

The Spectator

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To Dr. Leacock.
What shall the
Principal say in
reply?

General Sir Arthur W. Currie, G.C.M.G., K.C.B.,
Principal,
McGill University,
Montreal, P. Q.

Dear Sir Arthur:

The American Newspaper Publishers Association, which includes practically all the leading daily newspapers in the United States and Canada, is holding its annual meeting in New York city on April 25, 26, 27, and 28, and the big event of this gathering is the annual dinner, which takes place on Thursday, April 27th. They usually have four short speeches by outstanding Americans and Britishers. This year the speakers that have already accepted invitations are Miss Amelia Earhart, Mr. Douglas, the man whom Roosevelt has appointed as Director of the budget, and Mr. Kettering, who is, I think, the economist of the General Motors Corporation. I have just received a telegram from New York asking whether it is likely that Mr. Stephen Leacock would accept an invitation to be the fourth speaker, not only as a distinguished Britisher, but as one so capable of introducing an element of humour and cheer into the proceedings. I have just had a long conversation with New York in which I pointed out that Mr. Leacock, who held the high office of Professor of Political Economy at McGill University, was primarily an economist, and, like all real humourists, was only a humourist when the spirit moved him, and that we could not properly invite him to be one of the speakers and then restrict him to a humorous speech. They fully recognized the correctness of this attitude, but said that circumstances in the United States at the present time were such that in the public interest they felt like taking some liberties in this instance; the gloom of the publishers was so thick that some efforts had to be made to dispel it, and that they could think of no one so capable of taking hold of the situation and putting the finishing touches on the dinner as Stephen Leacock, if he could be prevailed upon to do so. In all of which I agreed with them.

I said, therefore, that I would place the matter before you and ask your advice in the hope that you might sound Mr. Leacock out and see whether he felt disposed to go down to New York and cheer his publisher friends up a bit, and through them the American people.

I hope I am not putting you to too much trouble. I think the cause is an excellent one, and the moment perhaps psychological for one