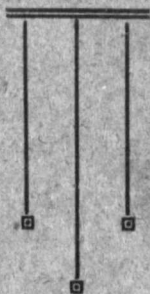


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*The Public Opinion of the
World; Its Sovereign
Power, and Its Silent
Mentor*



AN ADDRESS
BY
SIR ROBERT L. BORDEN
AT THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE
BRITISH AND FOREIGN BIBLE SOCIETY
LONDON, MAY 2, 1917

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Obliged to leave for Paris the day before the Annual Meeting in Queen's Hall, Mr. David Lloyd-George, the Premier of the United Kingdom, was unable to be present as he had hoped. He asked Sir Robert L. Borden, the Premier of Canada, to speak in his stead. Sir Robert Borden's speech gave great pleasure to his crowded audience; and it is here reproduced with his approval.

The Public Opinion of the World; Its Sovereign Power, and Its Silent Mentor



“I know that you must all very deeply regret—but no one so much as myself—the inability of the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to be here this morning to address you. I was spoken to late last evening, and, knowing the tremendous engagements and duties which he is called upon to discharge in these times of stress and urgency, I could not refuse the request which he made to me to come here and speak, however inadequately and unworthily, in his stead. I have not come here with any set address. I have come with hardly any notes, so I must speak to you from my heart to-day in appreciation of *the great work which this Society has done*, not only in this Mother-country and in the Overseas Dominions, but throughout the world, a work the importance of which it is perhaps difficult for us to estimate; a work which I hope will be even more splendid and more worthy in the future than it has been in the past.

The Crisis and Its Call

“I am very glad indeed to know that the Dominion which I have the honour to represent has contributed something to the great cause which this Society serves. In days gone by we may have leaned upon you in the Motherland for that purpose; but in this, as in other respects, the young giant beyond the

seas has learned to know his strength and to put that great and constantly increasing strength to a high purpose. We are met under the shadow of events so great that probably we who are passing through them do not realize their magnitude or the significance which the historian of the future will attach to them. Every generation is in some sense, and in no small sense, a trustee for the future; but upon the men and women of this generation there rests to-day, and there has rested for nearly three years, a responsibility greater perhaps than was ever laid upon the shoulders of mankind before. And I am very proud to say, and I know that you are all very proud to feel, that the spirit of our people, whether in this Motherland or elsewhere throughout the Empire, has risen fully responsive to the need. Beyond question we were very much absorbed in our own material concerns for many years before this war broke out. But when the call did come, all these ideas about immediate progress and development—the veneer, if I may call it, of materialism—were brushed aside in one moment, and we found that there was hid plain beneath that surface a spirit which has been constant and steadfast up to the present, and which, please God, will remain constant and steadfast until the end.

The Spirit of the Dominion

“No more peace-loving population ever dwelt in any part of the King’s Dominions than the people of Canada, but they realized the cause of this war; they realized from the first the purpose of you in the United Kingdom in undertaking it; they realized to what extent democracy, liberty, the civilization, the future of the world, rested upon the issue which had been prepared by Germany. And so they, in common

with all the people of the King's Dominions, were prepared, and are still prepared, to do their duty in this war to the end. It has already had profound influence upon our people, and it must continue in all the years to come to have perhaps an even more profound influence. I have seen in hospitals and in convalescent homes hundreds, thousands, of my own countrymen who had come across the Atlantic at the call of duty, who had gone beyond the Channel to discharge the highest duty of a citizen to his country, who had offered themselves for the supreme sacrifice if necessary, and who had fought in a splendid comradeship with men from these islands, from India, and from all the Overseas Dominions.

A Nation in the Making

“What will be the outlook of these men, what the outlook of the men from these islands after the war is over? They will come back, surely, realizing that, while this Empire has been called in the past the greatest human agency for good that the world has ever known, yet it may have in the future still higher and greater opportunities for service to the world, and they will come back inspired with the desire that those great responsibilities will be fulfilled. They will come back, further, conscious that in these great events in the world's greatest theatre of action they have played no inconspicuous part, and they will realize—I am speaking of the men from our Dominion—that in the contact of nations in the great events of to-day they have demonstrated, not only to you in this Mother-country, but to all the Allied nations and to the world at large, that Canada has raised herself to the full rank and dignity of nationhood in every worthy way.

It is the Spirit That Giveth Life

“We have sent from the manhood of Canada to this war, in one way and another, no less than 360,000 men. I mention this to show you the spirit of self-sacrifice, self-denial, and devotion which has animated our people, and which has been good for them, as for the cause which they are supporting, in its spiritual influence upon our nation as a whole. I may tell you that the people of Canada by voluntary contributions, for one benevolent patriotic purpose after another since the commencement of this war, have raised well-nigh sixty million of dollars, or £12,000,000—and they have done it willingly and splendidly, in no grudging spirit, but with a full sense of their responsibility. The gratitude of the people of the whole Empire must go out to its womanhood for their splendid devotion: God bless the women of the Empire for all that they have done for the service of the nation and of the world in this great struggle in which we are now engaged.

A Sure Foundation for Peace

“But what, after all, is the meaning of this war to the world? What is its meaning now, and what shall be its meaning in the years to come? On the other side of the Atlantic is a great kindred nation, after exercising infinite patience, has found itself constrained by the cause for which we are fighting to throw its force into the conflict—a force which cannot be over-estimated and which can have no small influence in bringing this war to that issue which we all have at heart. In that great nation there are, to my personal knowledge, more associations and societies designed and established for the purpose of maintaining the peace of the world than there are in all the

other nations put together. It may be that some of the ideals of these societies may under present conditions be entirely beyond practical realization. I care not for that. I say that the purpose is good, and I count among the great agencies which shall influence the opinion of the world those societies and the great work of a society like this. Because, believe me, though we may speak as much as we like of the influence of democracy, of the possibility of peace-keeping leagues of nations, *the future peace of the world must rest upon one firm basis, and one firm basis alone—and that is the public opinion of the world.*

The Guide to Our Goal

“The organized life of this nation and of the Dominions of the British Empire rests, in the final analysis, upon the public opinion of the people. It is upon that that our national life and our national institutions rest. And so, when we speak of organized leagues of the nations—and no one would welcome more heartily than I would all organized efforts for that purpose—I hold that in the community of the world, as in the community of any national life, there must be the public opinion which will command the peace of the world, and that it cannot be commanded in any other way. And so I hope that this war will inspire war-weary humanity with an earnest and purposeful effort to bring about that peace. Because I do not conceal from you my own conviction that unless the democracies of the world can find some means by which war on so gigantic a scale, with such awful results to humanity, can be avoided in the future, then the existing social order cannot last. But on what, after all, does democracy rest? The ideals of democracy, the purpose of democracy, the result of democracy, must

rest upon the collective conscience of the people in any community, and democracy will attain results, great or small, *in so far as the conscience, the purpose, and the ideal of the people are guided by that Book which it is the purpose of this Society to circulate.* And so it is the public opinion of the world that we must try to influence, and I repeat once more my high appreciation of the service that you are giving to humanity of the present and of the future in carrying on the great purpose which you have at heart and on behalf of which I have to speak to-day.

A Great Spiritual Uplift

“I believe that you have had in the United Kingdom, as we have had in Canada, a great spiritual uplift as the result of this war. Men and women are more concerned to-day with things spiritual than they were four years ago. It could not be otherwise: there has been so much devotion and so much self-sacrifice. More than that, there has been sorrow brought to many a home—sorrow mingled with a most solemn pride that those who have gone forth have proved themselves worthy of the highest ideals of humanity and the best traditions of the race. It would be impossible that all this should take place without its exercising a very powerful influence indeed upon the people; and perhaps our concern should be not so much as to how that will be maintained during the war—because I believe it will be—but as to what will come afterwards.

A Personal Reminiscence

“I remember, many years ago, hearing a great divine in my own country preach a sermon which I shall never forget

upon a text which I think I can recall: '*They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up on wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint.*' And he asked us, what was the meaning of the prophet in the order of this statement. Was it merely an anti-climax, or was there some great and profound thought beneath it all? And he pointed out that it is not so difficult for the nation or the Government to have a great spiritual uplift under a great inspiration and to maintain it while that inspiration lasts; but there is something greater and more difficult still in maintaining that high purpose when the inspiration has passed away and when the ordinary round and routine of everyday life have come. It may be easier to mount on wings as eagles than to walk and not faint. And so I pray that the great influence which I believe has permeated all the nations of our British Commonwealth may be maintained in the future. I pray that after this war is over and material considerations have again to be taken into account, strength may be given to you in this Homeland and to us in the Overseas Dominions that we may walk and not faint."

CANADIAN BIBLE SOCIETY

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