

*The Address*

Hon. Sir LOMER GOUIN (Minister of Justice): Mr. Speaker, I had no intention of taking part in this debate, and I would not now rise to address the House were it not that the right hon. the leader of the Opposition (Mr. Meighen), in the course of his speech, thought it proper to refer in the manner in which he did to my attitude during the last electoral campaign. I crave the attention of hon. members for a short time, and I also crave their indulgence, for though I may count myself as one of the veterans in our public life, yet as a newcomer to this House I must confess in all candour and sincerity that I feel exactly as does the young member who rises for the first time to address his fellow members.

Listening to the oft repeated references of the right hon. leader of the Opposition (Mr. Meighen) to the declarations that I made during the last general election, and also to the declarations which he says I may have made, I could not help thinking that my right hon. friend should be exceedingly grateful to me for having sought and won the confidence of the electors of Laurier-Outremont. Had I not been elected for that constituency much of the best effect of his great speech would have been lost.

I repeat, Mr. Speaker, that I do not intend to detain the House for any length of time, by attempting to answer all the statements which have been made about myself by my right hon. friend.

For many years I sat in another legislature and I have always avoided what might be construed as an attempt to impose my personal views on my colleagues in respect to any subject; I have never made a long speech to defend myself against personal attacks, and I do not intend to depart from that rule on this occasion.

I gladly accept this opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to add my most sincere congratulations to those which have already been so happily and so justly extended to you by those hon. members who have preceded me. I am glad also on this occasion to most heartily congratulate the hon. proposer and seconder of the Address in reply to the Speech from the Throne on their remarkably eloquent addresses.

My right hon. friend, the leader of the Opposition has endeavoured to put me in a contradictory position by quoting a paragraph from the Speech from the Throne in which it is stated:

Our Dominion has not escaped the world-wide economic disturbance and industrial depression, but has suffered less from it than other

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countries. Keen observers of the business barometer feel that the worst is about over and that at an early date we may look for a substantial revival of activity.

My right hon. friend has contrasted with that paragraph certain opinions which I expressed during the late general election to the effect that our country was passing through a most serious crisis. The picture I then drew of her economic, commercial and industrial condition, was no darker than that drawn by the right hon. gentleman himself at that time. Indeed, were I to trespass on the time of hon. gentlemen by quoting newspaper clippings to the extent that he did, I could very easily convince the House that on this point I hardly exceeded any of the statements of the right hon. leader of the Opposition himself.

With regard to the statement quoted by him, that I told the electors of Montreal, or Three Rivers—I do not remember which exactly—that the population of Canada was declining, he should at least, it seems to me, have given me credit for sufficient knowledge to believe that I could never make such a declaration, I did say more than once that our customs revenues were decreasing, and that is borne out by the official returns. I stated also, and rightly, that our foreign trade was falling off and I do not suppose that any hon. member will pretend that I misled the people of my province when I stated that our national debt was increasing to an alarming extent. No, Mr. Speaker, none of my declarations during that campaign were exaggerated; all and each of them were strictly in accord with our economic condition and the state of mind of the people at that time. In a word, there is no contradiction between any of my modest speeches and this Speech from the Throne. I would remind the right hon. leader of the Opposition that circumstances have changed in this country since the dissolution of the last Parliament. Great and important changes have happened in the interim, and I make bold to say that this feeling of security which already is so noticeable in our people, as well as the general revival in business, are due to a large extent to the confidence which the citizens of Canada repose in the new Government which they chose last December.

My right hon friend has referred to my standing on the tariff question, and if I understood him aright he even insinuated that that stand was inspired by certain interests which he holds responsible for his defeat and for the triumph of the Liberal party. My views on the tariff