

LIBERAL PATRIOTISM

Recommended ^{FOR} Consideration by Canadian Statesmen

BY AN OLD CANADIAN.

1st February, 1879

1879

(Charles Rankin)

O.L.S.

*Speech with which it is suggested His Excellency
Should ~~may~~ open the approaching Session of Parlia-
ment at Ottawa.*

GENTLEMEN,—

In calling you together at this time, according to annual custom, to hold your deliberations on matters affecting the interests of the community at large, I will avail myself of the opportunity to place before you, and invite your attention to the consideration of some matters which appear to me of paramount importance, as affecting those interests; and in doing so, I think it well to remind you, first, of the position, character, and peculiar circumstances of your country, as affecting in some degree what are practicable, or what are judicious objects for you to promote, or to aim at promoting.

First, then, it is well to bear in mind that the Dominion of Canada, although including a territory immense in extent, yet, with reference to that portion only of this great territory which, on account of climate or capacity for cultivation, is desirable or suitable for the habitation of man, it is very limited, and consists, principally, of merely a long narrow strip, extending from ocean to ocean, with the United States occupying all between it and the sea-board on the south, and limited on the north by frosty and rocky regions, extending away to the arctic.

The country, then, with reference to the settled or settleable parts of it, is very limited, and is of an awkward shape to deal with in administering its affairs; it has but one Atlantic port (Halifax) open in winter, and that not likely to be much used for central Canadian objects, because of the length of the circuitous route by which it may be reached, and the severity of winter weather along that route, while from United States ports (always open) the Province is much more readily and more conveniently reached.

Then, of the population of this long, narrow strip, amounting to about four millions, (including the inhabitants of your cities, towns, and villages), probably nine-tenths are poor, or of the classes whose necessities require their daily constant exertion to provide livelihood for their households. There are comparatively few persons of wealth in the Canadian community, and they are mostly of the wholesale mercantile classes, residing in the cities.

Again, you are very deeply in debt, for moneys borrowed in England, to carry on your public works—canals, railroads, &c.; and, I believe, the yearly interest of your present liabilities amounts to several millions of dollars. Some of the works for which you have incurred this debt may ultimately pay the interest of their cost, others will not such, for instance, as the intercolonial railroad, &c.

Under these circumstances, economy in the administration of your public affairs, is, of course, desirable; and retrenchment in regard to the expense of conducting those affairs, should be sought, and adopted where practicable, as there is no doubt you will, in various instances, find it to be; and that, doubtless, also, in some cases, consistently with an improved order of administration.

Extravagance in the cost of administering public matters, as well as in private living, has for some time past been the order of the day, and, if not checked, must result in public as well as private damage.

It is for you, therefore, the deputed guardians of the public welfare, to aim, both by your personal example, and by the enactment of salutary laws, to that end, to check such extravagance, and to procure your public affairs to be managed at a cost more proportionate to the comparative importance, wealth and circumstances of your country.

And to this end, I will venture to suggest to you that no means within your power to adopt, would be likely to have a better effect in this direction, by the influence of its example, than your abolishing your own sessional allowance of a thousand dollars each, which I must say, in view of the circumstances of the country, as above referred to, is extravagant. It was the unpatriotic and selfish act of a preceding House, in betrayal of the trust reposed in them by their constituents, to adopt that rate—let it be yours patriotically to abolish it, or to reduce it to the limits of reason.

If you adopt this first act of retrenchment, you may with good grace proceed, after ascertaining where it is practicable, to retrench in regard to the expenditure in all the Departments; and as to my own office of Governor-General, I promise you that I will cheerfully relinquish either the whole, or any particular proportion of the very large allowance which you have made to me.

The next matter of serious importance to which I would invite your attention, as needing correction, is the practice, which has become common, of the heads of the different Departments absenting themselves for considerable periods at a time, from their offices, and from the duties of those offices, to the retarding of the public business, &c. This should be corrected, and it should be made imperative on every paid public officer, to be always at his post, and giving his attention to the duties for which he is paid.

And, lastly, I will suggest to you whether it would not be in the interests of your constituents, that you should seek—through an act of the Imperial Parliament, if necessary—such a change in your constitution of government as would enable you, or would enable the Governor in Council, to appoint persons qualified to the headships of Departments, without the necessity of their having seats in Parliament; thus affording to those heads the opportunity, by giving their undivided attention to the duties of their offices, to become efficient in the discharge of those duties, being also responsible for such discharge.

But at the same time, while this much of a change in your constitution is certainly desirable, if no further change should be sought, yet I will venture to express the opinion, again referring to the circumstances of the country, that you should, in the interests of the people whom you represent, seek a more extended change, to the end of consolidating your eight Provincial Governments, allowing one Governor, with one Executive Council, and one Legislature, to attend to the duties of government, and the making of laws for your four millions of poor people, thus saving those people the expense of supporting seven unnecessary governments and legislatures, and thereby proportionately reducing taxation, which already bears heavily on the working and industrious classes.

There could also be the less argument against this change, since, as it is, each county, and even each township, has its own municipal government to look after its local affairs.

Placing these observations and suggestions before you, I recommend them to your serious consideration.

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