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The Basis of Canadian-American Relations

By Professor R. G. Trotter.

President Bishop:—Fellow members of the Canadian Club, we have as our guest today a young Ontario boy who grew to manhood in the United States and now occupies the chair of History at Queen's University. He has contributed in no small measure to enlightenment on the subject on which he is going to speak today—"The Basis of Canadian-American Relations."

The fact that we have had peace for the last 125 years gives food for thought—a matter of envy to every other country in the world. Without further introduction I shall ask Professor Trotter to speak before the microphone, but before doing so, I shall express, with your permission, our very grateful appreciation of his coming here today to us.

Professor Trotter:—Colonel Bishop, members of the Canadian Club, Canadian-American relations form a subject that is so close to us, so much a matter of every-day doings, that part of the time we forget that it is there at all. Part of the time, perhaps, we think too much about it. We all have a great many friends across the border. A great many of us are international in our family relations. From a personal point of view, we think of this continent north of Mexico as a unit.

We constitute two great national federations, both transcontinental, and, in many ways, very similar. But, in many ways, from our beginnings, we have been very different. I am not going to talk now of our beginnings. It would be too large a subject to force upon anyone after lunch.

One might begin to see the difference that grew up, in the days of the very early settlers, the difference in the European affiliations on these settlers, the difference some of them passed on geographically, as between sections of this continent, and in developing that line of thought one might build up a very good case for the assertion that, while we are one continent, we are two nations, in more than mere matters of form and words. I do not propose, however, to go into the history of these very early settlers, of these physical factors. I should like, however, to go back to the days of our fathers—about the middle of the nineteenth century.

Now in 1850 the United States had not settled this question of its national unity. North of the border there was a group of scattered provinces, very provincial and local in their life and institutions. Fur trade was carried on in areas to the west. In a few years the situation north of the border became clarified. The United States had fought the Civil War and had built a transcontinental railway. In Canada, Federation had become a fact; the intercolonial railway had become established and the Canadian Pacific projected to the West. Several phases of the development, during that quarter of a century when so much seemed to get settled, are worth looking at for their significance to our relations today.

Reciprocity was a very real phase of these developments. The fifties saw the only real reciprocity in trade, that has ever been between those countries, come into effect. It had been secured as a means to avoiding political amalgamation. Our leaders wanted to avoid it, but they did feel it must come, unless they could find a market south of the border. Reciprocity became a fact. Trade increased but it was not very long until south of the border dissatisfaction with it developed. That was partly caused here in Canada. In the late fifties our government went protectionist to the extent of levying new protection tariffs on American manufacturers. The reciprocity treaty said nothing about manufacturers. That was a legal proceeding, but America did not like it. American dissatisfaction was augmented by the American Civil War. For various

reasons, the sentiment in the North became very critical of these Provinces. Those who would end reciprocity took advantage of this growing sentiment against the Provinces and linked the two together. Also the Civil War had meant the free trading South was no longer a part of the Union. The protectionist North dominated Congress. Therefore, reciprocity was shoved to one side. Also the North was ready to take over Canada. There are sections in the North that thought annexation would have been better than reciprocity because it would give political control of the extended market. The Northwestern states hoped to extend their agricultural community across the border into the unpopulated Canadian or British Northwestern prairies. Reciprocity, as a matter of fact, was abrogated by the American Congress at the earliest possible moment under terms of the Treaty; and it was just after the close of the Civil War that reciprocity ceased to function. Hostility played a major part in the matter, but there was also an independent desire to annex Canada on the part of those who, irrespective of the trading situation, believed that America's manufactures' destiny was continental expansion. They believed when America had become the greatest military power in the world was the time to put the policy of expansion into effect. But talk about abrogating reciprocity in favor of annexation, whether by military means or their possible use, did not excite the desire in these provinces to welcome overtures from the republic that was anticipated. Instead of feeling that we must have annexation if we were losing reciprocity, sentiment developed strongly for a union of provinces which, it was then believed, would develop a wider market, within the British North, to offset for loss of a freer market across the border. It was felt that, rather than yield to the potential danger of overwhelming force, that union of the provinces would give military strength. It would enable them to stand on their feet. Sentiment in the provinces was swung toward federation, and political sentiment was swung in favor of it by making the most of the annexation bogey.

I think that the major influence in securing eventual acceptance of Federation was the policy of the British

Government; and that policy was the reverse of what it had been, as a result of circumstances created by the Civil War. There was the possibility of hostilities with the United States, and if for any reason there should be war between Britain and the United States, that war would be fought on the British-North American frontier. It would not merely be a naval war but a land war. Britain sent men and armies across the sea to be ready. They succeeded in holding off the American crisis by making it clear that, if war came, it would be a serious fight.

If we got Federation in '67 we got it, I believe, fundamentally because the situation between the various English-speaking and French-speaking peoples was what it was. It was an American-Canadian-British triangle and out of it came autonomy. When autonomy had been created the chief four eastern provinces took over the West; and settlement of the Hudson's Bay Company dispute in British Columbia came much quicker, because the British Government wanted to hasten with expansion, because the alternative to it was seeing the United States expand the Northwestern part of this continent. The British were very much interested in so shaping the foundations of this northern continent as to enable it to stand on its own feet opposite its great American neighbor. British statesmen were willing to concede complete independence from Britain for Canada. They wanted complete independence from the United States for Canada.

There was some talk—a good deal of talk after the Dominion had been created and had expanded to the Pacific—a good deal of talk among Americans—as to the possibility of even yet persuading Britain to surrender some northern territory at any rate to the States or, at least, to withdraw the British flag from the continent. In confidential discussions, there was in the background this question as to whether these demands should, in any sense, be granted, and it was the attitude of both the Dominion and the British Government that it was entirely out of the question. When you get below the surface you see the fundamental policy was to make impossible the American absorption of this Dominion. The young Dominion hardly knew which way she was

headed. National sentiment was very strong in the early days. We had a group which called itself "Canada First," and that became a very popular slogan. We were inevitably associated with our neighbors to the south and we were very much attached to our transoceanic connection. Just how were these various ideas to be adjusted? Could Canadians manage to reconcile a sense of nationality with the assumption that relations with the United States should be as close economically as the Americans would like them to be and our relations with the Mother Country also be continued as close relations? Both our parties looked to Washington, seeking renewals of reciprocity. Even the Conservative party had adopted a national policy and continued to try and get reciprocity from the States for natural products. They went so far as to try and get wider reciprocity. They talked about a commercial union and unrestricted reciprocity. That gave to the Conservative Party under Sir John A.'s leadership a chance of one more election.

You remember Sir John A.'s patriotic cry, "A British subject I was born; A British subject I will die." I would not for a moment question the sincerity of that utterance of Sir John A. at that time. I would like to suggest that, like all campaign slogans, it would bear some analysis. In several aspects it expressed Sir John's devotion to British connection, but it is important to remember also that, in the days of Sir John A., this Dominion would have liked to become the Kingdom of Canada, one of the group of kingdoms under the British Crown. He was an autonomist from the beginning of history. When he used that slogan he was appealing to something more than mere sentimental attachment to the British Crown. It was an underlying conviction of both French- and English-speaking Canadians that continued British dependence of a sort was a necessary price of our national status in relation to our next door neighbor.

Having won the election the Conservatives went again to Washington for a limited reciprocity, but again failed to get it. When the Liberals came into power they proceeded to maintain the reputation of loyalty to the British Crown and, at the same time, to satisfy the free-trading sentiment

of each member of their party as far as practical, introduced a British preference and began to seek expanded markets with Europe. Britain and the Empire pretty well gave up the hope of expanding markets south of the border. And during that period at the beginning of the present century when tariffs were becoming higher our relations, it appeared, in many respects, were becoming closer. No tariffs could keep down the increasing swarm of young Canadians who flocked to American centres, many of them staying in cities permanently. With the growing practice of American industry to establish branches in Canada there was increasing immigration into this country—executives and their families—and many of them became assimilated into our population. We in Canada looked to American centres as centres of our cultural life. New York set the swing politically. During these same years, difficulties that had continued for a very long time between the two countries were one after another set at rest.

Eventually annexation passed out of the picture. Then the President of the United States, who had devoted a great deal of time to creating goodwill between his country and his neighbor, sent a mission to Ottawa to ask for reciprocity and offered terms which, to himself and all members of that mission, seemed to be exceedingly generous. Some members of the mission could not understand how he could possibly be so generous until they learned that President Taft's fundamental motive was the purchasing of Canadian goodwill at no matter how high the price. When it became necessary to get through Congress the legislation agreed upon it was a far more difficult task, and it proved necessary in order to secure passage of the reciprocity legislation to use the strongest argument put forward by the President himself and by leaders of both great parties—the argument that it was necessary for the economic and political salvation of this continent. But that was one argument that could not be used at Ottawa, and even though they had to pay more for breakfast bacon and other necessities without reciprocity, our people did not want to risk political domination and possible absorption eventually by their neighbor. They were quite willing to pay the higher cost of living. That

upset was very revealing to our American friends and also to Canadians.

Our American friends had been observing how strong the Canadians' stand had been at the Imperial Conference in opposition to another imperial proposal that threatened to lessen and jeopardize our autonomy. Well, in 1911 that was the picture.

In 1935 another Canadian party dares to suggest that it would not lift a little finger to oppose reciprocity, not because Canadians have become any less jealous of their independence of the United States, but because Canadians have acquired more confidence in the preservation of their own independence and do not fear reciprocity as anything which would menace them in any sense. That growth in Canadian affairs and Canadian destiny is something that has many causes. But so far as they are related to Canadian-American relations, it seems to me that the major cause is that growth in Canadian status in the British Commonwealth. There was the war and the formation of the League of Nations. Canadians have had their heart-searching while this process has been going on. We have wondered where we were moving. It was only step by step that changes came and it is not surprising that it took some time to record them as realities. It is a long story. I believe that another thing that did more than anything else to convince Americans that Dominion status was a reality—that we were in a sense an independent state—was the exchange of diplomatic representatives between our two capitals. That was something which, I consider, without knowing anything about the intricacies of politics, would show Canadian independence and American acceptance of that fact. Americans certainly in their economic policy treated us more and more as an alien community. Economic nationalism in the United States vented itself in tariffs, in conduct of border movements of persons and goods, with a corresponding reaction on our side of the border. Then came the Ottawa Conference in 1932—a conference inside the Commonwealth. The Statute of Westminster the previous year assured the political independence of the Dominion and the Conference proved that independence was a reality.

The reality of the Dominion status became obvious to all observers. According to our friends across the border that conference had a very different significance, if you like, a contrary significance. Having seen us merit our nationality, they had been assuming that we were going to draw closer and closer and that we were going to become one of a group of the Western hemisphere—an independent community.

Canada has been from the beginning a member of the League of Nations and the United States has refused to enter it. You will find the fundamental explanation in our different outlooks towards the world in our different histories. The United States won its chance to try democracy and a national experiment in this new world only by winning the war against the Mother Country. They have ever since quite naturally asserted as two things which could not be separated—their independence and their right to try their democratic national experiment with complete avoidance of political entanglements with Europe.

What has been our story? I think some of the things I have said this afternoon offer some proof of our part of the story and tend to show what, I believe, is fundamentally true, that our chance to try our democratic experiment as a separate national society has only been ours because we preserved our European connection. Our Dominion, I do not believe, could have come into existence next door to the United States without British backing, nor do I believe it could have survived as a really independet society, politically independent and free from domination from the south, except as a part of the British Empire and a member of the British Commonwealth, whichever you prefer to call it, so that Canadians, whether or not they have thought very much about it, asserted as quite compatible, national independence with European associations of a very real sort; and the story of what has happened since the war makes it all the more obvious. We got our recognition at the peace conference, in the peace treaties, in the League of Nations, because we had Britain to champion our cause. It is true whether it championed our cause or not, had it not been for our association with the Homeland we would

not have had a chance. We stepped into the League of Nations in full nationality among the nations of the world and took a step our American cousins avoided.

I, for one, am convinced that it is just as true today as it ever was, if Canada would find her fullest national realization and would develop to the highest her own national culture as some contribution to the civilization of the world, that she is just as dependent still upon co-operative policies, not only within the Commonwealth and Europe, as she ever has been. So far as North American isolation being our policy is concerned, it is exactly the reverse with our chance, not only to continue our own internal life in our own way, but to play a part in building world civilization. If we do that, it seems to me, we will realize our true heritage.