

(November 14th, 1938)

## Britain After the Crisis

By BARON MIDDLETON OF MIDDLETON

LORD MIDDLETON:—Mr. Chairman, I should like to say at the outset how greatly honored I feel at being the guest of your famous club. And may I also thank you for your words of welcome, the truly Canadian welcome that has been extended to me.

I only wish that I felt easier about getting up on my hind legs to speak. Some fairly revel in this form of exercise. I envy them. There is no difficulty in getting such people started up; often the difficulty lies in stopping them.

Speaking, to me has always been a matter that is troublesome, and that is perhaps natural, because for three or four generations my family has been completely tongue tied; and moreover I followed a profession in which loquacity and power of argument were not regarded as cardinal virtues. I spent six long years in the Army as a junior subaltern, and very soon after joining I learned that in the army arguments are quickly settled by reference to a publication known as the Army List. This gives the date of an officer's seniority, and it does not take long to discover that senior officers are always right. Juniors, when their opinion differs, are wrong. Delightfully simple.

My trepidation is the more enhanced because I have some knowledge of the high standard of Oratory that is maintained in Canada. I was in this country during the federal election before last, and I listened with great interest and profound admiration to candidates for parliamentary honors and I thought the standard of public speaking was quite amazing. I listened at Brandon to your present prime minister when he spoke for a couple of hours against a hailstorm beating upon an iron roof. I thought that was a

tremendous feat of eloquence; and one that I could never hope to emulate.

It was suggested to me that my subject should be "Britain after the Crisis," but, if so be it please you I prefer the title "Britain and the Crisis." There is no "after" about it. I thought, too, that the suggestion mentioning Britain rather than England was good, for it seemed to imply a proper appreciation of the fact that Scotland rules England. I might add that she also rules the Church of England too, by way of a Scottish Archbishop of Canterbury. Incidentally we have a Scottish queen, who before long will visit Canada, and I have no doubt at all that she will charm Canada as she has already charmed all who have become acquainted with her, or who have even seen her. Scotland has also more than one finger in the Imperial pie, providing one Governor General for Canada, another for Australia, a viceroy for India and a governor for Burma. But why should I, a Yorkshire farmer resent Scotland's domination for she gave me a Highland mother who spoke Gaelic fluently, and two grandmothers who did likewise. But I do permit myself a smile when I hear of the antics of the Scottish Home Rule party. I think it would be much more to the point if we could have an English Home Rule party.

And now I come to the crisis. First I should like to make my own position quite clear. I do not stand here as a blind devotee of the National Government at Westminster. I hold that a back bench member of a second chamber should preserve independence regardless of any tie of party politics. Living up to my creed I have never hesitated to attack our present government in Parliament when I thought its measures were wrong. But however hostile and critical I may have been in the past, I would like to be as fair as I can when discussing the crisis.

To say that if war had been the issue of the crisis seven weeks ago Britain would have been fully prepared to meet it would be just as inaccurate as to say she was wholly unprepared.

Take our fighting services. The Navy at the end of September was ready. Mobilization had been a model of

rapidity and smoothness and precision. With regard to the Army, you all know it has never been the policy to maintain, for it has never been considered necessary, a huge standing army on the continental scale, and that for two main reasons. Firstly we have no aggressive designs anywhere, and secondly we have no extensive land frontiers that need constant watching. Our army, though small is up to date, very well equipped on modern lines, and in good heart.

Responsibility for protection from air attack rests with the Territorial Army, and it was the only section called out during the crisis, and it is true to say that it did all that energy and enthusiasm could do. It would not be true to say that it was fully equipped with anti-aircraft guns, but its deficiencies are being dealt with and rapidly made good.

The Royal Air Force has been extended enormously during the past two years and is now a force of which we are extremely proud. It is very efficient—witness the recent flight from Egypt to Australia—and its personnel is magnificent. The fighting forces, on the whole were not up to full strength, for the program had not been completed, but all that could have been done was done.

Our government has never lacked critics. No government ever escapes criticism, and perhaps it is as well, for it is good for governments to be criticized, just as it is for Boards of directors of companies, or schools or hospitals. The main charge against the government has been that air raid precautions were inadequate, and that schemes for the evacuation of the population from the most vulnerable areas were half baked, and in certain instances that charge has been substantiated. But I would ask you to give a thought to the immensity of the problems involved, the time there was at the government's disposal, the machinery that was available for dealing with them, and the actual results that were achieved.

Air raids on the scale that may be expected nowadays are really an unknown quantity. Some say we could learn about the war in Spain where the Russians, Germans and Italians are saving Spain from the Spaniards. Others say we could learn much from China. We have experts watch-

ing those countries, but so far their observations, so far as the public is aware, have revealed practically nothing. Raid effects are difficult to measure. Some say we may expect devastating results from high explosives, others from gas, and still others from fire. Actually all this remains to be seen. All these things can be guarded against to a certain extent, and let us remember the distribution of over thirty millions of gas masks in a matter of hours. That was a great achievement—one without parallel in either France or Germany. Immense numbers of trenches were dug in the open spaces of cities, and although they were incomplete and far from perfect they would undoubtedly have saved thousands of lives. Fire fighting apparatus has been multiplied considerably, but certainly not to the extent that will be required, and a great deal yet remains to be done.

Evacuation schemes are even more difficult. Imagine for yourselves what would happen if you received short notice that Toronto was to be bombed and you tried to get people out in accordance with a plan that would take some hours. You would have a difficult task to persuade them to take their turns, for like us, you are not used to being regimented and dragooned. It was perhaps for that reason that the official plans for evacuation became jammed by the voluntary evacuation of the cities that took place very quickly. More than a quarter of a million people left London by rail within a few hours, and many more left by road. Twenty-five thousand Jews living in the East end of London left in a body for some remote corner of South Wales in the twinkling of an eye. I don't blame them but you can see how complicated the situation became. It made the whole thing very, very difficult.

I have no doubt that in a totalitarian state things would have been done far more expeditiously. The population lives under a permanent state of discipline. The dictator raps out a few orders and woe betide anybody who dares to dissent or offer a contrary opinion.

Democracy, on the other hand is a slow moving machine—so much talk, persuasion, and consultation must precede any action, and where, as in the old country, decentralization is increasing the local authorities have to be cajoled

and persuaded before they will take any action. I will give you an example that I encountered in Hull. During the course of my duties I had to consult with the Lord Mayor and ask him what steps the city had taken. He was, by the way, a labor man, and he said, "My Lord you don't need to worry. Mr. Lansbury has seen Mr. Hitler, and Mr. Hitler says there won't be any war, so there is no need to fret." Whatever one thinks about one's fellow Yorkshiremen they do say what they think. A very simple faith in Mr. Hitler. When the crisis came that city spent two and a half million dollars to get things right and only got one million dollars of value because it had to be done in such a hurry.

My own opinion, for what it is worth, is that under all the circumstances I do not think that any government could have done more in the time at its disposal than the Chamberlain government did. I am quite sure of one thing, and that is that in the crisis if any of those who so furiously criticized Mr. Chamberlain had held office during the last few years, not only would no more have been done, but it is very doubtful if the issue of the crisis seven weeks ago would not have been war instead of peace.

What is happening now?

I think Britain may be compared to a man—a rather easy going man, who has suddenly sat down on a thumb tack with the business end uppermost. That pin had a barbed point and has not yet been dislodged and the discomfort remains. Of course there has been a lot of very solid heart searching and stock taking since the dress rehearsal for war. Air raid precautions and evacuation schemes were a side line of the Home office, but it has been recognized that preparation for civil defense in a war embellished with all the horrors that modern progress can devise is far too big a thing to be the sideline of any department of Government. Now, as you will have read, Sir John Anderson (another Scot) has been appointed Lord Privy Seal, and charged with the duty of forming a new department to take care of the job. I am confident that he will quickly gather up the loose ends, and there are plenty of them, and develop schemes of Air raid precautions and

evacuation that will be sound and workable and stir up the local authorities to play their parts effectively. The responsibilities of the local authorities are very heavy, but I believe that after the shock of the crisis they will rise to the occasion and do everything necessary to take care of their jobs efficiently.

There has been some complaint that so far the Government has not embarked on any scheme for the national registration of all men and women for national service of every kind in the event of an emergency. The government answer is that it means to do this voluntarily if it can, but in the event that it does not succeed they will then apply the principle of compulsion.

I have spoken of critics of the government, and I wonder if I have conveyed the impression of a divided country, or that Mr. Chamberlain's stock has fallen very low. I have no intention of conveying any such impression. We are showing a unity now such as we have never seen since the period of 1914 to 1918, and I believe Chamberlain's stock stands very high. Of course there are critics. The function of an opposition is to oppose, and there are always those who, when they are free of the burden, believe they could do the job so much better than those upon whom the responsibility actually rests. I cannot help noticing that amongst the most prominent of those that criticize Mr. Chamberlain are so many who, by their past performances, have shown that they did all they could to ensure that we had a weak foreign policy that might have led to the crisis, or who, by their actions as leaders of local authorities have slowed down and hampered the preparations for civil defense.

In spite of the fulminations and recriminations of these I believe there is a remarkable spirit in the old country. Since the crisis there have been municipal elections fought almost solely on the questions of foreign policy and civil defense. The results have not been startling, but there has been a steady gain for supporters of the government, and six boroughs have lost the opposition majorities in their councils. Furthermore there has been an important parliamentary by-election in which a young man who is not un-

known in Canada, the son of Lord Hailsham who was returned with a very good majority in favor of the government. It was a seat they never really hoped to hold, and in my opinion the result was very significant indeed. These straws show which way the wind is blowing, and that there is a very wholesome confidence in Chamberlain as a peacemaker.

I believe that preparedness in Britain and national and Imperial unity are the greatest factors for the future peace of the world. Only lunatics or gross materialists would want to impose the curse of war on the world. The question is whether the world is free of such madmen. I am certain of this, that those who guide our destinies are unlikely to pin their faith on those who have failed to keep the faith of their own promises. I am certain also that Britain will never have a foreign policy that is based on that most ignoble emotion, fear. There is, however, no nation that can look on the future with unconcern—no nation that can regard itself as immune to the dire consequences of war.

What of Canada?

Gentlemen, I submit I have come to a point where an English visitor should step down. I know that there are wise, shrewd and long headed men in Canada who are capable of guiding your great country along the road indicated by wisdom and honor. It would be presumptuous of me to dare to say more. But I do share with you the very earnest hope that your country and mine and all our kindred of the Empire may through our sagacity and strength influence the world to permanent peace and a solution of the problems, which must be found if war is to be avoided.