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British and French Co-operation

BY HON. JOHN KNIGHT.

THE PRESIDENT:—Gentlemen, as citizens of a country, the people of which trace their origin to the peoples of Great Britain and the great French Republic, combining in their culture the finest characteristics of both races, it is particularly fitting that today we should have as our guest a distinguished gentleman and diplomat of France. The Hon. John Knight has served his country for many years in the diplomatic service with outstanding success and has merited and received the very highest honors. We welcome him as first minister extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary of France to this country. The Hon. Mr. Knight is no stranger to this country. He has made several visits to us in the past and numbers among his warm friends many of our distinguished citizens. It is our hope that in his capacity as Minister, he will have a better or larger opportunity of coming into more intimate contact with our people and that he will be better able to interpret to his countrymen our aspirations and our ideals, in this manner serving to perpetuate the most happy relations which have existed between our countries for a long time and also to strengthen the historic ties which bind us together. I have very much pleasure in introducing to you Hon. John Knight, First Minister Extraordinary to Canada.

HON. JOHN KNIGHT:—Mr. Chairman, gentlemen, it is a great honor and pleasure to have to address you today—to address members of the Canadian Club of Toronto. I know already about the activities of this association and of the good it has done in Canada for the improvement of the ideals of Canada and the rest of the world. I had the pleasure, during my stay in Ottawa, of hearing inter-

esting speeches in the Canadian Club and I appreciate today the honor and pleasure of addressing this Canadian Club. It is also a great honor that I may be the First French Minister who will have addressed the prominent men of Toronto. I may be a little venturesome in having accepted the invitation of your club as, in spite of my name, I speak in a language that is not mine. I accepted the invitation of your club with great pleasure, I do not mind saying, just because I may have the opportunity to address the prominent citizens of Toronto about a subject in which I believe strongly. Should my words lack some qualities, they will be at least words of deep conviction.

The very fact that you invited me without knowing anything about me but my official capacity proves that you are great sympathizers with the friendship between Britain and France. Still, if I can give a few reasons more to keep these feelings, I think I will have done today a very good work. I have many reasons to believe in the efficiency of French and British co-operation. I may say it is very personal to me. Excuse me alluding to my name. My name reminds me of my Scotch origin, and the accent in which I talk your language reminds you of my French nationality, so you see I owe to British and French co-operation my very existence. That is purely a personal reason. Since my youngest days I have always been a great believer in the good that could be done in the world when the French and British combined together. The chief reason for that was, and I do not mind telling it now, in my very young years, during the last years of the nineteenth century, the friendship between Great Britain and France was not what it is now, and there were even moments of friction between both countries. I still remember how that relations between both countries were not satisfactory. There was a feeling of uneasiness; and the same feeling was also in Great Britain and, at that time, more or less in all the world. That makes us appreciate the present situation more and more and appreciate all that has been accomplished during the last thirty years. The man to whom we are indebted for the French and British friendship was a man who has done

a good deal for humanity. I think the British consider him one of the greatest British Kings. I mean King Edward. He came to the throne late in life. During his many years as Prince of Wales he had been in more direct touch with men than a sovereign could be, until he had acquired great experience of humanity and of the principal political questions of his days. He had also a great knowledge and love of France. He was spending a great part of his time in my country where he was extremely popular. Edward VII understood what good could be accomplished for both countries and the rest of humanity if he could bring Britain and France together—into full co-operation. To realize and attain that end, he was mostly helped by one of your statesmen, the Marquis of Lansdowne, as secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. On the French side the statesman who was more responsible for the British and French entente was Monsieur Delcassé, who was responsible for the French foreign policy at a time when he had very difficult questions to settle with Britain, and he realized the value of the friendship between both countries. He was mostly assisted by our ambassador in London, Monsieur Paul Cambon, who held that charge from about 1897 to 1921. In fact, under the influence of King Edward, one came to look for the reasons why Britain and France would not be in full friendship and co-operation. It was surprising to see how absolutely futile the things were that stood between them. The Newfoundland question and the Morocco question were points of friction between France and Britain. Then both these questions were looked at by both countries with a desire for mutual understanding, and the agreement was extremely easy to reach, and since that Newfoundland, Egypt and Morocco have not been heard of any more as points of friction between Great Britain and France. They have been grounds of co-operation for both countries.

A British statesman who has done considerable work for the development of the co-operation between France and Britain is Sir Edward Grey. I may say, I consider him as one of the statesmen who had the highest and purest conscience that has ever been known. He was in charge of the foreign policy as Under Secretary of State

in the Administration of Lord Roseberry. At that time, relations between both countries were not so satisfactory. As he said in his souvenirs, when he took full charge in 1906, under the Administration of Mr. Campbell Bannerman, of the British foreign policy, he fully proved what had been done by Lord Lansdowne in that branch of the work for the development of those relations. During these eight or ten years preceding the Great War when Europe was sitting on kegs of powder, those in responsible positions wished they could prevent it exploding. One has to read again of Sir Edward Grey and his interviews with Mr. Paul Cambon our Minister in London. He spoke in English and Mr. Cambon, who could not understand English very well, was speaking in French which Sir Edward could not understand very well. They exchanged ideas and combined their efforts to avoid the outburst of war on their countries and in Europe. They succeeded in their efforts to avoid war with the continental powers in the maritimes, but two Balkan powers clashed in 1914.

Throughout there has been no real alliance between Britain and France. I think, in fact, it is much better like that. The understanding between France and Great Britain was based on a great appreciation between the leaders of both countries and between the whole of the nations; it was in conformity to their interests and in conformity to their duty, I should say, to the rest of humanity. Two days after war had been declared by France, war was declared by Britain in that historical sitting of the House of Commons. What were the four years that followed? Well, you know. Out of that very tragedy both our nations came with a new bond between them. I should say a common hate, the hate of war itself. Our countries were the two countries who paid the greatest tribute of blood. Three million men the British and French together lost. Most of them remain in French soil. That gives another meaning to the approachment between France and Britain: our love of our boys who were sacrificed just for the comfort and security of life. I was allowed on a former visit to see the memorial in your university where their names are written forever. The sacrifice that was made by our boys during the war, we understand, was done

for the ideal of our countries—to keep Britain as well as France free to pursue the ideals, to pursue freely the ambition that they have for the rest of the world. Now that it is easy to combine British and French interests, it has put on the highest level the co-operation of Britain and France, and they must work together for the goodwill of the world.

Practical co-operation between France and Britain has to be very active because in Europe there are many problems between different countries that have to be settled. The hope of those with bad intentions is that France and Britain will not work on the same side. You have heard in the Canadian Club many explanations about the League of Nations. I will not speak about that subject. But I may say when the League was established I might have been a bit skeptical about it. Yet I have observed what it has done. I think in one generation one will hardly understand how the world existed without the League of Nations. And humanity will remain indebted to both our countries, Britain and France, for having brought to a realization the League of Nations to work together with a spirit of goodwill and efficiency. When we look behind, we can appreciate all it has done in the affairs between our nations and what it is now and what it was thirty years ago. I do not mean to say that there is sufficient friendship between Britain and France; it is their duty—they are the two leading nations in the world—to work to keep and preserve the peace amongst the rest of humanity. French and British co-operation can not only be exercised in politics, economics and in industry, but both countries can be of great help to each other.

In 1869 the Suez Canal was opened. Of what use it has been, you all know. When it was opened it was known that the country that would benefit most would be Great Britain. You know what value it has been to British garrisons in the years of peace and during war. If it had not existed, it is possible that victory would not have been on the side where it was. This is just an illustration of what both countries can do for each other. From the purely intellectual standpoint, I think it is also of great value that there is an approachment and co-operation be-

tween the British and French. Their intellectual civilizations are very different from each other, although coming from the same source. The French intellectual civilization, in my opinion, is due to our geographical position and to the different elements of the races which compose the French nation, however united it is now. The British culture is an Anglo-Saxon culture. As the name indicates, it goes back to when the Angles and Saxons came to Britain and brought that culture with them. They adopted the Roman and Greek culture that was already developed in the British Isles and added that culture. The insular position of Britain is a great reason why it has developed in a very original way, differing from the continental cultures and from the French one. Which is the best, French or British culture, I will not decide. I think it would be very futile to try, because they are different. I think they are just complementary to each other. Both cultures can combine to make the civilization of future humanity better.

The cultures of both our countries are distinct from each other so that none of them can lose anything of their most important features, of their strength and charm, and Great Britain and France can meet on intellectual grounds, although keeping their originality. One can co-operate without merging. In fact, I read a few days ago in the papers, Sir Austen Chamberlain in a joking discussion said that Scotsmen could not merge with Englishmen and Englishmen could not merge with Scotsmen. I do not think the Frenchman could merge with the Britisher. But I think that the British and French could co-operate together and that we will be a light to the rest of humanity.

Well, gentlemen, I do not want to take up all your time, but I would like to have told you much more of what I believe about that subject. I would like to tell you how glad I was that I could talk about British and French co-operation before a Canadian audience and especially in Toronto. The French first discovered this country in the middle of the seventeenth century and Great Britain has the benefit today. That is an illustration of what good it can do both nations when they work together. You know better than I do that Canada is more prosperous and more

happy since French and British elements have come into understanding and co-operation. You are, I may say, specially favored that Canada is composed of possibly the two best elements in humanity--the British and the French. You are favored in this way that to induce the rest of the British and French nations to work together for their own benefit and for the benefit of humanity, you have just to show yourselves being good Canadians.