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An address by Mr. Sidney E. Smith, Secretary of State for External Affairs, to the Biennial Conference of the Association of Canadian Clubs, Quebec City, June 21, 1958.

The presidential chair of this Association, which I have had the honour of occupying, has indeed been a comfortable one. Unlike most presidential positions, it is by nature essentially sedentary; the incumbent can share the elation of good talk and the joys of good companionship with few very arduous responsibilities to discharge; and such demands as the position may make are generally, as in the present circumstances, a pleasure to fulfill. Indeed, the constitution of our Association stipulates only that the President shall represent the Association, but living as we do under the influence of the special genius of the British Constitutional spirit, it is, I suppose, nigh inevitable that we should be governed in our proceedings not so much by the imperious demands of explicitly enunciated regulations as by the more gentle but perhaps more persuasive urgings of tradition. And regardless of what our "founding fathers" may have had in mind for the Association's presidents, custom and usage have come to require a presidential address on occasions such as this. Insofar as the President himself is concerned, this is probably a wise precedent; the pages of history have amply demonstrated that privilege without responsibility, is not, in the terminology of one school of historiography, a good thing. For a non-working member of the organization's staff silence corrupts, from which it follows by the inexorable laws of misquotation that absolute silence corrupts absolutely. The custom of a presidential address has evolved, I suspect, in response to much the same needs as are met by the human conscience and Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. (I did not say human conscience or Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition). If it would not be entirely accurate to say that the custom keeps him on his toes, it brings him to his feet at least once in his two years of office.