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The European Crisis

By Mr. Philip W. Wilson*

Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen,—I well remember the first occasion on which I had the privilege of appearing before the Canadian Club of Toronto, and great an honor as that undoubtedly was, I feel that to-day the fact that you should be ready to listen to me a second time is an even greater honor, and I profoundly thank you for your repeated hospitality.

It is perfectly true, sir, that I inflicted upon this Club a speech about Ireland, but after all there are a certain number of people, perhaps unimportant people, who do not live in Ireland. To-day I should like to bring before you, if I may, in a few words, the yearning need, the deep unspoken hope of the world as a whole.

This morning I said a few words to the boys at Upper Canada College. I told them of the need of men in the world to-day, and then, coming back here, I had in my mind, what is the world we are preparing for those boys, and for those who shall come after them. From the Washington Conference, where I was a spectator, it seemed to me that one carried away in one's heart a sense of a profound issue confronting all nations alike, the choice as to whether the elaborate civilization of which we are a part is to be organized for the purposes of life or for the purposes of death, for a life more abundant or for a death more cruel. And the great struggle that is going on in Washington is the same struggle that is going on in Europe between that in man which says there is nothing to be done except you use force and that in man which says there is an alternative to force, namely good faith. Between Force and Faith, that is the issue which dominates every other issue in the world to-day.

There was no doubt that the official policy of the United States was declared from the first to be based upon good faith. The experience of the two Americas, North and South, had been for years, that the twenty-four sovereignties, with different races, different colored races, different religions,

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could live at peace with only one recent navy and with no army at all on the European scale. And it was a historic event when the President opened the conference with that Lord's Prayer which declares the brotherhood of man under the sanction of the fatherhood of God. Those who speak our language, Canadians, Australians, British, agreed with the President, and took their place on the side of Faith and against the use of Force.

But there were two nations which had to be convinced, and this is what is bringing me closer and closer to the European crisis. The first was Japan, Japan which had wakened up to Western civilization in order to find two facts; the first fact was the German army; the second fact was the British navy—force on land and force on sea. But nothing, I think, so impressed the Japanese as their journey across your great continent from the Atlantic to the Pacific. There they saw a new fact of mighty civilizations growing up without contemplating the use of force whether on land or sea, and it is undoubtedly a fact that at Washington a new spirit invoked the new Japan. And although it is not true that many of the major problems of China have been settled—they have not—yet it is true that what appeared to be a growing danger of a conflict in the Far East, has been averted, and averted because continuous discussion has been substituted for the prospect of arbitrament by force. That is of the greatest importance to us, British, Canadians and Australians, because a disturbance in the far East would mean throwing a bomb largely into India, which is at the present moment gradually arising to her feet, electing her parliaments, granting women's suffrage—India which is to take her place by the side of the great self-governing Dominions of the British Empire. I have said that to Japan it was a new story. Unfortunately to France it seemed no more than the old old story. I don't want to give you a lecture on French history, which would be rather presumptuous for me to do. But you will remember how a thousand years ago Charlemagne endeavored to establish in Christendom what Lord Bryce called the Holy Roman Empire, which has been said to be neither Holy, Roman, nor an Empire, but something like a United States of Christendom, and you remember how time after time the international ideals of France expressed in her Crusades, expressed in her Cathedrals, were shattered by the non-belief of mankind around her, until there emerged a France in which it seemed that the only fact was force and as if the greatest of all delusions was faith. And that was the France which crushed

the Hugenots, which broke the links that were being gradually forged between herself and the Lutherans of Germany, the Presbyterians of Scotland, and the Puritans of England. And one of the most tragic facts about the bombardment of Rheims Cathedral was this, that the Cathedral was empty when it was bombarded and had ceased to be in any real sense a shrine, and had been declared a national monument. But still, even then, France was yearning after the international ideal. You may say that Rousseau was an idealist and that Voltaire was a cynic, but both of them were internationalists. Once again the hand of war came down on France. Right through the 19th century from the battle of Waterloo to the Battle of the Marne it could not be said that France played the part of a bad European. Quite the contrary. She was not the ally of England during that period when we endeavored to establish the brotherhood of man on a basis of commerce in the '50's. As you know she was not able to convince the rest of Europe and was repeatedly attacked.

Now that is the France with which we have to deal to-day, a France in which the essential faith on which your great city and Dominion is based, has been shattered, a France which has lost the hope that men may be brothers. No good blaming M. Briand. Let him go and you have M. Poincaré. Let M. Poincaré go and in France there is always the chair left vacant by Napoleon Bonaparte for a dictator. It is the mind of France with which you have to deal; it is the soul of France which has to be put to rest.

Now look what that means. You here in Canada have one armed man for every 2,000 people. France has one armed man for every 40 people; Japan one for 100;—one for 40 in a country exhausted by war, while you get on with a far lengthier frontier than France with one soldier for every 2,000.

Now I come to the British policy. What is it that a statesman like Lloyd George sees? He sees the whole world being organized on large units—India 330,000,000 under one custom's union, the same arrangement perhaps, for China, North and South America—not under one sovereignty, I don't mean that—but I do mean this, that is that one system whereby the nations live at peace. And then you turn back to Europe with its two dozen divided sovereignties, all of them or most of them gone tariff-mad, so that little countries with only a million or two people are blocking the channels of trade for all their neighbors around, all of them or nearly all of them building up debts. What we want in Europe is the ideal of

Charlemagne, the ideal of Rousseau, the ideal of every sensible man, that there should be a United States of Europe, not united in actual sovereignty but united in friendship, the same spirit which you preserve here, even amid provocation, towards your neighbors to the south.

Everyone knows that Canada has had something to put up with in the last few weeks, the last few years. Everyone knows that! Everyone knows with what good temper and good spirit you have faced the economic pressure which was being put upon you, to some extent, I believe, pressure put upon you in inadvertence, partly because, as far as I can judge, the United States is rather afraid of being annexed by Canada. But at least you do not fight about it. You do not grouse about it. At least there is in North America the sense that men are aiming at one object, which is the happiness of all.

Now that was the main idea with which the Prime Minister of Britain, Mr. Lloyd George, went to Cannes. At Cannes the aim was to secure for France a sense of security. What France needed was the rest cure. She wanted to get away from her politicians and back to her teachers and her artists, and Great Britain has been prepared to give to France alone on her own behalf with the help of the United States a guarantee, a noble guarantee as between gentlemen, of the French frontier. If only we could have got that happily established then indeed it would have been possible to go forward to the second conference at Genoa, which was to deal with the whole question of European indebtedness. Not that Britain wanted to be excused her debts, but that she would be prepared to excuse others. Six hundred million pounds, after all, is owed us from France. That is not an inconsiderable gift from one country to another.

But what we said was this, that if we were to take the tremendous responsibility on our own behalf and to some extent, I suppose, as involving your own future, the tremendous responsibility of saying that possibly there might be another occasion when British troops should lay down their lives in defence of France, then we do say that French policy should be so arranged as to render it as little likely as possible for another war to take place.

I think it best, if you will allow me, to speak with absolute frankness. I am sure you will understand that I am here not as expressing my own views, but as merely a kind of witness to you of what is going on. But now let me put this point to you. The population of France is stationary. The

population of Britain is increasing. Why is the French population stationary? It is because there is always in this world a choice between comfort and children. There are always those who give to the future generation, deny themselves, and must make sacrifices. Now I ask you to put yourselves in the position of the mother of many children in England, who is called upon to guarantee her own flesh and blood for the life of a country where the mothers themselves are not ready to bear children for the same task. We are going right to the realities of the position. No ill feeling towards France! Nothing of that kind! We want France to be prosperous. We want her to be safe, and we know that if she went into another war she would be neither. What we say is this; that Christendom was not meant to be one perpetual feud. It was made to be a place where arts could flourish, where wealth could be evenly and properly distributed, wherein the great hope could be held forth to the rest of the world.

Now I want to make it quite plain, if it is necessary, that I am not a pro-German. Ever since the Germans took a piece off the roof of my house I have always been peeved with the Prussian. But we have got to face the facts in regard to Germany. Her Kaiser has gone. She is a republic. Her army is really disbanded. It is only one sixth or one seventh that of France. Her fortresses are really dismantled. Her allies, Austria-Hungary and Turkey are shattered and starving. Her armies are really dispersed. Krupp's works in the departments that made the big guns are now making locomotives for Russia. Her financial credit is really gone. The mark that was worth 20 to the sovereign is now, I suppose, worth about 800 to the sovereign. The other day I bought a Ford car, and one of my friends said, "How foolish! For the same sum of money you might have purchased a castle in Austria." Shipping also in Germany has been sent elsewhere.

Now what country has ever had such humiliation as that? Let us be fair about it. If Germany is not beaten she never will be beaten, and no country ever could be beaten. But I do say this, when Prussia was prostrate before Napoleon Bonaparte unfortunately France did not make a friend of her and Prussia rose again from the dust. The great object of British diplomacy has been not merely to get a little trade from Germany, though trade is not a crime—it is a mutual service between man and man and country and country, and it is an honorable service if honorably undertaken—the object of Britain has been if possible to secure an end to the perpetual feud

between the Frank and the Hun, so that each may live side by side with the other. Trading, exchange, not perhaps affection, but at least the usual amenities of polite life. Unless you have that I am bound to tell you frankly Europe will be an intolerable place in which to live. If Germany attacked France again I know British people that would go to France to protect our own graves in France. You know it too. After all it has been the business of the British Empire to promote friendship. You remember the conciliation that we have had in South Africa. You remember also the conciliation which is proceeding in Ireland. We are not a people who can cherish a grudge after the victory.

Now I come to the great case of Russia. I understand the feelings of France. If there is one virtue that France has it is in the way in which the common person makes himself independent by means of thrift. I think it is one of the most honorable characteristics of the French nation, that every family tries to make itself independent of state assistance. It was a serious thing when there in the little stocking, the Russian bonds, taken out at the request of the French Government, were found to be valueless, because whatever Bolshevism does or does not do it does not increase the price of your investments. Now what is the position of Russia today? It is true you have got the Bolshevists. What you have is a state returning to the essentials of what the Bolshevists would call a bourgeoisie or capitalistic system. They are even paying interest on money. They are even telling their workmen that they have got to work, and I can assure you that the discipline in some of these factories would seem almost like tyranny in a city like your own.

Now I have always had misgivings as to whether we had the right to tell the Russians how they should govern themselves. I have never approved of the way they govern themselves, whether by the Czar or by Lenine, but I have always felt that it was their business and not ours. But what I do say is, that behind the Czar, behind the Bolshevism, we must remember the Russian people. They lost in dead several times what we lost in France or Britain or greater Britain. They lost in property many times what any other nation lost. And they saved Paris. Therefore, as it seems to me, with Russia starving, in the main, as the result of the war, for it was the war that drove her into Bolshevism, with Russia starving it seems to me that we want to be careful how in our policy we are so antagonistic to her and Germany as to drive these nations desperate into each other's arms so as to

unite the German brain and the Russian brawn. Remember that when France was driven to Caesarism it was at first a bare-footed army with which Napoleon Bonaparte conquered Europe. Now these are the realities. I have not seen Mr. Lloyd George for years. I have heard occasionally of him, but I am certain, or at any rate I had better say I suspect, that I have said nothing to you to-day with which a British statesman in London would generally disagree.

Now of course Britain may be wrong. She has made big mistakes in her history and it takes a big nation to make big mistakes. But she may be wrong and our critics across the English Channel may be right. But there is one thing perfectly clear, you are never going to convince the stupid Englishman of his mistake by threatening him—never. And I do think this, that undoubtedly there has been on the other side a profound feeling aroused by the announcement on the part of the French Government that they will feel it necessary in the future to build as many as 90,000 tons of submarines for purely defensive purposes.

I take myself a philosophic view of this matter, partly because I happen to be living on this side of the Atlantic and partly because the submarines are not yet built. I believe, however, that the case which was presented at Washington against the submarine is in the main unanswerable, that they cannot be used without at the same time being abused. And while I do not go so far as Sir Philip Gibbs in suggesting that during the past month or two there has been danger of an outbreak of hostilities between Great Britain and France—that, I think, is going too far—yet there is undoubtedly in Britain to-day a profound concern over the state of mind in which France finds herself. Of course perhaps we understand that state of mind because we also have to face a budget, and the French budget does not balance. That means taxation; that means entering into that very secret stocking of each house and finding out exactly what each family is worth, which is so exceedingly repugnant to the French domestic mind. It means not merely levying an income tax, but collecting it, and therefore, the French Government, which wants votes like other Governments, is doing its utmost to keep the thing going on the basis of this paper, German reparations, Russian loans, as long as possible, before admitting and declaring the truth, that neither of these securities is at present equal to par. I realize all that. My own feeling about it is this, that what France chiefly needs is time, time and pa-

tience, persuasion, friendship, will do more for her than hard words, though plain words have to be spoken.

I will only say this in conclusion, that Italy is out all the time and all the way for the policy of disarmament on land, a united Europe, and an arrangement with regard to the debts. Italy feels that the problems for her are all those little nations on the east of Europe. If only they could be disarmed, if only they could be regularized, Italy feels she might have her life as she wants it.

Therefore, with the possible exception of Poland, and even Poland has sent to Britain to get her to put her finances in order, it is a fact that the view which France presents to-day is a view that she presents alone, and that there is no one with her in that policy.

Gentlemen, that is the crisis which is rising in Europe. It is no use denying its seriousness. When Lloyd George comes back to London through Paris and is not received by the President of France that can have only one meaning, which is that the old close relations between the two countries are for the moment somewhat strained. When we are told that the Supreme council will not meet again there is only one thing to be said about it, that for the moment the concert of Europe, as Lord Salisbury called it, has broken down.

But I take comfort in what was said to the prophet when he was told that the Lord was not in the wind and the earthquake and the fire, but that after the earthquake the wind and the fire there would come the still small voice of reason and wisdom and love and justice.

Give France time. Give Europe time, and they will find, all of them, that they have more to gain by the common life of that continent than they can gain every one for their own level and individual lives. And in that work of conciliation, of reason and persuasion, of common sense, I am glad to believe that the Empire of which we are all one part, each one a part and all belonging to the whole, in that great task we are all doing what we can.

The English language is now the language of diplomacy because it is the language in which fair play can obtain the fairest hearing. All honor to those who have made it so, and may we be worthy of the language when we speak it.