

(August 31st, 1936)

## Address

BY THE RT. HON. SIR PERCY VINCENT, LORD MAYOR OF LONDON AND MEMBERS OF HIS COUNCIL.

PRESIDENT, COLONEL MESS:—My Lord Mayor, members and guests of the Canadian Club: In the 18th century, Dr. Samuel Johnson wrote these words: "When a man is tired of London he is tired of life; for there is in London all that life can afford." I am sure that many of us either through visits to London or through reading books or talking with our friends could even more enthusiastically quote those words than Dr. Johnson wrote them. We have many years of history after his life, many of them perhaps not important, but the history before his life at least must add to the romance and tradition which I am sure prompted his quotation.

We are particularly fortunate and honoured in having today the representative of London and all such words convey. I do not know how you gentlemen feel about it, but I cannot think of London or go to London without turning over in my mind the story of Dick Whittington and his cat. Dick Whittington, "thrice Lord Mayor of London". Surely it is the romance that surrounds that story which makes it so interesting. And at the outside, perhaps, it is the romance around that story that gives us the right to first welcome our Lord Mayor of London. It is not my privilege today to outline some of the history of that romance. I would like to give you a little idea of the gentleman's importance. The photographs that have preceded My Lord Mayor's visit have shown his character without any comment from me. He has served his city as Common Councilman, Alderman, Sheriff and now Lord Mayor. He is a golfer and an able golfer, although he won't acknowledge it. And perhaps particularly to this country, greatest of all, he is an out-

standing agriculturalist. It seems that at the Lord Mayor's show last November, the agricultural aspect has never seen the like for a period of fifty years.

Gentlemen, My Lord Mayor, again although he will not acknowledge it, must be a very tired gentleman. He has travelled from coast to coast without stopping, has had little rest, and his good nature has been called upon most frequently. He has been very kind in having some of his party give us the story behind London. He will address us briefly and not in protest, I am glad to say. I am sure you will all join in welcoming the Rt. Hon. the Lord Mayor of London, Sir Percy Vincent.

SIR PERCY VINCENT, LORD MAYOR OF LONDON:—Mr. Chairman and gentlemen, your chairman has told me that I must not speak for more than a few moments. He said, "I know very well from the reputation you have got, you are one of the world's worst speakers." That is the only truth he really spoke to you this morning.

I am going to tell you just a little about the life of a Lord Mayor. I am not going to tell you gentlemen what I think of your country; you know already. I can only say if I were twenty years younger, this is the place I should come to.

Now I understand this is the Canadian Club, but when I got here this morning the chairman told me, he said there were so many members of the Empire Club who would like to come and hear what the senior alderman and the chief commoner has to say; so I am sure we are very delighted to be here this morning and receive you gentlemen.

As far as the Mansion House is concerned, I believe it was built in 1753. A few years ago the corporation thought it was hardly a healthy place for the Lord Mayor to live in and so they spent £100,000 reconditioning it, which I believe is about \$500,000 in this country—not a small amount. But I don't mind telling you that the \$500,000 did not come out of the ratepayers' pocket but out of the private purse of the Corporation of the City of London. I thought it would interest some of you gentlemen because I am told you are keen-headed business men and, I know, would not like to spend money like that to make even the poor old Lord Mayor comfortable.

The Lord Mayor is generally called about eight o'clock in the morning. Some of you might think that is rather late in the day but wait until I have finished with you. After a very hurried breakfast, you get into your office about nine o'clock and in comes the secretary with a big pile of letters and he goes through those letters with you and I am sure some of them are very, very interesting. I don't know what some people think the Lord Mayor is or who he is. Some people think he is a matrimonial agency. I have been asked, if I can find a wife or a husband. One lady wrote, saying she was a very delightful girl and she really wanted a nice husband. And whatever you do, she said, don't send me a bald-headed man. She gave me her weight and said she was a very fine figure and all that sort of thing. And another young lady, who said she was only nineteen, wanted a husband and she wanted a good worker. And I thought, when I get to Canada I know I can find plenty of good workers. And she said, she wanted a man with a little money. Well, I thought, they have any amount of money over there, so they do not want a poor girl for a wife.

Well, the Lord Mayor starts at nine. After he has got through his letters and all that kind of thing, at ten he has interviews. When my good friend Mr. Roebuck comes over and wants to see the Lord Mayor, well I have to see him at ten a.m., the only time I have a chance to shake hands. At 10.30 you drive to the Old Bailey and receive the judges and open the sessions. I do not mind saying that it is very important work and I have often thought why the judges should be so anxious to go to the Old Bailey. And I found after inquiries they get a jolly good luncheon there, and it doesn't cost a penny, at the cost of the Lord Mayors and sheriffs. Well, at 10.45 I have got to get back to the Mansion House and you might ask why. Well, I have to see the Clerk of the Justice Room, and see the lists of the cases which have to come up and be heard that morning. That takes about a quarter of an hour and the court is open at 11 a.m., and I believe the Justice Room at the Mansion House is the only private home in London or in the world which has its own justice room. There the Lord Mayor has to sit alone and do the best he can with the learned clerk. At noon you may have twenty to forty people to

lunch. The Lord Mayor has to receive his guests and the lunch takes place at 1 p.m. After they have had their cigar and glass of wine, at 2.30, we manage to clear out the guests and there is another meeting at 3. At 3.30 or 4 p.m. you generally provide tea for the platform speakers. The poor little old Lord Mayor has to pay for the tea for the platform speakers again. After tea is over you get rid of them and you think, "I will have a look at the evening papers and see what is taking place". At 6.30 a man comes with your book. There is a dinner to go to. Have you got your speech in your pocket? I have a very excellent secretary and he provides me with some very fine speeches. I generally leave them behind. I always tell him how well his speeches went and they are given to the press. Then we go to this wonderful banquet. After the banquet is over, very often you have to go to a reception because, after all is said and done, there are twenty-six metropolitan mayors in London and they like the Lord Mayor for once to come to one of their receptions during the year and I think it is the duty of every Lord Mayor to attend those functions because they are doing the same kind of work as we are at the Guild Hall.

After the reception is over, because they do not want you there too long, because it is their meeting, then you get back home and your secretary meets you and says, "It is nearly 11.15 and you are perfectly free to do just what you like. That is very kind and considerate of him. And of course after you have had one, which I know some of you people don't believe in—we do—we have one and then toddle off to bed and get ready for the next day.

I think my time is up; I am going to ask Sir T. Vansittart Bowater to tell you the real work of the corporation so far as an alderman is concerned. I thank you, gentlemen.

COL. MESS:—My Lord Mayor, you make very light of your duties. They sound very simple but we are afraid you are giving us a story, however sincere it may be, which is not quite complete. Our next speaker is the Senior Alderman, Sir T. Vansittart Bowater, a gentleman with a very interesting career. In 1914 he occupied the position of Lord Mayor of London and at the outbreak of war was very nearly taken prisoner in Belgium. Sir T. Vansittart Bowater is senior alderman for the city. I would ask you, sir, to please address our guests.

SIR T. VANSITTART BOWATER:—Mr. President and gentlemen, the Lord Mayor is always extremely kind to those who go with him, because, if he can put some of the responsibility on to their shoulders and relieve himself of some of his speaking, he delights in doing it. But it is a great pleasure to me to give you just a few instances of the responsibilities and duties of the alderman of the city of London. My time is limited so I will not be able to tell you as much as I would like. The Corporation of the City of London is an unreformed corporation. It means we have been carrying on the same duties and exercising the same functions for some hundreds of years. An alderman in the City of London is an alderman for life. The consequence is we are very particular of the kind of alderman we have, and we have the last say. We have the last say in this way that the aldermen are elected. There are twenty-six wards in the city and each ward elects its own alderman. That alderman, before he is accepted, the Lord Mayor will go down and attend the meeting at which the election takes place and says: "I declare Mr. So and So elected, subject to the final decision of the Court of Aldermen." If he is a decent fellow and honest and upright he becomes elected a member of the Court of Aldermen. Then his duties commence. The Lord Mayor has only told you part of what he has to do, a small part. Because often he has not time to take his court at Mansion House and the consequence is one of the aldermen go to relieve him and take the court of justice. That is something which I think is not exercised in any other city in England. The alderman sits there as a judge over a board. In many places, as you know, the board consists of perhaps five or six gentlemen who sit in a magisterial capacity. But we sit there alone and the clerk is simply supposed to keep us within the limits of the law. Many, many important cases come before those two courts, the Lord Mayor's Court and the Justice Room in the City of London. They are tried there before us aldermen and it is quite the exception that one of our judgments is overruled because we are all business men, as I see you are, and we judge the cases, with the assistance of the law, from a business point of view. Well, the case, if it is too big—we can only give 6 to 12 months; the case of Lord Lillsant

Bottomley came before the Court of Aldermen before it was finally disposed of. If we cannot give them what we think they ought to have we send them to Old Bailey and the Judge of the High Court can give them any sentence he likes. And the aldermen are commissioners. And no case at the Old Bailey can be tried unless there are two commissioners. There are four courts: the High Court Judge takes one, but an alderman always had to be there. The courts won't run all the same length of time. Perhaps three courts are finished and one left. Whoever that judge is, if he is there by himself, unless an alderman is present, nothing can be taken any notice of, and the whole case would have to be tried again. The consequence is an alderman is always present, because a great responsibility rests on his shoulders.

Well, it is from the aldermen we get our Lord Mayor. And the reason we always get a good Lord Mayor is, because it takes him some years after he becomes an alderman, before he can become Lord Mayor. And he has a lot of experience before he is elected. On September 29—you see the Lord Mayor has not much longer to run and we never re-elect the Lord Mayor, because there is always someone wants the position. On September 29, they choose two members of the Court of Aldermen and send them up for final approval of one of them to the Court of Aldermen. We sit in another room. The election is taken by a show of hands. And they send in Mr. Jones and Mr. Johnston and they come in and it is announced that Mr. Jones and Mr. Johnston have been sent to the Court of Aldermen and from these two we elect one, not by ballot, but by whispers as to which man we want to serve for the ensuing year. And the Lord Mayor takes on his right hand the man we have chosen, and that all goes on by seniority. We have had cases where we have rejected a man. We have not thought him a fit and proper person and we would not have him. But there is no appeal from the decision of the Court of Aldermen. They have the final say, and they need give no reason and do not give any reason and their decision is final. That is the reason why we never get a bad one. Some are better than others but we never get a bad one. The aldermen take turns sitting at one of these courts.

And then the Court of Common Council is never complete unless two aldermen are present, and if they are not present court cannot go on. The senior aldermen, as we call them, those who are past the chance of being Lord Mayor, sit on the right hand of the Lord Mayor and those who have not past the chair sit on the left. And we are very strict in our court and I think a very good rule, everything goes by seniority and then there is no lobbying. We go by seniority and that seniority is respected to the fullest degree.

I think my time is up. I have given you some of the duties.

COL. MESS:—We thank you, sir, for your very interesting words in regard to the duties of an alderman of the City of London. We are all undoubtedly anxious to hear more of the City of London from Mr. Frederick Rowland. He is chairman of the most important Financial Committee of the Corporation and is undoubtedly well versed and able to give us some idea of the finances, the history and the traditions of the interesting offices. Mr. Rowland.

MR. FREDERICK ROWLAND:—I feel it a great honor and one of those many privileges, which develop upon one during his year of office, in being called upon to address a few remarks on the dear old Constitution of the Corporation of London at this distinguished gathering today. We like to refer to one or two of those emblems of power which we use in our ceremonial in connection with the Lord Mayor and Court of Common Council in London. You see before you our city Mace. It is 200 years old. It was actually made in 1735 and it is one of our most treasured possessions. It is carried before each Lord Mayor on ceremonial occasions. We have another Mace called the Crystal Mace, and that is used on very special occasions. It is carried by the Rt. Hon. Lord Mayor at the time of the Coronation. Then there is the pearl sword, carried by the Lord Mayor before His Majesty the King when in the city. The sword is inverted, point down, when in the presence of the sovereign. Then we have another sword, called the Black Star, and use it on the death of the sovereign. In addition to the two swords, and this is a provision which I hope will never be fulfilled, and that is: if the Lord Mayor dies in the year of his office, he is entitled to be buried

amongst the admirals and generals in St. Paul's Cathedral.

You have invited me to give you a few remarks regarding the constitution and working of the Court of Common Council. I think Sir T. Vansittart Bowater said something about the Court of Aldermen always having the last word. Well, that may be perfectly true, but I would like to tell you that the Chief Commonor always has the first word. And that in the Court of Common Council, next to His Lordship, it is the Chairman of the Committee who has the right of intervening and directing the debate of the chamber.

What is this London of which I am to speak. It is unique amongst the cities of the world, not so much because of its claim to antiquity or by virtue of the size of its population, but because of the peculiar position it occupies in the general framework of British public life. Almost it may be described as a State within a State.

When it is remembered that the most important financial and commercial activities of the Metropolis are confined within the area of the old city walls, and that the assessments for income tax approximate one fourth of the total yield of the United Kingdom, it will be realized how vast are the interests lying within its jurisdiction. It is the greatest city of the greatest Empire the world has ever known. It is our great common heritage, a heritage to which we were born, to which you were born and it is your London as well as our London.

May I come to the constitution of the Court of Common Council? The earliest known list of members of this council is found in the city archives *circa* 1285, "the names of the good men of all the Wards sworn to consult with the Aldermen on the affairs of the City of London". This list contains 40 names, another list of 133 names is found in 1347, and in this list the Wards are duly represented in proportion of their size, by six, five, or fewer representatives. Soon after the middle of the 14th century the Guilds began to claim a more direct participation in the Government of the City than they had hitherto enjoyed, with the result that, in 1376, they were able to wrest the election of the members of the Common Council and of the Lord Mayor and Sheriffs from the Wards, and vest it in themselves.

In less than ten years, however, in 1384, the election reverted to the inhabitants of the wards, being freemen, each ward electing representatives as before in proportion to its size, and this system has continued down to the present day (except as to the necessity of the elector being a freeman). In 1341 King Edward III granted the city a charter, empowering the citizens in their corporate capacity, to amend customs which in course of time should have been found hard or defective. Under the provisions of this charter, the Court of Common Council last fixed, in 1840, the number of annually elected representatives, at present 206, and has from time to time reformed the machinery of the city's municipal government without objection or interference from authorities outside. The bills or the acts have to be read a first, second, and third time. As recently as 1911 an Act was thus passed empowering the Court of Common Council by resolution to vary from time to time the date of the election of Sheriffs and other officials usually elected by the Common Hall on Midsummer day.

This Court has also the exclusive power of conferring the honorary freedom of the city and of voting corporate addresses to Royal and other distinguished personages. All documents requiring the Common Seal of the Corporation, and all leases granted by the Royal Hospitals, of which the Chamberlain holds the corporate seal, must be sealed in open court at a meeting of the Common Council. The Court is widely known for its munificent support of public charities and liberal contributions to the relief of distress in all parts of the world. The majority of the city offices are in the gift of the Common Council or its various Committees.

Every person eligible as a representative on the Common Council must first be a Freeman of the city and householder in the Ward he seeks to represent; in other words, a person who, being free of the city is rated for a house, paying scot and bearing lot. This is the ancient customary qualification. Or, secondly, he must be a Freeman of the city and must occupy premises to the value of ten pounds per annum in the Ward he desires to represent and must be on the annual register of Parliamentary voters for the city of London in respect of such premises. This is the statutory

qualification. The qualifications of the electors are the same as those required in the candidates except that the elector need not be a Freeman of the city. The city of London is divided into 25 Wards of unequal size, Bassishaw, the smallest, has four representatives, and the largest Farringdon Without, sixteen, and in addition there is one Ward called "Bridge Without", which has an alderman who is elected by the Court of Aldermen from amongst those Aldermen who have served the office of Lord Mayor, but has no other representative. Every Common Councilman ceases to hold office at midnight on the 20th of December, and next day, St. Thomas's Day, the annual elections to fill their places are held at various Wardmotes, presided over by the Alderman of the Ward, or, in his unavoidable absence, by the Lord Mayor. The Court of Common Council—the full style of which is "the Lord Mayor, Aldermen and Commons of the City of London in Common Council assembled"—consists of the Lord Mayor, 25 other Aldermen, and 206 Commoners, making a total of 232. Party politics have no part in the Municipal Elections of the City; how to promote the best interests of the Ward and the City is the paramount consideration in the minds of both the electors and the elected, character and business experience being the only qualities taken into account.

I would just like to refer to the personnel of the Common Council. Any man who will visit the Council Chamber when the discussions are going on or who will read them in the public press will be fully convinced that a patriotic, generous, unselfish spirit pervades the debates. There is a marked absence of personalities and bitterness, even during the warmest contests, and the Citizens of London have good reason to be proud of the men that they send to represent them.

The fact has been referred to that the Court of Common Council is the only unreformed authority left, and the following extract from the report of the Municipal Corporation Commissioners, 1837, clearly explains why other Corporations were reformed and the Corporation of London left to continue unaltered its beneficent career:—

"We therefore feel it to be our duty to represent to your Majesty that the existing Municipal Corporations of

England and Wales neither possess nor deserve the confidence or respect of Your Majesty's subjects, and that a thorough reform must be effected before they can become, what we humbly submit to your Majesty they ought to be, useful and efficient instruments of local government."

"The history of the Common Council of London is that of a body which has watched vigilantly over the interests of its constituents and for a long series of years has studied to improve the Corporate Institutions with great earnestness, unremitting caution, and scrupulous justice."

The result of the report was that the corporation was left the only unreformed corporation in the Kingdom. Whenever reform has been found necessary the Common Council itself has always effected such reform. The entire absence of political controversy, in its debates and elections, has undoubtedly tended to make the Corporation an institution to which all parties of the state can have recourse, with the certainty that no question of international importance is likely to be disregarded or receive inadequate or partial consideration at its hands.

Always anxious to maintain its ancient traditions and privileges unswayed and uncurtailed, its members perform daily important municipal functions with humble reliance upon the city's time-honoured Motto, *Domine Nos, Dirige*.

Just a word with regard to the actual work of the corporation. Every Committee of the Common Council, with the exception of two or three which will be specially mentioned, consists of six Aldermen and twenty-nine Commoners; the first named are nominated by the Court of Aldermen and the Commoners by the members of 25 Wards or sides of Wards, each nominating one of their number to the Court of Common Council, which usually confirms such nominations. Subject to annual re-election on St. Thomas's Day, each member serves for four years, and cannot continue longer to be a member of the same Committee except with the consent of all his colleagues in his Ward and also with the approbation of the Court of Common Council. This rule acts most beneficially, ensuring as it does that by passing from one committee to another members obtain a general knowledge of all branches of corporation work. A chairman is elected at

the first meeting of the committee in each year and acts for the year and only in most exceptional cases is the term extended, but he remains as late chairman a member of the committee for another year.

The work of the committees may be conveniently divided under the following heads: Estates, Domestic, Educational, Open Spaces, Public Health, Public Service and Additional. The Estates deals with City Lands, Bridge House Estate, Coal and Corn and Finance, Irish Society. Domestic, Law and City Courts, Officers and Clerks, General Purposes, Special Privileges. Education, The Gresham, Library, City of London Schools, Music, Freeman's School, Elementary Education. Open Spaces, Epping Forest, West Ham Park, and Coal and Corn and Finance; Public Service, Markets, Police, County Purposes, Port of Health; Public Health, Improvements and Finance, Streets, Sanitary Housing. Additional, Visiting Committees City of London Mental Hospital, Overseers, Assessment.

I am pleased to tell you that we have the Chairman of the Finance Committee, Mr. Wittingdon, here today—one of the most important committees.

A few figures on what the City Corporation has done out of its own funds, nothing to do with rates. It has spent in lands and in the acquisition and maintenance upon dwellings for the labouring poor, and charitable purposes and for public purposes no less in the last 170 years than \$90,000,000. That I think is an average of \$500,000 per annum for each of the last 170 years.

Need I keep you longer telling you of the importance of the Corporation of London. I have almost concluded my remarks. We work by committees. The committees submit reports to the Common Council meeting and they are either amended or approved and dealt with by the Board.

The most important function of the city, however, is the least easy to define, namely, the part it plays in the public and ceremonial life of the Kingdom, acting either in its corporate capacity or through its chief magistrate the Lord Mayor. A variety of circumstances have established its position in this respect—the prestige and dignity

of its ancient institutions, its weight in National politics throughout the centuries, its predominance in wealth and enterprise. The Guild Hall has become in a sense a national platform and its hospitalities are regarded as a necessary part of the public welcome extended to visiting monarchs.

May I conclude with the beautiful lines which run as follows:—

Oh wonderful City,  
Round Thee in love we draw,  
Thine is the grace of freedom,  
The Majesty of the Law,  
Be Righteousness Thy Sceptre,  
Justice thy diadem,  
And on her shining forehead  
Be peace the crowning gem.

COL. MESS:—Thank you very much, Mr. Rowland, for your most fascinating story.

I believe, My Lord Mayor, that out West you made the remark that were it possible to elect another Dick Whittingdon for three years, he could not possibly carry on the arduous duties of today. Undoubtedly you are fatigued after your trip. We thank you very much for being with us today.