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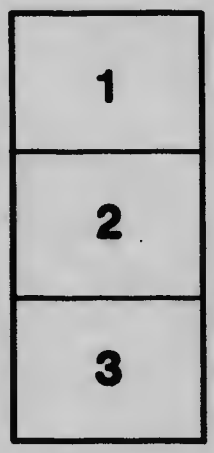

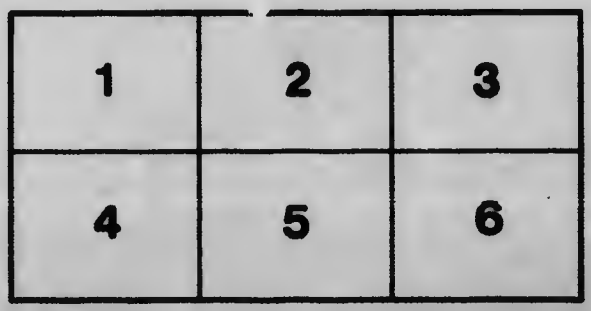

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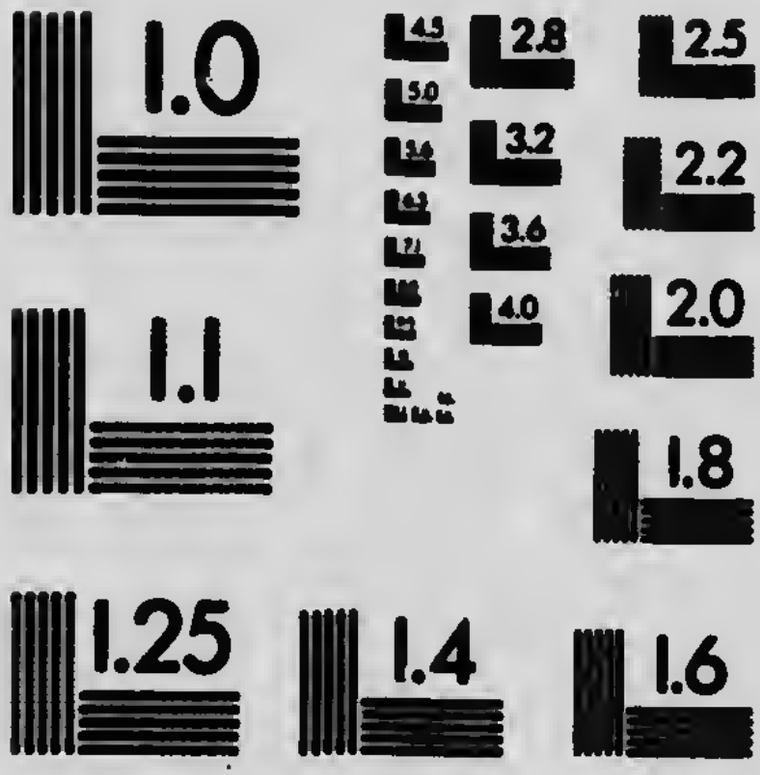

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The possible action of Canada in the cause of International Arbitration

Speech delivered by Mr Henri Bourassa, at the Lake Mohonk Conference, May, 14th, 1913

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Up to the present hour, Canada, a mere dependency of Great Britain, endowed with a large measure of internal self-government, but deprived of all the powers and responsibilities of state, has played no part in the world of international politics.

The constant evolution of the principles and powers of government in the British Empire, and the growth in population and wealth of the great dependencies of Great Britain, are rapidly bringing us to the day when Canada and the other self-governing British communities will have to assume the responsibilities of manhood, either as independent nations or as real partners of Great Britain in some new form of federated association.

In either case, Canada, with her immense territory and superabundent natural resources, which are already attracting a yearly growing number of settlers from all countries of northern and central Europe, with her exceptional advantages for cheap and rapid communications with Europe, — Canada is bound to play an important part in the affairs of the world; and that part ought to be favorable to the cause of peace and good will among nations.

No existing community of white men will enter the state of nationhood with less causes — passed, present or future, historical or economical, accidental or permanent — of quarrels with the outside world, with keener motives, both moral and material, to be at peace and to see peace prevail in the world.

The geographical position and economic conditions of Canada are such that she has a deep and growing interest in the preservation of peace, not only on the continent of which she forms an important part, but on the two oceans bordering her shores and giving her communications with Europe and Asia.

The peculiar configuration of the country, practically cut into three distinct regions by the barren table-land north of Lake Superior and the lofty chain of the Rockies, make it of vital importance to Canadian trade that the sea routes of both oceans remain uninterrupted, and the free transit on rail, between Canada and the United States, unhampered.

That inconvenience cannot be overcome by sea communications around the north shores of Canada, such as the United States are on the point of creating through the Panama Canal. May I interject here that from the viewpoint of peace and justice, Canada will thus be spared the temptation of protecting her own interest at the expense of international equity?

Besides, the farming and manufacturing industries of Canada, the development of her vast natural resources, the completion of her transportation facilities, will demand, for many years to come, an enormous importation of capital. There is not an industry in Canada which is not directly or indirectly indebted to foreign investors. For years, those investments were practically confined to British capital. For various causes, which need not be indicated or analysed here, British money lenders are getting to be rather close fisted; but foreign capital is pouring in, from the United States especially, also from France, Belgium, and even Germany. Canadian borrowers are fully aware — and they feel it keenly at this very moment — that, in time of war, or during periods when war is simply apprehended, money is more difficult to obtain, a higher interest or discount rate has to be paid, loans on short call are withdrawn; so that, if the period of strain lasts, the financial status of the borrowing country, though at peace, is disturbed nearly as much as that of the country at war.

* * *

Apart from those purely economical causes, Canada has, in her political conditions, in her ethnical composition and historical traditions, numerous and powerful motives to stand by the cause of peace and arbitration.

Although British by her political allegiance and constitution, largely English-speaking — though more so in appearance than in fact — and protestant in majority, Canada is in reality a conglomeration of white men from various European countries, and will likely preserve that composite character.

First among the non-British elements come the French Canadians, the pioneers of the country. By a curious train of circumstances, they have been the most constant and faithful upholders of British institutions; they have resisted all plans and tendencies favorable to the annexation of the country to the United States; while preserving jealousy their racial characteristics, they have put no obstacle in the development of a broad and thoroughly Canadian nationality, of which they are, in fact, the real founders.

In the field of international affairs, they are sure to be found on the side of peace and arbitration. They are, at the present time, the staunchest opponents of the movement on foot to drag Canada in the vortex of European quarrels and rivalries. Although they have renounced long ago all ideas of a political connexion with France, they have kept for that country, whence they draw the food for their intellectual nourishment, a sentimental attachment which makes them view with favour all tendencies to maintain a good entente between Great Britain and France. This implies in their mind no spirit of animosity against Germany, because the actual causes of bitterness and rancour between modern France and the new Teutonic Empire are all posterior, by many years, to their complete secession from the country of their origin.

Of course, in spite of their steady progress in number, education and wealth, the relative importance of the French, as a national factor, decreases gradually with the growing invasion of foreign elements, coming either from English-speaking countries or from Germany Scandinavia and Slavonic Europe.

* * *

Immigration is likely to be the problem of Canada. Various causes, which need not be analysed here, tend to make the assimilation of foreigners slower in Canada than it has been in the United States. This is not the occasion to dwell on the advantages or inconveniences which may result to Canada, as a nation, from the resistance of those new cosmopolitan strata to the pressure of assimilation. But as a factor in the framing of a public

opinion favorable to the international peace and arbitration, it is decidedly advantageous and powerful.

Most of those foreigners — and this applies also to a certain extent to the people of the British Isles — have come to Canada largely because they were given to understand that Canada is a country where peace, order and liberty prevail, a country free from the entanglements of international rivalries, with their dreadful sequel of conscription, of military and naval budgets, of heavy taxation, of the burdens of armed peace and the horrors of war.

They can easily be enrolled in the ranks of the persistent opponents of military Imperialism and blatant jingoism.

The longer the non-British preserve their ethnical characteristics, the better disposed they will be to accept and uphold the principles of arbitration, which would lessen if not altogether suppress the causes of conflict between their native land and Great Britain. They will also view with favour any movement to assert the right of Canada to remain neutral in British wars not directly connected with the interests and safety of Canada, — in those wars especially in which their father land may be drawn.

If that doctrine of colonial neutrality, which was practically acknowledged by Great Britain fifty years ago, finally prevailed over the new imperialistic tendencies, even before Canada could assert it as a nation or a co-partner of Great Britain, it would have a beneficient and far-reaching influence upon the councils of Great Britain. It might, for example, induce the British government to change their views with regard to the proposal made by Mr. Choate, in the name of the United States, at the Hague conference, in 1907, to abolish the practice of piracy on sea in time of war,— which proposal, though approved by two thirds of the delegates present, was left in suspense principally on account of the opposition raised by the representatives of Great Britain.

Let us hope that the next conference will see the same proposition renewed, accepted by Great Britain, and put into practice by all maritime powers.

Its adoption would free Canada from even the semblance of a pretence to enter into the dangerous game of naval armaments, either on her own account or as a contributor to the British naval organisation.

* * *

The most important factor, perhaps, in the education of Canada as an upholder of peace and arbitration lies in her long preliminary stage as a dependency.

Viewed from that angle, the state of colonial subjection and irresponsibility, detrimental as it has been to the intellectual and material development of Canada, may have a marked and beneficient effect on her future course, either as an independent nation or as a powerful partner in a British Confederacy.

On her own account, Canada has had no quarrel with any one. She has no conquest to answer for, no wound to heal, no grudge to satisfy, no claim to adjust, either subjectively or objectively. For many years to come, she will have no need of colonies, no shadow of a pretence to covet new territory—not even the "pious" desire of conquering, stealing, bullying or killing "inferior races", in order to inculcate in them the tenets and habits of a "superior civilisation". The great "christian" powers have hardly left her any chance of entering that field of "education" and "improvement", of assuming her share of the "white man's burden".

Once the safety of trade secured on sea, there remains in the world but one country with which Canada can be in trouble: the United States.

May I devote the latter part of these remarks to a brief consideration of what the relations of Canada with the United States have been, in the

past, what they are at present, and what they should be in the future?

In fact, this is the root of my subject. The general state of international unrest is nothing, after all, but the transmission, through the ramification of international rivalries and alliances, of some local points of friction between individual States. The part that Canada will be called upon to play in the game of international politics will depend mainly upon her relations with her powerful and sole neighbour, the United States of America.

* * *

Elaborate preparations are just being made to commemorate the century of continuous peace between the two great English-speaking nations. The object in undoubtedly worthy of recognition and mutual congratulations.

I hope it will not be considered ungracious if I recall the fact that, although war has not been actually declared between Great Britain and the United States, there have been, during those hundred years, long periods of strained relations, and, on several occasions, serious and acute causes of misundertanding which brought the two countries on the verge of armed conflict.

The most practical manner of celebrating that centenary of peace would undoubtedly be, in both countries, the adoption of measures and the propounding of sentiments, most likely to eradicate all possible causes of dissension. Foremost among those measures should be the solemn pledge to resort to arbitration in all present and future cases of dispute. Naturally, that pledge should be mutually sincere, and resorted to even when sordid interests or jingoistic clamours may try to raise obstacles and trouble.

But the main object I have in view, in recalling the past instances of strained relations between Great Britain and the United States, is to point out that in none of those instances Canada was involved, directly or indirectly. More than that, Canada was not concerned in either of the two bloody conflicts which were terminated, the first by the Treaty of Versailles, in 1783, the other by the Peace of Ghent, in 1814.

The protracted struggle which culminated in the self-creation of the American Republic arose from the resistance offered by the English colonists to the pretension of the British authorities to tax them without their consent or participation.

Although we, Canadians, resisted the temptation to join hands with the "rebels", we continued the same struggle, by more pacific methods,and finally secured the acknowledgment by Great Britain of the principle for which the founders of the American Republic had fought.

The war of 1812-13 was due to the persistency with which Great Britain exercised on American vessels the so-called right of visit. Although they stood loyally by Great Britain on the battlefield, Canadians had no sympathy with and no part in the cause of the war.

The agitation raised in the United States over the delimitation of the northern boundary of the Western States — the "fifty-four forty or fight" war cry of the Clay-Polk electoral contest, in 1844, — took place long before Canada had possession and control of the territory in dispute.

During the protracted Civil War, the sympathies of the Canadian people were much more divided than the sentiments of the British. With the Trent incident and the raids of the Alabama, they had nothing to do.

The fenian incursions across the frontiers of Canada were a repercussion of the thorny problem of British rule in Ireland — a matter entirely foreign to Canada.

With the Venezuela incident, Canada, of course, had nothing to do.

The latest dispute, on the determination of the Alaska boundary, was finally settled in a manner not altogether acceptable to many Canadians;

but the settlement being the result of an agreement concluded between the governments of Great Britain and the United States, over the head of Canadian authorities, it could hardly be called a bone of contention between Canada and the United States.

* * *

In no instance whatever has Canada brought Great Britain in clash with the United States. She has never caused even the slightest degree of trouble or estrangement between the two countries.

This is peculiarly remarkable in view of the fact that Canada is the part of the British Empire most closely connected with the United States, —the two countries being divided by an imaginary line, much over four thousand miles long (counting the boundary of Alaska).

Of course, it would be puerile to pretend that the relations between the two countries have always remained **au même diapason.**

There were occasions when the smaller nation thought that the bigger one had a slight disposition to bully her.

Naturally, demagogues, politicians, panic-mongers, flag-waivers, and various other species of dealers in cheap patriotism, have not failed, at times, to hit hard at the "Yankee"—just as, at the other extremity of the field of politics, disappointed politicians or despondent thinkers have occasionnally fallen into the advocacy of national or commercial union with the United States. But, on the whole, it can be accurately stated that the vast majority of Canadians are equally determined to preserve the integrity of their Canadian nationality and to live on terms of peaceful rivalry and friendly relations with their powerful neighbours to the South. Annexation would be regarded by most Canadians as detrimental to both countries; a war between the two countries would be abhorrent to all.

All these facts and features, enlightened by over a century — as far as both countries are concerned — of friendly relations, should be of good omen for the future. Why should Canada, when a nation or a free partner of Great Britain, prove to be a more troublesome neighbour to the United States than she has been as a self-governing but externally irresponsible colony?

* * *

Naturally, if both countries want the future to be worthy of the past, they must remain true to their best traditions and resist firmly the temptations of greed and the appeals of jingoism.

Canada should be clear sighted and patriotic enough, and have a sufficient degree of self possession, to discourage the tremendous pressure now brought to bear upon her to drag her in the folly of naval armaments, either by contribution to the British fleet or by the organisation of a navy of her own, for which she has not the slightest need.

On the other hand, the people and government of the United States can do much, either by action or by inaction, according to circumstances, to develop the good feelings of their growing neighbours and educate them in the process of building up a peaceful, progressive, truly christian democracy. They can do as much to spoil them forever.

The influence of the United States in Canada is considerable and far-reaching. The contiguity of their territories; the community of language and origin; the natural co-adaptation of climatic and economical conditions, which brings an enormous exchange of goods, under all degrees and kinds of customs' tariffs; the constant interchange of population, now much more equally belanced than formerly; the enormous circulation in Canada of American journals and publications of all kinds:— these are all causes which tend to make of Canada, in many respects, a replica of the United States.

Those causes operate with all the greater strength that they are not checked, in Canada, by the counterpoising influence of any other country close by.

From a purely national point of view, much could be said of the inconveniences resulting to Canada from that peculiar situation.

Upon such an occasion as the present one, it is more fitting, I think, to indicate the advantages Canada has derived from that radiation of forces originated in the United States; and above all, to point out in what manner that influence could be used to draw Canada to the cause of peace and arbitration.

* * *

The services which the great American Republic has rendered, though unwillingly or unknowingly, to her young neighbour, have been of vital importance and of permanent effect.

In declaring their independence, the inhabitants of the thirteen English colonies opened the eyes of British statesmen to the dangers of Downing Street rule in the colonies. They thereby paved the way to our constitutional liberties, and, as a result, secured the consolidation of the British Empire.

In proclaiming the so-called "Monroe doctrine", at the urgent request of the British Foreign Secretary, George Canning, the United States practically made Canada safe from aggression on the part of the other nations. And this has been unreservedly accepted by all British foreign ministers from George Canning down to Sir Edward Grey.

It must be confessed that the Monroe doctrine is looked upon in Canada, to day, with much less favour than in Great Britain, Nevertheless, I venture to say that it should hold good, provided it grows broader and adapts itself to actual and coming circumstances, and is not lowered to the level of rank jingoism or narrowed to the measure of party exigencies or sordid interest.

As a declaration of the right and determination of all free communities in America to govern themselves unhampered by the domination or pressure of European nations — with due regard, of course, to existing rights —it ought to be kept alive, and Canada should stand by it as strenuously as the United States or any other free American community.

Naturally, if it is to endure, it must carry as a reciprocal consequence the abstention of American nations to interfere in the affairs of Europe, otherwise than for the protection of their citizens and the safeguard of their interests.

As between American communities, it should remain what it was meant to be: the exercise of a noble and disinterested prerogative on the part of the oldest and most powerful American nation, to uphold the rights and liberties of her younger sister nations, but never to be used as a "big stick" to bully and terrorise into subjection the weaker states of America.

On the other hand it should not be meant to abrogate the eternal laws of justice, applicable to all nations, at all times, and therefore not be invoked by any American community, last of all by the great English-speaking republic, against the right adjudication of any just claim on the part of any European or Asiatic nation.

Finally and above all, it should not be raised as an obstacle against the adoption of general laws of arbitration. On the contrary, it should be enlarged and enlivened so as to become one of the main supports of the noble doctrine to which this conference is devoted.

* * *

It is by the evolution of the Monroe doctrine and its adaptation to the broader code of international arbitration that the people and governement of

the United States can accomplish most in the creation of a sound public opinion in Canada.

Nothing could retard the progress of the peaceful and confiding dispositions of the Canadian people as much as the conviction or the mere suspicion, that any one constituted in authority in the United States, is bent on making of Canada a "mere adjunct" of the Republic.

Nothing could more successfully develop those same dispositions, and draw Canada to the cause of international arbitration, than the marked evidence which the great American Republic could give of her determination, not only to advocate arbitration, but to put it in practice in all possible disputes with the weakest as well as with the strongest nations.

The creation of the International Waterways Commission, with a view to adjust the claims of the numerous parties interested in the enjoyment and development of the vast water shed common to both countries, has been a good step in that direction. It is a practical beginning in the establishment of measures tending to prevent causes of conflict and to settle all difficulties by way of arbitration.

Another beneficient measure would be the establishment in Washington of a permanent Canadian office, of a semi ambassadorial character, working in free cooperation with the British Embassy. The governments of the United States and Canada would thus be kept in close and constant intercourse. The views of the Canadian government, on all questions of common interest, would be communicated first hand and in full to the authorities of the United States.

* * *

May I close by saying that the spectacle of two great democracies, perpetuating on the Continent of America some of the best features of the leading races of Europe, free from the crushing burden of armaments, and living side by side in a state of peaceful emulation, would be one of the most appreciable assets of humanity?