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SOME THOUGHTS ON POSTWAR CANADA

An address by Mr. Vincent Massey, C.H., P.C., Chancellor of the University of Toronto, and Former Canadian Minister to the United States and Canadian High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, to the Canadian Society of New York on January 28, 1949.

It is a great pleasure to me to meet the Members of the Canadian Society of New York again. I say again because I was your guest twenty-one years ago, so long ago that a boy could have been born, could have grown up and cast his first vote since we last met.

Many of you gentlemen are of course Canadians, or former Canadians, or honorary Canadians. I expect there are few of you who have not some contact with Canada, but perhaps you do not know all that has been happening in the last few years. The pace of our national development has been greatly quickened. There has been a tremendous growth in stature. The war has been largely responsible for this. I think it is correct to say that in the first world war we won our maturity as a country and that in the second war this maturity was expressed. The last thing I want to do is to bore you by giving you statistics, but there are one or two points which might be of interest. 21 years ago only one foreign state was represented in Ottawa. Now some 30 countries exchange representatives with Canada. So much for international contacts. It is a matter of some significance that in the late conflict we were fourth among the Allies in the production of munitions, fourth in air power, and third in sea power. To apply some yardsticks in the post-war years, we were the third largest contributor in money to UNRRA and now our annual contribution to the U.N. budget is next to those of the five major powers.

But material growth is only part of the picture. When a boy has become an adult his height and weight are less important than his individual personality. We ask not how big he has grown but what sort of a chap he has become. With nations as with men the important thing is the question of character and individuality. Now it would be a very dull world if persons or communities were too much the same. It is customary to underline similarities between communities. It is also important to recognize differences. I think that too is an important aid to understanding. It is therefore interesting to ask what makes us different in Canada from other countries, gives us our distinguishing marks? One important thing of course is our racial pattern. As the world of course knows we have two cultures in Canada, English and French. About one third of our people speak French as their mother tongue. Their contribution greatly enriches our national life.

...../Geography too

Geography too plays its part in giving us an individual character. This is better understood to-day than it used to be as the geographer has taken his proper place in the field of scholarship. We have two great natural features which have helped to shape our national economy. One of these is what we call the Canadian Shield, the vast area of ancient rock which stretches from Quebec northwest across the continent and gives us our mineral wealth and also with its lakes and forests provides a playground for innumerable people from this side of the line. The St. Lawrence River is the other feature. It is the greatest natural gateway into this continent and has been ever since Champlain first sailed up its broad reaches. The river and the Great Lakes which it drains have helped to give an East-West axis - contacts with Europe - to our national life, in trade in the things one cannot weigh or measure.

Then of course there is the climate. This year, at least in my part of Canada, we have had less winter than you apparently have had in New York, but Canada is a northern country, we are exclusively a northern country unlike our neighbor, and this has had a decided effect on national temperament and on the type of settler who elects to come to our shores.

But there is something else which distinguishes us. We are the offspring of a marriage between history and geography. This of course is true in some measure of all countries but the blend is more striking with us, the combination of historical and geographical elements. While our cultural traditions come from both Great Britain and France, our political traditions come from Great Britain. We have a constitution formed largely on the British model. We are the only monarchy in the Americas just as we are the only American country out of the 22 which has retained constitutional links with the old world. It was a great act of faith and vision which led the architects of our country to build into our young democracy the framework of Crown and Parliament which had stood the test of time in the parent country. With great boldness they based it on a federal foundation not unlike yours. Our British institutions were planted in North American soil and physical environment naturally plays a great part in shaping our life. We belong to the British Commonwealth - yet we are an American nation. We can say in the same breath "we British" and "we North Americans". We like to think that we have made a pretty good job of weaving the two threads into our national fabric, the intangible ones representing the British heritage and those which are physical, - the habits and customs which belong to North America.

This I fear sounds very theoretical. You will ask what is the concrete proof of all this. Well, during the war we were able to see an actual demonstration of the fact that Canada is a product of heredity and environment. There were many thousands of Canadian servicemen in England working alongside the British and American forces there and we could therefore see for the first time innumerable members of the three countries together. Canadians could generally be identified without difficulty. Something in their bearing marked them as Canadians. They had qualities which suggested both the new world and the old. They had much in common with both their British and American friends but were rarely to be mistaken for either. We had often asked ourselves had we produced a Canadian type. Here he was.

Canada's position in the world as an independent sovereign nation and also as a member state of the British Commonwealth is of course a commonplace to Canadians. But it is sometimes confusing to others. There are those, including occasionally friends on this side of the boundary, who still find it hard to understand the paradox of our position, however clear it is to us. Similarities between communities are often deceptive. We know this well in the field of Anglo-American relations. Each country is apt to judge the other in terms of its own institutions. The things they have in common give rise to illusions. I wonder who it was who said that Great Britain and the United States were "two friendly countries separated by a common language"? It was a shrewd remark.

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As far as Canada is concerned it can easily be asked by the uninstructed why, for instance, have we a Governor-General unless he governs? Of course those who understand our system know full well that the Governor-General, who is appointed by the King on the recommendation of the Canadian Government, acts as the personal representative of the sovereign. His relation to the government of Canada is as you know exactly the same as that of the King to the government in Great Britain.

We treasure the British connection in Canada because it has given us some of our most characteristic institutions and keeps alive certain traditions in Canada which give us our meaning as a separate country. A distinguished citizen of New York, Mr. Lawrence Hunt, made a very penetrating remark on a visit to my country not very long ago when he said "Canada outside of the British Commonwealth would lose her political and spiritual significance as a nation". That is true. Canada is the more Canadian for being British.

Next to Great Britain herself we are the senior member of our sisterhood of nations. We are more than that. Canada is the laboratory in which the modern concept of a British Commonwealth was gradually worked out. This was effected not through any effort to devise elaborate theories but just by a workmanlike process of reconciling the aspirations of a young country with continued membership in a group. In this we were aided by wise men in the mother-country who understood. And to-day let me say that nowhere in the world is there greater understanding of Canada's position and outlook than in London. We can look with some real satisfaction on the part we have played in the growth of the idea of a British Commonwealth, for there are few people in the world west of the Iron Curtain who do not recognize the contribution which the Commonwealth is making today to the world's freedom, and stability.

The Commonwealth has been in the news of late. Certain things have happened which have given rise to speculations as to its future. The Indian Empire for instance has dissolved into two states, India and Pakistan. At present they occupy a position in the Commonwealth like that of Canada or Australia but they have not yet decided on their future status. They have full freedom of choice. Ceylon has become a Dominion having achieved her sovereign status quietly with good will on both sides. Burma has elected to become a republic. So has Eire. Mr. Churchill made a characteristic observation on this subject in December when he said, according to the report that "he still had some hopes that Ireland was to be partitioned together, and thus excluded into the British Commonwealth". Although Eire is now a foreign state, she will rightly enjoy close relations in trade and citizenship with other Commonwealth countries.

What is the significance of these developments? How do they add up? Is the Commonwealth in liquidation? Well, people have often said it was in liquidation before this and events have proved them wrong. I venture to state that what we see is a demonstration of the flexibility of British institutions, their power of adapting themselves to changing conditions. There is one thing that is abundantly clear. All the changes which have taken place have been the free and unfettered decision of the people concerned. And when power has been transferred, this has been done with cordiality and good will. Indeed such a fundamental change as has taken place in India is not a defeat of British policy. It is the fulfilment of the hopes of countless Englishmen ever since Macaulay sowed the seeds of democracy in the Indian sub-continent over a century ago. It was Englishmen and Scotsmen who first taught Indians to want to be free.

It is always difficult to define the British Commonwealth. Any great conception which has grown over the generations as this has done eludes the labels of the theorist. Although it is hard to say what the Commonwealth is, it is easier to say some of the things it is not. It is not a military alliance, although the units which compose it all - save one - acted together

in 1939. They did the same thing at the same time for the same reasons. It is not a tariff union although trade preferences on a moderate basis remain in the Commonwealth as is appropriate in a family. It has no single citizenship for each member state has the right to control such matters. It is made up of diverse races, faiths and tongues. It has not even a common form of government although the British parliamentary system has been the accepted prototype. But all its citizens wherever they live have one supreme thing in common, they are all subjects of one King. Lord Balfour's famous phrase is profoundly important. He said, you will recall, that we were "united by a common allegiance to the Crown". That is not just a fine phrase. For through the Crown with all it implies the Commonwealth finds its real unity, and its peoples gain their feeling of community, of kinship. The Crown gives us a sense of continuity for it represents the growth of a thousand years. It gives us stability too for at the apex of our constitution it stands above all controversy and represents all parties, all classes, all elements in the community. The Crown to us is the very symbol of freedom and tolerance, it represents our way of life. Without the Crown the Commonwealth as a sisterhood of nations would cease to exist because the essential link would have gone.

I am sure there are countless people in many places who would agree that the Commonwealth is an invaluable factor in the world today. They are sometimes less certain about the colonial Empire as distinct from the group of self-governing nations. May I say just a word about that. Empire as a term has an eighteenth century ring about it. The word colony conjures up the image of George III. But it is helpful to remember that the demise of George III took place a long time ago and that much has happened since. Words after all are only labels. In the 40 odd communities which comprises the colonial Empire there is a steady movement towards self-government, accelerated since the war, which makes nonsense of the word imperialism so ardently employed in Moscow. The facts speak for themselves. Constitutional progress and advance in individual welfare in the colonial Empire today make it one of the strongest bulwarks in the world against the menace of Communism.

There has been a movement of late among certain Latin American countries to challenge the continued existence of colonies, most of them British, in Central and South America. May I say this: Two of the most important tests one can apply to a community are how far is public order maintained and individual liberty protected. If these tests are applied to the colonies in question it will be found that they are in very favourable contrast with some of the countries which ask for their extinction and in which political freedom is not yet assured.

Today the word freedom is often on our lips. It provides the background to much of our thinking. It is no academic term as it may have seemed in earlier years when we thought that human progress was automatic. Freedom is a practical business - something to be fought for. It is an urgent matter too, for in some parts of the world today, in the continent of Asia for example, liberty is now in retreat. A nation must now be judged by a triple test - by its belief in freedom, by its practice of freedom, by its willingness to defend freedom. You understand these things in this great country, for you have stood for liberty since the beginning. Without you today the world would have little hope. The belief in freedom is also the very foundation of the British Commonwealth and Empire. As far as Canada is concerned we have willingly made our own contribution to this cause in the past. As a Canadian, I am proud that my country is prepared to play its part today.

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The practical measure of our common beliefs is that great system of defence now in the making which will span the Atlantic. Let nothing thwart us in our task. We shall doubtless hear voices in the East whose aim will be to make our plans seem needless, - Beware of voices which cry "Peace, peace, when there is no peace". One thing alone can give us peace - the array of force on the side of right. Negotiations with dictators will always be futile and perilous save when they are conducted - as Mr. Eden reminded us the other night - on the only basis the dictator understands - negotiation from strength. The free world has been deceived more than once in this generation. This time, pray God, let us recognise danger when we see it.

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