

(October 16, 1929)

Address

BY PREMIER THE RIGHT HON. J. RAMSAY MACDONALD

PRESIDENT A. W. SCRIPTURE:—Gentlemen, before I introduce our guest of honor today I would like to read this telegram which was received a few months ago addressed to the Canadian Club, Royal York Hotel, Toronto:

“The British Empire Association of Illinois at Chicago sends heartiest greetings to Premier MacDonald and prays that the hands of the two great English-speaking peoples may be clasped in eternal friendship.” (Applause)

Your Honor, Right Honorable Sir, Prime Minister of Ontario, and gentlemen, this is such an auspicious occasion that I believe it would be presumptuous on my part to say other than this, that I have the proud distinction of introducing the Prime Minister of Great Britain, the Right Hon. J. Ramsay MacDonald.

PREMIER MACDONALD:—Little thought I when I was your guest last year that within this very brief space of time I should have the great pleasure of rising and thanking you a second time for your well-known hospitality. But here it is. The wheel of fortune takes many strange turns and equally rash and foolish is the man who will predict what is to happen a year hence in any political situation. I shall explain to you in one minute that has no reference whatever to a very interesting situation which you make me feel you know everything about. But when I left London, according to the calendar only about ten or eleven days ago, but according to the impression it has made upon the poor human mind, somewhere about the middle of the last century it seems, I decided that for the

first seven or eight days I was to work and for the next eight or nine days I was to play. I don't know if this is play but I can assure you, my friends, if it is play my fellow-countrymen in Canada fully carry out the English tradition that play is a very heavy and serious occupation. What I meant to do in Canada was to review the events of those heavy days in a spirit of restful contemplation and with your Prime Minister sitting alongside of me to undergo a very beneficial exchange of views. But here I am. Here with you in front of me, called upon to make a speech. Now what can I say? I am in the most difficult situation. I discovered for instance, if I use that delightful Scottish word “homely,” and supposing I was to apply it to His Honor, what would the Toronto papers say tomorrow morning? I am not at all sure but some of these delightful gentlemen who keep us enlightened on the other side will not make the wires or the air, I don't know which medium is used, vibrate with the announcement that in the face of His Honor, to whom I not only give an official title but a title that comes as the expression of my heart, one whom I do honor, that I had as a matter of fact by using the word “homely” insulted him to his face.

Now, my friends, I can assure you that the characteristics that were born in me when I saw the light first of all in the North of Scotland, the characteristic that some of you have applied so successfully to life, caution, never leaping before you look, being always careful to sound the future before you commit yourself to the present, that those characteristics have never been drawn upon under greater stress than I have had to draw upon them since I landed in New York; and some of those moments of trepidation have been very serious. This morning, for instance, some of those friends who are travelling with me and who spend the whole day with a spy-glass at their eye looking at the weather ahead, said there is a serious attack made upon you in the newspapers this morning. The mayor of some town has been announcing in public that he does not countenance with some point you made. There is the question of temperance attributed to you although we know you never said anything about it as flared in the newspaper; and I got into a terrible state of excitement and conser-

nation, until by a more careful examination of the printed column I found I wasn't the man at all but it was my honorable friend who sits on my left (Premier Ferguson) who by his conduct and his utterances, regarding which I should be the very last man to pronounce a judgment of any kind—I shall never pat him on the back nor pat him on the head, because the man who would come worst out of that encounter in the end would be myself—but it was owing to his escapades that I had to spend a very hectic and unhappy five minutes this morning.

Mr. President, I have got my warning and I am going to say nothing that either by hook or by crook, and both methods are very often used in politics, can implicate me in the very interesting and very stirring fight in which you are now engaged. I shall evince my interest when it is all over and when the newspapers will announce the result, which my honorable friend to my left whispers to me, although I have not heard him, "What is the use of waiting for newspaper announcements?" I am perfectly certain if his distinguished opponent were sitting by me he would say exactly the same thing with exactly the opposite meaning.

Well, I have been trying this morning when I was considering what I should say to you, to get right into my heart and into my mind, the traditional attitude of the best of our judges, who are the most innocent and most ignorant creatures on the face of the earth. When a case is before them they know nothing about it. When ordinary language is used to them, a bookmaker for instance, they mix that up with Mr. Wells and in the innocence of their hearts ask for explanations as to what bookmaker may mean. I have emblematically put the wig on my head; I have put a red robe on my shoulders to see what effect that would have; and I stand before you the most innocent of persons, a man who until he looked at a little card in front of his neighbor, let us officially say it and say it truthfully, officially, that I never heard the name of Ferguson since I left Lossiemount, where there was a very successful farmer who bore that name.

I am very glad to visit you and my visit this time is a sort of pastoral visitage. The Archbishop knows what is

in my mind. I came last year, for instance, as a sort of curate in charge of a parish, not in charge but rather in that sort of status of a free man, a man who could express any views he liked either on theology or politics, consequently a happy man. I am now here as an Archbishop. Times have changed. But I believe that Toronto might misunderstand that reference because I see in the guide book that there are a good many Presbyterians here. This is a Scotch settlement. I must accommodate myself to my own nature, one of the easiest jobs that I shall have to do between leaving London and getting back, and I shall say, last year I came as a ruling elder; this year I return as the Moderator.

But I come as the political head of a mother country which is proud of the family of independent children who looking at her firesides and thinking of them say, not only by lip but by heart, *'that is our home'*. And those of us who have been blessed with children of our own know that when the time comes, when full of days and years, manhood and womanhood, and independence of thought, they go out into the world, our problems of family unity change. In the old days it was the strap and the slipper and the word of authority and the frown and the threat, but when they grow up and go away, our problem is this: How, whilst they are enjoying their manhood and womanhood in absolute independence, they may still be bound to the old hearthstone by the intangible bonds of reverence and family life. I go back over there to London. I go back over there to Whitehall. I go back over there to the House of Commons, that center where great men have lived and moved and had their being and have died; I go back and dwell in halls where every Prime Minister almost since Walpole has gone up and down its stairs and where their faces meet me every time I go up and down. I go back and sit on a front bench where every man who has led the British House of Commons has sat, wander up and down in the lobbies where the ghosts I meet are the ghosts of the men who have made us a powerful nation, a far-extended nation, the ghosts of the men who have made their mistakes and have shown their wisdom and unified us together. And when I go there I think of Canada; I think of Aus-

tralia; I think of South Africa; I think of New Zealand; of the Irish Free State and I remember that, unless we can preserve between you and us the bond of reverence, no other bond can take its place.

There is of course a duty laid upon us of being mutually helpful to each other. I am not ashamed of being a Britisher. I am not ashamed of being a Scotsman, and I do feel in my heart of hearts that you and I, inheriting the same principles, inheriting the same history, taking our children to our knees when we want them to feel the father's strength, the soul and the achievements of the fathers who begot us, taking the same history books in Toronto and in London, going to the same corners in our book-shelves, taking down the same books, are opening them at the same pages, and with similar accents of our own, reading to them the same story and telling them of the same heroes in order to do—what? To bring enmity in their hearts against the rest of the world? Not at all, but to make them proud inheritors of a great and inspiring tradition which we all hold in common. We have had experience in common. We have a common virility. We do not fuss. We do not like to fuss. We prefer rather to live our lives like the ice-berg which is distributed, we are told, between air and water, the greater part of it hidden below, only a certain showy part of it manifesting itself above. That is our Scottish and English characteristic, but still my friends that virility which enables us to do hard work steadily and honestly, that characteristic that makes us feel that poverty is no disgrace, but that debts that we could pay and have not paid are disgraces, that makes independence of character, which makes us feel that the material manifestations of success or failure are as nothing to the human quality that remains behind them, and that is the quality that our virility gives us. Upon this the British Empire has been founded; qualities not quantities; characters, not force.

It is the kind of men we were, not the powers of our muscles, that have gone pioneering over the unknown parts of the earth, subduing them, making them fruitful and providing homes for decent honest God-fearing men and women. There is something in our common heart

that makes it impossible for a good Scotsman or Englishman or Welshman or Irishman to live under conditions lacking liberty. We are tolerant. That has been our characteristic. Our tolerance does not merely amount to this, that everybody can think as I think; our tolerance amounts to this, that we have gathered with anxious care around our study tables, around our library fire-places every thought that was an honest thought, not for the purpose of listening to it for entertainment but for the purpose of listening to it for our pondering, for our thought, for our consideration so that upon contribution after contribution of newer and newer thought we should rise higher and higher, on to the clean, clear and inspiring air of absolute truth. We have that in common as well. There are two other things we have in common, which are perhaps our most precious things of all. When we have got wealth it has not materialized us. Wealth has come to us with culture. Wealth has come to us as an opportunity for mental and spiritual development and on the other side of the scale, adversity has never crushed manhood out of our hearts, adversity with character, adversity with hope, adversity with a sense of responsibility; poverty and honesty have gone hand in hand although they are both clad in beggars' garb so far as our countries and races are concerned.

All I can suggest to you at the present moment is this, standing as I do, part of you and yet apart from you, standing as I do representing the children, standing as I do representing the old, facing you representing the young, standing as I do representing those who have stayed at home, to you who have gone abroad, impartial to your experience although I belong to you, determined not to interfere in your affairs, though in all your public life I might say not a sparrow falls but concerns us and is watched by us and is considered by us in the homeland, all I can say is this: I have suggestions that in economic affairs we should co-operate more closely. I offer you no program. That should be discussed in a proper way and in a proper place; but my friend and colleague, one of my best friends I ever had and one of the most loyal colleagues I shall ever have, Mr. Thomas, was here the other day,

and in his own gay, blithesome, happy style, I believe, made you some suggestions as to how you could help. May I in a more serious way, may I as the older brother of that family, may I as the man who takes the chair at the cabinet meeting, just say to you in passing, anything you can do in the line that Mr. Thomas suggests will be welcomed not only by Mr. Thomas himself but by the whole of the government whom I represent here at the present moment.

Then you and I have some difficult problems to solve, some of the most difficult that have ever been presented to democratic states, the growth and the individuality of the self-governing nations. I am not sure that if I commit myself to a descriptive word I would please you all, because I understand that one of the great questions that sometimes agitate you is whether you hope to be an equal part of Empire or a co-operating state, or what it is. My friends, use the word that suits you, and be assured of this, it will suit me. You are grown up. I remember the old days, for instance, when at the foreign office a foreign secretary signed documents that committed you. That has all gone. But may I whisper in your ear, sometimes it is a very difficult problem that is presented by any one driving a team unless by the team's leave always. Please make no mistake about that. I hope no Canadian newspaper is going to suggest that I forget that we never speak for you without your leave. It reminds me of a circus I attended the other day, (because, believe me, my friends, that amongst our other characteristics with our serious responsibilities, we do like a little recreation sometimes), and there was an item in the circus which was a display of bare-back riding. First of all a man came in with one horse which he rode around. Then a second horse and he stretched his legs and took the second horse and rode around, and this went on until he had five horses and when the fifth horse broke in, somebody in the audience shouted, "Go it, good old Ramsay, that is the fifth you have bespread." Well that symbolizes in rough and ready manner the problems we have to face; and what we have to do to solve governing the Dominions and ourselves is: to devise this machinery and technique of government which never can impose its will upon any of the nations if they are

unwilling to have it but which must solve this problem of how to keep us all co-operating together.

And then there is a final thing, my friends; our problems are economic and our problems are political, but they are going to be somewhat bigger and higher. They are going to be moral. A nation that has got no moral mission to the world is declining. Dry rot is manifesting itself. You and I, inheritors of those common traditions, inheritors of those common volumes of national history, inheritors of those common biographies of great men and great women, we have got to remember that the Empire of the community of nations, the commonwealth of nations to which we belong, must keep flags flying of such a nature that every eye that sees them knows they mean moral issues. Those of you and me and our community, far-flung as it is and divided by thousands and thousands of miles of seas, but with one common aspiration, one common mission, one common prayer in our hearts, and that is that every time a representative of ours speaks to the world, the world feels warmth, the world feels illumination, the world feels enthusiasm, and our battle-cry must be the battle-cry that will be music to the feet of millions and millions, not only of soldiers but of pilgrims, treading out and out the way of higher and higher moral aims and moral accomplishments.

So my friends, I am glad to be here again with you. I am glad to try and interpret to you once more what the mind of the old mother land is across those waters. I am trying to tell you what is in our hearts. You can agree with us or disagree with us on our politics; that is all right; never mind. There are probably a lot of you who don't know much about them. To tell you the truth, to these matters I am just a little bit indifferent. But this I do care about: I want to see those unities that keep us together and that are going to keep us together, the spin of the fine endurable silks, after all the material things have rusted, when all the bonds of steel and iron have rusted and broken, our children, and our children's children, if this generation has devised the means of spinning and weaving the finer and more enduring bonds, our children and our children's children will sit around as you and I have sat around, looking forward as you and I have looked forward this afternoon

into the future, with enmity in our hearts to no nation but with great pride and reverence in our hearts for our own.

PRESIDENT A. W. SCRIPTURE:—Gentlemen, it is the custom of the Canadian Club to thank its guests of honor for their address through the chairman. But this event today is of so outstanding a character that I think it is only fitting and proper that I should ask our own Prime Minister of Ontario, the Hon. G. Howard Ferguson, to express our hearty thanks to the Right Hon. J. Ramsay MacDonald.

PREMIER FERGUSON:—Your Honor, Mr. President, Mr. Prime Minister, I am glad to say a word of appreciation on behalf of this great gathering. I would like to remind you, Mr. Prime Minister, that you have here a most representative congregation of people from every department of our life, representing every class and every occupation and every degree of intelligence. Coming as you do from a country of vacillating public opinion and repeated political change, I regret that you are not to remain with us longer. You would have learned by mingling with the people of this province of Ontario that stability of thought comes with a higher degree of intelligence. And we in this province are stable, fixed in our thought and in our action. Nor would I have you think that this audience is composed of Scotsmen alone. The good old Emerald Isle has contributed a large proportion as well as England and Wales. True it is that we have mingled and intermarried and produced a new type. You have the Irishman, particularly, who may revel with the thought that he has a drop of Scotch in him. But, however, whatever our descent may be, in this province and in this Dominion we are determined to co-operate, not only for the consolidation of our activities throughout Canada but with determination that we shall cling to the mother who bore us.

This is the second time we have been honored in this Dominion by having the Prime Minister of Great Britain visit us, speaking with the voice of the whole British nation, and I am quite sure we will all agree that we have derived great benefit and been tremendously impressed with the eloquent and inspiring though brief address we have had from the Prime Minister of England. And may I say that

perhaps some of us had some misgivings when the changed conditions in England produced a new Prime Minister in the person of Mr. MacDonald? But your activities and your sentiments and your views expressed on behalf of Great Britain I think have met with the solid endorsement and appreciation, and you will have the entire co-operation in assisting you in carrying out your plans, of the people of Canada. First, last, and all the time, we are interested in promoting peace and good-will throughout the world, and there is no instrument so useful or so influential and powerful to carry out that great work as is the commonwealth of nations for which you speak; because you have said that while we are political entities within ourselves, yet we are tied together with that strong sentiment, with the strong bonds that come from the rich tradition of centuries of experience and wisdom that have founded the present British Empire. And you, sir, come as the great ambassador from the little isle across the sea and speak with the voice of force that will have its determining effect throughout the world. We are all exceedingly anxious, deeply interested in the promotion of good-will with all the nations and if a reconciliation can be reached amongst the English-speaking people of the world I think we have practically solved the problem and eliminated for the future the type of conflict that has settled international problems before.

May I, Mr. Prime Minister, on behalf of this very large and representative gathering, tender to you our sincere thanks for the excellent, inspiring talk you have given us today?