

(December 14, 1930)

Great Britain, Canada and the United States

BY JOHN BIRD

THE PRESIDENT:—Gentlemen, it is our privilege to have as our guest today Mr. John Bird, a native of a distant country of this great Empire of ours. Mr. Bird's extensive education, starting in Africa, continuing at Trinity School, Oxford, of which he was a brilliant graduate, followed on to Harvard, where he took a post graduate course, and in these three different countries he had great opportunity of learning a lot about the different parts of the English speaking world. Since meeting him this morning I have found he has also acquired a keen sense of humor, and I know we are going to enjoy hearing him. He is going to speak to us on "Great Britain, Canada and the United States," and it is with real pleasure I introduce John Bird of Washington, D.C.

MR. BIRD:—Mr. Chairman and gentlemen, as I listened to the words of your chairman—I may say to the too kind words of your chairman—it came to me that experience has taught me that the race of fibbers, tellers of white lies and plain ordinary prevaricators, may divide chiefly into two classes, into chairmen and lecturers. You have listened to a very charming example of the first. I would ask you to listen to an example of the second. It is a great privilege to be asked to talk to the Toronto Canadian Club, but there is a privilege I appreciate far more than this, the privilege of being able to listen to Canadians. Frankly I lead a double life. For an hour a day I talk. For the rest of my waking days I am in a position to listen.

Before I embark on the altogether too serious part of

my speech I wonder if you will allow me more for my entertainment than for yours to refer to the matter of humor, English and American, because after all when two nations find they do not always appreciate each other's jokes, then I think you have just the beginnings of international difficulty. You have for example here in Canada a type of humor which I think is distinct from the English or American and which it seems to me approximates the Scottish. It permits you to make dry and humorous remarks and retain a long face. For example while your chairman was speaking I, a mere Briton, did not at first realize he was being frightfully funny. If you will pick up an American publication such as *Life* or *Judge* you will find at once it is divided into neat, pithy little paragraphs, containing wise cracks and jokes. If you have an English humorous publication such as *Punch* you will find you are invited to wade through three quarters to a column and a half. The Americans I think are witty rather than humorous. The British are humorous and not particularly witty. Strike a witty Englishman and you usually find he is such a man as Hilaire Belloc. He had a French father and an Irish mother and, therefore, quite naturally he is an Englishman. The typical American figure of wit consists of taking things down a peg. The American who journeys across the Atlantic will refer to it as the big drink, or the herring pond. The Englishman who travels in the same manner and probably as fellow passenger, will probably refer to the ocean as the far-flung bottle line. As I journey across Canada looking southward and observe my fellow returning American residents, I sometimes think what you have got here is the heritage of three thousand miles of indefinite far-flung bottle line. Now English humor is a much slower thing. We Britons find ourselves speechless in the presence of a witty American. Our humor as a rule requires explanation. In order to show you the sorts of things which English find funny let me quote for you a couple of delightful lines by Wolfe:—

"The English have lately gotten over the habit of writing unpleasant epitaphs concerning the dead, but they write unpleasant things concerning the living."

Take H. G. Wells, which one of you is safe from him, which one may not take up a paper and discover he has given a totally new trend to the universe? After having given birth to a new heaven and new earth, thinking out a new series of letters, here lies Mr. H. G. Wells.

One of my amusements in western Canada has been looking in windows of book stores and noticing Zane Grey's popularity, because after all we understand the servant girl buying a dime novel to read about dukes, duchesses and miracles, but we would be surprised to find dukes and duchesses reading all about themselves in dime novels. Thus we find a bank clerk deriving instruction and entertainment from the works of Grey. But that a western Canadian should read him, that is another thing. In England they have their own Zane Grey; she is Miss Ethel M. Dell. In England they have two men like Hutchison.

American wit is the thrust of a rapier which bores to the core and reveals the truth in a flash. English humor is of the heart and not of the head. It expresses a rather settled attitude towards the universe. It is almost a shrugging of the shoulders at the world as it goes by. When I first arrived in New York I came from Boston. I had smuts on my nose. I was very much in need of "a wash and brush, tuppence." Those of you who know New York know it is a difficult place to get "a wash and brush, tuppence." For twenty minutes I walked the city of New York, and then being a mere law-abiding Briton I asked a constable to direct me to "a wash and brush up, tuppence." The fellow didn't understand me. Then, when I went through the motions of it, a light of intelligence dawned on his Irish countenance. "If I were you I would go to the nearest hotel." It was a surprise to me. And I went to the Biltmore and I found a beautiful wash room and not even tuppence to pay. And the humor of the situation seized me. I saw a big chap, the hall porter, with brass buttons. I seized him by the arm, dragged him into the street, and said, "Some wash and brush up, tuppence." And the fellow arrested me. Now I ask you, which one of you has not been in the neighborhood of Buckingham Palace and observed the American standing with his feet apart

and remarking judicially, "Some shack"? He is making an excellent joke in good American. Unfortunately, however, the Englishmen who overhears him only too often thinks the joke is on the American, thinks as a matter of fact the American does not realize Buckingham is a tolerable example of architecture and in point of fact King George lives inside. And that is the sad part of my story. And now to my muttons as it were, "Britain, Canada and the United States."

I am going to ask you the question, is Canada a link? "Great Britain, Canada, and the United States". As it were, a political triangle. I am aware that the word triangle has certain unfortunate associations. Triangle suggests the eternal triangle, "Look for the lady," "Cherchez la femme." The New Yorkers have translated that expression somewhat as follows: "Look for de goil what done de doit." As a matter of fact that principle is one which only too often is applied to international affairs and applied particularly to Canada. How often for example are we not told both in Britain and the United States that Canada is, as it were, a woman with two lovers, Britain and the United States? How often are we not told Canada, irritated by Great Britain in some such matter as Imperial Preference, will fly into the arms of the United States, and how often are we not told, rebuffed by the United States in some such matter as the Smuts-Hawley tariff, she will fly into the preferential arms of Great Britain? When I talk about a triangle please understand me to mean an equilateral triangle. The harmonious relations of these three countries can only be maintained successfully if Canada plays an equal role, which she will do in any case, but also if she is recognized by the other parties as playing that role. It has been my good fortune for seven years to come to Canada—and my reasons for coming here have not all of them been bottle reasons. I seem to have seen growing in Canada something which for the want of a better name is being called Canadian nationalism. Nationalism to a South African such as myself carries with it some hint of General Hertzog arriving at the Imperial Conference with a great big fat statement in his pocket all about the right to secede.

Nationalism, if it be a Nationalism—personally I prefer the word Canadianism—carried with it in Canada no hint of secession from the British Empire. It seems to me to be just this. It is based on the hope and the belief that here in Canada you are working out a civilization and a culture which is and shall be not merely British or American or French or only a combination of these, though it will include much of each of them, but something utterly and characteristically Canadian. That Nationalism, if it be Nationalism, I welcome, and particularly in connection with this political triangle, Great Britain, Canada, and the United States, because I believe it makes for better relations and not worse with Great Britain and better and not worse relations with the United States.

Let me turn first of all to the matter of Anglo-American relations. There is a play, "Wings over Europe," which has enjoyed success in London and on Broadway. One of the brighter moments in that play is when the young Minister of the Foreign Office has plucked a man at random off the street and suddenly introduced him into a meeting of the British Cabinet, 10 Downing street, and there he is asked, "What are the two most important things in the world?" He blusters and flusters in panic and finally blurts out, "Love and Anglo-American relations." When I was a bachelor I believed that Anglo-Saxon relations were the most important thing in the world. Now I am American I think they are very important. If you listen to the lecturers you will probably come to the conclusion there is some bulk commodity, Anglo-Saxon Relations, and you can buy a dime's worth. In other words a lecturer will talk about it in vague general terms. When I talk about Anglo-Saxon relations please understand me to mean perfectly definite things, tons and guns, cruisers and submarines. I mean rivalry in naval affairs. I mean rivalry in the sciences, like rubber in the far east, oil in Mosul, nickel in Sudbury; I mean rivalry or co-operation in perfectly definite commercial enterprises such as communication, that is co-operation between cable firms and radio firms. In other words I ask of you, my audience, that you will demand of me, of every lecturer who talks to you on this subject,

that we come right down to brass tacks and, in so far as considerations of time may permit, put platitudes aside.

I am not going back into this matter of feeling on both sides of the Atlantic, although of course it is a very tempting topic. We have always with us Mr. Thompson of Chicago, the gentleman who succeeds in riding back into office on the not very subtle expedient of offering to keep King George out of Chicago, and who is in some doubt as to whether George III. or George V. is on the throne. Far too many woolly statements are made on the matter of feeling on both sides, and incidents like Thompson's are grossly exaggerated.

I hope to get off one of these very platitudes against which I warned you two minutes ago. I want to say I think the feeling in Great Britain towards the United States today is on the whole worse than it was over any extended period during the nineteenth century. And that feeling in the United States towards Great Britain today is on the whole better than it was over any extended period during the nineteenth century. There were many times in the nineteenth century when it was eminently necessary for one or the other people to keep its political temper. That role often fell to Great Britain, notably during the Venezuelan boundary dispute. At that time the British Government gave a magnificent example of what is represented by keeping your political hair on. In the next century it is going to be eminently necessary for the one or the other, preferably both, to keep their political temper, and while I do feel the United States is less popular with the man on the street in Great Britain today than during the nineteenth century, I know of no people better schooled politically to keep its temper than the British people.

I will not go into naval affairs today but let me just say this about the London naval treaty. Some anonymous wit has said the United States and Great Britain now reside under a condition of faith, hope and parity. That, I think, well expresses the situation. Now that navies are stabilized, and particularly if they stay stabilized in 1931, when the next conference comes off, I hope we will have to talk less about the size of navies, less about tons and guns, less

about cruisers by way of eight and six-inch guns, and, much more about the uses of navies. In other words I hope that our naval problems of the future will be political problems. I hope that the commitments of the U.S. under the Kellogg pact will somehow be square with our own commitments under that pact, our commitments under the covenant of the League of Nations. I hope some day we shall receive assurance of what will be the commitments of the United States if, for example, the British navy were to be called out in pursuance of a League blockade. I hope this matter of the freedom of the seas will be gone into in due course in an open conference, though I recognize that conference will be very difficult and very extended. In other words I am thinking of naval problems in political terms rather than in mere naval terms.

Let me pass on to a much more interesting and more important aspect of Anglo-American relations, namely commercial rivalry or co-operation. I say rivalry or co-operation because I know there are many people in this world who forget that there can be commercial co-operation, who assume automatically that there must be commercial rivalry. I have here a book. It is called "America Conquers Britain," and it is written by Mr. Denny, journalist, in Washington. It is his thesis that commercial rivalries of one sort or another are heading Great Britain and the United States inevitably into a war and that commercial rivalries are so highly developed that a state of commercial warfare exists today. He has shown in this book what he means by commercial rivalries, for example like the Standard and Royal Dutch Shell between American companies.

Before the introduction of the radio Great Britain enjoyed a monopoly in the matter of communication through extensive cable developments. Since the radio Great Britain's supremacy has been sharply challenged by the United States. There is indeed rivalry today going on between British communications and American ones, in the Latin Americas and the Far East. I suggest that you read this book. I think by the reading of it world opinion will be brought to bear upon the rough spots in international relations. There isn't one page in this book, so far as I recall,

which doesn't contain an overstatement, an understatement, or some unnecessary piece of coloring matter. As to Mr. Denny's thesis as a whole, I beg utterly and totally to disagree. I am prepared to go along with Mr. Denny this far, to say that perhaps any commercial rivalry may produce a situation in which individual commercial interest might call for war, might even perhaps try to bring about a war.

But here I beg to point out that we have a new element. Consider that only two years ago Great Britain was the best customer of the United States. She has been supplanted as the best customer but she has been supplanted by Canada. I rather think that the mutual tariff pleasantries have taken Canada out of that position in the last two or three months and Great Britain is back as the best customer. Be that as it may, this much is quite clear, if you lump together Great Britain and the United States—call it an Empire, call it a Commonwealth, anything you like—at any rate of these two groups, the British Commonwealth and the United States, the one is the best customer of the other; the other is the best customer of the one, and while individual commercial interests might indeed have an interest in provoking war I reply that financial and economic interests taken in the bulk must inevitably throw their weight against such a war because in these two economic groups, the one is the best customer of the other and the other is the best customer of the one, and if the author of this book throws at my head the prediction of war through commercial rivalry I answer it by throwing back at his head a basic factor, which is economic interest in the bulk.

Let me now wander to the matter of relations of Canada and Great Britain. There is credited to Lloyd George one characteristically Georgian utterance; he is said to have told an audience in the United States that George Washington is the father of the British Empire as we know it today. That is one of the half-truths which we know is found to yield the Volstedian measure of truth, something less than one-half of one per cent. It is unnecessary to tell a Canadian audience that after the first throes of the rebellion were over British colonial policies were in the direction of reaction and not reprisals. As the merest school boy knows

for fifty years after the revolution Great Britain ruled her colonies with firmer hand and not looser rein. It was not until the rebellion and Lord Durham's great report that the beginning of that magnificent change by which the colonies turned into commonwealths was made, and if one must inquire into the parentage I suggest he turn his attention to Durham and Canada rather than George Washington, because it is here on this part of the continent that this experiment was first worked out.

At every step Great Britain has met you much more than half-way. Whether you have taught Great Britain or whether Great Britain has gradually learned doesn't matter. The point is today the situation exists in which Britain is perfectly prepared to treat you and other nations as nations entirely in control of their own destiny so far as they wish to get control. If you will examine most of the problems in Anglo-Canadian relations, constitutional problems, you find in the last resort they turn out to be more Canadian problems than Anglo-Canadian problems. Take the British North America Act for example. Of course, as has been pointed out, there may be some question as to what constitutes the voice of Canada, as to whether the voice of Dominion Parliament is the voice of Canada or whether it needs to be reinforced by the province. But that is a Canadian problem. If Canada makes up her mind—I do not suggest she should say that she wishes to revise the British North America Act—if she wishes the right to revise her own constitution the British Parliament will not say her nay. It is the same in regard to the right of appeal to the British Privy Council. I again am not in the least arguing this question. But what I say is if Canada makes up her mind that she wishes to abolish the right of appeal to the British Privy Council, that she wishes to establish the Supreme Court of Canada as the last court of appeal, the British parliament will not say her no. There is however one aspect of Anglo-Canadian relations which is not so easily dismissed as properly Canadian problems. I mean economic relations. I mean this matter of tariff adjustments. I do not propose to give you my own views of Imperial preference. What I propose is something much

more difficult and better worth while. Will you permit me to sketch something of the scene in England as it appears to many Englishmen in order that I may interpret to you for the moment certain English reactions to the proposals, for example, of Lord Melchett and Lord Beaverbrook.

As an Englishman looks at the world he finds that it is the tragedy of Great Britain that during the nineteenth century the little island which might support fifteen to twenty millions came to support forty millions of population. That came about because for thirty years after the Napoleonic wars, Great Britain had the start of her industrial rivals. She had gold and iron lying close to the sea and an unrivalled mercantile marine. She built up unrivalled industry and unrivalled export trade. There are millions of people in Great Britain today who believe Great Britain can only remain a first-class power, can only continue to support forty millions, if she regains her position in the world's export markets, and these people are often inclined to look a tariff gift horse in the mouth because they argue any increase of the cost of living will mean increased cost of production, and that will hurt Great Britain in her own export trade, and when one from any other Dominion, such as myself from South Africa or perhaps a Canadian talks to Britain about Imperial tariff adjustments, too often he will look you in the eye and will point out to you that less than one-half of Britain's trade is with the Empire including the Dominions; that proportion of course has increased by ten per cent in the last twenty years, but when you examine trade with the Dominion you find that Imperial preference is no very new thing; that Canada has been giving Imperial preferences since Laurier; since Laurier the proportion of your imports which you received from England has declined and declined and declined, and the proportion of your imports which you have received from the United States has increased and increased. He will tell you Empire tariff adjustments are not enough.

If in this statement I seem to have put forward a few statements in criticism of the proposals of Lord Beaverbrook and Melchett, I think it is up to me to say what I think perhaps should be done to increase intra-Empire trade,

because let me tell you there is nothing closer to my heart than better economic integration of the Empire. This suggestion is not particularly original or particularly my own. You have here in Canada a song which you sing, a song about the unwillingness of the British manufacturer to turn out goods to your Dominions requirements. If you gentlemen would make the British manufacturer and the British exporter as familiar with that song of yours, because it is a very good song, you would be doing great service to intra-Imperial trade. I am not one of those who believe efficiency is a perquisite of the Northern American continent. I think many British industries, especially in the war, are exceedingly efficient. But I do think Great Britain lacks somewhat in salesmanship. I think she might well take a leaf out of the American book. If you wish to stimulate intra-Imperial trade you must get together British exporters and Canadian importers, Canadian exporters and British importers; you must decide what types of goods can be exchanged without injury to existing interests and then in the matter of British exports to Canada you must induce the British manufacturer to establish distribution plants right across Canada, center, east and west. These plants must be in the hands of Canadian sales forces because your Canadian salesmen will see to it that Britain turns out the type of goods you can best use. They must institute the same type of service that the American firms supply on the Canadian market. You know very well it is useless to you to buy a pump or a British aeroplane engine if you cannot get spare parts. You must have the type of service you know you will need if you buy an aeroplane engine or a pump. The British manufacturer will fire at you an illustrated catalogue. The American manufacturer will send his plane up overnight, sell you the thing or lose the sale, and get out next morning. Britain must trade on that hard and business like basis in the Dominion. Then will Imperial preferences, then will tariff adjustments of one sort or another, bear fruit and not until then. Meanwhile don't blame the British manufacturer. Remember that the Dominion market has been a comparatively small thing in his

outlook and there has been no very stringent reason why he should exercise himself about it.

Let me refer briefly to the relations of Canada and the United States. When I talk to you about Canada I expect you to fill in the Canadian end of things which you know so much better than I do. I would not be faithful if I did not report to you that you are very popular in the United States, that people feel very friendly towards you. American opinion, as evidenced in the press and on the platform, is not merely favorable towards Canada, it tends quite often to look up to Canada. At the same time there is a curious paradox. When you are down in Washington and listen to both houses of Congress as interpreting American opinion it is generally blind to Canadian interests. That comes from the fact that Congress regards as purely American domestic concerns most of those matters which most affect you in your relations with the United States. I mean for example tariff. Tariff is a beautiful instance of the type of thing I mean. Nothing has so affected you in your relations with the United States in twenty years as the Hawley-Smoot tariff unless it be some previous American tariff. Nevertheless, Congress, as distinguished from the Department of Commerce and economic thinking in the United States, regards tariff as par excellence a purely American domestic concern. That is so patent I need not argue. All down the line you will find that in connection with waterways, in spite of enlightened opinion in the United States, you will find Congress, when discussing waterways, will adopt the traditional attitude of the twenty minute, hard boiled, egg. You will find in connection with prohibition, these matters of liquor export, Congress will regard these as matters of purely American domestic concern.

Please understand me, Americans in general are decidedly sympathetic to you. It is quite natural after all that the political thinking of a people as expressed in its Congress should be a good twenty-five years behind the rest of the country. That is the situation which we find in many parts of the world. I know this story about American financial domination of Canada. I know you are told you cannot chuck a stone out of a window in Canada with-

out hitting an American dollar invested outside. That may be true; that may not be true. Over the course of a century you might come to be hog-tied to the United States, and while it would not affect my argument, I want to say this, despite any economic dominations over the course of the next century, it is likely to be Canada which influences the United States quite as much as the United States which influences Canada.

What I mean is just this; any one familiar with American conditions will tell you of the anxiety that exists as regards law enforcement. Now in the whole matter of law enforcement, justice, administration of law courts, prosecution of the criminal, Americans look across their northern frontier with admiration almost amounting to envy. They are not merely willing, they are positively eager to accept Canadian precedent and in this matter of law enforcement they will even sometimes accept a perfectly good British precedent if it is served up to them as a Canadian one, served up as it were in a Canadian bottle. I might add to this list.

I have asked the question is Canada a link. I have touched that question. If you have watched me closely you will see I have touched every question I have asked this afternoon and I am going to touch this one. I want you to go back to the time when relations between the United States and Great Britain were very strained for the time being. It was the time when Ramsay MacDonald was writing articles in the *New York Nation* pointing out the gravity of the situation, the time when that same paper was offering a prize for an essay on the subject, "What is making for war between Great Britain and the United States?" At that time the *New York World* produced a striking editorial written by the very intelligent Mr. Lipman. It pointed out how throughout the course of history the rising Empire and the established Empire inevitably had clashed in war. The rising Empire always had been ready for a fight. The established Empire never had been willing to give up supremacy without a fight and it asked the question, "Will Great Britain and the United States inevitably clash in war?" and it answered it by reference to the Dom-

inions. It pointed out that never before in history had there been an Empire with the political wisdom and Liberalism of that British Empire, the wisdom and Liberalism which had permitted it to allow its daughter nations to grow up from colonies to commonwealths, and it held that same wisdom and Liberalism would permit Great Britain to work out a way of living with the United States. I think that was an exceedingly striking editorial to appear at such a time in an American newspaper. I agree with the *World*. I think as a matter of fact the Commonwealth is the fine flower of the Empire. I think the Dominion probably is Great Britain's great contribution to history. I think the *World* might have helped its argument by pointing out how the various Dominions are exceedingly popular in the United States. They refer to us as young Anglo-Saxon nations. They have a sort of glowing feeling when they talk about us. The editorial might have pointed out how you share with the United States certain North American predispositions—should I call it prejudice—you have a dislike of European entanglements of one sort or another, particularly one which might lead you to be mixed up in Balkan wars. You do not like article ten of the League of Nations, but at the same time unlike the United States you shoulder your world burden in the League of Nations. *Le Journal* has said Canada is not merely a link between the United States and Great Britain, she is a link between the American continent and the old world of Western Europe.