

LITERATURE AND THE EMPIRE AT THE PRESS CONFERENCE

Eloquent Speeches by Lord Morley, Mr. Birrell, Mr. Churchill and Milner.

At the imperial press conference at the foreign office there was a discussion upon the relation of literature to journalism. Lord Morley of Blackburn was the chairman, and there was again a very large attendance. His lordship met with a hearty reception when he entered the hall accompanied by Mr. Birrell, Mr. Winston Churchill and Lord Milner arrived afterwards, and were also warmly received.

The discussion was the intellectual treat of the conference. Lord Morley, speaking for just over half an hour, had something to say about the power and influence of the press, the extent of that influence, making it all the more imperative that it should be used in the right way. His lordship aroused great merriment by his little reminiscence of the man who could write "general invective," which was renewed when he added that his friend "must have found employment in some quarters since." Other features of a memorable gathering were the eloquent speeches of Mr. Churchill and Mr. Birrell, while Lord Milner, Mr. T. P. O'Connor, Sir Edward Russell and several of the delegates also contributed to the oratory.

Lord Morley.

Lord Morley, who, on rising to speak, had a very hearty welcome, said no doubt the heartiness of their reception was partly due to the fact that he was for a good time himself connected with the profession which the delegates represented. (Hear, hear.) He observed that it had been suggested that they should not pay so much time to the matter of literature, but after all it was not a small topic—(hear, hear)—and there was a connection, if they would let him say so, between literature and Empire. (Cheers.)

"I only," he added, "offer a commonplace upon that point. As if our glorious English tongue were not one of the glories of Empire (hear, hear). As if it were not perhaps the strongest, the most enduring bond of imperial union. Ah! possibly a thousand times stronger and more enduring in a sense, wider and deeper imperially than all the achievements, magnificent as they are, of all the soldiers and sailors, and of all the statesmen who have directed them. (Hear, hear.)

"To go on with my commonplace. As if Shakespeare and Burns and Bunan and Swift and all the rest of that superb gallery were not the greatest of British Empire-builders. (Cheers.) This is only a commonplace, but a commonplace with a true and deep grandeur in it, and I know of no more stupendous and overwhelming fact than the supreme dominance of the English tongue over millions in the new worlds of the East. (Hear, hear.) It is a stupendous and overwhelming fact and justifies the place which you have been good enough to give to literature amongst the objects of your consideration. (Cheers.) I will make one remark on the other side. I am rather surprised that you did not choose science as one of your subjects, because, after all, the governing thoughts and the movement of interests of men fluctuate with the ebb and flow of the great tides of human curiosity, energy, ecclesiastical age, another age, a third, a literary age, but I believe you will agree that the age in which we live and find ourselves is a practical, a speculative, and a scientific age."

What is Journalism?

He was not going to regale them with all the great and noble things that had been said about literature. He was not certain that his best plan would not have been to wander about his library for an hour or two and collect all the grand things that had been said about literature. They were there that day to talk about literature and journalism. What was journalism? It was not easy to say off-hand what literature was.

"Are you going to treat it today as a profession?" continued Lord Morley. "I think you probably will be inclined to think that as regards that, that that is the view that is most appropriate for this occasion. But I looked out the word literature in the Oxford dictionary, and what was my shock to find myself quoted, and thereby handed down to immortality, as having said, 'Literature is the most seductive, the most deceiving, the most dangerous of all professions.' (Lord laughter.)

It was long ago, Lord Morley added, since he committed himself to that perplexing opinion, and he had survived what he could not recover, the secret of that menacing language. (Laughter.) He believed it was the feeling he had in his mind at that date, that an enormous number of persons—men and women—were committing themselves to literature as a profession, who had no more right to take the writing of books than Mr. Birrell or he had the right to take to painting oil pictures or water-colours. (Laughter.) "So many," he went on to say, "thought themselves called, as you did not, to serve by the public really chosen. But as to the profession—the honorable and arduous profession—of the journalist. Though Carlyle uses very little language upon that, in one place he said, 'Is not every able editor the ruler of the world, being as he is, the persuader of it?' On one other occasion he said that journalism was ditch water. (Laughter.) Sometimes he was inclined to think it was. (Re-nouvelled laughter.) But the class of journalists, like the class of men of letters more strictly so-called, contained an infinite variety of general and species and sub-species, from the very high class of publicist to his leaderless and nimble paragraphs. They were not there that day to confer upon grammar—though this was a fruitful topic—or punctuation; they were not there to discuss style. No-

body could make a motion or move an amendment upon style. (Laughter.) He would only make one remark about style. He hoped they would all agree with him. They could not approach in stature and compass to the giants; but there was one thing they could do—they could strive in their pursuit and cultivation of the great and noble and difficult art of writing after the two moderate virtues of simplicity and directness; and by this he meant, of course, freedom from affectation, because this was the most odious of qualities in character and manner, and more odious still in literature and journalism. The simpler and direct was what everyone ought to aim at, and which everyone could, if he took the trouble, attain to. Of course the foundation of style was a full knowledge of matter.

Some Definitions.

It was said about platform speakers that a platform speech depended on three things—first, who said it; second, how he said it; and third, what he said—and really it was added what he said was the least important. That was not true, the journalists, because what a platform speaker said vanished more or less rapidly, and what the journalist wrote remained. Journalism, he was told the other day by a home member of the conference, was literature in a hurry, and he taxed him with having invented this saying. He did not agree.

They had to go deeper than this. Journalism, added Lord Morley, was, and might be, in a hurry, but literature was not. Literature more or less assumed the attitude of the judge. The journalist, dealing with what were live issues, was more or less of an advocate. Literature dealt with ideals; the journalist was a man of action, and therefore, was concerned with the real. If he were a wise journalist—as they all were—he would understand that what he took for the real was not half as real as a great deal of what was ideal. Would anybody deny that there were about half a dozen lines of Burns which had more influence upon political thought and action than all the millions of leading articles that had been written in Burns country, or even in the southern parts of the island?

When all was said, the literary element was what made all the difference in the world between the editor and the writer, and the newsboy who shouted scare headlines at the street corners. He was asked the other day—he was rather challenged—to define what he understood to be a good journalist. His friendly challenger tried his own hand at the qualities of a good journalist, and these, in his view, appeared to be candour, courtesy, independence and respect. Well, those were qualities which he had made up a good journalist, but also any decent sort of man. Therefore, he found that definition to be quite inadequate. He was not going to attempt to define the qualities of a good journalist for fear of omitting one which any of them might maintain to belong to journalism. He was far too experienced to make an enemy of any newspaper. (Laughter.)

An Editorial Golden Motto.

He was reminded of a remark by Cromwell in an interview he had with a certain band of Presbyterian ministers: "I beseech you," he said, "in the name of Christ if you are not possibly mistaken." He suggested that that motto, in letters of gold, should appear in all editorial rooms—not newsrooms—in all editorial rooms of newspapers. (Applause.) The telegraphic address of an editor friend of his was "Vatican." He hoped no one there would suppose they were so important an assembly as the Vatican Council to define infallibility. Infallibility was generally another word for impotence. (Laughter.) Journalism was not infallible, and was not quite so omnipotent as it often thought.

The improvement in journalism, added Morley, had in his time been enormous, and he thought it was still improving. He could remember when the writings in the reviews were very coarse and extremely ignorant. That was gone. It was true there was plenty of stiff language used. He remembered once, when he was in charge of a newspaper, a young man came to him for employment.

"I said to him," said Lord Morley, "what is your special qualification?" He replied "Invective." (Laughter.) "I said 'What kind of invective?' and he replied, 'No particular kind—general invective.' (Laughter.)

"I think," he added, "my friend must have found employment in some quarters since." (Lord laughter.) Everybody would agree, continued Lord Morley, everybody who observed, that the temper of journalism was always being improved. Taken as a whole, criticism was not ungenerous. And as for literary criticism, in his opinion there had never been, either in England or even in France, so much critical power and knowledge applied as they would find in English journalism today. (Cheers.) But he wanted to ask two questions. Their knowledge of the press covered a wider area than his did. Was the newspaper the enemy of the book? Did people in England, in Australia, read more books? Did they know better the difference between a bad book and a good one? He had known more than one man of great influence who seemed to think it did not much matter, as a book was a book. (Laughter.) In his (Lord Morley's) opinion, the answer to the question whether people read more and knew the difference between good and bad books was more favorable and encouraging. The book was sometimes its own enemy; it might come too soon or too late; the author might have invented a coin that was not in the treasury, or like fruit or flowers in the garden, he might have planted his thoughts, choosing his season wrong. But the general result of his views was that in the matter of literature the authors of books were never more favorably placed.

One more question—a very important one, perhaps. Lord Morley continued:

It was said by critics of democracy, not merely in this country, but elsewhere in every democracy, that journalism of the newer type impairs and

weakens the habit and faculty of continuous and coherent attention. If this were so, it would not be short of a disaster, because the habit and faculty of continuous and coherent attention is one of the main gains of all education. I am not sure if it is not as much a gain for education as the knowledge itself which education supplies. It is true that the newer type of journalism weakens the faculty of coherent attention. I am bound to say that when I see gentlemen coming up to town on a morning by the suburban train with a financial paper under one arm, and a sporting paper under the other, and a general newspaper written, what is called, "crisply"—if he is of an aesthetic turn of mind he has also an illustrated paper—when I am told that this gentleman is making his career shaped and his opinions moulded, and his views settled by this process, I confess I am very sceptical.

During our proceedings a good deal has been said of the rebarbarism of Europe—the rattling back into arms and preparation for the use of arms. Herbert Spencer for a long time noticed this tendency to rebarbarism. I wonder how far the press has shared in the large flow of general forces that have brought about this rebarbarism. There are those who say that, though a minister may make a blunder, though a permanent official may wear his official blinkers too large and too tight, though diplomats may be not too personal enough or too crafty, and though larger considerations, yet the press is more answerable than all these things put together. I have heard that view expressed, and as I am putting one or two questions, I will put the question, you consider that the opinion of the press over-sets and at the home, the opinion of the press is systematically and perseveringly used on behalf of peace among the nations.

I only say this—there is nobody who is not bound to recognize that the press is a great centre and fountain of public-heated duty and moral force; that it is the guide to an intellectual grasp of the facts of the world; and that it is, in its best forms, an organ of the highest sense. I am very proud to have met you, and I am very proud to have been a member of your profession. (Lord cheers.)

Mr. W. S. Douglas, New Zealand.

Mr. W. S. Douglas, "New Zealand Herald," Auckland, took advantage of the opportunity of his contribution to the debate to remark that New Zealand would do her best to assist the mother country in imperial defence whenever she was called upon. "Tell us what to do," he said, "and we will do it." (Applause.) With regard to the subject of a newspaper was not to cultivate letters but to be a good journalist. News and to give a vivid graphic, and interesting picture of the happenings in the world.

Mr. Winston Churchill.

Mr. Winston Churchill received a hearty reception on rising. Whatever opinion might be formed, he said, about the Imperial Press Conference, he thought there was one quality which was certainly very apparent in the discussions of the morning; and he would do himself the honor of congratulating members of the conference upon their courage. After all, they were living in anxious times, very critical situations had been unfolded to them; and after a week of discussions upon some of the most appalling prospects which could possibly be opened up before the most heated imagination, in which they could see great catastrophes, the eve of an Armageddon, if they liked—they found themselves engaged that morning, at any rate, on a mild discussion on the relations of literature to journalism, and the relative position occupied by those two important subjects.

He thought posterity would greatly admire the proceedings of the conference. (Laughter.) They would say what wonderful composure, such a moment, what noble equanimity in such periods of stress, what iron nerve on the part of those men when they could thus deliberate calmly on the verge of catastrophes. (Laughter.) But he ventured to think that the discussion upon which they were engaged that morning would have at least as much effect in maintaining the reputation for good sense and dignity of this country as some other addresses in other places which had lately attracted the attention of the country.

The power of the press was a fertile theme. It was gradually increasing, but was the power of the pressman increasing with the power of the machine. He thought the power of the machine, if they were to ask questions, must be answered in the near future, because whereas in former times an individual had the power to shape governments and policies, they could not fail to observe that in this walk of life, as in so many others, the human element was in great danger of being crushed underneath the power of the machinery which it had helped to create. When Mr. Birrell was drawing attention to the spirit of the partnership which sometimes animated newspaper comment, he thought there was an explanation to be found in the fact that newspapers were ever represented, and as the years passed by, they had come less to represent the opinions of the writers than the opinions of their readers. That was the position that was being created at the present time, and the conference, which tended to increase the power and influence and strength of the man behind the sword, marked in a very distinct manner the recognition and revival of the authority of the individuals who were charged with the conduct of newspapers, and was an important

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landmark in the life of the individual writer. (Hear, hear.) If a man sold partisanship, that was, after all, a humble trade, and he was only a merchant in a small way of business. In so far as the forces in which they were gripped at the present time might lead newspapers to write what the readers were anxious to learn, rather than give full expressions to their own internal conceptions and opinions, there, no doubt, they found their profession did not reap all the fruits and all the honor which was its due; but when they found on honest and sincere attempt on the part of the writers for newspapers to correct evil prejudices which were spread abroad, the work of the pressman or of the writer acquired a noble and splendid character. (Hear, hear.)

An Academy of Language.

He was bound to say that in the latter sphere the writer belonged to the luckiest class of human beings. The great mass of the human race could not do more than be contented all day, and their play did not commence until after they were discharged, but the men who sold truth, and one of those whose work was his pleasure. And, therefore, he ventured to say that they were celebrating that the meeting of those who were among the more lucky of mankind, because the means by which they earned their living and discharged their daily duties were also those in which they gave the fullest, the freest and the

Lord Morley had spoken to them of the power of the British press. Let them not forget that the British press, the press of the British Empire, were the trustees of the English language.

The old process of growth by which local customs and local usages were selected by great writers and men of literary pre-eminence, had passed away, and a much more thoroughgoing wholesale mechanical process had taken its place. They saw that they were menaced by all sorts of barbarous attacks—phonetic spelling and unsatisfactory and slipshod methods of expression; and though he would wish to prison our language in harsh or arbitrary rules, or deliver it over to the judgment of any particular body of men, there were many powerful arguments which might be heard in support of some academy which, without restricting the growth of the language, would place upon each phrase and expression and each new word the imprimatur of style.

At present the only control was that of the Censor of Plays—(laughter)—and that was exercised with a desire to give satisfaction, but it met with less success than the earnest desire which he deserved. He would like to say—and here he spoke with great trepidation as one who had never realized to the full the privileges and advantages of a classical education—(laughter)—that in the study of English we might borrow an example from the ancient Greeks. They had succeeded in making their language a model for the whole world, and the finest medium—so he was credibly informed.

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though he had never employed it—dashed into human speech and human eloquence.

How did they do it? It was because they studied Greek. That was the cause and method by which the perfection of their language was achieved, and surely we who already possessed a language which was one of the greatest and most expressive and powerful languages in the world, and hoped that our language would continue to exert an ever-increasing dominion over the world, should not be content to exert a powerful influence upon the growth of the human race, ought to take the trouble to see that the English language was properly studied in the schools of the British Empire, and that boys and girls were taught to read its great writers and noble passages.

It had been said words were the only things which lasted for ever. Utterances which had passed from human lips, and which appeared to have been uttered almost at the moment they had been spoken, had endured and were enduring, while the most enduring and tremendous monuments which had been erected had crumbled and passed away altogether.

The way in which the British press and British writers could best serve the large and general interests of the British Empire was to write wise, good, and true words—words proclaiming the solidarity of Christendom and the interdependence of nations, and refrain from words which would cause friction and mischief-making among nations. Let them be words which asserted that confidence produced confidence between the nations, just in the same way as hatred and suspicion produced the very things which gave them birth. The great powers of the world were not great cut-throats and assassins, striking for sinister and infernal ends; but, on the other hand, should rather be considered as brothers pursuing the same high ideals as ourselves, and treading the same road, continually upwards, and ever approaching a brighter and more glorious end. (Applause.)

HARD TIMES IN SCOTLAND

Number of Men Out of Work in Glasgow Alone is Estimated at 40,000 to 60,000.

Scottish correspondence Manchester Guardian: Despite a number of large orders for new vessels placed on the Clyde, the prospect of some Government orders, and a fair amount of working going on in the Scottish iron and steel trades, the industrial situation is deadly dull in the large cities in Scotland, Edinburgh, Dundee, and Aberdeen are all worse off than they were a year ago, so far as the number of unemployed is concerned, and Glasgow is, according to the chairman of the distress committee, worse than it has ever been during the present period of depression. He stated recently that while the "Board of Trade Labour Gazette" showed 7.9 per cent of the trades reporting returned unemployed at the end of last May, returns by 42 unions in Glasgow, with an aggregate membership of over 30,000 men, showed that 19.3 per cent were idle at present. Therefore, he concluded, Glasgow was 150 per cent worse than the kingdom generally. The Glasgow Trades Council estimate the total unemployed at 40,000 to 60,000, but no official census has been taken, and a large number of the unemployed, being smaller laborers, are not tabulated by any trade union. But things are obviously bad enough. The distress committee's funds are exhausted, and after badgering the Government in vain for a big grant the committee find themselves at a standstill. Hence the declaration of Mr. W. F. Anderson on Monday—that he declined any longer to be the nominal chairman of a nominal committee, and would ask the corporation to relieve him of the duty. Mr. Anderson said that the crisis position the committee were in had to a large extent been brought about by the unfair and untrue statements which had been circulated in Glasgow about the work of the committee.

Glasgow's special grievance is that while they have been urged on by the authorities above to take action to provide work, and have been bullied by the out-of-work-funds to provide more work, their funds have dried up, the unemployed remain on their hands, the distress committee applied their condition was made known, and parliament had granted a certain sum, a considerable amount at the end of the financial year, was unexpended, handed back to the treasury. Unable to move the local government board, the distress committee applied to the premier. Obviously Mr. Asquith could not pass the Scottish secretary, and he asked the committee, in the first instance to see Lord Pentland. The latter received a deputation from the committee last week, but he is able-bodied nobody is entitled to poor law relief; the other, that by the system of yearly lets of houses a working man who may not have the certainty of three months' steady work in a place has to take his house in February or March for a year from

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against the next Government grant. A large number of the men working at the Palaeozoic labor colony have been paid off. Frankly, there is good reason to believe that this colony has not been a success. It is cold and desolate, and is not likely to make any reasonable return on the outlay, unless some profitable system of utilizing peat can be found.

Edinburgh's farm colony at Muriestown, however, is spoken of hopefully. It is about 200 acres in extent and twelve miles from the city, and it has been used as a dumping ground for the refuse from the capital, which must be got rid of anyhow. Two or three hundred men have been at work all winter removing the sod with spades, trenching the ground down to "pan" to the depth of a foot, and then spreading above the lower soil twelve inches of city refuse. It was reported the other day at a meeting of the Edinburgh distress committee that the crops were growing very well. The committee decided to offer three allotments to let, and authority was granted to spend several hundred pounds to erect new buildings in order to make the allotments suitable for tenants.

The distress from unemployment is always accentuated in Scotland by two facts—one that so long as he or she is able-bodied nobody is entitled to poor law relief; the other, that by the system of yearly lets of houses a working man who may not have the certainty of three months' steady work in a place has to take his house in February or March for a year from

the following May. A bill now before parliament, and likely to go through this year, will probably largely remedy the house-letting grievance for small houses. The Government's proposals, following on the poor law commission report, will be likely to meet the former grievance.

Pacific Coast Excursions.
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Mrs. Henry Vadsworth, an American society lady, and a friend of Mr. Roosevelt, has beaten all the ex-President's achievements by riding 150 miles in sixteen hours. She had sixteen horses in relay along the route, and was accompanied by Dr. Grayson, who accompanied Mr. Roosevelt in his ride.

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