

Scotland and Her Memories

An Address

DELIVERED AT MONTREAL, HALLOWE'EN, 1890,

BY

HON. GEO. W. ROSS.

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HON. GEO. W. ROSS,

Minister of Education for Ontario,

AT MONTREAL,

ON

HALLOWE'EN, OCTOBER 31st, 1890.

S. C. STEVENSON,

President of the Caledonian Society, in the Chair.



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AM not a little depressed to-night by the thought that in inviting me to address you the committee was under the impression I was a native of Scotland, and so, fully accredited to speak for the land "of brown heath and shaggy wood." I may as well confess, therefore, at the outset, that I have not that high honor. Years before I was born, my parents bade adieu to their native glens in Ross-shire, took ship at Cromarty, tossed for nine weeks on the broad Atlantic, floated past Montreal,

then a village of a few thousand inhabitants, pushed their way westward, how or why I can hardly tell, raised their log cabin in the wilderness, and at some interval between then and now I appeared, Celtic in descent, Celtic in language, associations and sympathies, in fact Celtic in everything except latitude and longitude. These are my credentials—the best I have to offer. That they are not better is no fault of mine. Under these somewhat untoward circumstances, I shall, therefore, speak to you to-night, not as a Scotsman “to the manor born,” but as a Scottish Canadian, and I shall do so under the conviction, that if there is a single person before me who could not claim by right of birth an interest in all the glorious deeds of a Scottish ancestry, he would prefer as his next choice an interest as a Canadian of Scottish descent.

In considering what would be appropriate and useful to say, it occurred to me that from the standpoint of a Scottish Canadian, I might venture upon your indulgence while I attempted to show in what respect Canadians might profit by the ex-

ample of that nation and people, one of whose ancient festivals we are commemorating to-night.

First, permit me to say that Scottish sentiment is pre-eminently PATRIOTIC.

What is there in Scottish character that will not let die the memories of the old land; that will bring together as by some magic spell her sons and daughters to witness Scottish games, partake of Scottish haggis, dance Scottish strathspeys and tullochgorms, listen to Scottish bagpipes, drink Scottish drinks, and defiantly sing "The cock may crow and the day may dawn, but aye we'el taste the barley bree." Of course, the cynical answer to that question would be "clannishness." A more polite answer would be "sentiment," the true answer is "love of country"—a love so many-sided and so firmly bound to the object of its affection, that "time but the impression deeper makes, as streams their channels deeper wear."

What are the characteristics of this love of country?

I. It is like Scottish humor, *undemonstrative*. It

never expresses itself in superheated declamation, or in boisterous huzzas, or in untimely protestations of loyalty. It assumes that a Scotsman *must* love his country, because it is his OWN, in the abstract, as the metaphysician would say. It was from this standpoint that Sir Walter Scott wrote :—

“ Breathes there a man with soul so dead,
Who never to himself hath said
This is my own, my native land?”

As much as to say, can it be possible that any man—I mean any Scotsman—would FORGET his native country. And if there should be such a monstrosity, the poet, to show his detestation and contempt for him, hurls at him the strongest invective perhaps in the English language :—

“ The wretch centred all in self,
Living, shall forfeit fair renown,
And doubly dying, shall go down
To the vile dust from whence he sprung,
Unwept, unhonored and unsung.”

2. *It is æsthetic.* A Scotchman, loves his country because to his mind “it is beautiful of situation and the joy of the whole earth.” So fervid is this

admiration, that, exile him as you may, he will sing with passionate enthusiasm of "Scotland's howes and Scotland's knowes and Scotland's hills forever."

No doubt this love of Scotland as a land of "lake and mountain," has been intensified by the character of Scottish poetry, almost every stanza of which, from Ossian to Sir Walter Scott, is redolent of the heather. Whatever feeling or passion or sentiment is appealed to, field and flood, glen and mountain, are placed under tribute to give it a perspective, which adds immeasurably to its intensity. Does the poet seek a trysting place for the heart-sick lover? Then he must ask him "to breathe out the tender tale beneath the milk-white thorn that scents the evening gale."

Does he want a threnody for joys departed never to return? Then nature must supply the key note even if he has to reproach her for her beauty, and so he cries :

"Ye banks and braes o' bonny Doon,
How *can* ye bloom sae fresh and fair?
How *can* ye chant ye little birds?
And I sae weary fou o' care."

Even the tender memories of "Auld Langsyne" are embroidered with "gowans fine," and the ruthless ploughshare is garlanded with daisies. Who would not love a land whose native beauty is rainbowed with such poetry and romance?

3. *It is heroic.* To the Scotsman, his native land is essentially a land of heroes. What if her hills are bleak? They have ever been the abode of freemen. What if her glens are wild and dark? They have ever been the shelter of liberty and virtue. Not in the number of his clansmen, nor in the serenity of his Scottish skies, nor in the fertility of Scottish soil does he boast, but in the manly fibre of his race. He envies no land its millionaires, or its balmy atmosphere, or its waving cornfields, so long as he can claim for Scotland the place of honor as the representative of manliness and independence of character. Few countries can boast of such a long succession of heroic men. From that morning in June, 1314, when Bruce led forth his 30,000 valiant Celts to meet the mightiest array of English soldiers that ever wielded battle-

axe on Scottish soil, down to the time that Sir Colin Campbell relieved Lucknow and saved our Indian Empire, the long procession of Scottish heroes has never been broken.

Nor is it on their own native heath alone that their sturdy tramp has been heard. They have gone out to all the ends of the earth as missionaries, as soldiers and as explorers, and have shown by their energy, perseverance and endurance how difficulties are to be overcome, how empires are to be subdued, victories achieved and national honor vindicated. Crimean turf may cover them, but Alma and Balac-lava can never be forgotten. In swamp and jungle Livingstone may lie down to die, but his dust mingles with that of England's proudest monarchs in Westminster Abbey. China and Hindostan may still worship the mysticism of Vishnu and Confucius, but Burns and Duff will be remembered "while circling time moves round in an eternal sphere."

In the presence of these elements of Scottish patriotism what thoughts should fill our minds to-

night? May we not ask ourselves? Do we love Canada with the deep, strong, fervent loyalty, "still as the breeze, but dreadful as the storm" which characterized our forefathers? Is this goodly land of ours, so richly blessed with peace and plenty, dear to us as were the bleak hills of Scotland to her kilted clansmen? Are we cultivating that independence of character which has made every page of Scottish history the biography of heroism? Do we cherish those great virtues of domestic affection, the sanctity of home and respect for parental authority, which make the peasant's cottage a stronger defence of national morality than standing armies or battalions of police. If not, then in vain for us has Scotland been the home of freedom. In vain for us has Bruce fought his battles or Wallace shed his blood. In vain for us has martyr or covenanter died that conscience may be free.

But why indulge in gloomy forebodings? Look over this beautiful land from east to west, and what do we behold? In a panoply of green, sheltered from burning suns by the warm mists of the

Atlantic, and laved by waters which no tyrant hand has yet subdued, mark the fair form of the youngest province of our great Dominion. Westward follow the march of empire, and whether it be where the Bay of Fundy breaks with incessant roar on two Provinces ; or where the St. Lawrence sweeps with imperial majesty past the frowning bastions of Quebec ; or where four lakes woo like jealous lovers the fair Province of Ontario ; or where, bowing beneath the luxuriance of nodding corn-fields, Manitoba invites the halting emigrant ; or where, looking towards the Orient, Columbia smiles amid her golden sands ; is this not a land of wealth and beauty and glorious fruition? Has Scotland its sylvan lochs that shimmer in the sunshine and mirror the richness of heather and gorse and fir tree? And have we not lakes as beautiful as artist ever painted, or poet longed to see? Have Scotland's sons made their native land glorious by their heroic deeds? Then why should not we, who are the heirs to all the ages, and with Scottish blood in our veins to boot, make this land the home of independence, the

very Valhalla of heroes? Has Scotland shown that out of an admixture of alien races—Danish, Scandinavian and Norman—with all their various dialects and tribal jealousies, she could form a nation with an individuality of character unmistakably her own; and shall not we too, whether of Saxon, Celtic or Norman blood, whether speaking the language of Northumbria or of Gaul, laying aside all jealousies of race and creed, work out a Canadian nationality as strong, as self-reliant, and as manly as ever wore the Scottish tartan, or tramped the Scottish heather.

Second. Scottish sentiment is DEMOCRATIC.

We owe much to the democratic spirit of Scotland. Even under the Government by clans, Scotland was democratic. Though Chiefs were largely hereditary, and the titular leaders in peace and war, no great enterprise was ever undertaken without consulting the heads of the various families composing the clan. All questions of moment were settled by majorities, every man having the right to vote.

But although manhood suffrage existed in Scot-

land over one thousand years ago, it was not until the people had accepted the Presbyterian form of worship that their democratic tendencies asserted themselves fully. The two principles of government for which they contended were: First, that the secular authorities had no power to bind the conscience in regard to religion; and—Second, that the *people* in the matter of church polity were sovereign, not the *state*. They believed Presbyterianism to be government by the people and through the people, sanctioned by God himself, and, having once adopted it, they clung to it with characteristic tenacity. The Confession of Faith and the form of worship which it prescribed, was on this account peculiarly dear to them. It was framed by their own representatives, that is by a general assembly of their own church, and, in defending it, they were simply defending the constitution which they had made for themselves. This fact should not be lost sight of in studying the history of Scotland's religious struggles. I do not desire to depreciate in the slightest degree those stalwart fathers of the

church, who, for conscience' sake, were prepared to sacrifice their lives rather than deny their convictions. There were many such. But nevertheless the fact, that the Presbyterianism of Scotland was democratic in its administration, strengthened its hold upon the affections of the people. When Jenny Geddes hurled her "cutty stool" at the head of the Dean of Edinburgh, in St. Giles' church, over 200 years ago, she was simply making a practical protest in the name of the people of Scotland against the assumption of any man, no matter how dignified, reading prayers in "her lug" without her will and consent, that is without having been appointed thereto by some Presbytery or Synod chosen by the people. And when men and women, without regard to rank or station, signed the Solemn League and Covenant in Grayfriar's Churchyard, what was it but a declaration by the people of Scotland that no monarch, not even a Stuart clansman, should dictate to them in religious matters.

For years the battle raged around this point.

Now it was Knox, representing the people, resisting the Queen and the nobles. Then it was Andrew Melville, representing the people, resisting the episcopacy, but in every case it was the people resisting the encroachments of the State upon their right to think and judge for themselves in religious matters.

My historical ramblings so far have been of a religious character, or, to change the simile, I have been considering the warp of Scotland's history. What kind of woof was the active shuttle of political life weaving into this wondrous democratic web? The growth of Presbyterianism in Scotland stimulated the growth of Puritanism in England, and both made common cause against the tyranny of the Stuart kings. Then followed the defeat of Charles I., his execution at Whitehall, and the triumph of democracy under the Protectorate. Then came the revolution of 1688 by which the responsibility of the King to the House of Commons, that is to the people, was fully guaranteed. One hundred years later and a new empire with the

sovereignty of the people as its corner stone was founded on this side of the Atlantic. "The first public voice in America for dissolving all connection with Great Britain," says Bancroft, "came not from the Puritans of New England, the Dutch of New York, nor the planters of Virginia, but from the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians. They carried with them to the New World the creed, the spirit of resistance and the courage of Covenanters." In another fifty years we have the Catholic Emancipation Act, which meant that the conscience of the people should be free. Four years after, the abolition of slavery throughout the British Empire, which meant that the mind and body should be free. Thirteen years later we had the repeal of the corn laws, which meant that the people's bread should be free. Then Reform Bills, one, two and three. Then the disestablishment of the Irish Church, Ballot Acts, Franchise Acts—all the fruit of that tree of liberty whose tender roots were watered by Scottish blood and guarded by Scottish hearts that never quailed. And from that day till

now, the circles have been widening with the circuit of the sun. Despotisms have been crumbling on every continent. Monarchs once haughty and supercilious have become deferential and conciliatory. The mastership of the throne has been transferred to the ballot box. The divinity that formerly hedged in the King now hedges in the electorate. The royalty of the throne has blossomed into the royalty of the citizen. In every clime and on every continent the enquiry has gone forth—from Russia to Japan, from the Transvaal to Brazil—"What constitutes a State?" and the answer comes back laden with the pæans of emancipated humanity:—

“ Not high-raised battlements or labored mound,
Thick wall, or moated gate ;
Not cities proud, with spires and turrets crown'd
Not bays and broad-arm'd ports,
Where laughing at the storm, proud navies ride ;
Not starr'd and spangled courts,
Where low-brow'd baseness wafts perfume to pride.
No, men, high-minded men,
With powers so far above dull brutes endued,
In forest, brake or den,
As beasts excel cold rock and brambles rude
Men who their duties know,
But know their rights, and, knowing, dare maintain.

May I ask the citizens of Canada, the uncrowned kings who at the ballot-box express their sovereign will with regard to the destiny of a country one-hundred times the size of Scotland, if they concur in this definition of a State? If so, how many of them will bring to the discharge of their duty as electors the courage of those men who took their lives in their hands; men who fought bloody battles, defied principalities and powers, and even deposed Kings, that their children might enjoy what John Milton called "the liberty to know, to argue and to utter," according to the dictates of their own conscience. How many of them will guard the political honor of Canada, as they would guard their homes against the pestilence that wasteth at noonday, and repudiate every appeal to self interest if not consistent with the prosperity of the whole people? How many are prepared to act upon the advice given by Wolsey to Cromwell:—

" Let all the ends thou aim'st at be thy country's,
 Thy God's and truth's; then if thou fall'st, O Cromwell,
 Thou fall'st a blessed martyr."

Blessed country when the majority will so do.

Third. Scottish sentiment is PROGRESSIVE.

In dealing with this topic I will confine myself to the example of Scotland with regard to education. What were the principles kept in view by the founders of Scottish schools?

(1) They determined there must be at least one school in every parish, as much as to say, the whole people of Scotland must be educated irrespective of social position or creed. The parish schools were essentially national schools.

(2) There must be no religious obstacles to the education of the people. Long before a conscience clause was embodied in any Act of Parliament it was enjoined by the Assembly of the Presbyterian Church that "no instruction should be forced upon the children of Roman Catholics to which their parents or priests had objected." Protestants and Catholics for generations were educated side by side in Scottish schools.

(3) Poverty must be no barrier to the education required for citizenship, and so, in the case of poor children, education was *free* from time immemorial.

(4) There must be no shirking of the preparation necessary for citizenship. All must attend school. There are evidences of the principle of compulsory school attendance as far back as King James IV., (1494.)

(5) Education must be comprehensive. The Parish schools were more than elementary schools. They provided a good classical and mathematical education, and in conjunction with the universities furnished those facilities for that higher education without which a nation can no more attain to greatness than life can be sustained without oxygen. From their early youth thousands of peasant boys had their minds enriched with the poetry of Virgil and of Homer, with the writings of Tacitus or of Xenophon, with the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle.

What a noble record of wisdom and forethought this epitome of Scottish education contains. Think of it, national schools, liberty of conscience, compulsory attendance, classical academies, universities—a golden stairway from the peasant's door to the

temple of fame—an aureole of perpetual beauty covering the whole sky. Grand as are the laurels won by claymore and philibeg ; grand as was the fierce onset of the Highland hosts at Alma ; grand as was the heroic defence of Lucknow against the brutal Sepoy, to me the peasant boy who pushes his way through the Parish school and perseveres in the face of poverty and privation till laureated by his university is no less a hero than the scarred veterans of Alma or Lucknow.

And now let me ask what is education doing for us? Will those who are passing through our schools and universities be inspired with such devotion to their country that when they enter upon the great arena of citizenship they will bring to the contest the ripeness of Scottish scholarship, the clearness of Scottish intellect, and the solidity of Scottish character? I hope so. We will need them all in the keen race for national autonomy on which we have entered. If we are to hold the northern half of this continent, and hold it we must, or fill dishonored graves, every means by which the

resources of the country, mental as well as material, can be increased, must be utilized. Culture must be wedded to patriotism; science, to industry; morality, to energy; independence of character, to confidence in the future of Canada. What if an occasional storm-cloud does appear on the horizon? What if now and again a few white caps appear in the distance? What if every handful of corn planted by our fathers has not yielded an hundred fold? Let us not be fainthearted.

We are heirs to a vast estate and a still vaster history of conquest and renown. This "Greater Britain," this hardy scion of Anglo-Saxon stock, this forested Dominion must not pass from memory as did the mound-builders of the western prairies. The heroes who fell on the plains of Abraham say it must not be; the loyalists who preferred the freedom of her forests to the restraints of an alien civilization, say it must not be. The pioneers, who made her solitary places blossom as the rose, say it must not be. Citizen and soldier, sower and reaper of every nationality and creed,

say it must not be. Let us seize the inspiration of these mighty spirits, who, though dead, still speak to us from their urns. Let us by a law of succession stronger than Norman feudalism bind our children and our children's children to cherish liberty as did their Scottish ancestors, that Canada, so honored in her historic associations, may be equally honored in the courage, loyalty and devotion of her sons.