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Can We Be Neutral?

By Mr. D'Arcy C. Marsh.

Col. Mess, Chairman:—Spain is at war; Italy is champing at the bit; Germany is looking for trouble; Japan and China are at loggerheads; Russia is threatening. What will be Canada's position should these happenings bring about a world explosion? With improvements in the mechanics of war, away ahead of the training and ability of the average layman to understand, how can the individual interpret international movements with any chance of success? Diplomats and statesmen may know, but cannot tell. He must therefore go to an individual whose chosen profession permits him to study these problems; whose training enables him to relate clearly his conclusions; and whose independence allows him a freedom of speech impossible in others. As you know we have such a one in our guest speaker today. He is recently returned from Europe, and while writing his book "How Goes the Empire" he finds time to come and discuss for us this question of Can we be Neutral? Gentlemen, Mr. D'Arcy Marsh.

Mr. Marsh:—Mr. President and members of the Canadian Club: I greatly appreciate the honour you have done me in inviting me to address the club. Nevertheless I am in a somewhat peculiar position—and have been, in fact, ever since I came back from England—the position in which the great Jowett, master of Balliol, found himself, when he lay dying. His house was crowded with people waiting for news and the fact annoyed him. Finally he called the Butler to him and said. "James, tell all these people to go away, I shall do nothing definite tonight."

In the same spirit I doubt if I shall say anything definite today. If I could really tell you the answer to the questions which face us, I should be worthy of inclusion in Roosevelt's

brain trust, a seat in the British Cabinet, or at least in the Canadian. The only thing I can do is, give you some idea of the mass of impressions I gathered while I was in England, and then pose a number of questions which I shall carefully refrain from answering.

My trip to England, I should explain, was made with the object of writing a book. The idea was conceived coldbloodedly towards the end of 1936, because I had a premonition that events would occur that would make it readable. But I had no idea, that in 1936 we were going to embark on one of the most amazing years in the Empire's history—a year that gave us three kings, that saw Hitler occupy the Rhineland, that saw the conquest of Ethopia, and that saw the opening of the Spanish war.

The book was conceived because I realized that, at this particular time, the attitude of the Dominion toward the British foreign policy was of paramount importance to Britain, and I further realized that the attitude of Canada was of paramount importance to the United States, because they were already beginning to talk about isolation. Since then, of course, we have had the pan-American conference. Those were the ideas I had in mind when I started out, and they were very definite. Some years ago I sat in an editorial chair and daily declaimed, what I was convinced was the truth about Canada, the Empire and the rest of the world. Then a suspicion grew upon me that I might not be so right after all.

The same sort of thing occurs when a Canadian goes to Europe. From Canada where we can see what we think is a broad picture of the European scene, villains are real villains with slouch hats and black whiskers. Their villainy is very villainous indeed and the heroes are cast in a very heroic mould. But when we get to Europe the picture gets somewhat blurred—villians are not so villainous and heroes not so heroic as we had imagined them.

I went to Geneva fairly gnashing my teeth at the villainous Baron Aloisi, who was leading the attack on the poor little heroic Ethiopian delegation to the League of Nations. When I got there I discovered a very brilliant, charming, kindly man who probably hated his job as much as I did. I discovered he was much admired for his brilliant handling

of the Saar Plebiscite, and altogether a very different man from what I had imagined.

I went to Europe first of all to find out what sort of a situation was going to develop, and second to try to discover, what was the attitude of the British people toward Canada, and whether they expected Canada to go into another war.

There is something about the title of my speech that is wrong. I ask: "Can we be Neutral?" but I do not define the kind of war in which our neutrality might be exercised. Naturally there are hundreds of wars in which we could be neutral. There is one going on in Spain now and we are neutral. And about that war it seems to me, that a new technique in wars is developing. If the same technique had been in vogue in 1914 as seems to be in vogue now, Austria, when the Archduke Ferdinand was murdered at Sarajevo, would not have hurled ultimatums and marched on Serbia. Rather she would have subsidized a revolutionary party and started a civil war. Then France would have gone along and supported the Government and they could have had a nice little fight without many people being the worse. In other wars there has been a declaration of hostilities. In this war there was nothing like that, but a variety of European powers seem to be managing quite nicely without blowing people up and otherwise attaining their objective at somebody else's expense. There are only three kinds of war about which I want to discuss the question of Canada's neutrality. They are a major European war, a war involving the League, and an Empire war.

Canada has two points of contact with Europe—one as a signatory of the Covenant of the League of Nations, and the other as a member of the British Empire. As a signatory of the Covenant, although she has exerted her utmost efforts to take the teeth out of it, Canada is obliged to fall into line with other members, if it is decided to apply sanctions—economic or military.

As to the second point of contact, if Downing Street involves Britain in a war, will Canada be involved also?

Most of you have read Mackenzie King's speech at Geneva. In that speech he made the very clear statement that Canada considers herself a country of the New World, completely outside the troubles and hatreds of Europe; free

to determine for herself, her course of action in an Empire war. Actually there was nothing new in that statement. It was merely a reiteration of the traditional Canadian policy, as it was stated years ago by Sir Wilfred Laurier, when he declared: "While I cannot admit that Canada should take part in all the wars of Britain, I am not prepared to say that she should not take any part at all . . . In future, Canada shall be at Liberty to act as she thinks fit . . . to do just as she pleases and reserve the right to judge for herself, whether there is cause for her to act or not."

I want to talk to you about the League. At the risk of quoting ancient history I think I should, to make my point clear, trace some of its history. The Treaty of Versailles was signed and the League was brought into being. For the first ten years of its existence, France dominated its councils, and imposed what might be called a French pattern on Europe. There was reason in her attitude, for after the war she was still afraid of Germany—an old fear, going back to the days of 1870. She asked the United States and Britain for an Anglo-American guarantee of the maintainance of the Rhine boundary as defined by the treaty. This was refused and she turned to her second line—the ring of steel around Germany, the Little Entente (Jugoslavia, Roumania and Czechoslovakia) and Poland, and insisted in carrying on the Treaty of Versailles as long as possible. Then all seemed to go well, though actually it was not working. On the surface there was peace, but underneath in Germany there were forces working that erupted and threw up that monstrosity which is Nazism, with Hitler at its head. When Hitler came into power, he broke down the ring of steel, reparations were stopped, and the ascendency of France came to an end. France, still faced by her fear of Germany, turned to Russia and Russia entered the League of Nations. Then there was signed the Franco-Soviet pact—a treaty quite legal under the Covenant of the League. It was thus that France brought Russia into the picture, to bolster up her waning influence.

I had that picture in mind when I attended the last session of the League, a session whose purpose was to save the League, if that were possible. They talked, to a large extent, all the old platitudes—all, that is, except Maxim

Litvinoff. He made one of the most vital speeches I have ever heard. Everyone seemed to believe the polite fiction that there was no country anxious to make war—again everybody except Litvinoff. He knew that one country wanted to make war, and he identified that country as Germany, but he went on to say that if all the peace-loving nations who were members of the League would act together, their total strength in terms of man-power and equipment would be greater than any possible aggregation of strength that Germany could gather to her aid. He was almost unanswerable when he declared that the League would eventually have to go the limit and fight. But at the back, one felt that cutting across international boundaries there was the clash between Fascism and communism. Since I have come back that clash has manifested itself in Spain. Actually Litvinoff was making a plea to the peace-loving countries of Europe to make with Russia a defensive alliance against Germany and Italy. In other words, during the first period of the League, France was using the League as an alliance against Germany, and in the second, Russia is trying to do the same thing.

Thus, when you consider the League in the light of the original ideals of collective security, you can see that at no time has it been operating. I had a long talk with Lord Cecil. He has probably the clearest conception of any man of what the League might mean, and he, today, is clinging with pathetic tenacity to the idea, that it is still a workable organization. There was a time when it might have been made so—in the "twenties" when Stresemann, Briand and Cecil dominated Europe—but that time is gone.

That was the background when Mackenzie King made his speech, and the question naturally arises: "Is Canada interested in a League which is merely a defensive alliance of some European nations against some others?"

There is a more difficult question to be faced by Canada, Whether or not she would take part in a war, into which she would be drawn as a member of the British Commonwealth of Nations? In other words—Would Ottawa follow Downing Street?

We claim to be free to do as we like, but the very fact that we are free, means that, perhaps, we aren't.

Would we?

That is the important thing. What the average man condemns today is a policy, which would bring Canada with Britain into a war. The nature of the war would not be a very important thing, for the curious thing about wars is that the original causes are only determined by historians after we are dead. There is no doubt that if the British—who are as subtle as any in the world—were to go to war, that war to us would appear as an honourable war.

We talk about the baneful influence of Britain in Canada. You can go down Whitehall and find no dreadful old gentlemen with white whiskers plotting how to get remote parts of the Empire involved in their quarrels. It is infinitely more subtle than that, and its impact on Canada cannot be defined very easily.

If I stood up in Massey Hall and presented the case for Canadian Isolation, and suggested that Canada should never, under any circumstances, become involved in a war in which Britain was involved, nothing very much would happen. There would be a certain amount of cheering, and some booing.

If, on the other hand, I stood up and said the same thing in different words—"Tear down that Union Jack and get rid of it"—there would be a riot and I should go to jail. The fact is that in the event of war the things that would drag us in are not matters of economic or political advantage, but matters of sentiment and the flag, that really brought us in before.

Under these circumstances the answer is: "Yes, we would go in." I think we would. I was talking the other day to a very prominent Canadian about the matter and he said: "Today the flag would have it, but I do not know if the flag would have it five years from now."

That is a tremendously significant statement. Changes are taking place in England, and here we come to the most poignant aspect of the whole situation.

When the idea of my book was conceived, I was staying with a friend—a Canadian statesman—and we listened to Baldwin's speech after the death of King George V. He told how the dying King had looked up and asked: "How goes the Empire?" and received the answer: "Sire, all goes well." "There", said my friend, "is the title of your book—'How goes the Empire?'"

A year later we had a tragedy almost as great, and one whose repercussions may profoundly affect the whole Empire. And that brings up the final question in connection with our allegiance to Britain and whether we would be drawn into her wars.

The tragedy of Belvedere came during a time of great stress in Europe, and to understand fully its implications one must trace for a short period the history of the British monarchy.

George IV was a splendid old reprobate and got away with it. When Victoria came to the throne you will remember that when the Archbishop of Canterbury knelt before her and told her she was queen, she said: "Oh, I will be good." And she kept her promise. With some sort of unconscious wisdom, Victoria seemed to realize that times were changing and that mere regality was not enough. So she started out to identify the royal family with all the virtues of the respectable British middle-class home. And with the aid of the Prince Consort she succeeded.

Edward VII rebelled a little and the Edwardians were brilliant and glittering. There were some mistakes made but those mistakes never got out, for they kept in mind that nothing must ever be done that would lower the dignity of the throne.

George V and Mary fulfilled the ultimate ideals of Victoria in the matter of Royal family life. This proved to be the soundest bulwark of constitutional monarchy, as was illustrated in the storm of 1914-1918. Hohenzollerns, Romanoffs and Hapsburgs were swept away, but there was left a benevolent old gentleman with his children and grandchildren at Windsor.

Then we had the last extraordinary tragedy, and it was a political event of the greatest importance, for while I believe that the flag would have it now, I do not know how long the influence will last, unless the symbol of Imperial unity, the Crown, remains untarnished.

There are many Canadians today who think along the lines of isolationism. To one such I said the other day: "It is as though we were in a car going down hill, and the

brakes have gone wrong. Everybody else is trying to fix them, but Canada has decided that nothing can be done about it, and has got herself a cushion so that she will not be too badly hurt."

"No", he replied, "Rather Canada is in a trailer, and what she wants to do is to cut loose, apply brakes of her own, and let the car go on."

That seems to be the dilemma. At the present moment I believe we are with the car, but the next fifty years will probably tell the complete story.