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Britain in India

By SIR FIROZKHAN NOON, K.C.I.E.,
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SIR FIROZKHAN NOON, K.C.I.E., M.A.:—Your Honour, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Conant and Gentlemen: First of all, please allow me to thank you all for very kindly sparing time to come here and listen to me. My sole object in coming to Canada has been to try and bring before the public in Canada what India and its people are and what they mean to this great community of nations. We, in India, form seventy-five per cent. of the subjects of His Majesty, and naturally, when belonging to a different climate and perhaps a different race, many feelings arise in the minds of not only people living outside the British Empire, but also living within the British Empire, as to what the future holds for India within the Empire, and as to whether the future generations of this Empire will be able to hold together for their own defense and betterment and for the good of mankind, or whether for differences of race and economic benefits they are likely to fall asunder. That is a point which is likely to arise in the minds of all of us, no matter where we live.

Unfortunately, there is an impression, not only in Europe and the New World, but also in the minds of some of your brother citizens living in other parts of the Empire, that it is not possible for us all to work together for all times, because of the feeling that there is nothing in common between themselves and ourselves to keep us together. That, I feel, is based on a lack of knowledge. That is because you do not understand what we are or know what India stands for today.

“Joint Meeting with Empire Club.”

Great Britain took over the administration of India in the year 1858, by a proclamation of Queen Victoria. I shall now say a word about the connection of the East Indian Company with the Indian public, because you know it as well as I do, that the least said the better. But since the day when His Majesty's Government took over the administration of the Company a new era dawned on India and that unity has been able to establish throughout the whole of that great continent, law and order and peace, which are so essential for the educational and moral and economic progress of any nation in the world. It is that form of government which has united India into one people and in which we can now dream of calling ourselves one nation. That government has provided us with a common language which is foreign to us, and yet today it is ours as much as it is yours. That is the English language. We may not be able to understand each other when we come from the Northwest down to Madras. Yet, when we speak English we do.

During the whole of these eighty years our educational system has been based entirely on the English educational system. Our institutions have been planned by Englishmen, imported from England and by Indians who have been educated in England.

We have for the first time in the history of the East imbibed from our British colleagues the idea of the sovereignty of the people. Before that we only knew the rule of one man, but since our connection with the British people this new thought has pervaded the whole of our country with the result that for the last seventy years, representative institutions have been working in India successfully.

Some of you might think that the present Constitution which exists in India today has been born in a day because of certain political education put forward by ourselves to have the country ruled by our own people. No, that is not the work of one day. British association in India has built up a system of local bodies since the year 1870. There have been municipal committees working more successfully throughout India since that time. We also have had representative institutions in our rural areas since that time. We call them District Boards, as you call them rural municipal-

ities, which means they are full of local people looking after all their own local affairs and serving as a training ground for higher legislatures.

Since 1910 we have had legislative councils of varying degree and power. In 1919 we started our system of government that we call diarchy. We have elected representative houses with half the Ministers responsible to the people and half of the Ministers responsible to the Crown and in the year 1935 the new Constitution came in which has in the provinces eliminated that system of diarchy. We have elected houses with no official houses in them, and ministries which are responsible to the elected house, and ministries which can be turned out by an adverse vote of the Legislature, and all departments in the provinces have been handed over to the Provincial Administrator, in the same way as is the case in Canada.

For the Central Government, we have a Federal Parliament which will exercise all its powers, except the control of the army and foreign relations.

However, our struggle for political control of the country has been a long one. Gradually one by one these things have come into our hands, just as it has been the case with all other countries, including your own.

We have a law in India which is to the effect that your mother doesn't give you milk until you cry for it, and that is a very sound principle that has been found to exist in all countries in the world. You had to fight your Mother Country in order to get your political freedom, and in the same way in India we have had to fight for our political rights. These rights have come to us much easier than they have to you. Today in India you find the government of the whole continent has been allowed to pass into the hands of the people, without a fight or without a revolution. I think when history comes to be written it will be the greatest glory of England that she has trained nearly 400 million people in her own ways of freedom and democracy, with the result today in a short space of eighty years, they are able to take their place in the ranks of self-governing nations in the world.

There may be a criticism and very justifiable criticism advanced against the British Government in India. We all

know, even now when we have national government in India there have been similar criticisms advanced against them. Criticism will be advanced against all governments in all countries, but in India on occasions it has been magnified. But we also know that but for this British control of India's problems, India would not be where she is today. We have only to look to other countries in the East. Show me one country which has such a democratic constitution today as India has—even among those countries which are self-governing in the East. Show me one country which owes its suzerainty or sovereignty to any of the other European nations in Europe, where you can find even the signs of self-government in their small municipalities. Not one. And we know these things as well as the world does. But we don't talk of these things very frequently because, it might give the Englishman a swollen head.

This political struggle against England where some of our advanced politicians have threatened to go out of the Empire and proclaim independence is exactly in the spirit of the Persian proverb that I am going to quote to you: "Threaten a man with death and he will be content to have fever." They wanted Dominion status like other sister Dominions and they thought they would never get that unless they threatened England that they were going to desert her. Beyond that nobody in India wanted to leave the great Commonwealth of Nations, the boons of which we all know and we all appreciate.

Mahatma Ghandi was asked one day what he meant by independence and he said, "Independence in exactly the same way as Canada, South Africa and Australia."

Now, this Nationalist Party, Mr. Ghandi's party, who have put up a very strong fight for political control of the country, the members of this party have suffered enormously by going to jail and on account of peaceful strikes. Today out of the eleven British Provinces you have his party in power in eight of the eleven, and all these Ministers, pledged to the National Congress Party have sworn allegiance to the King. Only the other day, about three or four days ago, I received some newspaper cuttings and from these I learned that the Prime Minister in the Punjab, where I come from, had made a speech at a dinner party in

Simla, that the Punjab would stand by His Majesty's Government in case of war. There also came news that these Congress Ministries have all declared that they will stand by the Mother Country in case of war. I am quoting these things to you, only to show that the heart of India is sound and that India will always be within the Empire.

If there are any people who think that because we have a difference of opinion with Great Britain regarding the pace of advance to our self-government and that on account of that we shall fall out with her or other sister Dominions, they are very much mistaken. Our future is cut out and decided and that future lies within the British Empire.

We in India have lost no time in making known to the world that in case of trouble India is behind the Mother Country, and I have no doubt that even those parts of the Empire who have so far not opened their mouths still have their heart with the Mother Country. People who don't know us wonder why it is that in spite of India being declared a discontented country, according to the gutter press of most countries—with due apologies to the press here—that we are discontented, revolutionary, and yet when the occasion comes India's heart is found to be sound. The reason is not far to seek. Firstly, the outside world knows nothing about India, except what they learn from the filth written by some bad women who travel through our country within three or four days and then come home and write about us. They also don't know what friendships, what economic friendships and political ties exist between Great Britain and India. They don't know how much we value the great economic and industrial connections of Great Britain and India.

Why was it, if India were a discontented country, that during the last war she gave 1,400,000 men to fight for the King? Why was it, if India was a discontented country, that from my own province alone, the Punjab, there were 500,000 recruits that were recruited during the time the war was going on? And, let me tell you, that was without conscription that you had to have in Canada.

I know of several instances in the Punjab where leading men from the villages were called up by the District

Officer and asked, "What can you do for your King in this hour of trial?" One man went home and brought both his sons and he said, "I have nothing more valuable than this. Take them with you." And it is in this manner that those 500,000 men were found. That wasn't the contribution of an oppressed race. That was a gift of a willing and friendly heart and it is that heart which exists in India today. Let me assure you that should there be another occasion India will not be found wanting.

Now, why is it that the Indian heart is with England? Has England done anything to deserve their loyalty and friendship? If so, what is it? Today we stand at the threshold of a new era in India, where the government has been handed over to the elected representatives of the people, but for those two subjects, our army and foreign relations. Is there anything in that connection of eighty years which the Indian people appreciate and value? Yes, if you knew. Today England has handed over to India as a trustee of the people the entire wealth of the nation, undiminished—nay, not undiminished, but enhanced. You go down and ask the worst critic of Great Britain in India, and outside India, and not one man will be able to tell you that England has taken away an ounce of gold or a pound of corn unless it was paid for in the open market at market prices. No cash contribution has been levied by England on India throughout that connection of eighty years, except for one instance, and that was during the war when India willingly contributed about 70 million pounds for the common chest, because we were all fighting a common enemy. Otherwise, every anna realized in India by way of taxation has been spent in India. All the land which belongs to the State, all the mineral wealth which is under the ground and belongs to the state, all the forests and all the natural wealth in the way of social services; in India, eighty per cent. of the railways belong to the State. The others are coming into the hands of the State when their lease expires, on payment of full compensation,—and all the projects into which millions of pounds have been sunk to make people secure against famine and belong to the State—All these have been handed over by an honest trustee in the most flourishing condition to the children of India.

What else has England handed over to India that we value? It is the system of government. Our judicial system, our civil services, our co-operative medical and other departments, all our permanent servants of the Crown recruited through public service commissions, with security of their services against all ministerial attacks (with due reverence), this system of administrative services is such that you will find the world has no example to show you that can compare in efficiency and service to the public.

Besides these services, what else has England given to India? I think her greatest gift has been the training of the mind of the Indian people in ways of democracy and freedom. Now, Gentlemen we are human beings, just as much as you are. We may not speak, but yet we appreciate what services have been rendered to India. By way of industry today India is one of the first eight industrial countries of the world enjoying a permanent seat on the International Labour organization in Geneva, and just to give you an example of what industrial progress we have made I shall only quote you two instances. You all know that India produces all the raw materials we need and we have a consuming market at our door. Gold and iron are plentiful. We have at the moment complete physical autonomy. People in the New World or in Europe may be thinking today that India is being economically or industrially drained by England. There is nothing farther from the truth. Today, India is negotiating a trade pact with England, renewal of the trade pact, as a free and independent partner of this Empire. And it is physical autonomy that has enabled India to build up her industry.

To give you one example. You hear so much about Lancashire and the row they make in the papers. In India today we are producing eighty-five per cent. of the cloth, machine-made cloth that we consume in India. In India we have built up during the course of the last ten or twelve years, we have increased the number of our sugar cane mills, with the result that we produce a million tons of white cane sugar in India today, and we are not importing an ounce from the Dutch East Indies, fifty per cent. of whose factories are now closed because their market is now gone.

If any of you here are interested in India, come and pay us a visit. We are not a hot country, full of snakes and mosquitoes as some of you might think. We have some of the best climates in the world in the months of November, December, January and February. If you come to Delhi, you will come back and say, "Well, India by way of climate has as good a climate as Canada."

Now, all this industrial prosperity is appreciated by the public. Don't run away with the idea if you have been looking for Paradise on earth that I have now found you one. We have many shortcomings in India. We are a very poor people. We are an agricultural country. Ninety per cent. of us depend on the agricultural products of our land, and as there has been an agricultural slump, the purchasing power of the people is low, yet we feel that money is not everything in the world and without money, even though poor, we can yet be happy and contented. That contentment is given to us by a deep and a living faith in the living God. We feel that you may do what you like in this world—the most careful of men plan things and yet they go wrong somewhere. Why? Because there is that kind of Providence working behind it. People say that God is on the side of the biggest battalions in the world. We do not believe in that theory of brute force. We believe that God is on the side of truth and God lives in the minds of the humble and the meek.

Last year in England, in the evening I was sitting at my radio when the Archbishop of Canterbury issued an appeal to the people of Great Britain. He said, "During this night King Edward is going to make up his mind what to do. Let us all pray that God may give him true guidance". There was an Indian friend sitting by me and I said to him, "Take it from me, whatever King Edward does tomorrow will be in the best interests of the nation", and he said, "Why?" I said, "A nation that still believes in a God, the prayers of that nation will never remain unanswered when they seek guidance."

If there are any people in this modern age of materialism and greed and aggrandizement who still believe in God, you will find quite a few of them in England, and during my travels through this country I am paying no lip compli-

ment to you that it has been a source of great joy to me to find that the heart of the Canadian people is still with God. It is my sincere prayer that if this Empire of ours and its people wish eventually to succeed they must never give up their faith in God. Today some people may be successful. They may appear to be successful, but we, in India, as do you in Canada, know and realize that eventually truth will shine, and it is our sincere hope that while we continue to arm ourselves for defense, yet the love of God may continue to live in our minds.

One of our well known ascetic poets has said: A human heart without the love of God is like a sugar cane without sugar, like a nightingale without song, like an organ without music, like a flower without scent.

MR. D. M. GOWDY:—I am going to ask Mr. J. F. Pratt, the President of the Empire Club to express the thanks of this audience.

MR. J. F. PRATT, K.C.:—Your Honour, Sir Firozkhan, Mr. Conant, Gentlemen: My first word of thanks is to the wise Indian Government which selected Sir Firozkhan Noon as its High Commissioner. But for that wisdom we would not have had the great privilege of listening today to what I consider has been one of the most illuminating and inspiring addresses that has ever been presented to a Canadian audience by a representative of our sister Dominion. Sir Firozkhan has come to us at considerable personal inconvenience because during the luncheon he told me that during the entire three weeks he has been in Canada he has not even had a Sunday to himself.

We trust that Sir Firozkhan, in accepting our sincere thanks will take back with him to his homeland in England, his present homeland, and convey to his fellow citizens in our sister Dominion, the best wishes of the Canadian and Empire Clubs for their long continuance with us in the British Empire.