to speak here to-day. In a moment of weakness I promised. These things at two weeks' distance look very simple. Then four or five days later when I received a telegram in the West asking my subject it began to assume a more serious aspect, and when, receiving no answer, the High Sheriff was commissioned to wait upon me and ask why, it became extremely realistic. So, writing thereafter to a friend, I besought him to call up the indefatigable Huestis and state that my remarks would be based upon "Some Emotions." In the interval which elapsed ere I returned to Toronto, I had forgotten the subject myself, so on Saturday I had to call up Mr. Irish, to ask what it might be, and when this morning, still unprepared, the diligent press called me up and explained that it was the custom for the orator on occasions like this to furnish advance sheets of his address, I felt it to be the inspiration of great irony. I told the newspaper man there was a dollar and

a half waiting for him if he would furnish me with the address instead.

It would be difficult for me to describe my feelings as I gaze out upon your critical and expectant countenances. There seems to me to be a sort of deformity about your appearance. I notice two or three acquaintances upon whom I should like to see served a writ of ejection summons. It has ever been their privilege in private to puncture the balloons of my public utterances. My position reminds me of the old story of the two Scotchmen who met one day.

"I'm verra mad the day," declared one.

"And why?" queried the other.

"Ye ken Sandy Maclaren?"

"Ay."

"He called me a lee-ar."

"Ah, well, what's the difference?"

"Oh, but, mon, he proved it, too."

Mr. Chairman, I cannot linger longer on preliminaries. I must pass the portal and get on the midway pleasance. You see I am speaking against time. It is a habit we sometimes get into. But you are a great deal more fortunate than the judges and juries I am wont to talk to. You know when you can escape. They, poor things, never do. I must, however, apologize to you for my unpreparedness. Every moment since I first made the engagement to be here to-day has been taken up with my professional duties. So I have come empty-handed and, I fear, empty-headed. Still there are a series of ideas cavorting across the campus of my mind which I shall endeavor to lasso and tame into some sort of service.

Mr. Chairman and gentlemen, there are two great experiments of government on trial on this continent. I exclude Mexico, for we don't talk much and we don't know much about Mexico, yet I fancy that in many respects the Mexican Government is the equal, if not the superior, of our own. I am alluding, however, to the Government of the United States and our own. Both are democracies—but are they ideal democracies? The democratic system of government works fairly well in Great Britain, mainly for two reasons. In the first place, it is an evolution, and the unevenness and extravagance of democracy is modulated by the existing circumstances. Their democracy has come gradually and the old territorial grandeeism on which their society was founded still continues to exercise a moderating and even preponderating influence on the whole social structure.

They have the directly representative Legislature and they have the modifying influence of the House hereditary and aristocratic in its tendencies. Yet even the poorest and meanest

citizen, by his merit, the accident of good fortune, or some other cause, may eventually find himself in that House. I remember passing St. Paul's with our own Lord Mount Stephen and having him point out in the little churchyard near by the well where, years before, when he was a little Scottish errand boy in London, he was wont to slake his thirst. So we have one of the products of our own commonwealth in the gilded chamber.

I would seek to impress on you that wealth and distinction there carry with them the responsibility of public service. Thus is democracy robbed of its terrors and dangers.

But when we pass to America the situation is different. We in Canada and our brothers across the border have taken the tool of democracy and clapped it on to great territories as the only instrument of government. The United States system is even more conservative than our own. It presents greater opposition to rapid and hasty action than our constitution does. In ours the popular will is translated immediately into law. Our legislatures have no second chamber; our Federal House has a second chamber, it is true, but it is no real power and simply reflects the sentiment of the lower chamber. As a result, we are ever experiencing the danger of the translation into law of hasty sentiment. We have only one dyke against that danger.

The American constitution provides that no state can interfere with contract. Our Provinces have no restriction. They are absolute and without restraint. If you transfer your property to me—I was going to say if I transfer mine to you, but I couldn't do that, for I haven't any—there should be no let or hindrance. But our Legislatures have no power to set contracts at naught. Our own Legislature recently in some instances came perilously close to doing this in moments of sudden gusts of feeling. Our only protection must be in a public opinion of high ideals and great honesty. On these we must rely for a staple, effective and honest government.

Now, let me say a word or two in respect to these things. Let us avoid materialism. And I must be careful here, for the monster of interpretation seems always lying about ready to jump upon the public speaker. So I hasten to explain that I do not sneer at materialism. This is a new country with much of its fortune before it. I realize that perhaps seventy-five per cent. of our waking moments must be devoted to our material welfare and advance, but I do object most emphatically to the prevalent dedication of one hundred and fifty per cent. of our time to that purpose.

Again, if I say anything which seems to disparage the United States, that must be taken with limitations also. I

would not break the canons of propriety, not to say common justice, by wanton and indiscriminate abuse of our own neighbor to the south. In the great realm of materialistic evolution she is without a peer. There is, too, another strong reason. She has an excuse we cannot plead. The United States broke away and set up nation-building without much assistance except the experience of the past. They pluckily tackled the exploitation of their great domain, and, moreover, they have had vomited upon their shores all the offal of Europe, which they have had to take in and assimilate to the purposes of government. They are a noble people, they have dedicated themselves to a great work and woe to him who seeks to stem the tide. Let us the rather beware of the deadly apathy which is stealing abroad in our own country to our shame.

With these limitations, I claim the right to say what is truthfully to be deduced from what may be deemed to be their shortcomings, that we may be the more alert in avoiding them. The law of self-preservation is a sound one, and we may administer to ourselves as a result of what we observe in others, many necessary cautions.

I do not want to be a prophet of ills, squeezing the blue-bag into every brow of human happiness. I am an ardent advocate of cheerful optimism and believe that there was never a time in the world's history when the faucets of human kindness turned out as limpid a stream as they do at present. Having regard to all this, and accepting a realization of the obligations that rest upon each one of us as citizens of a glorious young country, shall we not set ourselves to mend several of the difficulties from which we suffer?

First, then, let us look at ourselves from a political point of view. We have a political history. In 1873—on Guy Fawkes' day—the people of Canada rose and hurled from power the darling of their hearts, Sir John Macdonald, because he had been deemed guilty of a political crime. I say the action was creditable to this nation. It evidenced a strong, virile sentiment, whether it was good or bad as an administrative act.

Do you think we have improved? What of our Parliament to-day? Instead of devoting themselves to the serious questions of the nation and our relation to the great Empire of which we form a part, instead of formulating policy on principle, we find the House conducting a great debate on the morals of its members.

On the one side sits a man whom seven judges found guilty of crime. He was unseated, disqualified and nailed to the counter as a bad penny. Yet he is in our House of Commons

to-day. On the other side sits a man who was tried and convicted of the offence of voting twice at the same election. Still another case comes to my mind. A member of the local Legislature, desiring to enter the Federal House, affected to send his resignation to Mr. Speaker, arranging that it should never reach him, and, when beaten, returning with brazen-faced effrontery to his former seat and actually taking it. And no one had the courage to say him nay. What measure of decency can we expect from the deliberations of men of that kind?

Very recently I had occasion to be in a public place, in the office of a hotel, when a lady came in to inscribe her name at the desk. When she was thus engaged there broke forth in her hearing, almost at her ear, a procession of the foulest and most indecent oaths that ever fell from human lips. I turned around to discover whence they proceeded—from a member of the House of Commons!

So long as you have not sense enough to detect that kind of conduct and strength enough to resent it, so long will your institutions remain on the greased skidway to destruction.

Look back to the first Parliament of 1867. Go over the names of some of the men who composed it: Sir John Macdonald, Cartier, Groves, Hincks, Archibald, Galt, Cameron and Gibbs. And then pass to the other side and name them over: Alexander Mackenzie, Blake, Huntington, Dorien and others. Consider that group of Titans, men of heroic build and character. They brought confederation into existence and laid the foundation of our present greatness. When we think of these men and then take a peep at our present Parliament no wonder we exclaim, "How are the mighty fallen!"

We want a better class of men in Parliament. "Oh," I fancy I hear some one exclaim, "he wants the Parliament peopled with lawyers and dudes." Not at all. The last thing in the world I would like to see would be a House of Commons filled with members of my own profession. But our Parliament should be a fair and legitimate reflection of the community at large. I believe in serving the notice that the men required are the gentlemen in every department of life. We want none of the heroes of the glad hand, who use this method of retaining popularity at the expense of the people and the country. Canada wants gentlemen in her Parliament. It is the tribute that vice always pays to virtue that the men placed in the forefront are respectable figures, men like Sir Wilfrid Laurier and Mr. R. L. Borden, men against whom nothing can be said—the highest types of Canadian gentlemen. A man can possess all the higher and more refined instincts and yet have the popular qualities. Sir John Macdon-

ald and Sir Wilfrid Laurier are striking examples of this. But they triumphed in spite of the disadvantages of culture, high principle and high character. I long to see a state of affairs when the modest unassuming gentleman may claim some share in the destiny and government of his country.

Napoleon, that keen student of humanity and human affairs, once observed: "In the last analysis the country's authority and prestige is imposed on the poor gentlemen of that country." Napoleon had the sagacity to pass to the quick of the matter, that which is indispensable to the real fibre of any commonwealth.

We are wont to rail against the Family Compact, and there is no doubt that its arbitrary authority was much misused and that tyrannies and selfishness prevailed. But the Family Compact did a great deal for which it gets no credit. We have an administration of justice in the Provinces that is worthy of England. This will only continue if you do your duty. It does not devolve upon somebody else. The question for us is: What contribution are we making towards national progress and betterment?

I wish I had time to exhaust the subject, to follow these ideals as they might be exhibited commercially, socially and in other respects. Some time, perhaps, when you have four or five hours to spare, I will develop the subject at greater length.

Let me finish with an observation. What is the remedy? A chemical change is wrought by the change of the infinitesimal molecules, so if the community, the nation, is to be changed and improved the work must rest with the individuals. We want a multiplicity of units of excellence. We must all be deadly in earnest in our desires for the country's welfare. Time was when one million Canadians crossed the line and they gained an immediate advantage, were placed in the principal positions because they were Canadians, because they came from the land where honesty and principle governed. I want to see that state of affairs revived and continued.

It depends on the action of the individual. It may involve sacrifice. What of that? Everything that is worthy involves sacrifice. Make the sacrifice, then—willingly, joyfully—for this beautiful country. It is the memory of sublime deeds that lives, deeds of sacrifice, man for man, self for country, life for love. If it be, on the contrary, written, "He did it for reward; he did it for price," it strikes it from that catalogue of history and kindles enthusiasm on other altars.