

(February 8, 1909.)

The Canadian Club and its Influence on the Future of Canada.

BY SIR JAMES P. WHITNEY.

ADDRESSING the Canadian Club upon the foregoing subject Sir James P. Whitney, Premier of Ontario, said:

Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen of the Canadian Club,— After a painful visit to the dentist it is all the more pleasant to be received in this very cordial manner. My confession to you is conveyed in the Indian word, "pecavee," (I believe that's the way they pronounce it now) "I have sinned."

Whatever was the first original meaning of the phrase, the cloud had a silver lining in its use on a memorable occasion, you will remember, at Calcutta about the time I was born. Gentlemen, to you I plead guilty. I have sinned, and there is no pleasant double meaning to my confession, having regard to the high object of the system of Canadian Clubs and the service they are doing to the Canada of the future. I make open confession that I have not done all that I should to aid the Canadian Club when I consider its great and patriotic mission. I throw myself upon your mercy and will endeavor to atone, in so far as I am able, for my past delinquency.

But I must get a little nearer to my subject. Canada is undergoing a gradual development, growing all the time more rapid. Events are following events in changing succession. Great and imperial subjects call for immediate and careful consideration. Big problems are almost jostling one another before the public eye. They are problems that in their very nature cannot be hastily dealt with—cannot be dismissed idly.

The first of these great problems that presents itself is the relationship that is to exist between the different scattered groups which compose the great British Empire which we love. As a rule the public are alive to the fact that a change is near at hand, because they realize that the present system of government does not reap the full benefits to be obtained. The people are realizing that there must be important changes made in the loose and indeterminate system that exists. We have the spectacle of six or seven different groups of British

subjects, with a common love and aim for the continuity and permanency of the British Empire; and at the same time with a means of communication, from a governmental point of view, not fulfilling the object to which they were designed. A change is imminent. While I do not discount the difficulties to be encountered I have no doubt that there will loom up a well-considered and thoughtful system of change. For instance, take the tariff legislation of the mother country and each one of these groups—I am merely hazarding this. These are serious, momentous questions. Yet they should not stop us because they are difficult. The rather we should take courage in the belief that difficulties exist to be put out of the way. We are only touching the fringe of the question, but, as Canadian people, shall we not search for and be ready to launch at the proper psychological moment the public consideration of this question, rather than continue the policy of drift. I am not here to discuss these questions; merely to indicate them. When the time comes for their active consideration they will call for both ability and patriotism.

It will be at such a crisis that there can be displayed the influence of the Canadian Club, or the system of Canadian Clubs, for the movement is not confined to Toronto. I am strongly of the opinion that great advantages must accrue from any such organizations as the Canadian Clubs of Ontario. In the multitude of councillors there is wisdom. It does us all good to rub shoulders with the rest of the world. It may be heresy, but I am of the view that the man who has had the opportunity of doing that is just as well educated as he who has gotten his knowledge solely from books.

Holding these views you will not be surprised at the satisfaction with which I regard the growth of these Canadian Clubs. There is something to show from them. I find it difficult to put into exact words my appreciation and my estimate of associations of this kind. The submitting of different opinions apart from the clash and clamor of public discussion and public dispute result in good. They create the raw material from which wise conclusions are evolved. As a matter of course any influence from the outside is useful. The press reflects the minds and opinions and views of the public at large. In this country of ours the press, while not infallible, exercises an influence for good and a beneficial effect on the people of Canada. This influence should radiate from your Clubs. In the matter of public discussions you will agree with me when I say that 25 years ago the masses cheered

because their leaders cheered. Now they are looking much beneath the surface. If a balloon were to drop a man in every county in Ontario, I do not think he would have to wait longer than to meet the first wagon or man on foot, when, if the visitor inquired as to the public questions or the political situation, he would forthwith hear a very intelligent resume of what was going on in the Province of Ontario. I was going to say the Government of Ontario, but I stopped myself in time.

The influence of Canadian Clubs must be good. The extent of that influence is a matter of opinion. I do not think that there is much danger of it being exaggerated. One great advantage you have lies in the fact that men of both political parties are glad to be members. This is your saving grace. There is too much party feeling and prejudice. The party system must exist. We could have none other under our British system of government, with its unrivalled free institutions. The man who sneers at party and derides party efforts has failed to understand the possession of the franchise.

But when men of both political parties who are prepared to support the right and are not afraid to oppose the wrong, come together in our Province to consider the great momentous future of the British race, they are on a larger and broader plane. If the time ever comes—God forbid!—when our future relations and imperial problems are up for discussion and there is an attempt from any source to instill the acid of party politics, such institutions as yours will have a duty to perform by governing and guiding and rendering it impossible for the poison to have its usual force.

I was invited to address the Club on one occasion previously. I have always been sorry that I did not. Next time I shall ask to be invited. To take part in such deliberations as yours is one of the highest privileges and duties that can fall to the lot of a resident or citizen of the Province of Ontario. In conclusion, let me urge you never to lose sight of the wide possibilities before your Canadian Clubs. The future may be pregnant with great results—or otherwise. Be equal to the emergency. Go on doing your duty as British subjects in this country of ours.
