

(August 31, 1928)

## Historical Buildings and their National Influence

BY VISCOUNT PEEL.

PRESIDENT R. O. DALY:—There could be nothing more welcome to the Canadian Club nor more in keeping with its objectives and ideals than the opportunity which is presented here today of greeting this distinguished gathering of Empire Statesmen. The vast power and responsibility of the various countries represented in our assembly here today cannot fail to impress us with the significance of this occasion. Among all these people there is arising a strong desire to understand one another's habits of thought, to appreciate more fully one another's individual problems and to co-operate more effectively than ever before in promoting the common interests of the Empire and in advancing the cause of civilization and peace throughout the world. We are proud to meet these Empire delegates on Canadian soil. We hope their visit throughout the length and breadth of this country will still more increase their confidence in the future of the Empire. We are also glad to welcome here today the English Public School boys from Harrow, Glenalmond and Clifton, who are visiting in Toronto today. Viscount Peel, the leader of this group of Empire statesmen, throughout his career, municipal and parliamentary, has added honor and distinction to one of the most illustrious names in the history of Parliament. He has very kindly consented to address the meeting. He has chosen as his subject "Historical Buildings and Their National Influence," and it is with very great pleasure that I ask him to address you.

VISCOUNT PEEL:—Mr. President, It is a great honor for me to have the opportunity of addressing the Canadian

Club of Toronto which I understand is so significant of the professional, business and intellectual ability of this great city. And for a few moments I am going to be allowed by the favor of your President to stray from the paths of politics and business to deal with a matter outside perhaps that more regular groove—the subject of history and historical monuments, not merely, of course, from the point of view of archaeology or as a specialized archaeologist, but from the point of view of its connection with the history and national characteristics, because we all have our national assets and we are all determined to make the best of these treasures. We have of course, and I am speaking now for the United Kingdom, a great many assets of which you are all aware, but we have in particular one treasure of special value which is due to our long history and which consists of the monuments of antiquity and the public buildings which have so great an effect and are themselves an example of the national character. I want to give a very short sketch of the recent development of interest in all these subjects in Great Britain. Again, not from the point of view of the archaeologist who has long studied these matters, although I myself, if you will permit the personal reference, am a descendant of a very eminent archaeologist of the 17th century, Sir William Dugdale, who wrote the *Monasticon*, which gave a full account of the state of the monasteries in England in those days.

While we have been in the past rather inclined, I think, on the side of interest in these historical monuments, we are not at all lacking in the history sense. Indeed in our political institutions we have been singularly observant of history and its traditions. We have been fond, some say almost over-fond, of maintaining old forms although the substance changes. Many familiar examples of that will suggest themselves to you, but we make great political changes and we set our formula. We like to pretend or to say that we are not introducing any new matter, that we are really retracing the customs of the past. We did so in our Magna Charta, although historians agree that from that restatement, as it were, of our constitution, great changes followed as a result. But to take some smaller

matters, members of Parliament when they enter or leave the chamber bow to the speaker. Many of them forget they are not really bowing to the speaker, but bowing to the old altar which stood in the chapel of St. Stephens behind the speaker's chair, and the bow goes through the speaker to the altar behind. Again, the very name of the speaker goes back to those early times in our history when the speaker really was the speaker and voiced the grievances of the Commons to the King before they granted money. Again, in our House of Lords, to which I belong, we are still maintaining the idea that the Lord Chancellor (who was, by the way, to have headed this deputation) was rather an inferior sort of person, not allowed to sit in the chamber of the Lords, but was to sit outside, consulted on legal questions when their Lordships, who were less versed in these matters, wanted assistance. And even still the Lord Chancellor, though he sits as Speaker in the House of Lords, has no control over order. The members themselves preserve order, but when he addresses the House he takes a step to the front and left and one to the left and right thereby placing himself within the sacred precincts of the chamber and allowing him to address with propriety Their Lordships.

Now these are all, if you will, very pleasant hypocrisies, though they imply our sense of humor.

It is rather singular to observe that these buildings represent in a visible and open form the practice and habits of the past quite as much as those habits and institutions to which I have just referred. I should say, because I am always generous to the other nationalities that occupy the two islands of Great Britain, that I think there is more interest in those subjects in Ireland and Scotland and among the Welsh than among the pure English, among whom I may class myself. It is not due to their inherent virtue. It may be due to the fact that they wish to maintain in every way their national characteristics and habits against the more populous and more overbearing portion of the island. I submit that these monuments should be more interesting than museums, in which are collections of objects connected with other countries and other histories, and which don't represent in the same de-

liberate way the history of the country with which they are themselves associated.

Now we often see buildings which are the work of foreign architects in our own country, but there is this observation to make, that these buildings built by foreign architects generally get subdued in some subtle way to the national character. They take a different shape from that which they took in the countries which gave rise to that particular class of architecture. They take on the national color, that is to say, if they are to become a part of the living architecture of the country itself. And we can be quite sure that, if we are struck by some particular building and feel that it is not indigenous but has some exotic qualities, it is due to the fact that in some strange way it is not deeply and intimately associated with the character of that country where it is standing.

I should like to give one or two reasons why I think that there has not until comparatively recently been this deep interest in these historical associations and monuments. The first is the great classical tradition which, more particularly since the Renaissance, has dominated until recently our schools and universities. We were all steeped in this classical tradition, and people quoted Horace as if it were familiar to them every day. Nowadays nobody quotes Greek. Very few people would understand it. And I think quoting Latin is nearly gone out in our political institutions. I believe I am one of the few people who do quote Latin in the House of Lords. Another reason which is interesting to look back upon is the strange iconoclastic habit of our ancestors. They always seemed to think that they could build finer buildings than their predecessors and to do that they very often pulled down and destroyed, as did the Roman Empire, some of the finer buildings of the past. Let me give you two great examples. Henry III. found a magnificent abbey church at Westminster. He was not satisfied. He pulled it down. And the great building which you now associate with Westminster Abbey dates of course from the building of Henry III. May I say incidentally, as a matter of some interest, that I was called into a committee the other day to discuss this question, whether any enlargement of the

Abbey was possible. Because, perhaps through faulty selection of the great men, the Abbey, not only so far as interment is concerned but in connection with monuments, is so full of eminent people that the eminent people of to-day are getting nervous as to the opportunities which they may have, and now that the Empire is enlarged and we shall welcome some of its eminent people, I hope we shall have some sympathy from our Prime Minister when that question of the enlargement is discussed. Another great example of iconoclasm by one of our great men is the ruthlessness with which Sir Christopher Wren pulled down a large portion of the old Henry VIII. palace at Hampton Court and ran his magnificent building into it and tried to fuse them, but he didn't. And then, of course, we have had so much destruction of some of our most magnificent memorials through religious and political passions. Though I belong to the Church of England and not to the Catholic Church I cannot help feeling some regret for the destruction of some of the finest glass we have had in our cathedrals.

Just one more word about the causes of the revival of interest. They are many and rather deep-seated, and I can only allude to them in a sentence or two. The first I think is the result of the comparative method introduced into history by our modern historians. That is to say, we must judge of the past not on standards of our own day but by standards of the particular day about which we are writing. And as a result of that these buildings take their place as illustrating the whole range of the social conditions prevailing at their time. We don't regard them as good or bad so much but as characteristic. And another point is, I think, that our sense of history has been immensely strengthened by the vast extension to the life of man which has been shown to be the case by the discoveries of our geologists and archaeologists. Moreover, those doctrines of evolution, so potent over the whole range of science, had their effect here also, and as we see the slow movement and development from early beginnings so are we more interested to see the works of our ancestors at different periods of our history and development. I would like to give a few examples showing the extraordinary revival of

public interest in these matters which we have had in England during the last few years. I have one from the daily press, because you have in the daily press a great touchstone of popular feeling. Let me give you briefly the history of the recent investigation into the amphitheatre near Caerleon in Wales. For about two or three centuries Caerleon at Usk was the capital of the second Roman legion. About 80 A.D. I suppose the great coliseum at Rome of Titus was founded and it is about the same time that this amphitheatre at Caerleon was built for the benefit and amusement of the officers and men of that second legion. They stayed there for about 25 years. Originally that post was well suited because the Romans at that time had to defend themselves against the Welsh but as time went on the enemies outside changed. The Welshmen were no longer troublesome, but the Romans had to defend themselves against a more troublesome enemy, and those were the Irish rovers who came over. And the camp was moved to Cardiff, ten miles off, rather more, and the Saxon type of fortress constructed, which proved formidable against these rovers.

Well, about 300 A.D., we hear more about that second legion and it moved across, as we think, to Richborough; to that old part of the Kentish coast, and then destruction and decay fell on the amphitheatre and camp. Soil and grass grew over it and in the 14th century people's historical associations got mixed. They got it confused with the legends of Arthur and his Round Table; and so this big saucer covered with soil and grass was supposed to be one of the many tables which King Arthur and his gallant Knights established in Britain and Wales. And then we get down into modern days when the excavation was undertaken at the expense of a great Canadian newspaper, the *Daily Mail*. What more formidable example of public interest could one give than that connection of a modern newspaper with ancient Roman theatres?

The other day there was opened at Hampton Court the kitchen and the beer cellar of King Henry VIII. and if I were to give you the number of gallons of beer apparently consumed by the lords and ladies of the court of Henry VIII. you would be horrified at the same time you were

edified. One subject which occupies now the mind of the Bishop of Durham in addition to their coal problems is this question of Durham castle, which since Norman times, for seven centuries, has stood squarely on the great rock on the end of which also stands the cathedral. It is beginning to decay and there is some danger of that historical castle, now in charge of the University of Durham, falling into the valley below, and we have to find something like \$750,000 to keep it in place. The moral is, it isn't enough even to put your building on a rock.

But connected with a love of antiquity there is also the development of the aesthetic sense. There was an interesting debate in both houses not long ago because of a proposal that certain of the city churches, many of them buildings by Wren, were to be pulled down and the land to be sold and other church buildings built in more necessitous parts of London. Now that, from the position of the church and Bishops, was an admirable object. But we felt and the House of Commons felt and the House of Lords very nearly felt, because it nearly defeated it, that after all these wonderful churches standing shoulder to shoulder with the great business places were a national memorial of inestimable value and no question of money must stand in the way of their retention. And I think it is a remarkable thing that in what may be called the very heart of the material civilization in England, in the very city itself, side by side with these great business houses, some of them represented by gentlemen here, you have these great churches pointing with their spires up to Heaven. I think that is somewhat of a refutation of the idea that ours is a material civilization and has not got a deep spiritual basis. Let me show you the question of Waterloo bridge. We are always having difficulties between the aesthetic side and the practical side. Some want a larger bridge and more tramways. Others say here is one of the finest bridges in the world, a real adornment to the city in which it is placed.

These examples, taken together, are signs of a remarkable growth and development of the historic sense and historic duties. Now may I go to the more practical question of the method by which these old buildings are preserved

and maintained? I may add incidentally that I am one of those whose part duty is connected with this particular responsibility and therefore I am very familiar with it.

The Commissioners of Works are the constituted authority for State action in protection of ancient monuments, but their power does not extend to ecclesiastical buildings in use or to private dwelling houses in occupation. This is, of course, a serious limitation of powers as it definitely excludes some of the grandest and most important buildings (our cathedrals and parish churches), and humbler structures like those cottages of any date from the late middle ages to the 18th century which give our English villages their peculiar charm. Under the Act of 1913, the Commissioner of Works can, with the owner's consent, assume guardianship of a monument. They do not necessarily become owners, but they assume responsibility for all work of repair, and, incidentally, collect the entrance fees.

The Commissioners are advised by three ancient monuments Boards (for England, Wales and Scotland respectively). These boards consist of experts and of well-known men who have the interests of ancient monuments at heart. They are an extra official element in the administration of the Act and they perform a valuable service in securing public confidence that the Act shall be administered in a broad spirit. They recommend to the Commissioners from time to time that certain monuments shall be declared to be of national importance, and once this has been done, a monument cannot be altered or destroyed by an owner without the permission of the Commissioners who may issue a preservation order, placing the monument under their protection. Such an order requires confirmation by Parliament within eighteen months. But the mere fact that a monument is included and published in the Commissioners' lists, whether on their own initiative or on the advice of one of the Boards, is usually sufficient to secure its preservation, and owners as a rule are willing, so far as their means allow, to co-operate in the protection of the monuments. But many monuments require such large expenditure that the state is called in to carry the burden.

The annual sum at the disposal of the commissioners is far from adequate, being about £45,000, out of which the cost of caretaking must also be met. If you visit one of our great monuments, say Rievaulx Abbey, which stands, like many other Cistercian foundations, in a wooded valley of wonderful beauty, you will have an opportunity of seeing what our aims are in spending comparatively large sums on these ruined buildings. First of all, you will see no restoration—for we have long passed the stage when we can think of rebuilding wholly or in part something whose function it is to stand as a piece of the past actually surviving into the present. Much of the rest of the past has gone—the men and women, and much of the things that made up their everyday life; we have here a material survival, incomplete it is true, for the vaulted roof has gone, and the glass, and the life of what was once a busy community with varied occupations and provision for all its needs—bakery, tannery, brewery, etc. And the survival has a modern setting, but this is inevitable and just.

We do not make it only a monument for the antiquary to delight in—though we have dug out the foundations of the buildings that have all but vanished and have exposed the plans of cloister, chapterhouse, warming room, etc.—we make it a place which exists also for its own beauty. The eye wanders from the exquisite architecture of the great church to the smooth lawn which covers the whole floor of nave and presbytery, except for areas occupied by tiles, or altars, or tombs in position. We ruthlessly clear away ivy; the flowers in the wall disappear when the wall is repointed, but they come back in the end.

So far I have only spoken of Abbeys, but the office of works has in its charge a whole collection of monuments ranging from the days of the prehistoric architects who built Stonehenge to the time of Sir Christopher Wren, say from 1700 B.C. to 1700 A.D. This fact affords an index of the astonishing richness of our inheritance. Canadians come to England but they do not perhaps expect to find on the whole, things approaching in interest the great and famous things to be seen on the continent. But they are wrong. Stonehenge, Avebury and Grim's Grave; the

numerous dolmens and barrows, remains of pre-historic villages, of great camps—these are witnesses to a civilization which, if it has hardly left a history, has left enough to show that it was the product of men of intelligence and ability, to whom we owe no small part of the debt that we owe to the past. England is rich in Roman remains. The Roman wall in the north is wonderful even to German and Italian archaeologists and at Richborough we have the massive walls of the last fort, I suppose, to be held by the legions before they departed forever. On the moors of Yorkshire, my department maintains a long stretch of Roman road.

Gentlemen, my time is approaching and may I conclude with a sentence. There is so much to say that it is difficult to include one's remarks within a few minutes. But I should like to allude to the great work done by one of our great viceroys, Lord Curzon, in taking care of the ancient monuments of that tremendous country, India. I need hardly say, because the subject requires no argument, that we must preserve these great national assets and, after all, we feel in England and Great Britain that we only hold these great assets as trustees for the Empire itself. I am much interested to know that you in Canada are taking care, both through the state and through the provincial governments, of your buildings and places of interest and I am quite certain that your far remote descendants in the centuries to come will thank you for having so early in your great national life looked after these great historical possessions. I thank you.