(September 28, 1930)

Aviation

By Lord Trenchard

President Henderson:—Lord Trenchard, Mr. Acting Prime Minister, Your Worship, and gentlemen of the Canadian Club, despite the fact that it is twelve years since hostilities ceased in the great war I know we all feel great pride today in paying our respects to Lord Trenchard who has such an active part in one of His Majesty's branches of the army.

In August, 1914, Lord Trenchard was called upon to build up at home a flying corps for service on the various fronts. He completed his task in a very short time. He was sent to France to take command of No. 1 wing of the Royal Flying Corps. Before 1915 was over Lord Trenchard was in command of the whole Royal Flying Corps on active service and he gave unstintedly of his time and energy to that cause. To show what a success he was he rose from the rank of Major to Major General in a little over one year. The Canadian Club has been fortunate in the past in having commanders of the navy and army of His Majesty's service in the war, but I think this is the first time we have had the commander of the Royal Flying Corps, the new branch of His Majesty's services.

I know that there are a large number of air veterans here today. I would appreciate it if they would stand now so Lord Trenchard may have an idea of how many there are and also so he will feel a little more at home amongst his own group. Gentlemen, I have great pleasure in introducing Lord Trenchard, G.C.B., D.S.O., who will speak to us on aviation.

Lord Trenchard:—Mr. President, acting Prime Minister, your worship and gentlemen. What am I to say? I

am no good at speaking, and when I came on this visit, which I wanted to do so many years, I said I would not make a speech. What I have to say I hope will interest you. I feel it is no good my telling you my impressions because I have only been here a few hours and you know much more about your own country than I ever shall. But I am more than interested in coming, and I am more than delighted to see already a number of people who, if I may say so, are old friends and very good to me when I was in a position of responsibility of the air force in the war. I owe more to them than to anybody. The officers and men of the air force made me what I am.

It was many years ago, thirty-eight to be accurate, when I first went into the service of the army in The Royal Scottish Fusiliers, to whom I am going to refer a little later on in connection with the Scottish Fusiliers of Canada, I went to India and I remember looking at the frontier and wondering if we would ever get to Cabul, and wondering what a horrible road it was to get there. I remember how easy it was to get there not many years ago. Then I went to South Africa, and, something of which I am very proud, I was second in command for some considerable time of the Canadian Scouts. I shall never forget the Canadians, because after one of our drives with the Canadian Scouts, the Scouts were in the line refitting, and Lord Kitchener wired to know when columns would be ready, and officers of the other columns said three or four or two or five days, and our commanding officer wired back, "My outfit can go out today." It was a most extraordinarily interesting time.

From there I went to another country, West Africa, which was continually at war, and there were no roads. I remember we could not leave the sea without a soldier. We had bicycles throughout that country and we gave the people half a crown a day to keep them and that made them keep the roads and when the roads were made we cancelled the half crown a day. But it was a cheap way of making the roads and it showed to me how communication was the most civilizing influence there is. And that I shall refer to again in aviation.

And many of you must remember those early days in aviation when one used to lie on one's stomach and say, "He is off; no, he isn't." And we started in flying old box-kites and most of us who learned in that day came down at some time. Then the war came and to my bitter regret I was left in England. But Lord Kitchener sent for me and I thought I would talk a little bit through my hat and explain to them what I was going to do. I said we had been four years making two squadrons and one half. I said, "Make it thirty." All he said was, "Trenchard, make it sixty." And the next thing he said was, "When I come down to Aldershot, let me see them flying in formation." I said, "We haven't throttles." He said, "Trenchard, I told you I wanted to see them flying in formation. When I come to Aldershot let me see them try." And look at them now, the way they keep as straight a line as my regiment. It is the most wonderful thing to think of the foresight of that man who said that.

I cannot speak too highly of all those wonderful airmen in France, those wonderful pilots who came from this country, what they did. There is one seated on my right whose name was a household word in those days and is still. Your mayor was up on the channel coast, where they had their appalling night anti-air craft fire to meet, and in those days, too, an enormous number of machines thought they would get to London and very often stopped at his airdrome to bomb that coast. You know it better than I can tell it. All I can say is you cannot know it as I know it, but I cannot tell all that happened in those days. I hope when the history of the Empire is written it will really give the spirit because the spirit to me was the most extraordinary thing. Our airmen used to say, "Oh, sir, the infantry were pleased with us today, weren't they." They felt they were helping an enormous number of men on the ground.

I will turn to when the war closed. We were proud to have formed an air service, and I wondered, could we not use an air service in ordinary daily work, could it not be a civilizing influence, and, understanding the difficulties of the past that I outlined in West Africa, shortage of communication, I wondered could not it be of some good?

There were a good many people who thought it was risky—but let me tell you a story, in order that you may think of the civilizing influence it may be. We were told if we crossed the desert between Cairo and Bagdad there was danger if the craft came down of never being seen again. Well, one of the first machines going across had the most extraordinary bit of luck. I remember it so well because I was sitting waiting to know what happened. Going across they saw a little group of eight Arabs looking at an object on the ground. They came lower and thought it was a man they were looking at. They landed and found a wounded Sheik who probably would have died as it would have taken him twenty-eight days to get to Bagdad. They took him up and in four hours were in Bagdad hospital. He was brought back in three weeks well. Ever after when a machine came down four or six camel-men would come, and, facing outward, remain on sentry duty all night, never asking for anything. Surely that shows a civilizing influence and surely it also shows that the people in the air service have still the same spirit as those of the early days who stood up just now.

I could not help remembering conditions of thirty years before: the squadron notice board at Bagdad read this way: two machines at Karachi; two machines at Cabul; two at Haifa on the shores of the Mediterranean, and two at Bagdad. They brought out I believe six hundred people from Cabul, to India, without the loss of a single life, with heavy snow on the ground, and coming back in quite a different altitude to bring those people out. If one squadron can accomplish what this one has done, taking the government from one place to another, what possibilities are there in aviation?

A lot of people feel that bombing is often conducted involving the lives of women and children. Ninety-nine per cent of the time when aircraft have gone into troublesome districts no bomb has had to be dropped, not one. Sometimes they have been given a dose of Enos fruit salts which has been much better to their temper at the moment than a bomb, and it is not true to say it is brutal.

The fact is that seeing an aeroplane has an effect upon

those wild tribes of thinking, "Well, by Jove, here they come, let us talk it over." They haven't forgotten their crime, whatever it was, which they might have forgotten had we had to get there by foot or camel. And aeroplanes in the future—and mind you they are enormously powerful weapons—if they are used cautiously can be an enormous influence. It can take political officers out to see their countries and therefore avoid misunderstanding. I have touched on this at some length because of my time at the air service, though first I was connected with civil aviation, —but my last five years at Whitehall I had more than I could do constructing a real air force on a permanent basis. But I do hope you will feel it is not a brutalizing weapon. It can be used as humanely as another weapon if not more so.

And if you will look back on what has been done since those days. In the South African war my revolver bullet went as fast as the Snider Cup machine the other day went. It gives you an idea—an old-type revolver and slug. If you think about the ordinary way of talking about aviation: two young pilots, one flying from Cairo to the Cape and the other from Cairo to Nigeria, were describing their experiences, when the one who went to the Cape turned to the other one and said, "How do you get to Nigeria?" The other one said, "Well you go straight south from Cairo to Khartoum, turn sharp left (sic) and keep straight on." And that was perfectly true. But that was not said for effect. If I asked my way, I don't know how I should get clearer direction.

I would like to refer to the great honor that I had in being connected with Canada in the north Waterloo regiment, the Scottish Fusiliers of Canada. Our great Colonel in Chief, I mean the Prince of Wales, takes the keenest interest in the regiment and all its branches, and I am very sorry I have not an opportunity of going at this time to Kitchener to see them. But it is a link that in my early days when I was second in command I had something to do with the Canadian Scouts. It is nice to think I am honorary colonel of one of your great regiments.

About Civil Aviation! I do not know quite what to say more than this. I sometimes think I hear too much of, "Does it pay?" A lot of people mean by that, does it mean five or six per cent on the money they invest? I think it is handicapping civil aviation at the present moment to look at it in that way. It pays the Empire, it pays each country in my opinion, I am certain. Here is quick communication. Your business man cannot afford the time involved in a month of travel to India and back to see something that is calling for attention, but he does not mind if it will only take ten days. He can spare the time. So it is worth it in that way. It is of use politically. In fact our Prime Minister in England uses it frequently between Lossiemouth and Downing street, and therefore it pays each part of the Empire to help to create aviation facilities, and after several years it is time enough to begin to say what is the exact commercial value of money invested, not forgetting there are unforeseen assets in civil aviation, that you cannot at present turn into money to see what it is worth. Those of course are my own private views. I know some people think it will pay in money quicker than others. We need not talk about that at present as long as everybody will realize it offers unforeseen benefits to humanity. The R-100 you have seen over here and I have not seen it since it came back, and probably you know more about it than I do, but the last I saw of the R-101 it was preparing to go to India. The airship development is one of the most interesting things, but it is slow in my opinion. But I have the greatest faith that the airships will be of use from a civil standpoint and I think they will take not so long as some people believe to prove their usefulness. Think, when they talk of the future of aviation, that aviation is the quickest form of communication, and somebody much bigger than I am said, "Civilization is communication," and I thoroughly agree with that. I think one should do everything possible to encourage it both as a military weapon and for civil use.

I am only too pleased to be asked to come here and I am very glad to have shaken by the hand many of you whom I knew overseas. I knew of your services in the war and what you did. It was easier to talk to you then, as I

felt in a way that you were paid to listen to me. I am really more pleased than I can say to see you and I wish I could talk individually to each of you over old times. I look back on those old days, and, as Haig said, a whole lot of the boys who came out really should have been still at school, and it was wonderful how they went and did their services and stood it all through to the end. It was my lot to sit in an arm chair. Never did I hate anything more than when I used to sit at my table and record how many machines did not come back. But that was my lot and theirs to do what they did. And if you gentlemen sitting here in this room could see those boys—one squadron of eighteen machines set out on a two hundred mile flight and one came back. And the other squadron men asked: "who had done this? Let us go out and see to it."

I thank you and I ask you to excuse me for the shortcomings of my remarks.

THE PRESIDENT:—Lord Trenchard, on behalf of the Canadian Club may I extend to you our very sincere thanks for your remarks today. I know you can tell by the clapping that they do not think you are no speaker. They have enjoyed your remarks. We have appreciated the honor in having you here and we hope you will remember us and come and see us again.