

1916
Compliments H. J. C.

97

THE HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE
OF THE
NATIONAL ANTHEM

AN ADDRESS BY

VEN. ARCHDEACON CODY, D.D., LL.D.

*Before the Empire Club of Canada
Toronto, December 21st, 1916*



THE HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE OF
THE NATIONAL ANTHEMAN ADDRESS BY VEN. ARCHDEACON CODY,
D.D., LL.D.*Before the Empire Club of Canada, Toronto,
December 21, 1916*

MR. PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN,—The subject on which I am to speak is always timely. Never was it more timely than to-day. The subject is, "The History and Present Significance of Our National Anthem." Someone has said, "Let me make the songs of a nation, and I care not who make their laws." That epigrammatic statement has a heart of truth. Among the potent factors in developing and enriching our patriotism is the constant singing of our national anthem. The smouldering fires of patriotism have in these latter days burst forth into a blazing flame. Everywhere men are arising to strive and to sacrifice that the goodly heritage of our Empire shall not pass away. We nourish and stimulate our patriotism by the solemn singing together of this hymn of our race.

The use of particular words and music formally to express the patriotic creed of a country is a comparatively modern ceremonial. Our own British National Anthem is probably the oldest of all the national anthems in current use to-day. The national anthem of the French, the Marseillaise, dates from 1792. It sets the blood of the whole nation tingling. When sung by armies with eyes now weeping and then all ablaze, it has hurled upon their foes the thousands of France defying danger, death and despotism. The national anthem of Austria was inspired by our own national anthem and dates from the year 1797. The

4 HISTORY OF NATIONAL ANTHEM

national anthem of Belgium dates from the struggles for independence in 1830. The stately national anthem of Russia, a prayer for the Czar and for prosperity to his people, dates from 1833. The famous German patriotic song, "Die Wacht Am Rhein," was the composition of an obscure Swabian merchant in 1840, and it was only after the unification of Germany in 1871 that this local song became the national anthem of the new German Empire. Before that time the national anthem of Prussia, "Heil dir, im Sieger-Krantz—," was sung to the tune of our own British National Anthem. All the national anthems of Europe are thus of comparatively modern origin.

What is the source of our own National Anthem? One would naturally think that the story of this anthem, its words and its music, would be written large on the page of English history; and yet the origin of both the words and the music is hidden in obscurity, and is a matter of musical and literary controversy to the present day. The Anthem was not made; it grew like a folk song. What I shall seek to lay before you are only the most probable conclusions, and the outstanding features of the history.

The words are rooted far back in English history. The phrase, "God Save the King," is found in our English Bible. This translation does not accurately represent the original Hebrew, which meant only "Let the King Live." In the Vulgate the translation is "Vivat Rex"; in the French version "Vive Le Roi." Coverdale's Bible of 1535 has "God save the new Kyng." The expression, "God Save the King," appears to occur first in the Geneva Bible of 1560. But before that time there was a foreshadowing of a national watch-word. On August 10, 1545, the fleet, under Lord Lisle in the reign of King Henry VIII., had as its watch-word "God Save King Henrye"; and the response was "And long to reign over us." Here is a beginning of some formal expression of national loyalty. A song sung at the Conduit in Cornhill in the Coronation procession of Edward VI.; the Tudor prayers for the Sovereign; and the form of prayer for the anni-

versary of the Gunpowder Plot, supply hints of the coming anthem.

Probably the first occasion on which the basis of the present tune was used was in the days of King James the First. The King, Lords and Commons had been delivered from the perils of the Gunpowder Plot. The Merchant-Tailors Company of London, on July 16, 1607, gave a banquet for the King, and at it was sung a hymn of thanksgiving, the words of which no one to-day exactly knows. Presumably some of the sentiments were the same as those in the first part of our National Anthem. The music was supplied by Dr. John Bull. May I remind you, in passing, that John Bull is not a mythical character? He was a cadet of an old Somersetshire family, born in 1563; he died at Antwerp in 1628, and he was Court Musician to Queen Elizabeth and her successor, King James the First. Dr. John Bull conducted this hymn of thanksgiving to a tune either of his own composition or of his own adaptation; and the choristers of the Chapel Royal sang it, placed in a boat that was hung from the roof above the high table on this festive occasion. Some years afterwards an "ayre," or organ voluntary without words, was discovered in a manuscript book of Dr. John Bull's compositions, and it very closely resembles the music of our National Anthem both in rhythm and melody. It has, therefore, been concluded that very probably the nucleus of the music (so far as we can trace it in England) was composed or adapted by Dr. John Bull for this banquet in 1607 in the Merchant Tailors' Hall. An old folk-song may lie behind it.

On the occasion when the words of our National Anthem first come before us in something like their present form, we have an illustration of the strange irony of history. In 1688, when William of Orange was seeking to land on the south coast of England, and when Capt. John Churchill, afterwards Duke of Marlborough, was exhorting the King's Guards to desert him, there was being sung in the Chapel Royal, the private Chapel of the Roman Catholic King James II.;

6 HISTORY OF NATIONAL ANTHEM

under the direction of Father Petre, a Latin hymn of two verses that are practically identical with the first two verses of our National Anthem to-day. The literal translation of those Latin words is :

Oh God, most excellent,
Make now our Sovereign safe,
May happy victory and glory accompany him.
Do Thou now make our Lord safe.
May the Lord arise,
May He scatter the Rebels and repress them.
Do Thou confound their devices,
Dispel their fraudulent schemes ;
On Thee may our hope be fixed,
Oh, save us, Lord.

We can well imagine with what fervour James and his devout satellites joined in this musical petition !

Now it is one of the ironies of history that upon the first occasion of which we have knowledge of its use this fervent hymn-prayer imploring Divine help for the reigning monarch was not answered in the terms of its petition ; and before the year had sped, William III. sat on the throne of James II. Salvation was not vouchsafed the Stuart dynasty. It has been conjectured that these Latin verses were based on some hymn composed at the restoration of Charles II. in 1660. To what music was it sung ? It would seem that Dr. Anthony Young, the organist of All Hallows Church, Barking, London, had come upon Dr. John Bull's "Ayre" and made further improvements upon it and further adaptations of it and that the hymn was sung to his music.

The words of this anthem seem now to have passed out of current use. But it apparently lingered on among the Jacobites. On a drinking cup in the old Scotch castle of Fingask the following words were inscribed—I quote part of them :

God save the King, I pray.
God bless the King, I pray,
God save the King.
Send him victorious,
Happy and glorious,
Soon to reign over us,
God save the King.

A Jacobite song! What is the force of "send"? "Send the rightful Stuart King over the water, soon to reign over us, instead of the usurper." Now, this version is probably only an adaptation of the original to special circumstances. As a Jacobite adaptation it seems to have been current before the close of the 17th Century and in the earlier part of the 18th.

The next occasion on which our growing National Anthem appears is in 1740. Henry Carey (who wrote "Sally in Our Alley") seems to have become acquainted with this old Latin Hymn of James II.'s time. He translated it or used a translation of it into English, retaining traces, however, of the Jacobite adaptation, and he sang it at the banquet given by the Mercers Company to King George II., in celebration of the taking of Porto Bello. The first line ran "God Save Our Lord the King." He never claimed that it was his own composition; he never claimed that he had written the music; those claims were made long after Henry Carey was dead and gone. And yet Charles Reade always maintained that Henry Carey had written both the words and the music, and said it was a crying shame that Henry Carey's countrymen had left the composer of their National Anthem to die in poverty by his own hand! When Henry Carey died, this anthem, "God Save the King," had not become generally known.

Another copy of this old Latin anthem must have come into the hands of John Travers, the organist of the Chapel Royal. For in November, 1743, he concluded a concert, at which he presided, with a Latin chorus consisting of these two verses as they had been sung for James II., and on the programme he gave his own English prose translation of the Latin words. The name of the Sovereign is not mentioned in the Latin hymn; nor in the version in the "Pretender" wine glass, "God save the King, I pray"; nor in the version which was printed in the first edition of "Thesaurus Musicus," 1743, and begins "God save our Lord the King." This would seem to be an earlier version of the first line than that commonly sung to-day. But in

8 HISTORY OF NATIONAL ANTHEM

days of Jacobite activity it was not desirable to allow people to go about singing anthems to kings without a name. There must be some sort of definition, and this we presently find.

On September 28th, 1745, twelve days after the Pretender was proclaimed King in Edinburgh, "God Save the King," with specific reference to King George, was sung at Drury Lane Theatre with the harmonies and accompaniments of Dr. Arne, the musical director. This performance was received with "tumultuous applause," and the example was followed at Covent Garden Theatre, where Dr. Burney supplied the harmonies. Thus, to keep up the irony of the situation, music originally sung by zealous Protestants to celebrate the frustration of Gunpowder Plot was afterwards sung in the chapel of the Roman Catholic King, James II., wedded to words of prayer against the designs of William of Orange; and finally the self-same musical prayer, used without avail on behalf of James II., was revived to serve as the battle hymn of the Hanoverians who sat on his throne. After the song had largely disappeared it was revived, when the Pretender attempted by the aid of his faithful fellow countrymen to regain the crown his ancestor had lost. It was not until after the suppression of the Rebellion of 1745, a Scottish insurrection supported by France, that this song became associated with national and patriotic feeling in England.

In the *Gentleman's Magazine* for October, 1745, the words and music were reprinted as "A Song for Two Voices—as sung at both Playhouses." The first line runs: "God save Great George, our King." This is the first known version which contains the third stanza, beginning:

"Thy choicest gifts in store,
On George be placed to pour,"

Another milestone in its progress into general favour was passed when Dr. Attwood wove the melody into the special anthem which he composed for the coronation of George IV. in 1821.

The word "gracious" which is in use to-day apparently crept in because "William" (King William IV.) would not scan. Curious but vain were the efforts made to fit it in. The first line, as we know it now, seems not to have appeared before June, 1830. Seven years later, on the accession of Queen Victoria, the peculiar appropriateness of the epithet "gracious" to the young sovereign doubtless fixed the usage. Indeed it may be said that it is from Queen Victoria's coronation that the anthem with the feminine name became truly national. From that day to the present it has been sung by great choirs to the accompaniment of grand organs, full orchestras and massed bands, and by the multitudinous throats of the British people.

This, in outline, is, as far as may be determined, the history of our National Anthem. Its history wonderfully illustrates the spirit of caution and compromise that marks the English race. Instead of striking out on some new line they take something that lies to their hand and make the necessary adaptations to circumstances. At one time it is sung in the interest of King James I. against the Gunpowder plotters; again it is sung in the interest of James II. against William of Orange; again, it is sung as the battle song of the Hanoverians against Jacobite plotters and pretenders; and now at last, it is the voice of the deepest patriotic sentiment of our world-wide commonwealth.

There is another interesting point to which I would draw your attention when you read the words of the Anthem. The first verse originated in days when the doctrine of the divine right of kings was stoutly held. It is a prayer for the King couched in the strongest and most fervid forms. To-day we interpret it in a more constitutional and democratic sense, and we regard the King as the embodiment of the unity and justice of our whole Empire. The third verse had its origin in the days of the constitutional and limited monarchy of the Hanoverians. In it you do not pray

10 HISTORY OF NATIONAL ANTHEM

for the King in the same absolute way, but you pray that God will endow him with choice gifts in order that he may exercise his great powers aright ; and then there follows a truly constitutional sentiment :

May He defend our laws,
And ever give us cause
To sing with heart and voice,
God save the King.

Thus again you have these characteristics of the English race—caution and compromise, variety in unity, the linking together of things that, when pushed to logical conclusions, might seem mutually exclusive. Absolutism and constitutionalism are combined.

Some words and expressions in the Anthem require a slight explanation. The word "send" in "send him victorious" is a relic of the Jacobite adaptation of the original anthem. It has little significance as it stands, but it had a significance against the historic background of "the King over the water." "God Save *the* King" is often mis-sung "*our* King," but "the King" is the proper text.

Some have thought that the second verse is an English "Hymn of Hate" and thoroughly unchristian in its sentiment. That interpretation, I believe, is based upon a misunderstanding of the meaning of the words of the hymn.

"O Lord, our God, arise,
Scatter his enemies."

This is an adaptation, as you know, of the first verse of the 68th Psalm. It is, in essence, a prayer to the God of Battles that He will give us the victory. If our cause is right, if we believe we are seeking to establish truth and justice in the world, may we not pray to God to bless the cause by giving us the victory? "Confound their politics"—There are some people even at this day who think that "confound" in the National Anthem is a mild and rather polite swear-word. "Confound" means to throw into con-

fusion or to bring to naught. "Politics" is an archaic form of "Policies." Who among the Allies has any hesitation in asking God to bring to naught the tortuous policies, the nefarious stratagems of our great antagonist? "Frustrate their knavish tricks"—the only fault to be found to-day with these words is that they are too mild to meet the present situation. The Latin original strictly means "their evil schemes." When I think of the enemy's reckless disregard of the law of international good faith upon which alone civilization can be built up; when I think of the atrocities they have perpetrated, that are paralleled only by the atrocities of their "natural ally"—it is Bernhardt's term—the Turk; when I think of the women and children laid as sacrifices on the reeking altars of human passion; when I think of the stealthy death that from the sky above and from the sea below comes upon non-combatants, on innocent women and children; when I think of poisoned wells; when I think of enslaved populations; when I think of the callous and calculated disregard of all the laws that the humaner peoples of the world have sought to enforce in order to mitigate the horrors of war; and when I remember that these outrages have been committed by an enemy without shame, without any present sense of wrong-doing, without any apology, but in pursuance of a deliberate policy of "frightfulness," I can without hesitation sing with heart and voice "Frustrate their knavish tricks." And for "knavish" you may even substitute "*fendish*."

Now a few words as to the present significance of this great anthem.

(1) The National Anthem has come to be the deepest and truest expression of the fundamental patriotic sentiments of the British people. As a race we are not always able readily to express our deepest feeling. It requires the agony of a great peril, or the exaltation of a great triumph to make the Briton vocal. In the last hundred years whenever Britons have been in dire and deadly peril, or whenever they have won a brilliant

triumph and are humbly and gratefully proud, whenever they are nerving themselves against an adverse fate, whenever the fountains of the great deeps of their souls are broken up, they have expressed their sentiments by singing this National Anthem. Its simple and vigorous verses are the one great vocal expression of the depth and intensity of our national emotion.

(2) It is to-day a great bond of imperial unity. There is only one National Anthem throughout the British Empire. The National Anthem which we sing in Canada is not one of our stirring Canadian patriotic songs, splendid as they may be, but "God Save the King." I wish most earnestly to submit that we ought to pay unique respect to the Anthem by our manner of singing it; that we ought to sing it standing in a position of attention; that its singing in a great assembly should not be merely the signal for donning overcoats and rubbers. It should be sung in these days as the solemn ritual of our imperial unity. We should stand erect, and show respect to the Sovereign and to those ideals for which he stands. I would venture to deprecate the growing custom of asking audiences to rise and pay to some of our national songs the same respect which they pay to the National Anthem. For example, I am impressed when I hear the stately and somewhat dirge-like music of "Oh, Canada," but it is only a beautiful Provincial *chanson*. It is not our National Anthem. The National Anthem—the National Anthem of the whole Empire—should stand alone and should be sung solemnly as the ritual of our unity, with all proper respect. Wherever this Anthem is sung and in whatever part of the Empire, what memories it calls up! The sons of old England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales think, when they sing it, of London and Windsor and Westminster Abbey and St. Paul's and the Tower, and all the glorious and splendid history of the mother of freedom. "God Save our Gracious King"—in every commonwealth and dominion and colony and dependency the whole world over, men stand together to chant "the ritual of our unity." The anthem is echoed from shore to shore,

and the ships on the high seas take up the chorus and send it on, an unbroken song—the symbol of the unity of the Empire.

(3) It is also the symbol to-day of the genius of our Empire. That genius means freedom, justice, mercy, tolerance and humanity. To-day there is being born a new imperialism, one that allows the fullest development and autonomy to all the constituent parts of our Empire ; one that is entirely consistent with the most ardent and loyal Canadianism. We have profoundest reverence for the ideals of our Empire and the keenest recognition of its responsibilities to the human race. To-day we are fighting because we believe that the British Empire stands for the highest and best things in the life of the whole world. The Empire stands for international friendship and confidence, commercial and political honour, the safeguarding of the rights and the liberties of the smaller states, justice and mercy, progressively remedial legislation in dealing with the wrongs of mankind, the training of men in self-government, unity and variety in that unity. To-day it has stood forth to smite down the ruthless militarism of the Prussian caste which imperils them all. It stands as the champion of the cause of international truth-keeping, international brotherliness and international peace. It is because in every part of the Empire we recognize that our ideals are one, and because we share the passion to fulfil these possibilities of blessing to mankind, that we profess as our creed this new imperialism of the British Commonwealth.

(4) The National Anthem stands, too, in these perilous days, particularly when we sing that strong and vigorous second verse, as a challenge to all the sons of freedom and mercy and humanity the world over to "carry on" against the threatening peril, against the tortuous policies and the fiendish stratagems of the foe.

There is a Latin phrase from Virgil, "I fear the Greeks even when they are offering gifts." It refers to the old story that the Greeks outside the walls of

Troy offered to present to the besieged Trojans a wooden horse. But the gift was fatal, because inside the horse were hidden Greek soldiers who should open the gates of the City by night. Hence the phrase. So I fear the Germans when they are, in a very faint and whispering fashion, offering the gift of Peace. What is inside the wooden horse? What underlies the proposal? In one of the great New York papers the other day there was a picture of the Kaiser as a big bandit. Under his arms he had a bit of France and nearly all of Belgium, all of Servia and Montenegro, a bit of Roumania and all of Poland. He was staggering along under the load as best he could. Hugging his booty close, he says, "Let us have peace." The bandit goes off with the booty and says to the world, "Let us have peace." His offer would seem to be directed mainly to arousing his own people, already sadly misled and misguided, to sterner efforts for their taskmasters, the Prussian war lords. No peace proposals could possibly be entertained from the murderer still at large and still claiming the right to murder. Surely until there is restitution, reparation and adequate guarantee, we may "fear the Greeks even when they are offering gifts." No man who knows anything about the conditions of actual warfare, or who has any of his loved ones at the Front or on the way, or who has talked with those who have come back from that inferno, would wish to prolong for one unnecessary hour this awful tragedy of blood and tears and destruction. And yet the blood and the sacrifice of those who have already made the supreme offering must challenge us to endure and to reinforce until our great moral and political objectives are gained and the world is made safe for peace, justice and decency. No well-intentioned suggestions from any quarter are going for a moment to interfere with the grim determination of the champions of freedom, by the blessing of God, to make freedom secure for the whole world.

