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First Meeting of Season, combined with Royal Winter Fair and Empire Club

Farming in England

ARTHUR G. STREET, ESQUIRE.

CHAIRMAN: MR. GORDON F. PERRY,
President, Royal Winter Fair.

CHAIRMAN:—Ladies and Gentlemen: We are greatly honoured in having as our Guest-Speaker Mr. Arthur Street, well known to you all as either a famous author or a famous farmer. I am going to ask a great personal friend of his, the Honourable Duncan Marshall, if he will say a word by way of introduction.

HONOURABLE DUNCAN MARSHALL:—Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen: It has been seldom my privilege to have more pleasure in introducing a public speaker than I have today. A half dozen years ago I was charmed by the pages of "Farmer's Glory", and I enquired who the author was. Since that time I have read with interest and with profit a dozen books written by Arthur Street, a Wiltshire farmer, who says he learned something of agriculture through his experience as a farm hand in the Province of Manitoba, beginning some twenty-six years ago. When I visited him on his farm last summer and made his personal acquaintance, I resolved that I would try, if possible, to bring him over to this country in order that many of the

farmers and business men in the Dominion of Canada might hear the voice of a practical farmer in England, who was fond enough of this country to be its champion upon more than one occasion.

We are indebted today to the Massey-Harris Company, through Mr. Russell, to the Imperial Oil Company, through Mr. Smith, and to Canada Packers, through Mr. Stanley MacLean, for having the privilege in several of the Provinces of Canada of hearing addresses by Mr. Street.

As a farm hand in Manitoba, Mr. Street was able to hold his job for three consecutive years which, I think, is as good a reputation as he needs to have as a worker. He later became tenant of the farm upon which he was born in Wiltshire, England, and after the War, with many of the other farmers, suffered reverses and he undertook to make these up by going into the dairy business. For five consecutive years he was out at work at 4.30 a.m., and drove his own milk waggon, delivering milk at the back door early in the morning at the houses of Salisbury and frequently going in at the front door late in the evening to attend dinner, thereby establishing the democracy and the dignity of British agriculture. No man has done more to uphold the dignity of farming than he has by his pen and his voice over the last five or six years and, because Canadian agriculture is so closely connected with British agriculture and because Britain is now and shall continue to be for many years largely the market for Canadian farm produce, I thought that we could become better acquainted, and it is important that we should be better acquainted with our fellow farmers in Great Britain, by having one of them come to us in this way. As I said in the beginning, I have very great pleasure and delight in introducing to you a working farmer, an author — he says by chance, but — his book, "Farmer's Glory", is the agricultural classic of Great Britain, if not of the world. If you have not delighted in his tales of the farm and you know anything about the operation upon the land, then you should read the stories written by a man who has perhaps greater love and understanding of the language of the land in his heart, than any person else I have had the privilege of meeting in many years. Mr. Arthur G. Street—farmer and author. (Applause).

MR. ARTHUR G. STREET:—Mr. Chairman, Mr. Marshall, Ladies and Gentlemen: It is a little difficult to talk to you after the sort of introduction that Mr. Marshall seems to be able to put forward on any opportunity. You see, I am a stranger amongst you. I am also that curious thing, a freak and a cross-bred. My pedigree is, "By Poverty out of Farm". Not, I think, the worst of pedigrees. When I tell you that I am a freak I know it, because I am never in my own country treated fairly. Up in London they say, "O, yes, that is Street. Writes books. Got a farm down in Wiltshire. A bit queer." Down in Wiltshire, they say, "O, yes, that is Street. Farms the farm his father had before him. Writes books. A bit queer." Never treated fairly. But it seems that up to date anyway, since I have come over here, you are doing your best to treat me fairly, for which I thank you.

Now, my job as I see it over here is to try to show you that there is farming in England, in Britain, which is worthy not only of the consideration of the townspeople of Britain but also of your consideration. Now, it occurs to me that a good many of you may well ask, "Well, how in the world can there be any farming at all in a little sawn-off Island like that? There isn't room for any." Then, you read in the papers that there is only thirteen per cent of the population of Britain on the land and you say again, of course, "The farms over there cannot amount to anything at all." Now, even so, it is important.

I met some new friends yesterday, at their leisure, and I rather gathered from them, that possibly at this meeting the desire for entertainment might be greater, than the desire for information. But, even so, I have a duty to the farms of my own country and if I have time I will try and entertain you later on. In the first place I want to give you a serious message and that is, the importance of the British farm in any Empire scheme, in any discussion in this great Commonwealth of Nations.

This is a material age, so I will first refer to its money value, the production side. If you look at a map you will see that funny little Island, so small in Europe. Then, you look across and you see the wide expanse of Canada. And I come here and tell you something that you won't believe,

but something which is true, that the agriculture of Canada produces just a little bit more per annum than the agriculture of my country, not much more; and that the agriculture of my country produces considerably more per annum, pound sterling, than the agriculture of Australia, and British farming produces every year, four times the farm output of South Africa, and I tell you that is not bad for a little sawn-off Island. It may be small, but we do know how to farm it.

Then, comes the question of capital. I had a great time at home trying to knock into people's heads that you cannot farm without capital. People come to me, townspeople chiefly, parents drive up and they say, "Mr. Street, we want to put Johnnie into farming. How do we do it and what is it going to cost?" I say, "Look here, don't waste his time and your money unless when he is trained you can give him some capital." I well remember one lady. "O, yes, a farmer doesn't need any capital. He just needs some cows and he milks them. He picks up the eggs and he cuts the wheat, but he doesn't need any capital." I said, "I am sorry, I am afraid Johnnie will have to have some." She said, "Well, we can let Johnnie have £200." A thousand dollars. I said, "I am sorry, but he can't do much with that." She said, "We shouldn't expect him to own his farm on the start." I had to tell her, "As a town farmer renting a farm, he will require, as a minimum, fifty dollars per acre for every acre he rents." When I told the lady that she said, quite frankly, "I don't believe it." Her husband, you notice, said nothing. It was very obvious to me, to use a farm illustration, the mare was the better horse in the stable, and so I continued to talk to her. I said, "Look here, outside you have a car which is worth about £100." (You must translate all this into dollars, because I'm bad in mathematics.) I said, "When that car is held up on the highway by a herd of cows, what does your husband say?" She said, "I don't like to tell you." I said, "Right. The next time you are hung up, you will say, or get him to say, 'Our £100 car is being held up by £400 of cattle—one item in a rather small farmer's budget'." Then, she began to realize that there was some capital in the British farm.

I saw some figures the other day that said that the total capital in farms in the countries of Canada, Australia,

South Africa and the Argentine, the total capital of those four countries engaged in agriculture was £1,920,000,000. For your information there is £1,200,000,000 invested in the farms of Great Britain. And I say to you, it is not a small business for a small island.

Then, you come to the question of employment. The dairy industry, one brand of the British farm, employs more people than will the ship-building of Great Britain, and all the electrical-engineering of Great Britain added together, and nobody knows it, and those who do know it, don't believe it, because it is difficult to see and the modern mind, due to the effect, largely, I am afraid, of modern education, can only comprehend what it can see, and there is nothing to see in farming—just a few poor fools, tracking about in the mud, who will always be, according to the political view, either a charming joke or else a damned nuisance. They can't see it. People at home are quite willing to see and understand and value the Selfridge Building and the British Broadcasting House—big things like that—but they cannot see farms.

When we built over there that big liner, the Queen Mary, everybody in Great Britain and, I think, quite a lot of people over here, were educated by the press and the wireless to know the length of her, the breadth of her, her tonnage and all about her, but as I have told you, although that was quite a big thing in the business life of the nation, a big thing in the one little industry of ship-building, as I told you, dairying employs many more people. If you could only get people when they see a man walking behind a few cows going down the road, if you could only get them to say, "Of course, that is bigger than the Queen Mary." It is true, it is bigger. Let me tell you this: From our point of view at home the time may come, and the wisest of us knows not how soon, when ships like the Queen Mary may be unable to cross the sea and that old fellow, walking behind the cows in the Old Country, will be considered of considerably more importance, than he is today.

There is another side to the importance of farms from our point of view, and that is the preservation of the beauty of England's countryside. A good many of you have visited England and know of that beauty. Have you thought that

beauty is largely and almost entirely due to the farms? The patch-work quilt—those irregularly shaped fields, irregular patches of different colours, stitched together with the hand-stitching of either straggling hedge-rows or gray stone walls, that patch-work quilt which clothes England, the beauty of it, the credit for it must be given to British farms. Nature, I grant you, weaves the fabric of that quilt, British farming designs the pattern. Take farming away, let it die over there, what have you? Swamps in your valleys, jungles, the patch-work quilt gone, and a great loss, not only to the people at home, but to the people over here. If we have anything in England which is unique, and of great value, which we ought to preserve, it is the beauty of our countryside and we can only preserve it, Ladies and Gentlemen, if we preserve a sufficiency of good farms in that Old Country.

Now, I come to a point which I think touches not only the farm at home but the farm here, and that is the question of national safety. It is funny, no matter how clever mankind becomes, you have to admit that over in the Old Country today the fear of the ancients, the fear of famine, is still the greatest fear. Now, we have a lessening in acreage. We keep building, we want more land for roads, for recreation, for houses, for railways. We are in the position of a beleaguered city—45,000,000 people on a little patch of ground. We must farm that patch of ground to its fullest capacity during peace, we must keep up the fertility of that patch of ground during peace so it can possibly save us during war. No statesman at home dare neglect the farms of his own country. There are 45,000,000 people he is responsible for and he does not know at what time the world may go mad and those people need food. Whatever the cost we have to preserve, from that point of view, a flourishing agriculture in the Old Country and, as I have told you, the farmers are the trustees of the land. We have farmed that land over there for generations, for centuries, and we can still farm it and we must always be permitted to farm it well.

The idea of running agriculture in the way so many other industries are run is absurd. I will just for a moment contrast, if you like, agriculture and mining. Notice the

difference. When you mine you use up national capital and make a most ungodly mess, but a farmer who knows his job can take crop after crop after crop out of the soil and still leave its beauty and its fertility unimpaired. A farmer, a good farmer, produces national income and preserves national capital. No other industry can claim to do that. (Applause).

So we must keep our farms up at home. Our farming at home must largely be the production in peace of perishable first quality foods, because the less grain we grow during peace, the more we shall be able to grow during war, and here is a point, which I feel I can say quite fairly, as an English farmer to you, and that is the relationship of Canada's agriculture, to this modern fear of famine in the Old Country. You will always in any Imperial conflict get for your agriculture here, very favourable consideration, because of your geographical position. You are not only the shortest haul to the Old Country for food, but you are the safest haul. Canada's produce, in the event of war, can come to the Old Country past no hostile shore whatsoever. At the time when our wheat crop is ready for transport in the winter there are sixteen hours of darkness. We have got very clever with war inventions these days but in the minds of a good many people in England today is the knowledge that, if war comes, Canada's produce will get to us. (Applause). So, we are always willing at home to recognize the importance of your farming over here, to give it, in any deal between the Mother Country and the Dominions, a square deal. But I have come over here to try to point out to you, that at the same time you must recognize, from various points of view, the importance of a flourishing agriculture on those few acres at home. We will recognize your importance. I have come here to ask you to recognize ours.

Now, that, I think, is the economic argument. There is the value of the British farm from the point of view of its money output, its employment, the question of national safety and the preserving of the beauty of the countryside, but there are other values to a rural population and this is a thing about which I am very keen, about which I know Mr. Marshall is very keen; and about which I hope that a good many of you are very keen; and that is the non-material

values of a rural population — if you like, the spiritual values. God help a country that hasn't got a rural population, because that is where the formation of national character is carried on: in the rural districts, not in the towns.

The British are, you will agree, an illogical people. We are, I know, the despair of more logical nations, Continental nations, especially. I give you an illustration: During the war, some very well meaning old gentlemen in the Old Country discovered to their horror that, while the troops of other nations were going over the top, singing songs or high moral fervour, that the British troops and the Dominion troops were going into battle singing, quite frankly, songs that were not printable. They got very worried about it and they said, "This cannot be", so they printed the proper type of songs and shipped them out to the front. Did the troops sing them? No, they didn't. They still went into battle singing the same sort of unprintable songs, one of which I dare to quote:

> Send my father and my mother,
> Send my sister and my brother,
> But, for God's sake, don't send me.

The British Tommy went into battle singing that; and all the other nations scratched their heads and said, "What in the world can you do, with a people like that? It isn't logical."

Well, life isn't logical. All the chess champions come from Czechoslovakia. If you want to play poker, they don't come from Czechoslovakia, the poker players, because poker isn't logical. Neither is life, neither is the art of government. That is not a logical thing, but the art of government is a thing, I think you will agree, the British nation does possess in a marked measure. (Applause). That art of government, Ladies and Gentlemen, was not learned in Britain's towns, it was learned in the country districts. I will give an illustration that will take you right back to Charles, the Second. At that time the British Constable was responsible for law and order in his village. At that time there was a law on the statute books that provided penalties, including branding, for anyone, who used bad language. At

that time everybody in the village swore as often and as charmingly as they do today and nobody took the slightest notice of the law at all. A logical nation would either have enforced that law or repealed it. No, not the English, Oh, no! They just left it there and didn't use it. Then, one day, there was a fellow in the village who was a darned nuisance to everybody. He was a wife-beater, a poacher, a thief and a drunkard, and, I think, what some of our more advanced friends now call, anti-social. Then, one day, he swore. The village constable said, "Here is this most excellent law", and he proceeded to put it into operation and that, Ladies and Gentlemen, is the art of government. (Applause) Not just knowing how, but knowing when; and I tell you that is what it is.

Let us go to an even later date. A friend of mine now well into his seventies, when a young man had his first farm in a village in the Old Country. He was courting hard and the old berger of the parish came up one day, just as he was off to see his girl, and he said, "We have elected thee overseer." Well, the overseer of a parish at that time had to make the rate, take charge of the parish, and this young man wasn't very much interested. He had other fish to fry. He said so. He said to the old villager, "Well, it is very nice of you to have elected me and all that, but I am not very interested," and the ancient said, "Well, thee damsel will be. The books be coming up tomorrow." Now, willy-nilly, that young man was forced to take his place in the government of his fellows, and that was the beginning of his training in the English village. He grows up, does his job, plays his part all his life. Two years ago he was a J.P. He drove up outside my window one afternoon and I yelled to him to come in. I said, "Daniel, you look all hot and bothered." He said, "I should think so. I have just wasted all day in such-and-such a police court." I said, "What do you mean—all day?" He said, "Well, we have given three decisions, two legal and grossly unjust, but the last one was illegal and just. I was going to have my way about something." "You see", he said, "I know the people." And that is the whole point; he knew the people. That is where the art of government is learned in the Old Country districts. If you just want the letter of the law administered

by a machine, well, have it. As an Englishman, I want something better.

Then, there is the charge of slowness which is always levelled against country people. I want to suggest to you today that the quality of being a little slower than one's fellows is a virtue, it is a thing to be admired. People are slow in the country. I suggest to you that they are sure.

I used to travel every day, every week, up to London by a certain train and at Woking, about fourteen miles from London the train used to fill up with people dashing up to town for business. I got to know them, I used to listen to them and they used to talk. They used to say, "Did you see what Lloyd George said in the Evening Standard yesterday?" "Did you hear what that silly ass, Street, said over the microphone last night?" "Did you hear what somebody else said?" They never had an idea of their own. All second-hand—all second-hand stuff. All townspeople, you see. Poor devils, it must be second-hand stuff. I have got an old farmer friend, close to eighty, and he knows, and, mark you, he has found it out himself he knows it doesn't matter what the Daily Mail says, or what I say over the microphone; the grass won't grow, unless the rain comes. "That", you say, "that isn't much." He knows it, he has discovered it himself. You have millions of people in town, who have never discovered a blamed thing.

Then, there is the question of the proper use of machinery. If you don't have a rural population you will never get that, because the country man uses machinery and refuses to serve it, whereas the town man, as I see it, is driven by a mechanical whip and has to serve the machinery which he has installed. In London, in the underground railway, I am one of the minority who stand upon the escalator and let it carry me to the top. I refuse to serve machinery. There are six or seven million people in London, who have no faith in the machine they have installed and no time to use it. If you can imagine the mental condition of people who run up an escalator—do you wonder at the troubles, you have in your towns? I don't. No, there is no power on earth, there is not sufficient money in the world to make an English agricultural labourer run up an escalator. You ask him to and he will look at that machine and say, "What, run up that? What are 'e aputtin' there for?" And I tell you, if you don't value your rural population, if you don't keep a sufficiency of people on the land in any country, you will have a country, a nation of people, who have not sufficient intellectual quality to ask themselves that simple question, "What are 'e aputtin' there for?"

We must keep a rural population in Canada. Their value is not, of necessity, in terms of money and in terms of dignity of individuality, of a few ideas which are not second-hand, but they also have a faith in a higher power than mankind because of their nearness to natural things. You have got to have a background of people like that.

Two years ago when we had a water shortage in the Old Country I lunched at the Cafe Royal with a friend, who was very annoyed when there was only a little water in the basin in the cloak-room. He said all sorts of things. I said, "Do you realize there has been scarcely any rain for two years?" He said, "Rain? Rain? What the devil has that to do with water in Piccadilly?" And that fellow thinks he is educated. He is ignorant, he doesn't know the first principles, but your country man is nearer to natural things and he is bound to realize that the question of water is in the hands of a higher power than mankind, not just in the hands of a borough surveyor, and it is because the country man must have a certain amount of faith, that I recommend to you, that he is very necessary to any country because, you see, with all the machinery, which he uses on his farm, if you take away the faith, that if he plants a seed, that seed will come up, nobody will plant one seed, and your farming will finish, and your towns will finish quite quickly. You must have a few people with a background of wholesome sanity who are willing to admit the presence of a higher power than mankind, with all his clever machines.

Then, is the country man a fool? He is slow in the uptake but I have never found him very much a fool. I always liked the story of the town man who went to the English village where he met a very old man and said, "Grandpa, how old are you?" He said, "Governor, I be ninety-two—ninety-two." The stranger said, "Well, you don't look bad for ninety-two," "No, no, fairish." "Well,

I can't see much the matter with you for ninety-two." He said, "No Governor, thirst don't show." And, you see, the clever townsman could do nothing else, but take him into the village "pub", and pay his footing. I have never, I tell you, found the country man a fool.

I remember the townspeople who came near me and bought a house and employed a rather half-witted country boy. This boy was supposed to be nothing very special. He annoyed his employer because he would just say "Ah" and "Oh", and "Yes" and "No". He would never give his employer any title, he never called him "Sir", "Mr. So-and-So", or anything—just "Yes" and "No". One day this fellow said, "You know, I would like you to remember that I have a handle to my name", and this half-witted boy looked at him and said, "Why, most mugs have." (Laughter)

There is a story that I can recommend to you, a book to read, and that is the biography of Richard Jefferies, a poet and a writer, a biography written by Reginald Arkell, which is fifty per cent biography of Richard Jefferies and fifty per cent Reginald Arkell, blowing off a lot of personal steam. In it he tells the story of Jefferies' father who lived in North Wiltshire when there were no railways, and when he wished to go from Bath to London and wished to catch a coach he used to go to the summer house built at the bottom of the garden, go down with two or three friends, a decanter of sherry and a pipe and sit there and wait for the coach. He might have to wait an hour. Poor old fellow. You see, he lived in the olden days when we were not so clever as we are now. How we must pity him! Fancy sitting waiting an hour for your coach to London! Then, Mr. Arkell goes on to say: "The other day I saw a girl of nineteen knocked down in London Circus and killed. She couldn't afford to wait thirty seconds for her coach. Have we progressed? Of course, she was taken to the most efficient ambulance, the traffic was stopped by an efficient policeman, efficient nurses attended her, everything was very efficient. The point I wish to draw attention to is, how Father Jefferies must have laughed above, because he could afford to wait an hour for his coach."

And here is another thing which a townsman once said to me which showed me the value of country people. He

read somewhere that people in the country planted trees and he said, "I will plant a tree." He lived in the town and had a back garden and he planted one and the next day he went and looked at it and it was eighteen inches high, a chestnut tree, and it had one sticky bud, and the thought suddenly struck him and he said, "By Jove, when this tree first blooms, I shall be dead and buried and my family will have forgotten me and", he said, "I can't bear it". So he pulled up the tree and threw it over the wall. He was a townsman, living from day to day, he dared not look at death. That is another quality in our country people, that they have to live their lives at a natural speed and they are not afraid to look ahead, they are not afraid to say, "If I do that this year, perhaps in four or five years time I shall attain my object." It is worth while to have a background of people behind you who, as I say, do their job from a material point of view and also provide a spiritual background which every nation must require.

I should like now to thank you for listening to the disjointed ramblings of a Wiltshire farmer, who owes a great deal to three years of very efficient education in the countryside of Northwest Manitoba. (Hearty applause).

CHAIRMAN:—Ladies and Gentlemen, I am sure you have all enjoyed the most interesting and instructive speech by our distinguished guest, and on behalf of the of the Royal Winter Fair, the Empire Club and the Canadian Club, just before breaking up I am going to ask Controller Ralph Day if he will say a word.

CONTROLLER RALPH DAY:—Mr. Chairman, Mr. Street, Ladies and Gentlemen: I have listened with a great deal of pleasure, as you also have, to Mr. Street, but I want to first thank my fellow townsmen for their logic and their far-sightedness in asking Mr. Street to come here today to say these few words to us. I have had the pleasure of reading just one of Mr. Street's books and it is therefore an even greater pleasure to me to stand here on behalf of my fellow citizens to thank him for coming here, to thank those who brought him and to say to you again, Sir, "Thank you very much", and to express the hope that we will again have the opportunity of hearing you. Thank you. (Applause).