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# THE REVIVED SIGNIFICANCE OF THE INITIALS "U. E."

A PAPER

*READ BEFORE THE PIONEER AND HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF  
THE COUNTY OF YORK, JULY, 1892,*

BY

REV. DR. SCADDING.

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## THE REVIVED SIGNIFICANCE OF THE INITIALS "U. E."

Most of us have been very familiar from our boyhood with the initials "U.E." Certain persons amongst us used to be spoken of as "U.E.'s." A fuller phrase sometimes was that they were U.E. Loyalists, but there long remained in the minds of many of us, probably, a certain degree of indefiniteness as to what the expression really meant. We have become better instructed since. The U.E. Loyalists, as we all know now, were persons who during the contests in the British colonies of North America between the advocates of independence and their opponents sided with the latter party. They conscientiously felt that their duty to the crown of Great Britain absolutely forbade their taking up arms for the purpose of freeing themselves from the yoke of the Mother Country. With them the Unity of the Empire was a sacred thing. To dismember it, or to aid in dismembering it, was a kind of impiety. The feeling was evidently a relic of the old chivalrous times, when the land one lived in was in theory, according to feudal ideas, the property of the king, and it was a matter of honor for every faithful liege subject to shield his king from suffering any loss.

This strong feeling induced very many of the British colonists to sacrifice their possessions, and in many cases lucrative positions, rather than assent to the political principles which were becoming predominant around them. They accordingly abandoned the localities which had been the home of themselves and their forefathers as speedily as it was possible to do so, and betook themselves to other portions of the continent, where the British rule still continued to prevail. These were the United Empire Loyalists, and they found places of refuge in parts of what are now called the Maritime Provinces of Canada, as also along the northern shores of the St. Lawrence, eastward of Kingston, and on the Bay of Quinte, and on the westerly banks of the River Niagara. In all these localities the authorities of Great Britain provided lands for the loyal refugees and their families, where they might commence again the useful, but laborious, work of colonists. Wild lands, too, were allotted for the occupancy of others, who were desirous after the conclusion of the revolution still to preserve their allegiance to the British crown by emigrating peacefully from their former homes. Subsequent settlers in the Maritime Provinces and in the two Canadas learned to regard with much respect their predecessors in the good work of colonization, on account of the sacrifices which it was known they had made for conscience sake; and hence the peculiar reverence which used to attach itself to the term U.E. Loyalists in our younger days, and even to the initials U.E. taken independently.

I remember looking with a degree of awe, when quite a youth on what was called a U.E. right. The head of a U.E. family was entitled to draw, as the expression was, a two hundred acre lot of wild land for each child in his family. The certificate to the effect that any child was thus entitled, was what was termed a "U.E. right"; it was transferable and saleable, and it was one of these certificates that it was my chance once, when a mere lad, to become the possessor of for a very small sum, and which was afterwards disposed of for my benefit at a very small rate of profit; but I know that it secured to its worthy purchaser a two hundred acre lot in the township of Brock, converted by him into a productive farm, which at this moment in its entirety would be a little fortune.

The initials U.E. seem likely ere long to assume a fresh importance in Canadian history. It is curious to observe what a part initials somewhat like these have played in history elsewhere. These abbreviations in the form of initials have quite a place of their own among literary curiosities. They have been found convenient in conveying an idea which otherwise would require a multitude of words to express, and they often have the power of creating a certain degree of enthusiasm. The letters U.S. have often the same effect on the citizen of the United States as the sight of his star-spangled banner. They represent to him his country, as it were. He humorously interprets them sometimes by the homely expression "Uncle Sam"—a kindly impersonation of his country. I remember when aforesaid the initials U.C. had much the same effect on young minds among ourselves here in Canada. They had the power of exciting a degree of patriotic feeling as representing the old province of Upper Canada, an abbreviation now poorly supplied by the not very euphonious "Ont." for Ontario. These initials now survive amongst us only as a prefix to a well-known great public school or college, and as such are still, I am happy to say, regarded with a sentiment of affection by its alumni. You will often hear the expression "Old Upper Canada," meaning old Upper Canada College, uttered by them in a tone of fondness. I need not mention what a peculiar power the initials N.P. had in our political circles a few years since, and for that matter they possess much influence still. The maintenance of what is called the National Policy is without doubt a matter of weighty importance, not as promotive of independence of Great Britain, but only as tending to secure unity among ourselves as a people. At the present moment, as we all know, there are three initials exerting a considerable power throughout Canada, viz., C.P.R. Among the older clergy of Canada, the letters S.P.G. awaken to this day a feeling of reverence and gratitude. They are the initials of the ancient English Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, which did so much for the furtherance of the best interests of the British colonists years ago, both in Canada and throughout what is now

known as the United States. In London many years ago the initials O.P. represented a stirring controversy in connection with theatrical affairs. We have all doubtless heard of the O.P. riots, which were riots among the populace for the purpose of bringing about a return to the O.P., *i.e.*, the old prices demanded for admission to Covent Garden or Drury Lane. Among the French, during the period of the first empire, one initial sufficed, *viz.*, N., to stir the national spirit. Among the Romans the letters S.P.Q.R., initials of the Latin word signifying the senate and people of Rome, seen on their military standards, were a kind of sacred tetragrammaton, having a talismanic effect on the minds of the soldiers.

The ancient Jewish hero's name Judas Maccabæus, so inspiring to Hebrew soldiers of yore, was formed from the first letters of the words in a Hebrew sentence signifying in English: "Who is like unto Thee, O Lord, among the gods?"—words borne on their ensigns and bucklers in time of war.

Strange to narrate, our familiar hip, hip, hurrah! is said to have had an origin connected with the Jews. Hip, or more properly hep, it seems, is composed of the initials of the Latin words, "Hierosolyma est perdita," *i.e.*, "It is all over with Jerusalem"—the exulting cry of the mob of a mediæval city while assaulting and sacking the ghetto or quarter inhabited by the unfortunate Hebrews of the place. I could refer to other names and words in history of like origin; for example, in the reign of Charles II. the ill-sounding word cabal was formed out of the initials of the names of the king's ministers at a particular time, and was made use of accordingly.

In Hudibras the absurd monosyllable "smec" is used to bring ridicule on a large class of Puritan writers of the Cromwellian period. Since it appears, in short for "smectymnuus," a portentous word formed from the initials of the following writers: Samuel Marshall, Edmund Calamy, Thomas Young, Matthew Newcomen, William Spurstow. But to return to our subject. It seems to me, as I have said, to be very certain that in the near future the unity of the empire will again become a watchword, and perhaps a war cry, having reference to political interests of a far wider extent than those which exercised the souls of our predecessors, 1777. It may possibly once more afford a test of a man's political principles, a test of his fidelity to the crown of Great Britain as severe as it proved to many of our progenitors, in the old original thirteen colonies, afterwards forming the now well known United States of North America. The British public are beginning to open their eyes to the fact that the British Empire is a very magnificent one and quite worthy of being preserved in its integrity.

Confederation is the order of the day. The German Empire has recently unified itself. The Italian people have just been undergoing the same process to their great advantage. It would be too bad for the British Empire to begin to disintegrate just at the moment when other empires are so carefully consolidating themselves. Its extent is said on good authority to be at this moment that of three Europes, or, rightly speaking nine million square miles, with a population, English speaking or otherwise, of four hundred millions. This, of course, includes the great empire of India, several vast territories over which the British crown exercises a protectorate. This vast empire is said to be in receipt of revenues amounting to some two hundred and ten million pounds sterling, and controls half the seaborne commerce of the world. It is manifest that this is an empire which ought not recklessly to be broken up and abandoned. On the contrary, every patriotic British heart must desire its consolidation, and, if possible, its perpetuity. One portion of the great continent of North America has already been confederated. This has been one step in the direction of a general imperial confederation. The work of confederating other groups of British colonies in other quarters of the globe has been actively commenced with the same object in view. This has been done with no idea of transforming these groups into independent nations in the future, but only as preparatory to a general confederation of the whole of them into a great empire, still having the parent country as its headquarters and principal focus of the system. The moving spirits of this enterprise have been the Lords Rosebery and Carnarvon. The death of the latter nobleman, which has occurred during the composition of this paper, is a great blow to the good cause, but without doubt a competent successor will appear.

Each group of colonies is expected to follow the good example set by the Canadian Dominion. It is hoped that in all future time the globe will be girt, as it were, by a British belt—by a chain of nations of various areas and irregularly placed, all of British speech and British descent, entertaining identical ideas of liberty, social order and law, governing themselves by institutions derived in principle from the mother state and all in this way, notwithstanding considerable diversity, compacted together into a permanent unity engaged to stand by one another in time of need. We, of course, are subjected to trials in these respects to which our brethren in Australia and at the Cape are not exposed. The proximity of the great republic to the south of the Canadian Dominion creates a difference, but the difficulties arising from the difference may, we confidently hope, be surmounted through the wisdom of statesmen and diplomatists. Some scheme of a just and well regulated reciprocity will be devised; friendly feeling towards the old mother land will continue to grow among our neighbors, and all desire for incorporation on either side of our boundary lines will be happily extinguished.

The two great English-speaking empires of the world would be virtually one, and a perpetual amity between them will be obviously to the interests of both.

The meeting of the conjoint societies of the pioneers of the counties of Peel and York happening to take place this year on a day so closely following after Dominion day, when the patriotic sentiment is especially warm in young and old throughout Canada, I have thought it fitting to take up briefly the subject which has been employing our attention. Descended as so many are in both of our societies from the old U. E.'s, (as the expression is), inheriting as we do so largely a deep respect for the old U. E. principles, it will be expected of us, I think, and of our children, when the critical time shall come, that we shall present a very decided front against all who shall be engaged in any movement for the dismemberment of the great British Empire, and what I desire is that in the meantime all our members should take into consideration, as far as it may be in their power, the pros and cons for the great measure of Imperial Confederation which is now occupying the minds of so many. I do not think the matter should be thrust aside as an impracticable and visionary project. So far as the mother country is concerned we may be sure that the conditions propounded for a perpetual connection will be just, honorable, simple and worthy of most respectful attention. Hers will be an easy yoke after her experience in the past. We shall, none of us I am sure, feel willing to throw ourselves away; we shall, none of us, be found willing to abandon our status as British subjects and all the proud associations with the history of the British Empire. The unity of the empire, in a grander sense than that which inspired the enthusiasm of our forefathers, will again become a stirring watchword amongst us, and to the last we shall endeavor to deserve the name bestowed upon us by the poet laureate (Tennyson) when he spoke of us as that "True North,"—meaning the loyal people of that portion of this northern continent of America, who have continued to this day firm in their attachment to the British crown. The laureate, I may add, has, in another place, expressed in lively terms the genuine feeling of the mother country towards her sons scattered over the face of the globe. In the second stanza of his popular song entitled, "Hands All Round," he thus calls upon the British public at large to join in wishing prosperity to—

"All the loyal hearts who long  
To keep our English empire whole!  
    To all our noble sons, the strong  
New England of the southern pole;  
    To England under Indian skies,  
To those dark millions of her realm!  
    To Canada, whom we love and prize,  
Whatever statesman hold the helm."

These are words which we in common with our fellow-British subjects throughout the world welcome most cordially, and with them I shall conclude.

[End of *The Revived Significance of the Initials "U. E."*, by Henry Scadding]