

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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FENCES

Speech by Mr. Sidney E. Smith, Secretary of State for External Affairs, at the Kiwanis International Convention, Chicago, June 30, 1958.

Oftentimes as I ponder matters concerning relations between the United States and Canada my mind turns to a favourite poem by Robert Frost, which tells of a fence which has to be repaired at spring mending time, and the poet says:

"I let my neighbour know beyond the hill;
And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again."

You notice how the poet thinks of a fence which is jointly maintained by neighbours in friendly co-operation. Later the poet goes on to tell us that the neighbour has kept and respected his father's saying, "Good fences make good neighbours."

My picture of this fence shows it as built of carefully placed stones - a friendly appearing fence. On each side stands one of the neighbours on his own property, with a friendly hand extended across the fence. But neither neighbour, as I see it, would ever be sitting on the fence, either literally or figuratively. There is no place for someone who is a fence-sitter, someone who seeks to evade responsibility and to avoid facing life squarely and on his own two feet.

As the poet has done, I like to ponder whether good fences make good neighbours. It seems to me so much depends upon the neighbours; so much depends on the kind of fence. If they are unneighbourly neighbours, a fence separates them. If they are friendly neighbours, the fence becomes a meeting place where they can come and talk about their common interests and their common problems. The fence avoids arguments because it delineates where one man's property ends and the other's begins, and so there is that certainty and security in their relations which prevents the arguments and unpleasanties which otherwise might ensue. The fence permits to each a certain measure of privacy.