

(March 25th, 1936)

## India and the Empire

BY LIEUT.-GENERAL SIR W. EDMUND IRONSIDE,  
K.C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O.

PRESIDENT BRACE:—Your Honor, Distinguished Guests and Gentlemen. On behalf of the members of The Empire Club of Canada, I am pleased indeed to have with us, His honor, the Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario, distinguished officers of Canada's military forces and the members of the Canadian Club. We are pleased to have you with us to join in doing honor to our distinguished guest today. Brigadier Elkins, C.B.E., D.S.O., Commanding Officer of District Number Two, is sitting at our head table and I am going to ask Brigadier Elkins to introduce our honored and distinguished guest.

BRIGADIER ELKINS:—Mr. Chairman, Your Honor, Gentlemen. First of all, I would like to thank the Empire Club for their hospitality today to myself and to many other officers of this District. We appreciate very much the opportunity of meeting General Ironside. It is seldom we have the opportunity of hearing an officer of such varied experience as the speaker today; and I am very sensible of the privilege I have in introducing him.

General Ironside has a very long and distinguished service and he is particularly able to speak on the subject which he has chosen today. General Ironside was commissioned in the Royal Artillery in 1899, served with distinction in the South African War, and after that war between that and the outbreak of the Great War, he served both at home and in India in many regimental staff appointments.

On the outbreak of the War he held the rank of Major. In 1916, when the 4th Canadian Division was formed, he was appointed to it as General Staff Officer and in that

capacity he became known to a large section of Canadians, many of whom are here today.

After that he joined the 99th Infantry Brigade and in 1918 he was appointed to command the Allied Forces at Archangel, and again came in contact with the Canadians.

In 1920 he commanded the Ismid forces, and in 1921 the British forces in Northwest Persia. From 1922 to 1930, he was Commandant of the Staff College at Camberley and for two years was in charge of the 2nd Division at Aldershot.

In 1928, he went to India for three years until 1931, and commanded the Meerut District. From 1931 until 1933, he was Lieutenant of His Majesty's tower of London, and in 1932, he was made a Colonel Commandant of the Royal Artillery.

In 1933, he again went to India, this time as a Quartermaster-General. He has just relinquished that post and is now on his way to England to take up the position of General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Eastern Command.

I have much pleasure in presenting to you, General Ironside.

GENERAL SIR WILLIAM IRONSIDE:—Mr. Chairman, Your Honor, Gentlemen. I thank you very much, indeed for the honor you have done me in coming here and I won't thank you any more, but I will start straight away on the subject.

Now, Gentlemen, I want to draw a picture to you of India and as if I were talking to people who know nothing about it.

Here, we have an enormous country which is filled with 350,000,000 people, at least, if not more. It is very rich and one of the few countries in the world which has got a surplus in its budget. That means a great deal in these days. It means that the country has got great richness in it, because if the years become good the budget will get better and better. It doesn't mean to say we have been skinning the people. Some people in some countries say the British have been skinning them. But the government of India spends its money in India, and if you only saw the

works that are being carried out, if you saw the railways, if you saw the irrigation—there is no irrigation in the world like theirs in India. The five great rivers in the Punjab in hot weather are drained completely dry, are taken away in canals, these five enormous rivers, and they go right through the whole of the Punjab. Such a thing is unknown in any other country. The roads in India are as good as anywhere. The motor traffic is increasing beyond all belief, and the country itself is rapidly approaching—what shall we say?—Civilization.

Now, I would like just to draw a comparison to you with South Africa. South Africa was held an alien nation to the Anglo-Saxon race and we fought them from 1870 until 1902, and the bitterness that was born against us was great. All that period it was really terrible to see the bitterness between the two races and then we settled down to what we soldiers thought would be a long occupation of the country with an enormous force. The police force that we started with was very large and we left some four divisions in the country, thinking we would stay there for years and years and years.

In 1908, six years later, Lord Milner came out and after a certain amount of talk and to our horror, the country was handed over and given autonomy. I remember exactly what the people said. We all said the same: Here you are—what have you done it all for? You have conquered this country, now you will have to reconquer it. Nothing will ever go right. Everything will fall down. We were really pessimists, we were all pessimists.

Well, now, in 1914, that was six years later, not only did the Union of South Africa put down a rebellion in their own country, a rebellion of their own people—that is, DeWitt and some of his friends had made a rebellion and it was put down by General Botha and Smuts. Now, they did that and it would have taken us a great deal more time to do it than it took them, but they sent a large force to German Southwest, and also to German East Africa, and also a large contingent to France.

Now, I ask you, was not that a justification of what we have done in 1908? And I, myself, lived through it right

up from 1899 until practically 1912 or '13, with one short interval in India, and I am quite sure what we are doing in India now is going to have the same result and we shall get the same willingness out of India, voluntarily, that we should not get if we did not give them autonomy, and I think the result will be the same.

Now, I don't say for one minute that the problem is the same. The old "hard-beat" Indian army officers will probably tell me I am wrong, but I have been back to India so many times with intervals in between, that I have seen a difference which perhaps he did not see; and the rate at which India is improving in every point of view is so extraordinary that I put my views against his. And men like Winston Churchill—I am glad to note that when he saw the thing had been passed and was finished and autonomy was to be given, he bowed, said, "Yes, I have had my fight. It is now done," and that, I hope, will be what each one of us will do in India; each one of the servants out there, because the hardest thing of all is going to be for the people actually in the Service out there, voting their own jobs away, because it means less jobs for Britishers and more for Indians and when you are in the machine, it is very hard to feel yourself being ground between the cogs. That will be our hardest thing.

Now, the difficulties in India are actually more than they would be in a country like Canada, or a country even like South Africa. The real reason is there is not one nation in India, there are several nations. There are over a hundred languages, some of them bearing no comparison to the others whatever. We had to make a language that would suit the whole country. Urdu is the language of the camp, and people talk that as a vernacular and whatever language you were born to, you talk that one with your parents; and it is most extraordinary to think we should have produced something which is not our own language. We didn't produce English. It showed our own diffidence. I think it would have been better if we had brought English in and made them do it. We brought in a language that was a mixture of Arabic, Persian, and a few other tongues, closer to their own vernacular.

There are not only these differences of language, coming from the different invasions which took place in India, but there are the religions. Now, the two main religions are, of course, Mohammedanism and Hinduism, and those two are, perhaps I might say, in the sort of state of A.D. 1600 in England. You go back to that date and think how the Catholics and Protestants were fighting; and I don't think in India the Hindus and Mohammedans are as bad now as we were in 1600, and they are getting better every day, but the spirits do light up on the slightest pretext—they light up and then you may have a row. And for that reason, you will find that the British troops will not leave India. They are necessary and any of you who have seen the British Tommy in a row, keeping the peace, will see what an inestimable thing it is to have some one like that. You will see him picking up a woman off the streets, who has thrown herself deliberately in front of a machine, a tank or a motor to be killed, in order just to show that she wishes to be killed; the Tommy picking her up and saying, "Here, old woman, you are better on the platform here," and he pulls her off. She doesn't understand what he says and he doesn't understand what she says. And he stands there, with the most awful epithets being poured on his head, perhaps he smiles and lights a fag—he goes on just the same.

There is very little shooting in India. There are other countries where they have to shoot and it is the most extraordinary thing, if you read the papers—we are the brutal—what shall I call it?—the brutal rulers of a downtrodden country.

A man told me the other day that the Maharajah Patiala was paying Mussolini a visit and Mussolini, among other things said to him, "Aren't you ready to throw off this awful oppression of England?" and Maharajah Patiala leaned forward, looked at Mussolini a moment, couldn't believe what he said, and then burst into a roar of laughter. Mussolini said, "What are you laughing at?" He said, "You." What better answer could he have given? Such a thing to a man like Maharajah Patiala—he couldn't understand it.

Where is the oppression? Here we are, going faster than most people think is possible to give them this auton-

omy. What can you do? Then Patiala said, "To me it is extraordinary to think a man running a country like Italy—he must have had some people in India at some time—could think we were oppressing them. His idea is shooting people right and left in the streets. I am perfectly certain there is less shooting in India than there is in America."

Well, now, our difficulties are largely composed of that religious difficulty and of the caste difficulty. As you know, caste is very rigid in India. A man is born to a certain rank of life and there he stays for life. If your father is a leather worker, (and to work in leather is a low thing in Indian religion, because they look on a cow as sacred and therefore it is rather low), you have got to stay there.

Then you get, what you call these untouchables. An untouchable may have been educated at Oxford and may be an M.A. of Oxford and a Doctor of Laws, and if he goes back to India he is still untouchable. Such a thing can't go on and you see lots of stories about untouchables. There are people who do the lower grade work in India, of course, but there is no chance for them to rise under the system of rigid caste and they are throwing it over. And there is now, and you see it in the papers, a movement among them to say, "If this religion to which we belong will not give us a chance in the world, we will join any other religion which will give us a chance." It is a rather curious state of affairs that it should have arisen at all, and that they should prepare to give up a thing like that. If the shadow of an untouchable falls across the food of a high caste Brahmin or a high caste Hindu, he throws it away. It used to be the case with the high caste Sepoys. If a Sepoy was having a meal and his own British officer passed and a shadow fell across his food, he would throw it away. All that is gone. We couldn't call it nonsense, because it is in their religion, but it is all gone, and the young officers that we are now preparing for the Indian army are highly educated boys, sent to a native school, exactly like Sandringham. There you sit at the table with them and look to your right and to your left and see men of every caste sitting next to you, eating the same food as you, and the only thing is that neither pork nor beef are ever served, because the Hindu won't eat it.

He eats very little meat but he won't eat beef because a cow is sacred, and the other gentleman doesn't like pig.

It is a most extraordinary thing to think you will now get Mohammedan servants bringing the white man his bacon in the morning with his breakfast. You even get Sepoys serving British officers; and he will come in the morning and during the war he would give his officer his bacon.

That has changed things so much in India that one can hardly believe it.

The real fault, the trouble we have had in India is that we have educated such an enormous number of men, both at home and in India, at our universities in India, that we haven't been able to supply them with places. You all know perfectly well what that means. A young man comes out and he feels and thinks it is his right to have a place in the world, and it is, of course, his right. You have got to give him something to do and to see men with a B.A. of Oxford or Cambridge or one of the Indian universities being offered a sum of money like twenty or thirty rupees a month, is not a very great result for the money you have spent on your education. Now, those men must turn into discontented fellows. They must be caught by political factions and they must take the wrong turning.

Now, one of the most educated provinces is Bengal. Now, Bengal can't absorb all the Bengalis who are educated. Now, what the Bengalian would like would be that he should be handed over all the jobs all over India. But would that do—for your Saskatchewan and your Alberta and your Ontario—if one of your provinces was much more highly educated than the others and said they had the right to take over all the clerical jobs in all of the other provinces of Canada? Well, there would be a nice row.

Well, that is what would happen in India, so there will always be a certain amount of political difficulty. Under us they have always been able to get at the head people, but when they get their provincial autonomy which is the first step, and that will be granted them as soon as the machinery can be made, as soon as they get that, we hope that a great deal of the energy or steam, that is being let off at us, will then be let off against each other. That has been the ex-

perience in most places; and then I think that our provinces will have plenty of people to legislate for. So this energy, which is always there among an educated people, will be put down into the right lines and what we are trying to do is: we are trying to get people not to want to run the diplomacy of India, whether they should fight China, or make brotherhood with Japan or anything like that. What we would like is that Mr. Loberia, or whatever his name is, who has been to Oxford, should go back to his town, and see that the sanitation in that town is in good order, and that the local police are in good order, that the lighting of the town is done and that the pavements in the streets are put in order, and in fact all the municipal duties, which are so often neglected.

That is what we want. If we can get the fellows to take that on in India, then surely they will rise up from that, and what we are doing is: we are actually, deliberately, trying to drive the people into the provincial arena. As I say, there are some thirty million in each one.

Then, above, we have the Governor-General, the Viceroy, and I want you to understand, although he is the same man, he has two duties. His first duty is: he is the Governor-General of British India. That is only fifty per cent of India. The other fifty per cent. is the Indian States and those Indian States are governed by independent rulers. They are in alliance with us and although we control to a certain degree, they are absolutely independent and very jealous of their independence. They are often accused of being behind-hand and retrograde and I don't know what else, but mind you, you have a young democracy springing up in British India that thinks it knows everything, and one knows what democracy means when it runs wild, and on the other side you have an absolutely old and well-worn sovereignty. Some of these men date their lives and their ancestors back to days, when our ancestors were covered with wool. That is an absolute fact. These men are far better bred than we are in our own line. They go back and some of them really are very fine men, indeed, and our wars out in India show us how very fine they were; and there is absolutely no reason whatever why they shouldn't produce

leaders there. Our long eighty years' domination has probably been lengthened by that awful thing, the Mutiny, which was a scourge. It may have been a good thing, it may have been a bad thing—I don't know, but we suffered from that and all sorts of things happened in India. We don't allow people to walk past the well, where they threw the bodies of the women and children. We don't allow even now an Indian to pass by. Perhaps that will pass like everything else, but it has been in our feelings all the time there, and those are the small things which do make trouble. An Indian has a pride, a man bred like he is, has a pride; and it is tragical to over-ride a pride like that.

I think those things are going. The courtesy you see between the Upper castes of India and the Civil Service and the soldiers of India is such that you find all that has disappeared altogether among them.

Now, we are keeping the British Army in India, and one of the main reasons of doing that is that there is this question of the frontier. Now, we have on the frontier a very difficult question. We have what is called the administrative frontier, which is the frontier to which we have been able to go, and then the real frontier which is a good deal further on, a frontier to which we have not been able to go; and inside that area there are some 250,000 armed men, who really have not got enough to live on. They are wild tribes, men who look down upon India as the land of milk and honey and they look upon India as a place — "If I can only get in there, I can get what I want." Who can blame them? Their ancestors have done it, year in and year out, before we arrived. Down came these people into the plains, and it has always been the same, but we have given India peace. We have given her peace, but these men are still there and they are now trying a new system. We are trying to civilize them, and not to treat them like wild beasts. We are trying to say, "We will get there if we can." It costs a devil of a lot of money, still we are trying to get there.

What we are doing is this: Whenever there is any trouble, if they come and raid us and give us an excuse for punishing them, instead of bombing them from the air and

killing people, what we are doing is this: we are building a road right up into the middle of their country and we are getting them to build it themselves. They come and draw money for it and the men don't destroy roads which they, themselves, have built, and for which they have received money, and suddenly they find a motor car comes up that road, with all sorts of funny things to sell, the sort of thing the Indian likes and he has money in his pocket for making the road and he can buy things from these people who come up. He likes to buy a little silk for his wife, all sorts of funny things like concertinas and things of that sort. He is a funny bird. The Commander-in-Chief always said, "If you can interest the women in something more civilized you can civilize the men. Take out silk undies to them." There is a great deal of truth in that.

The result has been we are gradually working up with our roads into the country. We give money to the country and we also make it possible to send up smaller forces. We can send them up by motor. And those people, if they have to go out, figure it doesn't cost so much, and gradually we will work up to the frontiers; because it is an unheard of thing to have a frontier, that you won't let anybody else have, but you can't reach yourself.

Gentlemen, I think I have come more or less to the end of the picture that I have tried to make to you of India. It is a country which has in it almost every point of view, it has got everything you may want. We were calculating the other day and we came to the conclusion there was very, very little we couldn't get. Now, with a country like that, surely we are doing the right things, when we give it this autonomy. We are keeping very, very little to ourselves, and may I put it this way: If the crisis arises, and good Lord, surely the world is bad enough now, if the crisis arises again shall we not reap as we reaped in 1914, from South Africa and as we have reaped from you in 1914 and from New Zealand? We made one mistake in the United States and we have never made another. If this Indian world stands up, it means something greater, it means this, it means a bulwark against the aggressive East. We shall have put up something which will stand and our Empire is such that

if England fell, the rest of the Empire would stand up, and before we fall, if ever such a thing should happen to us, if we could have made India stand up, we shall have done something greater than anything in this world, because no one else has ever tried or even attempted to do such a thing, to make India stand up, because she will be eaten up at once, unless she is ready to defend herself. So, I will leave it at that. I think the thing has not practically been finished and I see a brilliant success for it.

PRESIDENT BRACE:—After such an address one cannot help but be proud of being British. I think we all feel that Britain is fortunate in being able to produce such men as General Ironside, Lord Willingdon and others who have done so much for the Empire in India.

I am going to ask Colonel Bishop, President of the Canadian Club, to express our thanks to General Ironside.

COLONEL BISHOP:—Mr. Chairman, Your Honor, General Ironside, Gentlemen: One rises with somewhat mingled feelings, primarily with a deep sense of appreciation for your very kindly thought in asking the Canadian Club to be present today to hear this magnificent address of General Ironside's. And secondly, to our distinguished guest of honor, himself, who typifies in his personality, his physical makeup, those characteristics which seem to be peculiar to the Englishmen and his governing of the native states and of all matters pertaining abroad, namely, common sense in the first place; good-will, in the second place, and last of all, a keen incisive sense of humor.

Those of the Canadian Corps remember General Ironside with a great affection and to those who were in the other services of the British Army, other than the Canadian, General Ironside was somewhat a mythical figure. One heard the most astounding things about this famous "Tiny" Ironside, when he was in the Intelligence Service. You agree with me, he is well named.

And we here, today, express appreciation to him for his being with us and expounding the gospel of Imperial Governorship, or rather Trusteeship. It is something I never contemplated in my life, but I know I am expressing, on your behalf, the assembled members of The Empire Club

and of the Canadian Club, a very grateful vote of thanks to him, and as a General going home to command the Eastern District, the Eastern Command, without being prophetic, one hazards the opinion it will not be long before we shall know him and look back on this day when Field Marshal, Sir William Edmund Ironside was with us.