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The Romance of Canada

BY THE RIGHT REVEREND BISHOP R. J. RENISON, D.D.,
RECTOR OF ST. PAUL'S

PRESIDENT CHALMERS:—Gentlemen, the guest of the Canadian Club of Toronto to-day is the Very Rev. Dr. Robert J. Renison, Rector of St. Paul's Church. Before I introduce Dr. Renison to you I should like to say that the Club is very happy to have at the head table Mr. Vernon McKenzie who has been travelling in Germany this summer and writing a series of illuminating articles for the *Toronto Globe*. Mr. McKenzie is a former resident of this city now resident in Seattle. We are glad to have Mr. McKenzie honor us by coming to the head table to-day.

I think the fact that those who control the affairs of St. Paul's Church saw fit to invite Dr. Renison to carry on the work of Dr. Cody is perhaps the best introduction I could give to you of our speaker to-day. For more than thirty years Dr. Cody carried on the work of St. Paul's and gave to St. Paul's a great deal of his own character and personality. I do not suppose, though, that the wardens of the church have brought Dr. Renison in merely to fill Dr. Cody's shoes, because Dr. Renison is a man who in his own church has always found a pair of shoes of his own and he has used them and he will use them at St. Paul's Church to beat out new paths. Dr. Renison considered the challenge of St. Paul's Church of sufficient importance to induce him to give up the diocese in the Peace River District. He was for a few months Bishop of Athabasca. He gave up whatever dignity and importance, honor and title attached to that office to become the Rector of St. Paul's Church. To-day Dr. Renison will speak to us on the

Romance of Canada and it is from a very rich storehouse of Canadian memories that Dr. Renison will draw for his address to-day. He is an Irishman and comes from Tipperary. His father was a missionary north of Lake Superior, in the country around Lake Nipigon. After graduating, Bishop Renison or Mr. Renison, as he was then, went north as a missionary himself, with headquarters at Moosonee long before the T. and N.O. Railway. Later Dr. Renison had a church at Hamilton. That was during the war and then he went overseas as a chaplain and has written a portion of "The Last Hundred Days of the War." Before being created Bishop of Athabasca he was Dean of New Westminster. We are glad to have him to-day. This is the first public audience he will have to face since becoming Rector of St. Paul's. Dr. Renison.

DR. RENISON: Mr. Chairman and gentlemen, when I was honored by being invited to speak to the Canadian Club I felt that I could not do better than say something about Canada. We are living in a very unusual time. The exuberance of life and the idealism of history have, for the moment, been obscured by certain world-wide conditions. Nevertheless, when I received your message as I was living under the blue Alberta skies with the peaks of the Rockies on the skyline, I felt it might be worth while to take my life in my hands and dare to dream for a moment, even to such a pragmatic organization as the Canadian Club of Toronto. We speak of the golden days of the English-speaking people. Men sometimes speak of the spacious days of Queen Elizabeth. As a matter of fact, in the days of Queen Elizabeth the British Empire was smaller than it has been for centuries and those were spacious days only on account of a certain quickening of the spirit of the little Island from which most of us have come.

We can hardly imagine that four hundred years ago this was an unknown land with a few hundred thousand Indians and a few million buffalo and that for countless centuries this great Continent was unknown. People living on the other side of the Atlantic thought that they had seen everything. The discovery of America did something more

than bring new vision; it quickened the imagination of some of the great nations of Europe and the discovery of the route to India and the discovery of Mexico brought a challenge to the men of Devon. And gentlemen, one thought I would like to leave with you to-day because it has everything to do with the case. What I would like to point out, in the first place, is that the Elizabethan mariners were not men who loved mere toil. They were not super-men who were dreaming of being heroic. They were looking for the easiest way to make money. They were dreaming of some little island where there might be found jewels and riches that would not have to be worked for so that they could take it easy for all their days. This was the dream of the North-West Passage. The story I am going to begin with is the story of the northern penetration of Canada.

Most people who live in this country have the idea that Canada was only annexed by way of the St. Lawrence. The story I have to tell you to-day speaks for itself. In the year 1607, on the 19th day of April, a strange little group entered a little church in the heart of London. There was in the party a captain in his Elizabethan dress and there were fourteen mariners with him. He was Henry Hudson. The next day he went out and sailed away in a little ship, about half the length of this room, with about fourteen men to discover the North-West Passage to the fabled countries of the Orient. He sailed from the north of Scotland and when going across the north Atlantic he sighted the icy cliffs of Cape Farewell on the coast of Greenland. He saw no passage there and, after going north fifty miles, reluctantly came back and lost his job with the company, who demanded results.

Next year another company employed him. This time the only crew he could get was a crew of Lascars and they sailed to make the new venture. As they went on the North Atlantic the Lascars began to waver and shirk and crept into their bunks and refused to go aloft. He saw it was impossible to make the Northern Passage and then he thought quickly and the thought came to his mind that there was a long unknown passage between the St. Lawrence and

Virginia. And so he sailed in that direction and one day in the middle of August he woke up and would have seen before him, if he had had the gift of looking forward three hundred years, what is now the skyline of New York at the mouth of the Hudson River. He sailed up as far as Albany and came back a made man. The company he had first worked for demanded in the name of patriotism that he should return and work for them. So he sailed for his last voyage. This last voyage was in 1610. It was extraordinary that through all the centuries the conviction remained with men that there was a North-West Passage to the Orient. He went on his last voyage, going into places where men had never gone before, and came to the mouth of the Strait which now bears his name. It is a long Strait and he came through it into Hudson Bay. He sailed up the Strait which is two hundred miles long by fifty miles wide. His ship was caught there in the great ice floes which fill the Strait in the summer time. When the hot weather comes the ice floes come down from the Arctic. He went down into that great Bay, twelve hundred miles long, that now bears his name. He sailed until he came to the mouth of what is now the River Nelson. The crew had scurvy but a Norwegian doctor made a brew out of spruce boughs and they recovered. There was a mutiny and Hudson was turned adrift with one or two loyal men and the world never saw him again. The ship went home and Britain mourned the loss of her greatest mariner.

Fifty years passed by but that voyage never passed from memory. At this time Pierre Radisson came into prominence. One day he was captured by Indians and they tied him to a stake. It just happened that there was the wife of a chief who had lost her son. When she was looking at the preparations for the funeral she thought that Pierre Radisson looked like her son. After the manner of the wives of great chiefs she had her way, the braves freed the boy. For two years he lived with the Indians, obtaining a knowledge of the Indian language and the Indian character that probably no white man ever had before. He roamed over the whole of the North Country as far as Hudson Bay with

the Indians until, at the end of two years he escaped from them and came down to where Albany now is on the Hudson River, then in the possession of the Dutch, coming back with incredible knowledge of the geography of the country. Thinking back through the centuries we do not realize the full value to Canada, in the eyes of Europe, of the furs Canada produced. The British people and in a lesser sense the people of Northern Europe lived in a country where it was just possible to live in winter without freezing to death. Furs were looked upon as a necessity for the well-to-do and rich.

Pierre Radisson and a brother-in-law of his named Chauart started upon one of the most marvellous voyages that I think any man, under similar circumstances, ever undertook. They had in equipment nothing except that provided by human nature. They started up the St. Lawrence River, going into No Man's Land where the Indians were still supreme. They went up into the Georgian Bay and then up beyond Lake Superior. They went from place to place, visiting new tribes and making friends. They travelled westward until they came to the Mississippi River—years before La Salle got there. They turned towards Lake Winnipeg and came down through Lake Nipigon, visiting Hudson Bay, and returned with seven hundred Indians and three hundred and sixty canoes laden with furs—the greatest argosy that ever came to Montreal. They had a marvellous grasp of that unknown country. As he returned Radisson was arrested for trading without a license. And his wealth was taken away from him.

Radisson went over to the Old Country to get justice. He went to the court of a great king. When he was there he met an Englishman by the name of Sir George Cartwright. Sir George took him to Oxford. It just happened there was a great Englishman in Oxford who listened to him very sympathetically. That was Prince Rupert. He was the greatest Englishman alive at the time. He outfitted two vessels. Radisson told him that it was possible to tap the great areas in the vicinity of Hudson Bay without going up the St. Lawrence.

The ships arrived at Hudson's Bay and they spent the winter there. Next year they returned, laden with the greatest cargo of furs that ever came to London.

Then the business men of London got together and they determined to form a company. That company was the Hudson's Bay Company. The gentlemen adventurers of the Hudson's Bay Company went to King Charles and asked him to sign his name to the charter. He did. I have seen the original charter in Lime Street, London. It is the most extraordinary document ever written. This great monarch granted the company all the territories adjoining Hudson's Bay, all rivers where they may lead, all lands touching the rivers, with the right of life and death over everything, so far as it is not controlled at the present moment by any other great monarch. That was the charter of the Hudson's Bay Company. They went on their journey and looking over the work of the next 250 years you can see these men going out year after year, bringing their little cargoes of supplies to enable the Indians to create new desires they never had before, and coming back laden with furs.

Radisson was one of the most extraordinary pioneers that ever lived. He established posts at Moose Factory, Nelson and elsewhere. He went back to France. He came out again in a small vessel that was not fit for sailing and kept on for the Hudson's Bay ports and when laden with furs had them stolen from him again by the authorities at the St. Lawrence. So he joined the Hudson's Bay Company once more. He thought they were at least honest and served them faithfully until the end of his days. There is in one of the journals a resolution passed that out of consideration for his faithful service they should make him a grant of £10 a year for his wife and children.

When he came out on his last voyage a boy named Henry Kelvie sailed on the ship. He was fourteen years of age and came out to be powder boy to the Governor. In those days the pioneers as soon as they came out would build a great palisade, and forbade any people to go outside the compound. There was a portier through which they

traded with the Indians who were the original traders. One day they tied Kelvie to a flag staff and flogged him because he disobeyed orders and the next day he disappeared. At last there came a message saying that he had penetrated hundreds of miles into the country with the Indians, that he had seen strange animals, with the heads of lions and the bodies of horses, which roamed the prairies, and if the Governor would forgive him he would bring out several hundred Indians with loads of furs and that he would show him new markets. He was forgiven on the spot. Henry Kelvie became Governor of Fort Churchill. It must be extraordinary to think back and realize what it must have felt like to have been the first white man to look upon those plains where the buffalo had their kingdom. The Hudson Bay Company gradually penetrated until they went right out to the Arctic. Just another story in connection with the Romance of Canada.

There was a strange new company known as the North-West Company about the end of the 18th century that challenged the supremacy of the Hudson's Bay Company. There was bitter competition between the two great companies and in this North-West Company there was a young man by the name of Alexander MacKenzie who came out in the year 1787 and was at the most northerly post of the company on Lake Athabasca. I was down there last summer and saw that part. He was a young Scotsman, twenty-four years of age, in charge of the ultimate outpost of the English trading world. One June morning he took his canoe and another canoe with six men and started out to discover a way to the open sea. No one had ever gone over the Northern part of the Continent to the sea. He went up the Great Slave River to the Great Slave Lake—one of the great lakes of the world and he had to cross land, hauling his canoe over it. The Indians believed that he was going to the land of the devils. He entered the river that now bears his name—the MacKenzie. Going two hundred miles up the MacKenzie he saw on the right the colossal waters of the Great Bear Lake coming down the Bear River and at last arrived where he saw the whales blowing

and saw nothing but ice beyond and he knew he had reached the sea. He called the river the River Disappointment and returned and lost his job with the company. He was told that he had wasted time. Just imagine that three thousand five hundred mile journey.

The next year he left Lake Athabasca and went westward until he came to a gorge in the Rockies and he pushed on over the top of the Rockies and into the Fraser country as far as he could go until he reached the Pacific Coast and wrote "Alexander MacKenzie. Over land from Canada, July 29, 1792." Imagine the thrill and tragedy that came to these old pioneers who helped to make Canada. What I want to say to you to-day is this: as we look over the history of our own country, we find men who have been looking for the North-West Passage to bring them within easy reach of China and Japan. If they had found what they were looking for very likely the history of England would have been like the history of Spain. But the North-West Passage does not matter at all. It is only a dream; it is only a flare that carried men on. And is it not true of a great many things in our lives? We set out for something—in search of it and in trying for it we find things of infinitely greater importance.

I would like to say in conclusion, I have lived for a long time in many parts of Canada. To-day I come back from Canada's great unknown Peace River country. I want to tell you that the Peace River Country is the most glorious part of unknown Canada. It is different from Alberta. It is different from Saskatchewan. It is different from Manitoba. It is as Alexander MacKenzie described it—"a combination of woodland, prairie, great rolling hills with the mountains in the distance. It is the most fertile country to be found in Canada. There men think nothing of thirty to forty bushels to the acre. But is it not strange when we get something we do not know what to do with it. I saw the farmers out there. I would like to say a kind word for the Canadian farmer.

The Canadian farmer is one of the most misunderstood men in the world. I was talking to a decent fellow in the

Peace River country and I said, "You have wonderful horses." "They ought to be," he said, "I give them a dozen eggs apiece a day." I said, "you are lying to me." "No, I am not," he replied. "They like them and they are good for them." Eggs cost three cents a dozen in the Peace River country, butter six cents a pound and wheat sixty cents a bushel. Out of that sixty cents, twenty-two cents go for carrying the wheat to the seaboard. You can see how much is left for the farmer.

Three hundred miles north of the Peace River is an experimental farm where you can see the finest wheat in the world. The further north you go the better the wheat. The discovery of new brands of wheat is extending for thousands of miles the arable part of Canada. It is a hard land; it is a difficult country to find ease in. But the people there are not begging. The people there are less depressed than the people in the more civilized parts of Canada. It is to that part of Canada that Alexander MacKenzie made his last great voyage. There are great areas of Canada unknown. No man can travel to the Pacific coast and see that marvellous coast line—more beautiful than Norway, and see the Peace River country with room for a countless number of people, without being profoundly convinced of the destiny that lies before Canada.

PRESIDENT CHALMERS:—Bishop Renison, gentlemen, I can say nothing more than thank Dr. Renison for his most excellent address—one that has been an inspiration to all of us.