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# New York State Bar Association

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ADDRESS OF

**SIR GEORGE FOSTER**

ACTING PRIME MINISTER OF CANADA

AT THE

ANNUAL DINNER—HOTEL ASTOR

NEW YORK, JANUARY 17, 1920

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FORTY-THIRD ANNUAL MEETING

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## Address by Sir George Foster

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen.—All the way through your reception has been a succession of kindness and goodwill. Commencing with the invitation which you were kind enough to give me to attend this Banquet, which invitation I would not have received had it not been for the indisposition of our Prime Minister, who, burdened with the almost incalculable labors of the five war years, is now somewhere on the "Seven seas" seeking recuperation and vanished health, not I hope so far vanished as not to return. I am here to take his place and very unworthily in one respect, that I am not a member of the legal profession. I am a layman, pure and simple, and nothing but your exceedingly kind reference, Mr. Chairman, and your exceedingly kind treatment has made it possible for me to hold up my head amidst an association of the assembled legal wisdom of the foremost State of the great United States. When I was asked to come, I began to wonder what I should say, and I will be frank enough to tell you that I am still wondering. There is one thing, however, which, like the traditional weather salutations one can always venture upon, and that is to thank you for the reception which you have given to me, and which is not a personal reception by any manner of means. Possibly not half a dozen men in this great assembly know of me, or ever heard of me, or care very much about whether they ever hear of me again. I am here, and I accept all of this cordiality on behalf of my own country, Canada. It is the appreciation of you people here for my country which is, for the time being, given to its representative. And that makes me a bit reminiscent. I may not be as old as I look, or I may be older than I look, that is for your legal shrewdness to decide, but it makes me a little

reminiscent when I think of 50 or 60 years ago, when interchanges like this would hardly have happened between Canada and the United States of America. People change, and one of the most pleasing and in many respects one of the most vital changes is that which has taken place between the different members of the Anglo-Saxon race, of which you in this United States of America form so large a membership. It is not uncommon now for your brothers North of the Line to receive from associations like this, requests that at such functions the Canadian Government or Canadian Societies may send someone down to represent Canada. Such coin had little currency 50 or 60 years ago; now it is the rule rather than the exception, and in truth, if all the invitations which were sent in this way to Canada were accepted, a considerable part of our population would become globe trotters; at least, so far as concerns portions of the U. S. contiguous to the national boundary. It was not always thus, and tiresome and somewhat long is the way travelled between that other time of fifty years ago and to-day, and often amid dangers and sometimes with actual peril. Your birth-pangs were suffered in war with a nation of which we form a part; your early infancy was passed amid enmities which are always engendered by war; your youth and your middle age inherited the war aftermath partly of presumptive hostility, of suspicion and prejudice, and partly of lack of information and consequent misrepresentation. In consequence neither across the line to the North, nor on this side, was the state of amity or good fellowship at all comparable to what it is to-day. But those times have passed away; generations have succeeded generations; war memories have faded; ignorance, lack of information, prejudice have receded before the constantly increasing intercourse which has taken place between your country and ours. Naturally the lion's whelp must take on the color and the quality of the lion itself

and so the hostility and prejudice prevailed against the outlying British Colonies and Dominions. All this has passed away before increased intercourse and information and the dispelling influence which this has exerted on the relationships between you and us. But, underneath it all, am I not right in saying that there was that great vitalizing undercurrent of a common origin, one language, early traditions and a literature which were the heritage of us all; that love of liberty and justice which has been spoken of so eloquently to-night as being a characteristic of the Anglo-Saxon race, and common ideals of conduct, social and national. These are the underlying and vitalizing influences which have operated all along to bring about this delightful state of amity, which, as your Chairman has explained to you, for a hundred years has enabled us to dispense with guards on the frontier, with armaments upon our lakes, and with military posts scattered along the 3500 miles of the imaginary line which divides us. And I take it, Mr. Chairman, as a real service rendered by our young nation — you will allow me to call it that — that Canada has in a very important and vital way been the medium through which a better influence has permeated this southern part of the American continent, and helped by a better understanding to unite this great branch of the Anglo-Saxon race to that other great branch of the Anglo-Saxon race which lives under the flag of Great Britain. If Canada has done that by her propinquity, by the goings and comings of her people to your own parts of the country, and vice versa, it is a contribution of our young country in which we may take some pride. Three thousand miles is a long distance between you and the metropolis of the British Empire to the heart and brain of the little islands in the North Sea, but when you will you can move, cross and re-cross the contiguous line of 3,000 miles that separates you from Canada. The way is short, the meet-



ing is easy, and so a wide and constant intercourse takes place. You come there, some of you, because you love sport, and you have heard that in Canada there are great opportunities for sport. Once there, when you look around with your keen American eye you find that there are chances for profit and you come there for profit, and with your coming and going for pleasure and profit you find yourself up against people very like yourselves, you become friends with them, you learn to love them as brothers and they love you in return, and so in that intercommunication there has been set up a human electric current, a fellow-feeling between the eight millions yonder and your 110,000,000 here, which is doing very much,—has done very much,—and will do very much more towards the entente cordiale between the English speaking countries of the world, for which the world in the past and the world in the future will have very much to be thankful for.

The 16th of this month compassed within its 24 hours several notable happenings. May I mention one or two of these? On the 16th of January, at midnight, an old and familiar friend—if not a friend, yet a well-known acquaintance,—was laid away in funeral solemnities of mingled sadness and rejoicing; probably no gerat funeral ever evoked quite the different expressions of feelings as those in evidence at about 12 o'clock last in the United States of America. I do not know whether "John Barleycorn" came over in the vessel with the Pilgrims, but there is a suspicion from the name that he had a British origin. Well, you have laid him away. I will be just as reticent about saying anything as to my sentiments with reference to that subject, as some of you gentlemen have been about some of the subjects you have been discussing here to-night. But, will you allow me to say that I have attended banquets in New York and some other places while "John

Barleycorn" had the freedom of the City, and I do not think I have seen a more jolly, better looking, and happy assembly of men,—even though they are lawyers,—than I have seen here to-night with "John Barleycorn" absolutely removed from their companionship. Things worse than this then might have happened.

Another notable event that took place was the serving of notice with unexpected suddenness that the economic blockade against Russia has been raised, and that the United States of America had issued orders for their soldiers to leave Eastern Russia and make an end to the intervention in connection with other great powers in that and in other parts of Russia. That is a momentous happening, when we come to think of all that it may mean. I leave that for the future. But there is another: Yesterday, in the Hall of the Clocks, in the historic City of Paris, was held the first representative Session of the League of Nations. Nine men sat about the table as representatives of the great powers belonging to the League; one place was vacant, the chair reserved for the representative of the United States of America. Now, I am not here to criticise the United States of America; I would be indeed rash if I attempted that, and it is not even in my heart to attempt it, but I cannot help expressing my deep regret for the fact.

I spent seven months and a half in Paris, mainly, in London partly, in attendance upon the Peace Conference, and I know the commanding position taken by the President as your representative in that Conference. President Wilson sat there in persona, but it was the United States which was represented in potentio, and whose power and influence, present and prospective, was the real representative at that Peace Conference.

I mention that simply, if it may be necessary, though I do not think it is, to recall to our minds that nations are responsible for their representatives. Some nations of Europe made

war as the culmination of long years of preparation and others light-heartedly launched themselves upon its dangerous waters. You will remember the cablegrams told us that when war was announced the people of Vienna were so overjoyed that they fell upon each others necks weeping tears of joy and gratitude, and now Vienna sits in sackcloth and ashes. Hundreds of thousands of her people die daily, presenting a spectacle of suffering, of demoralization, of hopelessness so great and so bad that it almost loses its power of articulation. But men say, and say rightly, they tolerated Kings who caused the war; they are therefore responsible for the consequences of the war and must bear them. If that is true, and who doubts it, how much more is it true of democratically governed countries who elect their representatives and must recognize responsibility for their action. That was the position of the United States of America when President Wilson represented it at the Peace Conference. So that we in our country and you in your country, being democratically governed, must hold ourselves responsible for those whom we have elected to govern us, must honor the commitments they have made in our name.

Now, in Canada we think that our duties as co-laborers and co-warriors in the great crusade of the last four or five years, have not entirely ended. Talking of bonds of union, this war was an added one which linked the people of the United States to the people of Canada, and I believe of both to the people of Great Britain and of the Allies who fought against the Hun. There was a common enemy, fought on common ground, fought with a common purpose and a common ideal and that common warfare was waged for our ideals and our principles of liberty and of justice, side by side, and sealed in comradeship and brotherhood by that most precious of all seals, the blood of the men who stand for them. We think in

Canada that our duties have not yet ended to those countries in whose service and for whose liberation from militarism and from the oppression of might we set out to secure. But is the whole crusade over? Once the Armistice was signed and the Peace ratifications have been passed, is there then nothing left to do to fulfil the purposes for which we crossed the seas? Certainly we did not cross the seas from lust of conquest, from the desire for gain; neither your country nor mine had the least thing, in territory, in added wealth, in anything of the material benefit to be gained from the war that was waged and from the consequences of that war which bore so heavily upon us all. Neither do I think we went across the seas merely to tear the crown from the Kaisers of middle Europe and throw them in the dust. We went to end the reign of might, acting through militarism, which bound and crippled the peoples of middle Europe and which threatened the peace and prosperity of the world. That is what we went for. The thing is not accomplished for which we set out; the goal of the crusade has not been reached; the work has not been carried to its completion if we simply overthrow militarism and leave anarchy to take its place, if we simply liberate people and then after a war of four or five years, which takes from them so much of their strength, and so much of the virile qualities necessary to maintain and to build up new countries and new powers, we leave them crippled and maimed. There are yet the weak to be strengthened; there are yet the feeble who require the guiding hand and helpful arm put about them, and, it seems to me, that our work has not been finished until we bring about that consummation for which we set out,— if we had any excuse for setting out at all in that great crusade of which I have just spoken.

Now, whatever we may say, I think we are all agreed in this conclusion: That the day has passed when any one nation

can isolate itself from the rest of the world. Just as in the Nation, its individual units, its constituent parts must give service for the good of society and the nation other than themselves.

So in these later days it is constantly coming to be more and more a fact, more and more a great truth, that nations themselves must expend themselves in service of good-will and of helpful action for the common good of the whole world. I think there are two considerations which make for that: There is, first, the consideration of good-will to make our world better and to make it better by our own active cooperation which is laid upon us as citizens of the world — speaking nationally. There is also, I think, the very strong consideration that by doing this we insure ourselves, and that is not a consideration of small weight, or of little merit. In the inextricable interwindings of economic and social affairs in the world to-day, is it possible for the peace of the world to be broken in any one considerable section without menacing the peace of the whole world? Therefore, it seems to me, there is a double interest in our international cooperation. Men say to me,—the question has been often raised,—why bother ourselves with affairs beyond the sea? Why not give ourselves to the development of our own resources and the pursuit of our own happiness and keep out of the world's troubles and its perilous currents. But the sense of Canada in an overwhelming degree was that living in the world we had two things to do: give of our services for the better life of the world, in so far as we could, and to make it as sure as possible that by that good service and good-will and the restrictions and aid that came therefrom, there would be less menace for the future; less opportunities for great wars, and that, therefore, our own future stability and well-being would be better insured and guarded. I believe that to be true and that is why we preach to our people to

take an interest, strong, enduring, intelligent in the fortunes of the world to which we are allied, whether we will or not, and the influences of which will reach upon ourselves however much we try to avoid them.

One thought more along this line. As one looks upon the European situation to-day, one is lead at times to be almost pessimistic as to the outcome of the future. The more we study the peculiar consequences which have followed the great, exhausting war, the more we sense the weaknesses of the peoples that have been set up in independent and new nationalities, the more we must come to the conclusion that the strength and guidance and maturer experience of the older and larger powers of the world must be brought into play in order that these peoples may be strengthened and protected in the early phases of their national existence. Unless that is done complete anarchy may follow and what that would spell for the world requires no great thought to conceive. In Europe you have old and strong powers; there you have these new nationalities just set up, not now strong, but which may become strong if protected and aided. There you have the smaller powers which have to be safeguarded against the machinations of stronger neighbors and the menace of combinations, and you have the backward peoples of the world which need to be nursed and fathered by the influence of the more forward nations into self-dependent communities.

There seems to me to be only two ways open. The world has either to settle its difficulties in the future as it has settled them in the past, by the sword, and the past gives us a sorry retrospect as to the consequences of settling national disputes by might and by force. If the war of the past five years was a war which so exceeded in destruction,—ruthless destruction in the magnitude of mechanical and other means of destruction, the wars of fifty years ago,—who can measure even in

thought the awful desolation to be wrought by another great war when science shall have added to its powers and when the mechanics of warfare shall have become a thousandfold more insidious and destructive than they are to-day. Not by that way do we think that the disputes of the world may be best settled and its peace-work be best secured.

The other way is by an association of the great and lesser powers of the world through which the economic and moral force of most is brought to bear upon all restless and warring factors to diminish and prevent the possibility of destructive wars, and lead gradually to a time when tribunals shall be substituted for armies, when war shall become unnecessary and impossible international affairs, as war becomes unnecessary in the internal affairs of a great nation. It is by that method exercised through the medium of a League of Nations, not perfect, as it is launched, but once being launched, assented to, put into operation, capable of improvements which experience and time will suggest, and so become in the end a machinery by which the world shall be guided in its international affairs as a nation is guided in its national affairs, on the lines of justice and of truth and of liberty, rather than by brute force.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I have been led into a discussion along lines that I had not thought of before I came here. I do not know what particular influence this audience had upon me, but as I looked into your faces it seemed to me that it was for me to translate to you what our own people in Canada think in this matter as we translated to you and to the world what we thought and what we were able to do in the great war whose clouds have just now passed from our skies, but the consequences of which will long remain.

Up in our Northern land of eight millions of people, we furnished 640,000 men and put them in khaki and sent 500,000 of them across the sea. When the war clarion sounded we did

not stop an instant to argue, we were ready with our response on the moment, and six weeks after the call for arms came the largest body of military men, perfectly equipped, crossed the Atlantic ocean, that had ever crossed an ocean before. Our men fought as your men fought, magnificently, heroes every one of them, as my friend the first speaker of this meeting said, who knew for what ideals and principles they periled life and who died as gentlemen and as patriots. We had the sympathy of your people in the United States in our effort long before you made the start, as you had the admiration of the people of Canada in the great and tremendous effort, which when once aroused to action, you put into force with all your tremendous powers of organization.

We have done and done well our great war work and in doing this have made a notable contribution to the world's freedom and progress.

But the world's work did not end when active war work ceased, nor were its great problems solved thereby. The fortunes of humanity are still in the balance, its destinies yet to be determined, its goal of ultimate peace and happiness yet to be reached. And, I cannot help thinking, that as in the past, the English speaking peoples have proved so beneficent and impelling a factor in the uplift of the world, so in its future development and betterment the close cooperation and unselfish effort of the English speaking peoples is not only a duty imperatively demanded but is also an opportunity fraught with consequences of the greatest importance to the civilization, the security and the happiness of the human race.

No nation lives nobly and greatly which lives for itself alone. Humanity is greater than any section thereof, and the law of good-will and mutual helpfulness persists in international relations as in those of society and individual nations. If the English speaking nations, united as they are in high



ideals of personal and national conduct, distributed as they are in influential and growing centres throughout the world, steadfast as they are in their profound love of liberty and justice, sink petty differences and join in hearty unselfish efforts on international lines, their influence on the future world development will furnish a glorious and imperishable record.

