



Some Historical Reflections Relating to the War

ADDRESS

DELIVERED BY

SIR CLIFFORD SIFTON, K.C.M.G., P.C., K.C.

CHAIRMAN, COMMISSION OF CONSERVATION

CANADA

UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE

WOMEN'S CANADIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY
OF OTTAWA

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“Some Historical Reflections Relating to the War”

I have thought that it would be appropriate at the present meeting of the Women's Canadian Historical Society of Ottawa, to present some historical reflections which may be of value in enabling us to form a more just conception of the importance of the struggle in which we are engaged, and the true meaning of it from the standpoint of the Canadian citizen.

Nothing that I will say, in so far as the facts are concerned, will be beyond the knowledge of any well-read school-boy. The knowledge of very important facts, however, frequently lies dormant. We do not always apply to the affairs of life the knowledge which is held in suspension in our memories. What I propose to do is to apply some of our common historical knowledge to the condition of affairs which exists in the world to-day.

LIBERTY VERSUS DESPOTISM.

In the many articles and addresses which deal with the war there is a constant reiteration of a perfectly true statement, that the war is one between the principle of liberty on the one hand and that of despotism on the other; liberty as we understand it, on the one hand, and despotism on the other hand in the form of a government where the personal and property rights of the individual can be arbitrarily invaded by the ruler or his officers or agents. Liberty is such a commonplace with us that we often do not appreciate what it is. Frequently I see statements made and suggestions put forward in the press which cause me to think that a little discussion on the subject would not be amiss. There seems to be a good deal of ignorance of fundamental principles where there should be knowledge. What then is this liberty which we enjoy, and how did it arise? Through what vicissitudes has it come to us, and by what struggles has it been won?

Our soundest constitutional writer says that the personal liberty of the Englishman, a right to enjoy liberty and property without arbitrary interference, was inherent in English law

before the Great Charter in the reign of King John. That it was not generally experienced, and not easily enforced, is shown by the inclusion in the Great Charter of a specific provision declaring the right of a subject not to suffer except by judgment of his peers in lawful trial. The inclusion of this provision in the Great Charter, however, by no means meant that the average citizen enjoyed the privileges which it purported to confer upon him. Lawless nobles, and still more lawless representatives of the Crown, openly and notoriously violated the rights of the people from time to time. It is one thing to make a declaration of rights and another thing to see to its enforcement. As a matter of fact, it took from the time of King John to the end of the reign of George the Third before the legal remedies for the infringement of liberty were perfected so that the ingenuity of the Crown lawyers could find no loophole and invent no new method by which the individual could be deprived of his personal rights by an arbitrarily disposed ruler or government. Throughout these long centuries the struggle went on, arising, subsiding, breaking out afresh at each attempt of arbitrary power to exercise what seems to be the ineradicable passion for tyranny. Each step forward was made at an infinite expense of labour and trouble. Sometimes the foes of liberty triumphed, but in the end its advocates in every case forced their opponents back and slowly consolidated the fruits of past endeavours.

The English revolution of 1688 was the culmination of the struggle for liberty. Prior to the Stuarts there had been a very slow but steady advance. Strong-headed and arbitrary as the Tudors were, they were not able to prevent it. The Stuarts tried to turn back the hands of the clock. Interference with both the rights of the person and of property finally brought about open rebellion. It cost the Stuart line the English throne; resulted in the Revolution in which the fruit of all previous contentions for liberty was consolidated. It then remained only to clear up the legal difficulties and perfect the procedure for enforcing the rights which were recognized.

EFFECTS OF ILLEGAL TAXATION.

It is a somewhat curious fact, and one that in a certain view is not too creditable to our forefathers, that the event

which finally drove the English people to rebellion was not the infringement of personal rights and liberty, but illegal taxation. It seems to be an indication that this attempt on property was more resented than an attempt on the rights of the person. Perhaps it can be explained by the fact that whereas the infringement of personal rights only affects the few people who are personally attacked, the institution of an illegal system of taxation affects the whole community.

The same thing happened in the famous struggle of the Dutch for their liberty against the Spaniards under Philip the Second. The Dutch were not finally driven into universal rebellion by murder, torture, and persecution, though these were inflicted in the most wholesale fashion. It was not until the Duke of Alva, the Spanish Regent, devised a new plan of extortionate taxation that the whole Dutch people finally threw themselves into the struggle.

PERSONAL LIBERTY.

Now, in plain language, what is this liberty that we speak of? It consists briefly in the right of every citizen to enjoy his personal freedom and his property without molestation or interference by the Crown, its officers or agents or any department of government, except in pursuance of equal laws which apply to every member of the community alike and which must be administered by the Courts of Justice upon well-defined principles. Only in pursuance of the provisions of these laws can the personal liberty or the property of any man or woman be placed in jeopardy. To this must be added the principle that, by a proper adjustment of governmental machinery, the people being represented in the law-making power, no law can be passed affecting them in person or property without their own consent as expressed by their parliamentary representatives.

These are such commonplaces with us that we are inclined to ask: Is it possible that intelligent men anywhere will submit to a different condition of things? Perhaps of all the people in the world we are the least qualified to judge on this point. We are a people apart: the Atlantic on the one side, and the Pacific on the other, have separated us from the old continents, where, since the dawn of history, men have fought and contended and

slaughtered each other in the support of what were often only differing systems of slavery. We, and our fathers who are native-born Canadians, have lived in this atmosphere of liberty, uncontaminated by even the breath of fear. Since the American revolution the principle of liberty has not been involved in such wars as this northern continent has experienced, except in the case of Mexico. In the War of 1812, and in the American Civil War, it was not involved. Free communities contended with each other; no one imagined that a victory on one side or another would have involved loss of personal liberty by the inhabitants of the conquered territory. Of all the people in the world, therefore, we native-born Canadians and the people of the United States are perhaps the least cognizant by our personal experience of what the lack of liberty means, or what is involved in the fear of its infringement. We stand in a unique position.

THE STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM.

Looking to our own history, that is, the history of England, we know that this liberty was hardly won. Centuries of contention on the part of the people finally resulted in a long and bloody struggle, a restoration of former conditions, more tyranny, more bloodshed, and then another and a final revolution in which the principles of liberty were consolidated.

What was this struggle which culminated in what we know as constitutional liberty? We are accustomed to respect our King and his representative. We meet him with acclamations of loyalty. Why is it? Is it because of any personal attribute in the Sovereign or his representative? Is it because we know that the particular individual who happens to occupy the throne, or his representative in Canada, is great, good, or personally distinguished by eminent qualities? None of these things. Our respect for the King is because he stands for a system, a form of government, a scheme of affairs under which we enjoy the blessings of liberty. We are loyal to him as the head of this system, so long and so long only as he maintains the principles and observes the conditions of the constitutional system which guarantees the freedom of the subject. It was not always so. For centuries the people were more or less constantly in a state of antagonism and opposition to the acts of the Crown and its representatives. Whether those representatives were the nobles

to whom part of the governing authority was delegated, or the direct representatives of the monarch, the ruling power represented that which sought to tyrannize over the subject, and not until the struggle had resulted in the violent death of one King, the dethronement of another, and the establishment on the throne of Britain of a new line of monarchs, by parliamentary title, did the contest cease. The fiction that the King rules by Right Divine was swept away. Since 1688 it has had no recognition in British Dominions.

The King sits upon his throne by virtue of an Act of Parliament—put there by the people's representatives—and the people have embodied in the laws the conditions upon which they are content to be governed. He is as much bound to respect these conditions as his subjects are to obey the laws. He has no rights that the law does not give him. He can act only as the law permits him to act. This, then, constitutes our liberty: liberty ordered and regulated by law, and the subjection of all our rulers to the law, which prevents arbitrary interference with rights of person or property. Untold sacrifices, suffering, and self-denial, extending over centuries, have brought about this condition of affairs and consolidated these principles that constitute the birthright of everyone born in British Dominions or any of the countries where British principles of liberty have spread.

ABSURD VIEWS.

When, therefore, one reads, as we did some time ago, that ~~na~~ an officer in the British Army suggested at a public meeting held in the city of London, that King George should dissolve Parliament and take command of the Army—in other words, that the King should at one stroke destroy the whole fabric of British Constitutional Liberty, the fruit of centuries of struggles and bloodshed, civil war and revolution—one wonders what kind of a conception such an individual must have of the constitution of his country. In connection with such a suggestion it may be desirable to call attention to two facts.

First, that once before in the history of England a King attempted to do the same thing. It cost him his head and cost his family the throne of England, and sent them forth wanderers and fugitives in foreign lands.

Second, that the entire British Empire to-day is fighting to the last gasp for the very constitutional liberty which it is suggested should be destroyed and thrown away at one stroke by a voluntary act.

I observed the other day a somewhat similar suggestion in a supposedly responsible newspaper, viz: that His Royal Highness the Duke of Connaught should take charge of the Canadian Militia and all preparations and work connected with our participation in the war. It was suggested by this paper that we were not doing enough, and the idea seemed to be that if His Royal Highness were to turn our Government out of office and take charge of the business of the country himself, he could, after the fashion of an Oriental despot, decide for himself what we should do, and forthwith require us to do it.

It is somewhat difficult to speak with patience of such suggestions as these. One would think that every school-boy knew that, as the representative of His Majesty, the Duke of Connaught occupies an exalted position as the political and social head of our Government, but that as such head his executive functions must be exercised by the advice of his Ministers. The government of this country is carried on by the members of the Cabinet chosen by Parliament, which, in turn, is elected by the people. The Crown and its representatives in this country cannot legally perform any executive act whatever, except upon the advice of the Ministers. The only way that His Royal Highness the Duke of Connaught could take charge of Canadian military business would be to resign the Governor-Generalship and be appointed by Sir Robert Borden as Minister of Militia, and get elected to the House of Commons, or appointed to the Senate. The people have control of the public business in Canada. It took two generations and a rebellion to secure that control, and we are likely to keep it now that we have it. No, let there be no trifling with the foundations of liberty. Let there be no hysterical calls by newspapers and publications for dictatorships, kingly or otherwise. The people of the British Empire long since took their government into their own hands, and so long as the Empire exists they will retain the control and maintain the principles of liberty, which are their birthright.

“WHAT WE HAVE WE HOLD.”

One characteristic of the British people is that what they get they hold. No less tenacious are the Dutch. The English are brave and liberty-loving, but so long ago as the time of Julius Cæsar, he said, speaking of the northern tribes of Europe, “The bravest of these are the Belgæ.” In the swamps and morasses of the territory which now constitutes Holland and Belgium there dwelt a race of men as brave and as devoted to liberty as any known in the history of the world. Though often conquered, they have never wholly submitted. Again and again the spirit of liberty raises her head amongst them and commands the deathless devotion of their people. By reason of a geographical accident, their country has been the battle ground of Europe. They have been harried and torn, slaughtered and plundered since the days of Cæsar, but their spirit has never been broken. Never were they more determined than they are now. The remnant of the Belgian Army fights desperately for the last little strip of its native soil; while the Hollanders, more fortunate as yet, persistently maintain their neutrality in the face of their gigantic neighbour.

England was more fortunate, not because her people were braver than the others, nor more fond of liberty, though sufficiently distinguished in that respect, but because the English channel flowed between them and their would-be oppressors. This is the true reason why British liberty has persisted without a break. Cradled behind the watery rampart, the British nation has developed its proud position as the home of liberty, and has carried the spirit of freedom to the ends of the earth.

Leaving aside for the present the case of Switzerland, which is not altogether analogous, Holland was first established in modern Europe as a sovereign country, recognized by other nations as such, and governing itself in accordance with the principles of constitutional liberty. Eighty years later England attained the same position. From these two little countries, therefore, came the constitutional liberties which we enjoy, and from them have sprung the great communities of the world where liberty is regarded as the main principle of the existence of the community: The United States, Canada, South Africa, New Zealand, and Australia.

A THING OF YESTERDAY.

Apart from these communities which have sprung directly from Britain and Holland, liberty, so far as the modern world is concerned, is but a thing of yesterday. Here is the record: In our own nation, if we date from Alfred the Great, during the period of eleven hundred years, liberty has been enjoyed for about two hundred and thirty years. The United States has been free since its national existence commenced—about one hundred and forty years. France enjoyed a brief period of liberty during the Revolution, lost it again, and has only really been free since 1870—about forty-five years. Italy has been a free country in part since 1861, as to the whole since 1871—about forty-four years. The freedom of the Balkan States, though their constitutional liberty in the face of the powers of their rulers is a question of some doubt, is only a matter of recent years.

How did this principle of liberty fare before the birth of Dutch and British freedom? I will go back, not too far, but far enough. Out of the dim vistas of the past there emerged, centuries before the Christian era, a collection of little States, of which one at least has been the wonder of all succeeding ages—Athens, the teacher, the instructress of the world in Art, Philosophy, and Literature. In Athens we find the first Sovereign State known to authentic history which enjoyed what we regard as constitutional liberty, a liberty fully controlled and regulated by law, and government by the consent and act of the governed. It was a small State. So far as we know it never had more than 250,000 free citizens, yet its fame has lasted throughout the ages, and will last as long as the written word is transmitted upon this planet to succeeding generations. Athens, then, the exemplar of the world in political liberty, art, philosophy, poetry, and literature, rose under her purely democratic government to the height of position and influence. She led the fight which turned into ignominious defeat the millions of Persia who sought to enslave Greece. She extended her influence over distant lands, and spread the beneficent influence of her civilization over most of the then known world. What followed? Disunion and degeneration. Greece was torn by internal dissension. Her people became

fatally sunk in languor and sloth, disdainful of the hardship, toil, and self-sacrifice of military life, and fell away from the practice of primitive virtue.

A VAIN EFFORT.

Philip of Macedonia built up his half-barbaric power. He and his son, Alexander the Great, subjugated Greece. Demosthenes sought in vain, in his peerless orations, to rouse his countrymen. Looking back at the situation now it seems beyond doubt that it was quite well within the power of Greece at that time, if militant and determined, to have broken the power of Philip and retained her own freedom. She failed through the supineness and indolence of her own citizens. Could the Greeks of that day have seen into the future, could they have beheld the fearful price that the people of their nation in succeeding ages were to pay for their sloth and cowardice, it is more than probable that such a terrible vision would have converted every Greek citizen into a hero such as those who fought at Thermopylæ, at Marathon, and at Salamis. But they could not see into the future, and they did not realize their crime against civilization.

The Macedonians triumphed. Mark the date—B.C. 336. Greece remained in subjection to the Macedonians to B.C. 198, when she was temporarily liberated by the Roman Army. She was practically absorbed by Rome in 149 B.C., and from that date, 149 B.C., until the year 1832—two thousand years—she never knew one hour of liberty. Two thousand years of slavery was the price paid for the few short years of self-indulgence and indolence. During the whole of that time, dating from the beginning of the decline of Rome, historians inform us that the only mention of Greece to be found in history is when it tells of the people of Greece being slaughtered or being sold into slavery. Twenty centuries of blood and outrage was the price paid for the loss of liberty.

By the time Augustus, the first emperor, was of middle age, Rome was monarch of the world. It has been sadly but truly said that from that time, until some centuries later, when the vigour of Roman power became relaxed, there was no accessible spot in the wide world to which any man could flee and remain in safety after provoking the anger of the ruler of Rome. Think of

the fact, that the personal whim of one man, or any of his lieutenants, meant that nowhere in the world could a man, however eminent his character or worth, find a safe resting place. Rome extended over the whole known and accessible world, the most perfect, the most unassailable, the most complete despotism ever known. The life, the religion, the person, the property of the individual were at the mercy of the whim or passing passion of the individual who happened, for the time being, to sit on the Imperial throne. So the world went until the conquering power of the Roman Empire was lost. Corruption ate away its strength, and the mighty organism began to crumble. Then, to despotism succeeded anarchy and confusion. The other day I read the chronological table of important events prefixed to Lord Bryce's great work on the Holy Roman Empire. I commend it to the attention of anyone who thinks that the normal condition of the world is one of peace and freedom. It is worth while to read it; it will not take more than half an hour, but the impression it leaves will last a lifetime.

From the time the Roman Empire began to crumble, Europe, Central Asia, and Northern Africa, most of the then known world, was a seething cauldron of war, slaughter, conflict, and slavery. One militant conqueror after another arose, conquered, slaughtered, and enslaved, and passed away.

THE RISE OF MOSLEMISM.

Mohammed was born in A.D. 569. He founded the empire which is to-day standing at bay in the Dardanelles. While fighting on the one hand for his existence with a courage and tenacity which has never failed since the first Mohammedan army took the field, the Turk, true to his traditions, is taking on the Armenian a terrible revenge for the troubles which he is obliged to endure. There has perhaps never been a nation which deserves so little at the hands of the rest of the world as Turkey. The Turk has personally many admirable qualities. As a ruler, he has none. His ways are the ways of the brute and assassin. When the Turk is assailed from the outside he seeks his revenge by pillage and massacre upon his unfortunate and defenceless Christian subjects. In a century and a half from the birth of Mohammed his followers had conquered most of the accessible portions of Asia, all of Northern Africa, all of Spain, parts of

the present country of France, and parts of Italy. Unbroken by the Crusades, they went steadily forward to the conquest of all Asia Minor, Constantinople, and a substantial portion of South-eastern Europe. They only stopped at the walls of Vienna.

Meanwhile a Mongol monarchy arose in China, led by Jenghis Khan. It conquered the whole of Northeastern Asia, swept over the countries in the west of Asia, entered Russia, and again and again sacked and plundered the cities of Russia and Poland, slaughtering the unfortunate inhabitants, and leaving only desolation in its train. This happened in the thirteenth century. It is beyond doubt that at that time the original Russians had achieved a high degree of civilization. This civilization was practically destroyed by the Mongol eruption. Reading a late book on Russia, by a well-informed Russian writer, I find that he attributes the backwardness of Russia, as compared with Western Europe, mainly to the fact of this invasion, and declares that the racial characteristics of the old Russian nation were terribly degraded by the mixture of Mongol blood. How little did the inhabitants of peaceful and prosperous Russia imagine that from far-distant and unknown lands a destroying horde of savages would come to bring fire and sword, tyranny and devastation to their homes. Yet we are feeling the effect of that invasion in Europe to-day. Throughout the whole history of Europe, from the downfall of Rome until modern times, we scarcely get one glimpse of light. Here and there communities broke into spasmodic rebellion against their aggressors, and temporarily won their freedom, only to be crushed again and to have their fetters rivetted more tightly. It is said that a measure of freedom prevailed in Portugal and Spain prior to the time of Ferdinand and Isabella, but if so it was of a most limited and incomplete character, and was effectually smothered under Philip II and the Inquisition.

"THE EVERLASTING LEAGUE."

In 1291 the men of the three Swiss cantons of Uri, Schwytz and Nidwalden (Unterwalden) met and joined hands in a covenant known as the Everlasting League. They covenanted to join themselves in a battle to the death, taking no account of life or happiness. It was a league to fight against the Austrian tyranny, and to achieve freedom. They achieved that

freedom. For three hundred years their condition was that of war or preparation for war. Meanwhile they tilled their little fields and herded their little flocks upon the mountain sides. But they never lost their freedom. It has persisted to this day. It was not in our modern sense a country enjoying constitutional liberty, because their cantons did not then constitute a country recognized as a nation by other nations. But the people of these cantons were free, and they governed themselves. They cast out the oppressor, and they kept him out. No foreign tyrant has even since got a permanent foothold in those cantons. Napoleon's bravest soldiers gave it up in despair. Whether that heroic little country will be able to hold its place against the might of Germany and Austria, under modern conditions, depends greatly upon the outcome of the present war. Should the Allies be defeated, there is little ground for the belief that Switzerland would be permitted to flaunt its freedom in the eyes of the victorious conquerors. What was the price paid by the men of Switzerland for their liberty? Centuries of practically perpetual war. They literally lived and slept with their arms, generation after generation. The liberties of Switzerland were fertilized by the blood of generations of her sons.

In the sixteenth century the empire of Charles the Fifth—Austria, the Netherlands, Spain, the Indies, and the New World—was the mightiest figure. It was a despotism. In all these lands there was not one man whose life and liberty were not subject to the whim of the Emperor. Nor, outside of Switzerland, was there in any other country in the world anything that could properly be called liberty. Certainly no one claimed that England under Henry the Eighth was a free country, when the tyrant's nod was sufficient to send anyone to the block. In an evil hour for himself and his family, Charles the Fifth undertook to force upon the citizens of the Netherlands, now known as Holland and Belgium, the abandonment of the reformed religion. Rebellion broke out. It lasted for forty years. What had begun as a religious persecution developed into a national war. Ruthless and arbitrary taxation was imposed upon the citizens of the Netherlands, and they were driven to desperation. The provinces in that territory which now constitute Belgium submitted and gave their adherence to Spain; but Holland

stood firm. That war has ever since stood in history as the most horrid example of brutality and outrage known to man.

THE BURGHERS OF THE NETHERLANDS.

The cities of the Netherlands were the emporiums of the trade of the world, famed for their greatness and opulence. They were sacked, looted, and destroyed. In desperation the people cut their dykes and flooded their country, and, inspired by the heroic example of William, Prince of Orange, they carried on the fight. Men driven from land by the armies of Spain and by the floods, took to their ships and, under the name of "The Beggars of the Sea," waged a desperate and unrelenting warfare on Spain. It took forty years. Most of the soldiers in their army when peace was declared had been born after the beginning of the war. But they won the fight. The plain burghers of these little submerged provinces brought the proudest monarch of the world to his knees, and, in 1609, Holland became the first permanently free constitutionally governed sovereign country in Europe since the days of Greece. With the exception of the short interval during which they were subject to Napoleon, the Dutch have maintained their freedom since that time; and now, like Switzerland, they look across at the German frontier and wonder whether they shall remain free, or if, as a result of their resistance to the aggression of Germany, the fate of Belgium shall be theirs also. Following the establishment of constitutional liberty in Holland came the English revolution, eighty years later. Looking back we can discern very clearly that the political education which stimulated the British people in their struggle for liberty was largely derived from the example of, and intercourse with, the stubborn burghers of Holland who had just closed the War of Independence by which the Dutch Republic had won its freedom from Spain. Beyond doubt the War of Independence in Holland stimulated, strengthened, and inspired the English patriots in their long fight against the exercise of tyrannical power by the Crown.

From these two revolutions sprang the liberties of the modern world. Those liberties are now challenged. Eighteen months ago anyone who said that the existence of constitutional freedom in the whole world was in danger would have been looked

upon as a lunatic. He would be a brave, and, I think, a very ignorant man who would deny the existence of the peril to-day.

ALIGNMENT OF NATIONS IN PRESENT WAR.

I have pointed out the genesis of modern liberty, the countries from which it sprang, the people who have made it theirs. Observe now the alignment of the nations in the present contest.

Upon one side stands England, the Mother of Parliaments, the cradle of modern liberty. France is free and steadily pursuing the highest ideals of enlightened civilization. Italy, rescued from the tyranny and misrule of centuries, is now a free, progressive, and constitutionally governed country. Finally, Russia, not at present free—not yet admitted to the sacred circle of the Immortals—but struggling towards the light.

On the other side, Austria, for centuries a bloodthirsty tyrant and oppressor. Turkey, whose name is the synonym for misrule and oppression, and whose answer to the demand for reform is massacre. Germany, which has elevated the lack of freedom into a virtue, and consecrated all the powers of despotism to the suppression of individual liberty.

We stand as the heirs of the struggles of all the past. In all this wide world every man who has struggled and fought and laid down his life for liberty has done something for us. He has contributed something to the ultimate triumph of the liberty which we enjoy. Free men in this strife should know no national boundary. The cause is one, and the people bound together by the memory of every contest that has been raised in its behalf, no matter in what country or at what time. It is a vital struggle. It is the same fight that has gone on since the Macedonians destroyed the liberty of Athens, only to-day it is on a more gigantic scale than ever before.

The voice of history from its dawn to the present day speaks in a tone so clear, so decided, so unmistakable that the simplest child cannot fail to comprehend it. What is the lesson which this voice inculcates but the lesson, "The free man's arms must aid the free man's laws." That, as the mailed fist is aimed against the champions of liberty, only the

mailed fist can effectively answer. The passion of man for tyrannizing over man is perpetual and ineradicable. There is but one remedy, and that is for the free nations of the world to sleep on their arms always ready for the contest, determined if need be to fight to the death. No nation ever won its liberty except at the price of blood. No nation has ever preserved its liberty except by freely shedding its blood whenever necessary. We on this continent are not exempt from this law. We have, by force of accidental circumstances, been exempt up to the present time, but our short and uneventful history is but a moment in the span of time. The period of exemption from peril is over. We are in the vortex of the nations of the world, and our hands must keep up our heads. The oceans which flow around our shores are no longer a protection; rather in modern conditions of navigation and of armaments are they an open and an easy means of access.

THE BLESSINGS OF FREEDOM.

It is a fact that in all the past history of the world there is not one-hundredth part of one per cent of the men who have been born into this world who have ever known the blessings of freedom. It is only in these latter days that the principles of liberty have triumphed, and that nation after nation has seen the light. But let there be no mistake. The triumph of liberty over the world will not be permitted to be achieved without a fearful contest. We are in the throes of that contest now. Co-operation, self-sacrifice, these will win the day if put forth to their utmost limit. We are engaged now in such a contest as has often convulsed the world in past times, but never has the contest been waged upon so gigantic a scale, and never have the consequences been so far-reaching as at the present time.

Liberty trembled in the balance when the Macedonian phalanx broke the army of Greece; it was lost. It trembled in the balance when the Roman legions set out to conquer the world; it was lost. It trembled in the balance when the Spaniards sought to overwhelm Holland; but freedom triumphed. It trembled in the balance when the Spanish Armada sailed up the English Channel; again freedom triumphed. It trembled

in the balance again when Napoleon, conqueror of all Europe, except Russia and Britain, stood on the shore of the English Channel and prayed for a dark night and a fair wind so that he could change the history of the world; again freedom triumphed. It trembles now, more surely, more desperately, and more critically than ever before. Modern ships of war and modern armaments have annihilated difficulties of communication. The ocean is no longer a barrier. No country in the world is safe if Germany and Austria triumph. In the days of Napoleon the triumph of the European conqueror meant little outside of Europe. The difficulties and dangers of the sea were a mighty protection. Those days are over. Modern ships and modern armament enable the most distant land to be attacked with the same efficiency as the next-door neighbour. We have not yet realized the effect upon the liberties of the world of modern ships and modern armament. When Julius Cæsar invaded Britain he crossed the Channel with his army in open boats. Eighteen centuries later Napoleon could devise no better method. When his army was collected on the shores of the Channel preparatory to the invasion of England, the resources of Europe could furnish no better transport than flat-bottomed wooden scows, propelled by sails and sweeps. He was at the mercy of wind and weather. There was not a musket in his army that could kill a man at a greater distance than one hundred yards. His cannon were toys as compared with the ordnance of our day.

A MIGHTY REVOLUTION.

One hundred years have wrought a mighty revolution. The floating fortress dreadnought of to-day is practically independent of wind and weather. It has been shown conclusively, in the past year, that skill and bravery count for little against superior weight of armament. Let us make this point a little more concrete.

If, when the Dutch rebelled against the Spanish monarchy, and kept up the fight for forty years and finally won, ships and guns had been developed as they are to-day, the Dutch resistance would not have lasted one year. They would have been pounded to pieces.

If, when Napoleon sought to invade England, with the resources of Europe at his feet, he had had command of modern

ships and guns, he would have been in England in six hours, and Britain assuredly would have fallen. Britain had no army to face the veterans who had conquered Europe. Skill, bravery, tenacity are all necessary, but they are of little or no value without adequate preparation.

What, then, is the lesson? The lesson is that if the conqueror once gets possession even for a week, once gets control of the docks and yards where the ships are built and repaired, and the factories where the rifles, cannon, and shells are manufactured, the war is over. No human power will avail to resist him or to oust him from possession. The bravest nation in the world to-day is absolutely dependent for its national existence upon its arsenals and its factories. There can be no longer the spectacle of a brave nation standing at bay against the conqueror which has planted its force in her midst. The bravest men in the world in such a case are no better than naked savages. What does this mean? It means that no chances can be taken; that once lost, liberty and independence, so far as this generation is concerned, are gone forever.

It may be that, when the war began, Germany sought no more than to cripple France and Russia, to the end that it might be prepared for a future contest against Britain. To-day it is clear that her vision goes further. She looks to world dominion. How she will use that dominion let Belgium answer. We have read from childhood of nations having been conquered and carried away in slavery. To-day the peasants of France and Belgium by the thousand have been transported to Germany, there to labour under conditions of veritable slavery. It is not a case of the dim distant past. It is happening now to people who, but a short eighteen months ago, were citizens of proud and happy nations, pursuing their daily avocations with no thought of danger.

THE RALLYING CALL.

This is the condition that confronts us. What then is our duty? It is to give ourselves wholly and unreservedly to the task until it is accomplished. It is a solemn and an awful duty, but it cannot be shirked or avoided. An insistent public opinion has stilled the voice of partisan strife. Nowhere in the British Dominions has the Government received more

loyal and unquestioning support than in Canada. We may even claim that the factiousness and hysterical criticism which has marked a portion of the British press has been notably absent from ours. Criticism there will be, and within bounds it is useful. Factiousness and political contention there must not be. In times of grave national peril a factious press is the gravest danger of democracy. We have largely escaped it, and more and more we are becoming impressed with the seriousness of our task and the necessity for union and consolidation of effort.

The last call has gone forth in Britain for more men. The nation has been warned that its last resources must be staked if victory is to be achieved. Victory is still far away. The toll has been heavy, and it will be heavier. Few of us will altogether escape. But better the toll than failure, which will lose all. Let no one regret that husband, brother, or son is at the front. Rather let us emulate the Spartan and the Roman mothers in the days of their primitive virtues, and send forth our sons to the fight, if need be to death, in the noblest cause in which men have ever contended.

Whatever may be the history of Canada, and I pray that it may be a brilliant and noble one, there will be no brighter page written in that history than the page which tells of the free men of Canada taking their place on the soil of Europe; stained with the blood and tears of centuries, to give their lives for the sacred cause of freedom.

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