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Our Inheritance

BY ARTHUR E. MORGAN, M.A.

COLONEL ARTHUR L. BISHOP, Chairman, in introducing the speaker, said: Fellow members of the Canadian Club: Montreal and Toronto are two great centres of population and must necessarily harbor great centres of education and learning. It is the new principal of McGill University to whom we are paying tribute today.

Principal Morgan assumes the very arduous duties in succession to that very widely known Corps Commander, Sir Arthur Currie, and we know that the many qualities that he can bring to bear in that high office will redound to the credit of Canada. He is an Englishman who, strange as it may seem, was educated at Trinity College, Dublin. As associate professor of English and English Literature he went from there to the University of Bristol, and, not content with that graduated to the University College of Exeter.

Then came the war where he made an excellent reputation as a gunner, principally, I imagine, in teaching what a long overseas experience enables me to appreciate at its true value—teaching young gunners not to shoot short. Immediately following the war Principal Morgan continued his course of English and English Literature at the University of Sheffield, and still later he was chosen to be the principal of the newly established University of Hull.

The powers that be of McGill have chosen him to take Sir Arthur Currie's place, and we know what great scope McGill offers to a man so well qualified in English and English Literature, and secondly, I might almost say primarily, to one so well endowed with the administrative ability that such a position requires.

MR. MORGAN:—Mr. Chairman and gentlemen of the

Canadian Club of Toronto, may I thank you first for tendering me this kind invitation to pay another visit to Toronto, and for the very kind words you have used in introducing me to this audience. You have touched a familiar chord in the hearts of many of this gathering when you referred to me as a gunner—one knows how touchy the Infantry always are on the subject of gunners.

The subject of my address does not immediately emerge from the total of my remarks, but the inheritance to which I have referred has been won by our western civilization after a struggle of a millenium or more for the freedom which some at any rate regard as its most priceless heritage. This heritage of personal liberty, won after continuous struggle, represents an attitude of mind, an attitude towards life which can best be described as opposite to the mind which is prepared to live in a state of slavery. It is a state of mind that demands the right of self-determination and self-disposal—the right to interpret "I will" into "I do." But that right is one that in the nature of things must be limited. However much the individual may claim the right of self-disposition that bigger group of individuals—Society—has also its rights which can only be maintained by the limitation of the rights of the individual to self-disposition.

We have therefore a system of regulation—we may call it law, habit or convention, but in one form or another, it is a system to limit that indefinite right of the individual to translate "I will" into "I do." The degree of civilization which any society enjoys may be measured by the skill with which that problem has been tackled—the problem of reconciling on the one hand the right of the individual, and on the other the rights of the society of which he is a part—the problem of discriminating between, and limiting the frontiers of, liberty and license.

In the simpler forms of civilization amongst primitive peoples, it is possible for the individual to comport himself practically as he desires. It is only as society becomes more complicated—as civilization becomes more intricate—that the problem of discriminating between the group and the individual becomes complicated, and there comes a time

when, only by limiting the indiscriminate rights of the individual, can the rights of the individual be preserved. Take for example the traffic problems of Toronto. A hundred and fifty years ago there was probably very little necessity to elaborate rules of the road for the wide spaces where your streets now are. It was unnecessary to have a man to direct, or colored contrivances at the corners to control, the traffic. Rules became necessary as the roads became more used, and today we are able to move with individual freedom only in so far as we are willing to submit to the limitation of our rights by what we call traffic regulations.

Now it may be asked, why is freedom so desirable? and I would answer that freedom is not only desirable, it is essential, because it is a prime condition of life. Life can only express itself in the circumstances of freedom.

But if life is to express itself, we must assume that there is some desirability that life should express itself. What is the purpose of life? That is a question that is followed by an indefinite number of marks of interrogation. No one has the answer to it and no one ever will have. Perhaps the purpose of life, so far as we can tell, is to be itself more abundantly. The innate quality of life is growth, and if that growth is not to be rank, but fine, it must have direction. But who can tell what is the direction in which life should move? No one can answer that question. All we can do is give the right conditions for growth and let life take its own course. It is only by a long process of trial and error that we can discriminate between success and failure. To discover the right direction of life a multiplicity of experiments is necessary and that can only be achieved by letting everyone express himself within certain limitations.

Where there are a thousand men, 999 may be wrong and one right; so that the freedom that is essential for the direction of human life involves the toleration of minorities. Lord Acton has stated that the only real test of freedom, by which a country can be judged, is the amount of security enjoyed by minorities. Every society of course is prepared to tolerate some degree of minority opinion, but Bernard Shaw says that tolerance and liberty have no sense

and use except as far as they tolerate opinions that are considered damnable, and give liberty to do what seems wrong—not, you will observe, what is wrong, but only what seems wrong. In other words there is no credit in being tolerant of views with which you agree. The only credit lies in toleration of views from which you dissent.

Mill says that if we are only prepared to give liberty of expression to views with which we agree we are running the risk of condemning a minority which may in the end become a majority, and he reminds us of the circumstances of the death of Socrates and of the Man who was crucified on Calvary. There is always the danger in intolerance that we may be suppressing truth, and if we do that we are driving the growth of life into a new and dangerous direction.

It is interesting to note how very intolerant revolutionaries frequently are. It almost seems as though those, who are most insistent in their demands for freedom, are the least willing to grant it, and I think that perhaps the most intolerant revolutionaries are children. The revolutionary that sees his opinions have resulted in very rapid progress, and that, as the new conditions which have followed are unstable, thinks it is only by the suppression of contrary opinions that it can be maintained. This is, of course, very specious, but at the same time it is a very dangerous doctrine.

Intolerance is dangerous because it prevents growth and stunts will, and human growth and human life depend on the will of the people who make up the mass of society. And that will, which must be duly balanced, is the mightiest force of human growth and development. It may spring from some small spot at the centre radiating outwards until other wills are inspired by the same force, so that there may come from that centre a radiating focus of power strong enough to bring a change in the direction of human growth.

Will is the basis of all human progress, and will can flourish only through exercise. Just as the human body needs exercise for the complete play of its physical strength, so the human will needs exercise for the tremendous part it has to play. And for that reason I myself believe that

the democratic organization on which our society is based is the greatest thing that has been or will be discovered by human society, for it gives, as no other political organization can give, free play and exercise to the will of the greatest number.

But it is immensely dangerous. It is even, I think, the most dangerous form of organization, but is its danger going to be an argument against it? Has any great sweep been achieved by the deadly doctrine of Safety First? No! It is only in so far as we are prepared to take risks that we are likely to move forward. I am not afraid of the dangers of Democracy, but I do recognize them, and they are perhaps greater now than ever they were before.

The nineteenth Century was the century in which democracy was brought to its highest point politically, and man, through the control of the physical sciences, learnt how to control nature and created the machines of the mechanised civilization with which we are so familiar. Man has got today in his hand a weapon of mechanical force and a means of physical power that he has never wielded before, a machine of great complications, delicacy and no settled balance, and it is this machine which democracy puts into the hands of the multitude. There you have a double element of risk, making our position today one of peculiar and delicate danger. But I would say this. If that same mechanical power were put into the hands of a tyrant, there would be very much greater danger still. And there are not wanting examples to prove that.

During the last half generation we have seen how the machine has gone wrong through lack of central control. The world has been treated as a world that could be run on competition and strife. There was a process from 1914 to 1918 which was nothing but a dislocation of the machinery of civilization, financially, industrially and politically. We have been seeing the effects of that dislocation ever since, and we shall see them for a long time yet—results that everyone deplores, but which no one seems to know how to rectify.

But a new generation has sprung up—millions of youths born into a world very different from the world into which

we ourselves were born; into an atmosphere of disorder and conditions of hopelessness. Is there any wonder that these young men and women, finding themselves under conditions that betoken lack of safety—is there any wonder that they should feel that any change is better than the present?

The changes that have taken place in the world today in Italy, Germany and Russia are all youth movements. They are an expression of the feeling of youth that, in order to win back some measure of safety and self-respect, change is necessary. They themselves, not having taken part in the struggle for freedom, were willing to barter that precious heritage of liberty and place themselves beneath the iron heel of a dictatorship in order that they might have once again conditions of equilibrium and hope. These movements were rooted deep in despair and they have been nourished by idealism. It is by harnessing the highest hopes of youth that dictators have stolen their liberty. That is a serious and solemn state of affairs, but I believe that even in these countries freedom will be regained, because the whole history of civilization shows that while freedom may have its ups and downs, in the long run it is triumphant.

What of this country? It is all a question of spirit, and there is in Canada, as in the whole block of civilization which springs from British Culture, the whole-hearted spirit of law-abiding self-discipline, so essentially the discovery of British Culture. There is a sanity and wisdom that prevents people from running after strange political gods: which makes us willing to bear hardships, because we know how great the struggle for freedom has been, and how great would be its loss.

Once again I come to the question of danger. We have to be always on the watch. Civilization, becoming more complicated, necessitates more regulation, and the whole problem, as I see it, is to provide the necessary regulation with a maximum of individual liberty and with a minimum of social tyranny. Any organization, in which the individual is tyrannized over or vice versa, is bad, but there is no simple means of solving the problem. The solution will be successful for those people who have social and political

tact. We have to remember that there is no exact definition of freedom. For each one of us the connotation of that word means something different.

I suppose that if ever there was a really free man it was Robinson Crusoe, but even he was not free to do as he liked. He wanted to leave his island, but he could not get away.

We do not regard it as a breach of liberty if we are not allowed to do things against the common good. It is no offence to our ideas of freedom that we are not allowed to take the watch from somebody else's pocket, but a thief would regard any such prohibition as a serious breach of his liberty. So you see there can never be anything in the nature of a simple definition of freedom.

It is a curious thing, as you go from land to land, to find that people who are great apostles of freedom will submit to rules with which they are familiar, but to which other people would never submit.

Once in the Black Forest I found it was an offence to smoke a pipe that did not have a little tin disc arrangement to cover the bowl. But I found it was a method of protection against forest fires. Everybody realized the danger and submitted to what was a wise precaution. So you see that freedom to one individual or even to one nation means something different from what freedom means to others.

One of the great dangers to liberty is that it is so easy to compensate for lack of freedom. There has been some very subtle psychology shown by these modern tyrants who have inveigled large batches of people to give up their freedom. If you look at the youth movements you will find that they have resulted in such things as simple clothes, late nights and latchkeys, speed and the sense of power given by the control of some swift machine. All these things give a sense of freedom, with the result that the more precious heritage of freedom of opinion, freedom of mind and spirit has been removed while the subject was blinded by the fact of more physical and social freedom. That seems to be the principal danger, but it is a great consolation to find that certain gentlemen who have tried those methods in England have succeeded no better than Mosley did at the last election.

Are we who are older very much better?

It is all very well for us to preach about our struggle for liberty and to blame youth for forgetting, but are we not willing to pay an editor five cents a day, or whatever is the price of his newspaper, and make him our dictator? May it not be said that we allow him to dictate to us our thoughts and opinions so long as he allows us to express them as our own? Are we any freer than Italy, Germany or Russia? I am sure we are. We are too wise to allow tyrants to rear their heads, and we have a respect for, and an enjoyment of, freedom. A great deal of water has got to run under bridges before we surrender that.

There certainly is danger, but I believe we shall overcome it. Freedom demands constant struggle, and we must never slacken our eternal vigilance coupled with the immutable determination never to give up independent thought. We can gain this from one source only—the extension and intensification of liberal education—of education that places all the facts before an individual and leaves him free to draw his own conclusions and make his own judgments.

This never ending struggle resolves itself into a question of the rights of the individual and the rights of society, and it is a difficult problem to know just how far we should tolerate what we disagree with. We must fight intolerance and cynicism. Although there is a certain respect due to tradition and to ideas which have come to hold the field because they have come as a process of human development, we must not forget that they may be wrong.

The greatest enemies of freedom are selfishness and laziness—laziness which makes so many of us willing to do anything or submit to any kind of spiritual or intellectual discipline, so long as we can have physical pleasures and live a comfortable life. Today the passion of fear is a very serious factor in the situation. Looking around us we see democracy inexpertly in control of a machine that may be wrecked. If it is wrecked it will bring such appalling ruin, that many of us are willing to say that rather than that we will submit ourselves to an expert dictator. But has he the skill? Look where dictatorship has led the people of Italy, if you need an answer.

No! Life cannot run on "safety first" lines. Things have

to be risked. Freedom carries with it an enormous responsibility, and we who are its inheritors, we who have to risk our heritage, bear greater responsibility in this respect.

How can we attain freedom? We never shall. We can only strive. Freedom is a product of good social organization, but it is also a condition of life itself. It is the product of a vigorous and disciplined idealism—of that form of life which we call the spirit of mankind.

The President, in thanking Mr. Morgan, said:—We are deeply grateful for the thoughts you have left with us, Mr. Morgan. I feel sure that if the address you have given us is a sample of what you will give to McGill, McGill will continue to enrich Canadian life with the culture and scholarship for which it has always been famed. We are greatly indebted to you for coming here to address the Canadian Club, and we hope that at some not too distant date we may have the pleasure of hearing you again.