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The British Empire

BY PROFESSOR WRONG.*

Mr. President and Gentlemen,—It is a pleasure for me to have once more the honor of speaking to the Canadian Club. I believe the last time I spoke here was in the early days of the war, and we have all lived long lives during the intervening years. The subject I am to speak upon is hardly my own choice; but it fitted in admirably with the subject I should have chosen. I am to explain the words of someone else; what General Smuts meant when he said that "the British Empire ceased to exist on August 4, 1914."

What the General meant was, of course, that at that date a new force within the British Empire became apparent; that the old form of organization had ceased to be adequate; and that some new relation of the various states within the Empire had become necessary. It is, perhaps, fitting that the remarks of General Smuts should be discussed here in Canada. It has been in Canada during the last one hundred and fifty years that the political development has taken place, which has been followed in other parts of the Empire.

I think one might say without any forcing of analogies that the development of Canada divides itself quite naturally into seven ages. We speak of the seven ages of man and there are really seven quite distinct phases of development in our history. But, unlike the ages of men, they are not steps towards decay but towards greater vigor. We began our record, as a British country, in the form of a conquered state. Canada was conquered as a result of war, and taken over and ruled as a conquered country; and the first age of our development was that of Military Despotism in which we were ruled by a military Governor under Royal proclamation, without any vestige of control of our own affairs. That period lasted a comparatively short time; and it was followed by what one might call the age of benevolent despotism.

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This benevolent despotism was created by the bill which we know as the Quebec Act. When this first Act of Parliament that affected the government of Canada was passed in 1774, it was believed by those who framed the Act that no Britons, except a few misguided people, would ever think of settling within the frontiers of Canada; because at that time Great Britain held the regions further south with better climate and what was believed to be more fertile land. And the Act of 1774 made great concessions to the French, which I myself do not regret; it gave them their civil law, and the old privileges of their Church under the French régime. Since it was expected that the population would always be prevaillingly French, it seemed wise to go as far as possible in concession. The despotism was benevolent for it was extremely well meaning. The Governors were in sympathy with the French; and I, for my part, do not think the French have any great cause for complaint over the treatment they received after the Conquest.

But soon there was a reversal of the expectations of those who framed the Quebec Act. There came the American Revolution, and it is quite true that on the Fourth of July, 1776, the British Empire ceased to exist. I cannot controvert that statement by explaining it in the way that I can explain away General Smuts' statement. The older British Empire literally ceased to exist. It was broken up from that time. But from the breakage of the old system came the migration of the loyal people who found their way here to Canada, and who were determined to create a state in harmony with their own political training and their own political ideas. The site of the City of Toronto where we stand was then, technically, a part of Quebec; for the Province of Quebec extended far westward and included the whole region north of the Ohio River as far as the Mississippi. It makes one's mouth water to think of that Province of Quebec. From a part of it have been formed no less than five States of the American Union.

Our loyalist ancestors came here and found the French Civil law not actually enforced, but none the less the law of the country. They found the Church of the French protected and privileged by the law. Naturally they desired to found a political system in harmony with their own ideas, and hence we have the third age. What was left of the old province of Quebec and had not been added to the United States, was divided into the two provinces of Upper Canada and Lower Canada. One of them, it was expected, would remain French, the other would be peopled chiefly by settlers of English origin.

Two separate elected legislatures were set up and we have what one may call normal colonial government, half a free government and half a government under the control of the Colonial Office in London. That third age endured for half a century, much longer than either of the previous ages had endured.

It was found to have many defects. It is true of political development that you cannot have a people half free and half unfree. During those fifty years we developed here conceptions of Responsible Government, of controlling our own affairs, which, in the end, led to such discontent that armed rebellion took place at the end of the period, and resulted in the beginning of the fourth age. This was that of an enforced union between the French and the English in Canada. The French as a whole were not consulted. Only a few people in Lower Canada were consulted. They gave their approval; and the French were forced into political union, under a single legislature, with the English in Canada. The two elements were, for the most part, strangers to each other. The outlook was hardly promising. But Canada improved. It was not very long before she had about three million people. You cannot play with three million people. The United States had only two-and-a-half million when it became a separate nation. There was bound to be in Canada some settlement of political relationships with Great Britain which involved greater responsibility on the part of the people of Canada, for it was soon seen that these three million people were going to look after themselves.

In 1858 came what I should call the fifth age of our development, when Canada took it upon herself to establish her fiscal independence; to put on duties at her discretion for revenue or to protect industries, and in doing so, to consider chiefly the interests of the Canadian people. There were some pretty sharp protests against the policy of fiscal independence. If you read the comments of the London Times about 1860 you will find some very unpleasant things said about Canada. I have been amused a little at a protest made by the Chamber of Commerce of Sheffield against Canada's fiscal independence. Great Britain had been enjoying Free Trade for some fifteen years; and the people of Sheffield and the Colonial Secretary of the time were surprised and shocked at the idea that Canada should turn its back on Free Trade and impose a tariff. There is a memorial of the Chamber of Commerce of Sheffield in which those ardent Imperialists say they find it actually true

that industries are growing up in Upper and Lower Canada through which the Canadian people can satisfy their own needs in respect to cutlery; and they prayed that the Imperial government should see that this sort of thing shall be stopped. There you have the fifth age of development.

Then we come to the sixth age. It is based on the creation of a Federal constitution, which very soon included all the British-territories stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Now, the feature of this constitution, the one under which we are now living, the most striking is that, unlike all the previous constitutions, it was made in Canada. It was the first of our constitutions that was shaped by our own people, by our own hand. True, it was modified in London, but the modifications were so slight as hardly to matter; and in 1867 we came under the provisions of a constitution which expressed the desires and ideals of the Canadian people themselves. Had the framers not been checked in London in respect to one thing we should now have the Kingdom of Canada. In London this name, proposed by Canada, was objected to, because it was thought that the United States, which was in rather an irritated condition with respect to troubles during the Civil War, would not like the idea of a Kingdom on its north frontier. And in deference to the United States—I suspect the United States hardly gave a thought to it—the name of the “Kingdom of Canada” was changed to the name “Dominion of Canada,” under which we now exist.

I am going to make a sporting offer to the members of the Canadian Club. If any one can produce authentic testimony as to the origin of the name “Dominion” of Canada, I do not know how much I am prepared to subscribe for a reward, but I will subscribe something liberal, and ask my friends at the table here to join me to make it something worth while. I don't know where the name “Dominion” of Canada came from, and I have never heard any explanation which seemed to me authentic.

Our sixth age involved complete domestic self-government. It did not involve, on the face of it, any control of foreign affairs, but that soon began to develop. We acquired the power to negotiate our own commercial treaties. And then there came the seventh and last age on the 4th of August 1914; when by some mysterious impulse which, I confess, I do not wholly understand; the whole British people thought alike and acted alike, and began to take their part in the great struggle. There is an English sonnet by Blanes White, of which the motive is,

that if a man had always lived in the brightness of the sunlight, he could never have known the mysteries and wonders of the darkness, could not have known the spaces dotted by the stars, and how great is this universe about us. And it seems to me that the British Empire in some way learned through darkness something of the meaning of its own life. We saw things in those days that we hardly knew existed, vistas which we hardly realized were within the range of our own life. Out of the darkness of those trying days and of the experiences of the years that followed came, I think, some new meaning of the union of the British peoples.

There are two things that came during the war which profoundly affected the status of the British peoples. The first was the need of some organized method of getting together to confront the common enemy, and out of it came the Imperial War Cabinet. The Imperial War Cabinet was an attempt to bring together in council in London, with some measure of authority in respect to action, the vital leaders of the whole British commonwealth. And the Imperial War Cabinet did this work extremely well. The more I hear of what it did and the way in which it did it; the more I admire the wisdom, the restraint, the insight, which our leaders showed in those terrible days of crisis. But the very name, Imperial War Cabinet, shows its limitations. It was brought together for a specific purpose. It planned for the war. It had no direct governing power. It could only make requests of the individual states of the Empire and act through existing constitutional machinery. But the Imperial War Cabinet did frame a war policy for the whole British Empire; and it framed it, as I said, extremely well. The Imperial War Cabinet developed defects. It took away from the activities of political life at home, the leaders, the prime ministers, who were in London just at the time when their presence was most critically needed in their own country. And so the Imperial War Cabinet has not given us the foundation upon which we can base the future organization of the peoples who compose the British Commonwealth. It has not failed—it did its work, but we are still waiting for a solution on that side of the union of our peoples.

Now, the other thing that has come out of the war was the international recognition at Paris; on the demand or request of the Prime Minister of Canada, of the various self-governing states of the British Empire as nations with full right and authority to act as nations. Out of that came representation

of Canada in the League of Nations; and out of that came also our representation in the International Labor Conference, which has held its first session at Washington. Now, difficulties have arisen, and the difficulty of which I am to speak to-day is the difficulty that comes from the United States in respect to the six members who are to sit in the League of Nations representing the six great states of the British Empire.

The letter which Lord Grey sent to the London press, and which was printed on January 31 of this year, is quite uncompromising. In order that there may be no mistake as to what Lord Grey said, I quote his words: "The self-governing Dominions are full members of the League. They will admit, and Great Britain can admit, no qualification whatever of that right." Now, there you are. Let us in these days express no word that is likely to add to the irritations which will come, no matter how careful we may be. There are two things that I should like Canadians to remember as in some way explaining the real difficulties felt in the United States. The United States has admitted that we are, fiscally, one people, that the different states of the British Empire may make all the trade arrangements they like among themselves and that such preference as they may give to each other will not be regarded as unfair discrimination. The United States will not demand concessions from Canada, for instance, because Canada chooses to give concessions to Great Britain. This is an extremely valuable admission, and involves, on the part of the United States, recognition of the British Commonwealth as a unit. Further, the British Commonwealth is a unit in respect to making war. If Great Britain is at war we are at war. We cannot get away from that, and we do not want to get away from it. We must admit that in those two things the outside nations have agreed to look upon the British Commonwealth as a single state.

Then, further, we must remember that in the United States there is a long tradition of antagonism to Great Britain. I have been obliged to go into the history of the American Revolution; and I have been astonished by the bitterness, as early as in 1775, of men like Washington and Franklin in respect to the supposed tyranny of Great Britain. Now, when Franklin and Washington said things then, they said them also to a distant posterity; and in the United States the point of view of Washington and Franklin and others has become an inherited conviction that Britain is always greedy and selfish. We must make some allowances in respect to public opinion in

the United States when we stand before the world, now as six and now as one; and we must be patient in trying to get the world to understand that curious paradox. It is difficult to understand that this British Commonwealth can after all be composed of free nations, each of them self-controlling and each of them playing its part with its own strength in the union that has been called heretofore the British Empire. And so, while standing without compromise on the utterance of Lord Grey,—I ask the members of the Canadian Club and the Canadian press to say no word that will add any needless irritation to a problem that is extremely difficult and the solution of which means a great deal for the well-being of the world.

I have been told by persons who, I think, know the situation in the United States, that it is not involved in their opposition that we, for instance, shall be forced to withdraw from membership of the League of Nations. The United States only claims that it will not be bound by anything done in which the British peoples have had more than one vote. In a word, they reserve the right to consider on its own merits any question in which they have not had the same number of votes. The reservation affects the United States only. I am told that those who are demanding this reservation at Washington are quite willing to admit that it binds only the United States, and does not bind those who are already full members of the League. We must have patience. The American people have shown in the past that, while they act slowly, they usually arrive at the right decision, and I hope they will not now disappoint us.

Now let me in the few moments that remain turn to discuss some points in respect to our own outlook that result from that saying of General Smuts. If the British Empire ceased to exist on the 4th of August 1914, then a highly centralized organization in respect, at any rate, to defence and foreign affairs passed away. We used to hear boasts about the bigness of the British Empire. I have never myself liked the picture of the British Empire as a colossus with its head under the pale sky of the north, its body basking in the sunshine of the tropics and its feet planted solidly on the lands of the Southern Seas. There is no virtue in mere size; and the British Empire, when it ceased to exist on August 4, 1914, was divided into a number of states, each of them self-acting, each of them charged with its own responsibilities. The British Commonwealth has become, if one may say so, a Team of

Nations, and what Canada has to look out for in the future is that it shall throw its full weight in the team, and not let its traces become slack. And I sometimes wonder if, in the midst of our exultance at being a young nation, we are not forgetting some of the responsibilities that go with full nationhood. There is a question of taking our share in the defence of the commonwealth, in helping to protect the weaker peoples of the earth, and trying to develop that self-government which we ourselves enjoy. These are things that go with the conception of being a nation. It is this responsibility which is now come home to us; and we cannot evade it, but must confront it under this new conception of our standing.

Then, going with this, is the self-discipline that any person who has attained to the discretion of manhood must acquire. I heard the other day a striking illustration from a banker of the lack of discipline among our own people. A trader in a small way had come to him to ask him for a loan of a thousand dollars. You know with what gentlemanly persistence a banker asks what the money is for, and when this banker pressed the point, rather shamefacedly in the end the customer said the truth was that his wife said she must have a fur coat. All I would say is that the case indicates a certain lack of self-discipline. As a nation, clothed as we are with vast responsibilities, I think each of us must be confronted with the problem of self-discipline in connection with personal expenditure, personal habits, and all those things which help to make us factors in weakening or strengthening the life of a nation. If we are to discharge the real functions of a nation we must learn the stern rigor of self-control and of industry which will help to equip our nation with the things that it ought to have.

Just one other thing and I am done. Let us get rid, in our national life, of what I may call the Tyranny of Fear. Let us not be afraid! Were we afraid in 1914? Yes, and no. Afraid because we saw the awfulness of the situation with which we were confronted; but yet not afraid, because we were ready to face it and see it through. I hear voices that say we have been disillusioned, that out of this war are not to come the good things which we promised ourselves. I call that, the Tyranny of Fear. I say that the nation that can fight through the kind of struggle through which we have come, and win just by grim tenacity and power to hang on, can also confront the problems of peace.

And so, let us not believe, as craven voices are to-day asking us to believe, that man is at heart a base animal, a poor

degraded creature, and that human nature is so weak that we need never expect to build anything sure on that foundation. People say human nature does not change. I do not want it to change. I am not aware that any kind of nature changes its fundamental qualities. What I do want, in respect to man, is to believe that there are in him the noble elements which, when appealed to, will respond and will enable him to play his part worthily in the drama of life. Let us confront our problems as a free state united with other free states. Let us co-operate in the upbuilding of a union that is unprecedented in the history of the world. We have a tradition of liberty that no other people has. Let us apply its principles and build up here in Canada something that is worthy of our past; something that will in the future help us to protect the weak, while at the same time we are finding our own best development.