



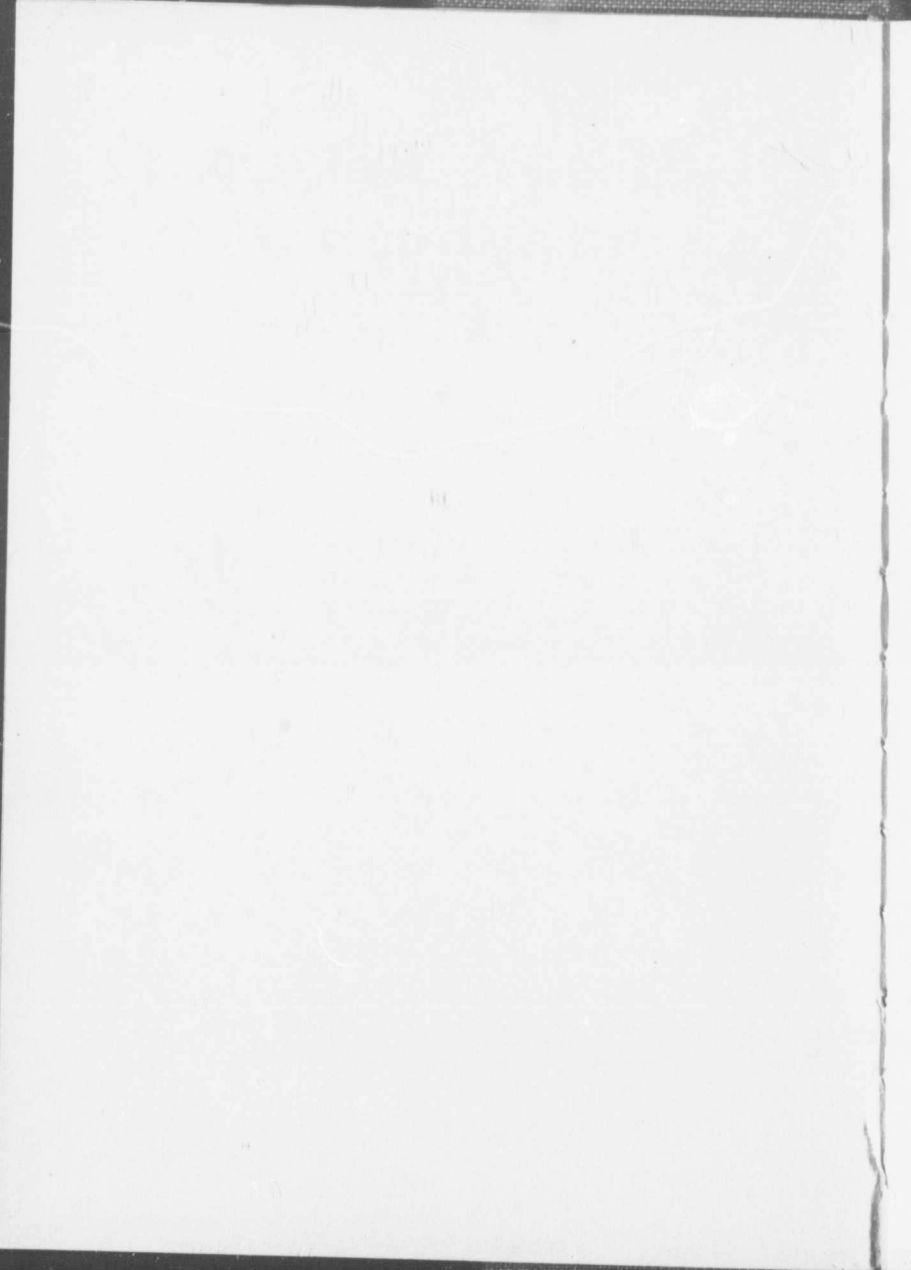
1916

Sup.

Canada's Relation to the Great War



Sir John Willison



Canada's Relation to the Great War

An Address by Sir John Willison
before the University Club of
Rochester, New York,
February 19, 1916

TORONTO:

THE NEWS PUBLISHING COMPANY OF TORONTO, LIMITED
MARCH, NINETEEN HUNDRED AND SIXTEEN

WILKINSON, J

222627

1547
22
W5

Canada's Relation to the Great War

THE American people have a genius for hospitality. Whether one goes East or West or North or South in this wide and wonderful country, in public places, in social clubs, in private houses, if one is so fortunate as to be admitted, strangers are treated with courtesy and consideration, very gracious in its manifestations, and very pleasant to the recipients. To those who come as your guests you are prodigal in sympathy and attention. During the last Presidential contest it was my fortune to cross this country from Detroit to San Francisco as a special correspondent of The London Times. In order that my despatches and letters could be written with reasonable discretion and knowledge it was necessary to seek the counsel of many public men and to receive the confidences of the State Committees of the political parties. You had three parties, and the nation has survived whether or not all the parties have survived. I had no letters of introduction and could only give the assurance of a stranger that confidences would not be violated. Everywhere I received such full and frank information that it was easy to forecast the result of the contest, and I cannot remember that in a single instance a pledge of secrecy was exacted or a doubt of my simple good faith suggested. Moreover, I knew when the returns were declared that I had never been misled and that the leaders of the various parties had a singular and common insight into the temper of the country. It is a curious and striking fact that within your national boundaries you have developed in all the tribes of men a common patriotism, common social characteristics and more and more a common physical likeness. But it is to your charity and hospitality that I desire to bear witness. One may come to you and wholly fail to justify the advance notices, but your ample

CANADA'S RELATION TO THE GREAT WAR

charity conceals the conviction that you have been defrauded, while if in any slight degree by happy accident or kindly Providence you are entertained, or interested, or instructed, you are so generous that one goes home in sad but certain confidence that he is not appreciated by his own people. One is so grateful that his feeling is expressed by the story of an Irishman in Canada who describes the mellowing effects of Jamieson's Irish Whiskey. "When I lived in Dublin," he would say, "I used to go to Maynooth where the Widdy Maloney kept a tavern. You could get as foine a male there as annywhere in the world. You could get a fillet of vale wid parsley, or a brisket of cowld bafe reclinin' on a bowlder of cabbage, and the widdy would bring in three fingers of Jamieson's and just a dhrap of raspberry vinegar and—a child could play wid you."

I shall not forget that I speak in a neutral country, and that whether we salute the Union Jack or the Stars and Stripes we honor the symbol of freedom. I shall not attempt to interpret American feeling, official or popular. I shall not undertake to define your relation to the struggle in Europe nor venture any opinion upon any incident which connects this country with any of the belligerents. Ever since the war began we in Canada have practiced reticence alike in spoken and written references to neutral nations. We have done nothing to embarrass British diplomacy in delicate negotiations with foreign courts and Governments. We have greatly restrained the natural arrogance of a young country and I would misrepresent the Canadian Government and the Canadian people if even by implication or indirection I should review American action or American policy. I may not even imitate the Roman Catholic Chaplain in Flanders, who sought reconciliation with a Protestant colleague. A close friendship had been disturbed by a theological dispute. In seeking to heal the breach the Father said: "Why should we quarrel. We are both doing the work of the Master. You in your way and I in His."

CANADA'S RELATION TO THE GREAT WAR

It is a curious experience to cross from Canada into this country. One feels, subconsciously, that he has been asleep and has passed into a new and strange land. One listens for familiar sounds and the mind gropes for cares and anxieties from which we seem to be momentarily separated. But we know that they will come again to disturb our peace and fill our days with apprehension. Our streets are full of soldiers. We hear the fife and the drum all day long. We see a few recruits grow into battalions. Since the first of the year every day 1,000 men have enlisted. In every town and village there are groups of men in training. Here and there across the country are great military encampments. One by one and week by week battalions go out from these encampments, entrain for Halifax and embark for the voyage across the sea. The Government tells us nothing, the press is silent, and few of us know that they have gone until they reach England.

When I was a boy, nearly 40 years ago, it was my privilege to hear an address by Schuyler Colfax, who was the colleague of General Grant in the Presidential contest of 1868. From his lips I first heard a phrase that has passed into literature and which I have remembered through all these years. He spoke of the long agony of the Civil war as days that tried men's souls. These are days that try men's souls throughout the British Empire, and not less in Canada than in England itself. Nowhere under the King's Sovereignty is there more unshaken resolution that the sun shall not go down on the flag we love and the institutions we cherish. It may be that we count for little in a world in arms, but at least we can command the world's respect and keep our own.

Possibly the action of Canada is a mystery to many Americans. But what else could we do? For nearly two generations we sang "God Save the Queen," the Queen who was the friend of America when official elements in Great Britain

CANADA'S RELATION TO THE GREAT WAR

were less friendly than they should have been; the Queen of whom Whittier made Americans say:

We bowed the heart but not the knee,
To England's Queen, God bless her.

When her great day closed a King succeeded, of rare human quality, who in his happy youth came to this country and left enduring impressions of a gracious and attractive personality, who, whether on the throne or not, was Prince and democrat and statesman and diplomat, and throughout his too short reign we sang "God Save the King" with the old faith and fervor. Another King succeeded, and because upon him as the constitutional embodiment of the Empire and the expression of its power and unity rests the burden of this tremendous time through which we are passing, we sing "God Save the King" with such devotion and solemnity and passion as we have never felt before. It is not so much intellectual reverence for monarchy that moves us as the conviction—continuing through the centuries—that the throne represents the traditions and the glories and the ideals and the aspirations of an historic Kingdom and a ruling people. And as we sing we must fight and pay and pray.

In peace we boasted of our British citizenship. Under the protection of the navy our trade had free course over all the seas. Under the flag we had freedom and security. We were fed and nourished by British capital. We spoke with authority in Imperial conferences. We disclaimed any thought of political independence. We declared that within the Empire we had a prouder and more influential citizenship than we could have under any other relation, connection or condition. It is true that we were not subject to any coercion or compulsion. Constitutionally the Government and Parliament of Canada were as free to act or to refrain from action as were the Government and Parliament of Great Britain. But Governments must express public opinion and no Government could have lived against the anger that would have

CANADA'S RELATION TO THE GREAT WAR

swept Canada with the sudden fury of a tempest if there had been hesitation or refusal to unite with the Mother Country, with the other Dominions, with India and the Dependencies in defence of the common Empire. Equality of privilege carries equality of responsibility and sacrifice, and if we had done otherwise than we have done we would have been shamed before the nations and sunk in self contempt. Whatever may be the attitude of Americans towards the tremendous conflict in which we are involved, whether their hearts are with us or against us, I know enough of the stock to which they belong to feel that they yield us homage. I know too that it will be said through the generations that we did our duty as we saw it. And if that be said and that be true nothing else matters. Indeed, as Sir Edward Carson said in the British House of Commons a few weeks ago, "What does it all matter so long as we win the war, and what does anything matter if we lose the war?"

There was no hesitation in Canada. Even before war was declared the Canadian Prime Minister gave the Imperial authorities absolute assurances of the moral and material support of the Dominion. Within ten weeks 33,000 troops embarked at Quebec, and for many months two thousand troops have left Canada every week for England. And in all the long span of human history there is nothing more romantic and majestic than the movement of these great armies of the Dominions across the seas to guard the old home and to shield with their living bodies the old mother of free communities. It was Henley who said "the sire lives in his sons and they pay their father's debt and the lion has left a whelp wherever his claw was set."

It may be that some of those who joined the first battalions were actuated chiefly by the spirit of adventure. It is not so now. Those who now enlist, and recruiting has not slackened, know that they must go where the battle is, that they must look death in the eyes and that they may not come

CANADA'S RELATION TO THE GREAT WAR

back. God give us decency enough not to forget when the war is over. We have 60,000 soldiers in France and Flanders. We have as many in training in England. We have 20,000 ready to sail. We have 100,000 in training in Canada. We have 250,000 under arms, and I have no shadow of doubt that the army of 500,000 which the Government has authorized will be established.

In the first year of the war our annual charge for war purposes was over \$100,000,000. For this year the war will cost us between \$250,000,000 and \$300,000,000. We launched a war loan of \$50,000,000 and over \$100,000,000 was subscribed. We have raised by popular subscription for relief and patriotic objects at least \$25,000,000. A few days ago a campaign in Montreal for the Patriotic Fund for dependents of soldiers produced \$2,500,000, and a similar campaign in Toronto \$2,400,000. The towns, villages and rural communities give as generously for relief and patriotic objects. In Ontario in one day we collected \$1,500,000 for the British Red Cross Fund. We have established hospitals in England and in France, at Saloniki, and in Canada for the wounded and disabled. We have ceased to have any social life outside the entertainments that are provided for soldiers or organized to raise money for patriotic movements. In providing comforts for the soldiers, in all the activities that we associate with the Red Cross, in ministering to the wounded, Canadian women have revealed the divinity which lies in the heart of woman everywhere and always appears at the call of sorrow and suffering. Their work has been incalculable, their courage sublime, their self-sacrifice touching, and inspiring. Our Universities have been centres of patriotic inspiration and active agencies in recruiting. A multitude of Canadian physicians, surgeons and nurses are in hospitals oversea serving with that simple submission to sacrifice and devotion to duty which we expect from the professions to which they belong, and never in vain. Our sporting organizations have been decimated by enlistment. From

CANADA'S RELATION TO THE GREAT WAR

these organizations many of our young officers have been obtained. In the honor roll of Victoria Crosses and Distinguished Service Orders Canadian sportsmen have glorious representation. I think of a church in Toronto which had a football club when the war began. All but three of its members enlisted. A second club was organized and all enlisted. Among the officers, and among the privates, too, of Canadian regiments are many young men who were social leaders, who held very responsible positions in banking and financial institutions, who directed important manufacturing and commercial enterprises, and who have sacrificed income and prospects for what they conceive to be the supreme duty of a British citizen in this crisis in British history. The other day at the camp in Toronto a private asked the permission of his Commanding Officer to discard his uniform for a social event which he desired to attend, and he returned in a dress suit and his own motor.

May I ask you to remember that we are not an English-speaking country as is Great Britain, or Australia or New Zealand. We have at most 8,000,000 people, and of these 3,000,000 do not habitually speak the English language. It is true that the French are open to the appeal of race as well as to the appeal of country. They are under the impulse of a double or a threefold loyalty; to France, whence they have their language and their literature; to Great Britain, whence came their free institutions and which guarantees their racial and religious privileges, and to Canada, in which they have free and equal citizenship. In the early days of the war a French-Canadian, visiting Toronto, said: "You ver quiet here in Toronto. In Quebec we mak the gran speeches. Our two muzzers, our two muzzers, we love zem both, France and England." But we have also nearly 700,000 Germans and Austrians, chiefly in Ontario and the Western Provinces, whose position is admittedly delicate and difficult, but who under all the circumstances have been reasonably submissive to the obligations of Canadian citizenship. And we have two or

CANADA'S RELATION TO THE GREAT WAR

three hundred thousand Americans, as devoted to Canada as the native Canadian and British population. Neither on the Western prairies nor in the industrial centres of older Canada, where they are numerous and influential, are they regarded as a separate element. From the first they have been of us and for us, generous in patriotic giving, and eager in every form of patriotic service. We have in Toronto an American Legion for service oversea, officered by Americans and recruited by Americans from among Americans in Canada. Two other legions are in process of organization. This is not the result of any appeal by the Canadian authorities but of the deliberate, voluntary action of Americans themselves. I have yet to hear a whisper of adverse criticism of the attitude or action of any American in Canada. Hence, whatever may be the legacies of the war, whatever sores may remain, whatever grievances may persist, there has been established between Canadians and Americans in Canada a community of faith and feeling that will endure, and be of high value in the evolution of our national experiment.

The historians of the war will agree that there was no more stupendous achievement than the voluntary enrollment in Great Britain of an army of 5,000,000, and second only in significance and magnitude will be the voluntary enrollment of the army of Canada. We have not had, and will not have, conscription or compulsion. No doubt those will stay who should go and those will go who should not. There may be those to whom we would like to apply General Early's prescription. In the Shenandoah Valley, as the sun was going down over the shattered fabric of the Confederacy and the gallant remnant of the Southern Army, ragged, hungry and exhausted, could endure no longer, General Early, contrary to custom, was induced to go to church. The subject of the sermon was the Resurrection and the preacher said: "My brethren, what would you think if all the dead you have known could now pass before you in solemn procession, and if in the silent, moving throng were all those who have died for

CANADA'S RELATION TO THE GREAT WAR

the South since this wasting and bloody war began." Early whispered to his neighbor in the pew: "I would conscript the whole d—— lot." But we will not conscript, even though we know that National Service is compatible with democracy and that the voluntary system may be unjust and unequal in its incidence and effects.

Already in the Canadian forces we have had 13,000 casualties. It was the sad privilege of the Canadian Prime Minister to plant maples over the graves of Canadians in France. We think of the solemn utterance of John Bright during the war of the Crimea: "The angel of death has been abroad throughout the land. You may almost hear the beating of his wings. There is no one, as when the first-born were slain of old, to sprinkle with blood the lintel and the two side-posts of our doors that he may spare and pass on." They begin to come back to us in invalid ships, maimed and broken, some with an empty sleeve, some with eyes that will not see the beauty of the earth any more, some with wounds that will heal, but all with the glory that will not fade. You understand, just as we begin to understand. For four years the shadow was over this country. Not only at Arlington and in the parks and squares of your great cities and towns, but in slumbering villages and quiet rural places, there are the stones and crosses which commemorate the soldiers of the Union. They sleep well in their beds on the hill-sides and you cherish their memories and honor their achievements. They gave their lives, as they believed, for country and freedom, and one would think meanly of an American who would suggest that the cause was not worth the sacrifice. So we believe, as Lincoln said, that we must nobly save or meanly lose the last best hope of earth. We believe, whether you agree or not, that we battle for free men, free seas, a free world and that the cause is worth the sacrifice. What is freedom? Separated from the poetry and sentiment which which we surround it, and reduced to the terms of practical life, What is Freedom? It is the right of a man to live his own life, to

CANADA'S RELATION TO THE GREAT WAR

speak the thing he will, to go on the street with his head up, to have his sanctuary inviolate, to have his convictions, and even his prejudices, respected, and to have as much right in the earth as any other man, whether he be rich, or titled, or hold a great office. The freedom for which we contend, as we believe, expresses the sacrifice and endurance, the blood and sweat of many heroic generations, and all the hardly won achievements of our civilization.

Of what avail the plow or sail,
Or land or life if freedom fail.

I have no love for war and no respect for the teaching that war is necessary to give fibre, courage and endurance to mankind. That true human progress comes through slaughter, through the destruction of many of the best things that man has made, and through misery and agony and ruin, is a doctrine that is pagan to the marrow, and that I cannot accept. Nor am I convinced, even though I see that much of the heroism and sacrifice which we glorify is displayed by the common men who do the world's common drudgery, and though we may set against the woe and havoc of war the glory of man—the simple glory of man as revealed on the ships and in the trenches. All that a man hath will he give for his life, and yet multitudes offer their lives freely for the institutions they cherish. Wars, therefore, do reveal qualities, or at least bring qualities into action, that command regard and reverence. But I do not believe that the true glory of a nation is in fleets or in armies, in warlike traditions or achievements, or in numbers left on the field. I have a very different conception of the British Empire, of its spirit and of its obligation to mankind. "Not by might nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts," and I believe that spirit is more truly expressed by the British Empire and the American Republic than by the nations against which we now contend.

We thought this was to be a century of peace and brotherhood. We talked much of the world spirit and the world con-

CANADA'S RELATION TO THE GREAT WAR

science. We had The Hague Tribunal and treaties of arbitration. We were almost persuaded that the nations would learn war no more. But the war came and the world which God made and saw was good has become a welter of horror. I think often in these days of the sentence to which Lincoln gives such solemn emphasis in his second inaugural message: "Woe unto the world because of offences, for it must needs be that offences come, but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh." The true glories of civilization, as I have said, are not in conquest, but in the fruits of government; not in war and its triumphs, but in peace and its blessings; not in the power of an Empire to menace and overawe the world, but in its disposition to do justly and love mercy and keep peace among the nations. As British subjects we believe that wherever the flag has been carried by the valor of British soldiers and seamen, freedom has ripened under its folds, law and order have been established and maintained, the common lot of the common man has been ameliorated, and "sweeter manners, purer laws," in the phrase of Tennyson, have been introduced and extended. I know there are doubtful chapters in the story, but it still is the best story that has been written in this old world and the shadows are hardly perceived in the wide stream of light that marks Britain's pathway down the centuries. Through all these centuries, in order to ensure the independence of the citizen and the integrity of free institutions, Great Britain has fought bloody battles, has overthrown tyrants at home and tyrants abroad, has pulled thrones down and set thrones up, has curbed the power of aristocracies and mocked the divinity of Kings, has poured out treasure beyond computation and scattered the bones of her sons over the whole earth.

But we know that Great Britain cannot be saved by her traditions or by her history. These may stimulate and inspire, but they cannot save. The Empire will triumph and endure if Britons of this generation are as rich in soul and as sound in body as their fathers were;

CANADA'S RELATION TO THE GREAT WAR

if there is the old spirit to endure and the old resolution to conquer. You may recall a sentence in the book which Homer Lea called "The Valor of Ignorance." It is the only touch of eloquence in a book which can be read profitably but with difficulty. He said: "The hunt for old Empires has now become the pastime of solitary men who find on the willow fringed banks of rivers a mud mound and a silence, in desert sands a mummy and a pyramid, by the shores of seas a temple and a song." History has no record of any great political experiment quite like that in which we are engaged, and only the God of Nations knows what is to be the issue. Empires as powerful and as affluent have sunk into moral decay, and intellectual barrenness, and physical weakness, and if we should be overcome the British Empire, now spread across the earth and secure on every sea, may shrink into two islands on the Atlantic, mourning the power and the glory that have passed. But we shall not fail, however long may be the struggle or whatever the sum of the sacrifice. We are told in Ecclesiastes that "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit." If Great Britain is slow to begin she is also slow to end. Through neglect of preparation and political discord and confusion of counsels, as is her way, she holds and gains and triumphs. We do not know when the fleets will return to harbor or the armies from the field. But we have faith and confidence that they will not be overcome and that the flag will not go down. We believe that those who fight will continue to bring honor to British arms and that those who fall, and they will be many, as Trevelyan said of the heroes of Cawnpore, will "bear in their breasts the wounds that do not shame." In our faith there is no arrogance. In our confidence there is no contempt for those against whom we contend. "For frantic boast and foolish word, Thy mercy on Thy people, Lord." In war or in peace we are the King's subjects. All that we have of strength and courage are at his command. God rules upon the sea. His will runs upon

CANADA'S RELATION TO THE GREAT WAR

the land. We trust Him and lean upon His mercy. We do not claim that the God of Battles is peculiarly our God or that the sum of human virtue is expressed in British institutions. We do believe that:—

He hath sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat,
He is sifting out the hearts of men before His Judgment Seat,

and whether nations rise or fall still it is true that the Lord
God Omnipotent reigneth.

