

(March 9th, 1908.)

The National Significance of the Plains of Abraham.

BY MR. JOHN A. EWAN, OF TORONTO.

ADDRESSING the Canadian Club upon "The National Significance of the Plains of Abraham," Mr. John A. Ewan of Toronto, spoke as follows :

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Canadian Club,—You have heard the explanation our worthy President has made with reference to the unfortunate occurrence which has put me in this unfortunate position to-night. The Club, however, was in a position where it must go on, and, as it happened that last fall I went down to Quebec, looked into conditions there and wrote a couple of articles for the Globe on the subject, Mr. Turnbull and his friends thought I could address you to some purpose on this somewhat interesting topic. Though I feel that it is an unfortunate position I am in, I feel that I can throw myself on the kindness and generosity of the members of the Canadian Club, to help me by their patience at least. I was never before in such a happy position to command an audience, because you had to hear me or lose your luncheon. So if the secretary will tile the door to prevent anyone from escaping we will proceed to business.

I fancy what has brought this subject prominently before the public just now is the fact that in July next we will have arrived at the three-hundredth year since Samuel de Champlain established a house on Canadian soil at Quebec. With that event in view, people have begun to speak about the old city of Quebec with more interest than ever before, and the minds of people are impressed with the fact that there had taken place one of the greatest events in the world's history, and that the spot where it had taken place was not what it ought to be.

I may just describe what I saw with my own eyes last September. Fortunately, that piece of ground on which this great event took place is not as absolutely alone from the people as it might have been. Close to, and adjoining a considerable city, a city which has grown rapidly, it is really marvellous that so much of the ground over which the battle

was fought is still practically in the condition it was when the French and English met there one hundred and fifty years ago. That has largely happened from the fact that it adjoins a fortress, and as ordnance lands, the British authorities thought it advisable to preserve them. You may ask why the public authorities should have built a jail there. Well, if you just remember that that jail was built by the authorities of a Province who have not the same reason to remember the Battle of the Plains of Abraham as we have, you will not be surprised that, on finding a nice piece of ground they built a jail upon it. That was the first piece of distinction, and still later the Ross Rifle factory was built there. Those are the two important buildings on that ground to-day, but I think the spot is far more vulgarized by the fact that every few yards there is a miserable tumble-down fence barring your passage. When I desired to see the spot where Wolfe fell, we had to climb with great difficulty over a very rickety fence. It is something not all to the credit of this country that it should be necessary to climb any sort of fence to examine a spot as famous to the world and to memory as that of the battlefield of the Plains of Abraham.

Now, is it necessary for me to make any defence of the proposition at all? That very distinguished writer, Mr. Goldwin Smith, is always deprecating anything that looks towards the encouragement of a military feeling, such as the dedication of battlefields or of anything that will recall scenes of carnage; but, I am sure, when we look into the philosophy of the thing we will find that, after all, it has good origin. We have laughed a good deal at the fourth of July oration, but there can be no doubt that these twelfth of July orations—(Laughter)—I must have been thinking of Dr. Sproule—these 4th of July orations did most certainly nerve the American people to tremendous exertions to save the Union in the early sixties. Men who fought at Shiloh, Antietam, Cold Harbor, and other battles had been wrought up to it in great measure by the fourth of July oration, and the American people have shown how patriotic a thing it is, how fitting a thing it is, to preserve such fields to the nation. At Gettysburg, and all about Shenandoah there is an enormous park dedicated to the memory of the men who fell in that vicinity. So, I am afraid that while humanity is what it is we cannot for a moment allow ourselves to forget the deeds of our ancestors.

One of the most striking things in the history of the world is that nations have a tendency towards aggregations. We find that fact demonstrated in the history of our own little Mother

Island. As you all know, Scotland and England joined fortunes—whether Ireland joined fortunes or not I don't know—but there was the principle. Peoples had to get together to preserve their station, their integrity, their liberty. The Italians were split into half a dozen states—now we have United Italy—and so with Germany and Russia. In the United States what happened? State after state was knit together until it is one of the great nations of the world. I think if our Empire is to preserve itself it must follow the example of those nations and get together. And why I hold that that event which took place in 1759 was a great world event is because it added to the British Empire this great territory of Canada, which every person believes will be one of the mighty parts of that nation and able to meet the world at arms. (Applause.)

I hope this land will never be an aggressive nation. I do not want militarism propagated on this continent any more than any other man, but you know how it is. Within the borders of a nation men are kept at peace by the strong arm of the law; unfortunately, in the world at large, there is no policeman that anybody respects. So, in international affairs we have to go back to the principle that might holds itself in readiness against aggression.

The point I am trying to get at is this—the continuance of British institutions and of liberty depends upon Britain's having the force to maintain them. (Applause.)

I was reading an issue of Collier's to-night containing Kipling's first letter, and, strange to say, I picked this paragraph from it:—"At Quebec there is a sort of place much infested by locomotives, like a coal-chute, whence rise the heights that Wolfe's men scaled on their way to the Plains of Abraham. Perhaps of all the tide-works in all our lands the affair of Quebec touches the heart and the eye more nearly than any other. Everything met there; France, the jealous partner of England's glory by land and sea for eight hundred years; England, bewildered as usual, but for a wonder not openly opposing Pitt, who knew; those other people destined to break from England as soon as the French Peril was removed. Montcalm himself, doomed and resolute; Wolfe, the inevitable trained workman appointed for the finish; and somewhere in the background one James Cook, master of H.M.S. Mercury, making beautiful and delicate charts of the St. Lawrence River.

"For these reasons the plains of Abraham are crowned with all sorts of beautiful things—including a jail and a factory.

There is, happily, now a movement on foot to abolish these adornments and turn the battlefield and its surroundings into a park, which by nature and association would be one of the most beautiful in the world."

I may say that the body of Wolfe neither reposes at Quebec nor, as some people imagine, in Westminster. There is a memorial in Westminster, but his body lies elsewhere. I would like to tell you a story which was told me in this very Canadian Club by Fred Waite, who was a member of the Alaskan Boundary Commission. There was a French Canadian gentleman who was also connected with the Commission, and it so happened that they visited a place where were exhibited the relics of a famous admiral. Suddenly, with great feeling, the French Canadian gentleman said, "Mr. Waite, why do you bring me here to show me the relics of a man who was a great trouble to our people, who battered their fleet on every sea?" They went away and shortly afterwards arrived at Greenwich. The French Canadian, spying a little church, and hastening up asked the verger at the door if there was anything within worth seeing, "Why, gentlemen, said he, "Wolfe, the conqueror of Quebec is buried here." The French gentleman merely groaned and turned away. (Laughter.)

I am glad to see that our French Canadian fellow subjects are joining with us in this movement, and I think that, before long, the Legislature of Quebec will make an appropriation for that purpose. It is to be hoped that it will provide for the removal of the jail.

I might explain why it is possible for our French Canadian fellow subjects to join with us. In the first place, there is no doubt that the more thinking of our French Canadian subjects regard British rule as good rule. In the second place, they have also a hero who fell there. Although not victorious he did his work well and sealed it with his life blood. You will remember that in the year following the capture of Quebec, de Levis came with 8,000 men and attacked the city, and, as you know, Murray sallied out with 3,800 men to meet him—with disaster to the British arms. De Levis was conqueror and drove them back to Quebec. But for the arrival of the fleet, I don't know what might have happened. It is always the fleet, gentlemen. (Applause) So they can celebrate de Levis and we can celebrate James Wolfe.

I think I would be imposing on your time if I said much about the battle itself, but there is no doubt in the world that it was one of the most brilliant feats that the British

Army ever accomplished. If you remember the original plan, Wolfe and Amherst should unite their forces and attack the stronghold. But Amherst was cautious and exceedingly slow, and was not half way through his task at Montreal when the first flurries of snow warned the British fleet that it had to leave the river. The British fleet was the base of the whole British operations. Without the fleet nothing could have been done. The British guns from the Levis side pounded the city almost into powder, but the army was unable to make a landing. Montcalm's arrangement of his troops was very skillful. He almost allowed Quebec to take care of itself, while he extended his lines along the Beauport shore down to Montmorency. Toward the end of July, Wolfe tried to make a landing, but it was an impossible feat to perform by an army as weak as his, and he was beaten back. Ever on the alert, however, he determined again to press beyond the almost impassable fastnesses of the river. On the night of the 12th of September, he went up the river and floated down in his boats to a point where he had decided to make a landing; then pushing up the very steep embankment he surprised the posts at the top. The first thing the Frenchmen knew he had his men on the battlefield. He always said if he got face to face with the enemy he would have no fear of the result. He wrote to his mother that "Montcalm has a large army of poor soldiers, while I have a small army of good soldiers." His words proved true.

Montcalm has been blamed for not fighting Wolfe from within the fortress, but these critics forget that Wolfe was between Montcalm and his source of supply, and that he had to get all of his provisions from the direction in which Wolfe's army was placed. In one week his army would have faced starvation, and Monckton's guns from the Levis shore had pounded the city almost to pieces. When Montcalm arrived on the scene, he saw Wolfe's lines drawn out two deep—which was the first time the British Army was ever deployed two deep—a lesson which our people did not learn in South Africa, I am sorry to say. Wolfe saw that what he had to fear was the marksmanship of the Indians and backwoodsmen in Montcalm's army. Another thing he did, showing how quick he was to learn a lesson, was to give orders not to fire until the word of command was given. He let the French come on until within forty paces when the word of command burst out along the English line. The first discharge crumbled up the enemy and, at the second discharge, they turned and fled. The Highlanders drew their swords and the victory was soon complete. But, if you think of an army of 3,600

men taking a fortress with probably twice that number in the vicinity, you will agree that it was one of the greatest feats a British Army has ever performed. (Applause.)

There is one thing about it, if it is decided to set apart this battlefield as a great national park it will be regarded as an unrivalled memorial. Those who have stood on the King's Bastion know what a magnificent spectacle is spread out before one's eyes. Standing here one can recall it. At the base of that huge rock flows that noble river, in which even the British fleet would look small. Then, on the farther shore, there are the fastnesses from which Monckton's guns stormed the citadel; then the Island of Orleans, like a demi-paradise; then the Beauport shore, with its beautiful line of white houses; beyond that the snowy falls of Montmorency; then the twin spires of Ste. Anne de Beaupre, and, farther still, the great line of Laurentian hills, ending in the grim peak of Cap Tormente. Wordsworth has a little sonnet in which he speaks of the River Thames as he crosses Westminster Bridge.

"Earth hath not any thing to show more fair;
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty."

That describes the scene from the citadel of Old Quebec. If the nation decides to set apart that field to the memory of Wolfe and his men, it will have done something worthy of Canada. (Applause.)

I may say that the emotions of this are a little too strong for me. Before I close, I would like to recite two or three verses from Sir Francis Hastings Doyle. During the second Chinese war a soldier named Moyse and some Hindoos, who had straggled, were captured by the Chinese troops. They were taken before the Chinese officer and ordered to kneel to him. The Hindoos obeyed, but Moyse refused to do so, saying he would not kneel to any Chinaman that ever lived. He was set upon and clubbed to death. Sir Francis Hastings Doyle composed the following verses on the incident:—

"Last night amid his fellow roughs
He jested, quaffed and swore,
A private soldier of the Buffs
Who never looked before.
To-day, beneath the foeman's frown
He stands in Elgin's place—
Ambassador from Britain's Crown
And type of all her race.

Poor, reckless, rude, low-born, untaught,
 Bewildered and alone—
 A heart, with British instinct fraught,
 He yet can call his own.

Aye, draw his body limb from limb,
 Bring cord and axe and flame,
 He only knows that not through him
 Shall England come to shame.

Far Kentish cornfields round him seem
 Like dreams that come and go,
 Bright leagues of cherry-blossoms gleam
 One sheet of living snow.

The smoke above his father's door
 In soft grey eddyings hung.
 Must he then watch it rise no more
 Doomed by himself, so young?

Yes, honor calls; with strength like steel
 He puts the vision by—
 Let dusky Indians cringe and kneel,
 A British lad must die.

And so with eyes that would not shrink,
 With knee, to man unbent,
 Unflinching on the dreadful brink,
 To his red grave he went.

Vain, mightiest fleets of iron frame,
 Vain, your all-shattering guns,
 Unless proud Britain holds untamed,
 The stout hearts of her sons.

So, let his name through ages ring,
 A man of mean estate,
 Who died, as famous Sparta's King,
 Because his soul was great."

Gentleman, I thank you. (Applause.)

President Turnbull—"I am sure we all appreciate what Mr. Ewan has said to-night, and I know I express your wishes when I extend to him the thanks of the Club for having filled the awful gap." (Applause).