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Mr Sir Geo. Foster



Address

of the

Right Honorable Sir George F. Foster, G. C. M. G.

Minister of Trade and Commerce for Canada

at the

Annual Banquet

of

The Canadian Society
of New York

The Biltmore

Saturday, November Twenty-second, 1919

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RIGHT HON. SIR GEORGE E. FOSTER, G. C. M. G.

COMPLIMENTS OF

The Canadian Society of New York

ROOM 1314

30 BROAD STREET, NEW YORK

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However, the Chairman has helped me out somewhat and I have this consciousness that wherein I lack in my unvarnished speech, which will be made up of catches here and there, the gentlemen who come after me are stalwarts everyone and where I fail to fill in they will do it most admirably I have no doubt. So you are in for a fairly good time this evening.

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RIGHT HON. SIR GEORGE E. FOSTER, G. C. M. G.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, I will make my introduction short. I believe I am more of a democrat than my friend, the Chairman. It made me feel that I had a half-year's study ahead of me to find out just all his introduction meant. I want to thank him, however, for his particularly fine introductory speech. It was short but very full. I have caught up enough threads of philosophy from that speech to cheer my heart and keep my thoughts going for many weeks to come.

I thank him for his kind allusions to Canada. Of course he had to allude kindly to Canada. He came from there. (Laughter) The best that is in him originated there. His chief merit is that New York has not spoiled him. (Laughter) So that though in every way it was very pleasant, it was what a good loyal son of Canada would be expected to say. And it warmed the atmosphere.

I have always had a horror of speaking first to an audience with which I am not acquainted. I like to see some other victim first on the altar and to watch his distress as the curtain raising approaches and to see how the audience appreciates what he says. I get in this way an idea of the audience and what it wants and I can accommodate myself to its mood, set my bark on the current and then it goes almost of itself.

However, the Chairman has helped me out somewhat and I have this consciousness that wherein I lack in my unvarnished speech, which will be made up of catches here and there, the gentlemen who come after me are stalwarts everyone and where I fail to fill in they will do it most admirably I have no doubt. So you are in for a fairly good time this evening.

I confess to a little bit of heartsickness as I face this Society of Canadians in New York, so prosperous looking, so mentally bright and capable, as I should judge them all to be, so fine in expression and personality, and I say this without any attempt at camouflage or flattery, a little bit of heartsickness that you are here and that my Country suffers the loss of such an abstraction from its working forces, mental, moral and physical.

I said to my friend, Senator Foster, that this city was a dangerous lodestone near to which I rather feared to usher our young men. You look so prosperous here that when you welcome our people from "The Land of the Snows", where conditions are a little sterner, and translate them into the wonderful warmth of this atmosphere I am afraid the longing will arise to become participants of the same conditions and under the guise of that genial impression of friendship you will draw in fresh recruits from our people to mingle with your own Society.

We learned to sacrifice during the War. Please put a little in practice now and when they come show them a bit of your rougher moods so when they see that side of the picture they will make up their minds to go back to Canada and rough it. (Laughter)

After all, we get good out of all these seemingly unfavorable tendencies and wherever one goes, whether it is to New York, or Boston, or Cleveland, or Philadelphia, or elsewhere and comes up against the Canadian section there one is glad he is a Canadian because Canadians almost invariably have made good. The rock bottom fibre has been in them and they have kept it and improved it and it has given them confidence and gained them esteem and won for them positions of emolument and of honor, and what Canadians have done Canadians can again do. So we are proud of our ex-Canadians and proud of our Country, that such progeny goes out therefrom and approves itself in the contest of life in wider spheres.

But you do us a good, absolutely and positively, and Canada is stronger today that a Society like this exists in New York, and that similar Societies exist in other cities of the United States. And the United States is stronger and friendly relations between the two are better, and

the world peace, which comes from world knowledge and the mingling of the different units of the world one with another is better assured. This transplantation and intercourse tends toward the removal of prejudices, the dispelling of ignorance, the meeting on a heart-to-heart, man-to-man-level, and finding that we are all very similar units of the common humanity and have our virtues as well as our faults. Ignorance, prejudice that comes from ignorance and lack of association have been the cause of nine-tenths of the quarrels among nations and the great wars of the world.

Passing out from the active into the suffering stage, for that has yet to be traversed, the Great War has done one thing of incalculable value, it has made the world acquainted with itself. It has thrown units of humanity from every part of the globe into side-by-side contact, where they have slept together, worked together, talked together, fought together and died together and they have thus gained a knowledge of each other that can never pass away. This influence for good will dispel world ignorance and unite mankind for the works of peace and for greater human progress. The world's prejudices and ignorances have thus been largely dispelled and today from thousands of added sources, from the film pictures, the news portraitures and the tales of suffering and victory, interunion has taken place, the gateways of the world have been thrown open and the hearts of the world have been united in appreciation and sympathy for the common ideals of justice and liberty. The war passes and the desolation thereof, but an influence like this remains, grows, stimulates and multiplies itself a thousand-fold as it goes marching on through all generations.

Now, Mr. Chairman, this was not at all the line of thought that I had intended to follow, as little as I had been thinking about it. I suppose it would be true to say of you people down here that you haven't altogether gotten away from your love for the old land, the old-new land. It seems to be almost a contradiction to call our Country the old land; but anyway it is your Fatherland. Those of you who are here haven't quite gotten away from the old Fatherland. Tonight as you sit around these tables you look back into old Nova Scotia, Prince

Edward Island and New Brunswick, back to Quebec, Ontario (I will not mention any other provinces because these former were the limits of Canada when you came away), you look back and see the old firesides gleaming, and see there the dear old mother, the father, your brothers and your sisters. You never get away from them. New York with all its wiles can never, never destroy the old home ties, knitted in you when you were born. The maples of our country, its brooks, its fields, its bright skies form a part of yourself and you will never get away from them. It is the inherent spirit that germinates in the birth and incorporates itself in the upbuilding of the child and he carries it with him wherever he goes and it makes him a better citizen in the country of his adoption. It is not a thing to be deplored, it is a thing to thank God for daily that those impressions of youth and the attachments thereof remain with us. They are the purifying influences of the later days when we have so many temptations to meet and so many difficulties to solve. So when I look upon your faces I know that what you are thinking about tonight is the scenes and memories of the old land when you were boys and girls there.

However, once you are away from frequent contact with the old places, other loves, other employments and the pursuits of business engross your attention that you cannot always be thinking about the old land, and gradually the haze of distance thickens, impressions become less vivid and less strong and your connections with the old land in the way of news are not well kept up, so I imagine that, as I stand before you tonight, the question in your minds is, "How are they getting along in the old land? We get scraps of news, but we don't quite know what you have been doing there all these years. Can you tell us something?"

There is just my trouble. If I erected the old fireside here for the moment and asked you to sit by while I told you a tithe of all that has been going on in Canada for the last fifty years we would be here pretty nearly until next Christmas. So I cannot undertake that. The most I can do is to flash on here and there a rough outline and allow you to fill in. Well, we have been "going on" in Canada for the last fifty years. Since we became one Dominion we have been going on. We have been "going

on" in a way which at times to some people has appeared slow, but after all we were laying the foundations for the swifter, steadier after-progress. Maybe that is the really sane way of getting along after all.

First we had, as your old settlers in the United States, the struggle for mere physical existence. Our progenitors, French and English, or French and British shall I say, so as to include all, came to a new country, virgin and beautiful, yet wild and frowning. They had only their bare hands, their sturdiness of nature and the ineradicable hope of bettering themselves, and they came there with these as their sole equipment and endowment. They found themselves in the face of a wilderness of frowning forests, vast open spaces, great unknown rivers, vast unsailed lakes, forbidding mountains and a strenuous and variable climate. The first great struggle was the struggle for existence against nature and against the red man, who was sometimes an ally and sometimes an enemy, but always an element of danger.

Gradually, as in your old pioneer days, the struggle for existence succeeded, nature was subdued gradually to minister to human wants and men aggregated themselves into scattered settlements and these later grew into villages and towns. The struggle at first was to see what nationality should dominate. It went on for a long period, but after 1759 and 1763 that matter was settled, and the old pioneers settled down to another struggle which was not for existence but for organization. Later came the struggle for development and expansion, slow at first and after a time more rapid. Provinces were outlined, municipal institutions founded, schools and churches built, law, order, and government achieved.

The four old provinces were for a long time the only settled portions of Canada but in 1860 and after expansion took new wings and great areas were added westward, and we opened up for ourselves a new world, passed the great lakes, ascended the mighty rivers, crossed the snow-crowned mountains, bathed our young nation's feet in the waters of the Pacific and took final possession of a country stretching thirty-five hundred miles from ocean to ocean with deep breadths of latitude. For Canada is not a narrow ribbon strip by any means, but a country which in acres is larger than your United

States, and which in volume and in quality of resources equals and, in some respects, surpasses your own, a country which lies there for us to conquer, the last great temperate zone area to be filled up, flooded with humanity and made to blossom under our management into peace, happiness and boundless prosperity.

The struggle for expansion has gone on there most successfully. Today we have in Canada thirty-eight thousand six-hundred miles of railway, three lines piercing the Rocky Mountains and seeking the Pacific Ocean on the west, a railway system which measured by so many miles to the inhabitant, or rather so many inhabitants to the mile surpasses that of any country in the world. And if you want to see a railway system really well managed, come up and visit Canada and run through on one of the great Canadian roads.

Of late we have had a development in the way of government-owned railways and just at this moment the railways in Canada are fairly evenly divided between the Canadian Pacific and all the others, aggregated into one system under Canadian government control. We own about an equal number of miles each way, government and private. We can test out the efficacy of the two systems and it is going to be interesting to see how they will work out.

We have gone into steel shipbuilding since the War came on and in the midst of all our other expenditures we are putting into ships seventy millions of dollars, and already have fifty-five either on the stocks, or which have taken the water and are now carrying our produce overseas.

We have developed and expanded our country as I told you. The field crops of Canada now amount to a yearly value of sixteen hundred millions of dollars. I am going to ask you to take your pencils, consider our population of eight millions of people and find out what our aggregate production is per head. Then look to your own and make the comparison.

Today, manufactured products of our country run up to about four billions of dollars for the year. Do the same with reference to that and then throw away from you the preconceived idea that Canada has made no industrial progress since you left it. She has gone ahead

so rapidly that you would be very much surprised to see what we are doing and have done.

Do you know that when the War broke out there never had been a fuse made in Canada? Do you know that we went to work, organized, made fuses, shells and explosives and during the last six months of the Great War we furnished fifty per cent of all the eighteen pound explosive shells used by the British Army? (Applause)

Our foreign trade for the last year has been in the neighborhood of twenty-one hundred million dollars. Perform the pencil operation on that as well and you will find that our foreign trade stands as high or higher than that of any country of the world per head of our population.

The estimated organized wealth of Canada today is in the neighborhood of seventeen billion dollars. Perform the pencil operation on that again. Some of you American-Canadians, or Canadian-Americans and some of the people of the United States have been making a great stir as to the necessity of branching out in trade with South America. Well, you trade with South America! During the last seven months, if my memory serves me right, you put up to us a bill of five hundred and forty millions of dollars for goods we have bought in the United States and you have only sold three hundred millions of dollars worth to all South America that you make such a splutter about, and you have only sold four-hundred and seventy-five millions of dollars worth to the whole of Asia that you are pushing so hard for and here your little neighbor to the north gives you an order for five-hundred and forty million dollars in seven months. And Canada always pays her bills. And yet ungracious that you are, when I come down here and give you a good Canadian dollar you dock me ten cents on it. (Laughter)

Canada did something in her War effort. I am just touching matters lightly here and there. Canada didn't stop one single moment when the peril showed itself in 1914. Her answer was given before it was asked, "We are ready! We are willing!" When the question, "When?" was put, she replied, "Now!" (applause) She didn't wait to be educated! Not a bit of it. We sprang to the front for two reasons. One was that we were part and parcel

of the Old Empire (applause) and without an hour's hesitation, without any need of a teacher we saw that the British Empire was aimed at and its extermination determined upon. We did not wait for time nor tide. Inside of a very few weeks thirty thousand well equipped Canadian troops sailed across the Atlantic Ocean, the biggest army that ever crossed seas previous to that, and inside of four months they were fighting in France and Belgium and they continued going and they continued fighting. In all five-hundred and fifty thousand of our men donned the khaki and four hundred and twenty thousand went across the seas. They fought as well, were as full of resource and as successful in that War as any other army (applause) and Canada was at the front during the whole War, and during that time the Canadian divisions never lost one single gun.

There are five-hundred and fifty thousand graves of British men in France and Belgium, making sacred forever the soil of both those countries to us and to all British people, and forty-five thousand are graves of Canadian soldiers. Our casualties were one hundred and fifty-nine thousand. When the armistice was signed we had two hundred and eighty-six thousand men "over there." We have brought them all back, we have demobilized them all with the exception of a fragment and we have brought back something else—sixty thousand of their dependents gathered up in Scotland, Ireland, Wales and England—the results of the lovemakings of our soldiers abroad. So that we have had a gain coming back to us of about sixty thousand, where we have to put on the other side forty-five thousand graves of our dead.

That much for our War effort. Now that the soldiers are coming back, what are we doing for them? We have today in Canada the finest equipment and service for the re-establishment of soldiers in vocational training and otherwise of any country in the world (applause) with more men passing through them in point of numbers than any other. We have spent already on that fifty-seven millions of dollars and we shall spend fifty million more, which will be altogether one hundred and seven millions of dollars for the re-establishment of the disabled, the putting of them into a position to earn their own living and become self-dependent useful citizens.

We have a soldiers' land settlement system on which we have spent over fifty-five millions of dollars and upon which we will expend one hundred and fifty-three millions of dollars in all, training men and placing them and supervising and helping them when on land and thus add to the productivity of the country. We have paid to our soldiers one hundred and fifty-three millions of dollars in gratuities alone, outside of all allotments and soldiers' pay, absolute gratuities added after their service was over. In doing that we do not say we have done as much as we ought or would like to do, but I am giving you these facts to show that we are doing the most we can.

Today in Canada we are settling down on the final evening or two of our last great Victory War Loan. I have been a Canadian Finance Minister, as the Chairman mentioned, and when Finance Minister I ventured at one time to put some inscribed stock upon the Canadian market and I thought we had done a pretty good thing to have Canada take up a few hundred thousand of a domestic loan. Necessity is the mother of invention and experimentation is the stepping stone to actual results. When the War got well under way the money market of the world was closed to Canada. We couldn't borrow a dollar in Great Britain. We could not borrow much in the United States, especially when after due cogitation you decided to jump in, as then you wanted all your money for your own work. Then we were pressed to new action. I must say it, even though a member of the Embassy is here tonight, we got a great shock with reference to our Mother Country. We had an idea that her wealth was immeasurable, that her banks could never be depleted, that her money bags were piled so high that you never could get to the end of them. What happened? In the second year and the third year of the War Britain wanted food for her people, for her armies. She wanted our wheat, cheese and bacon and the old Mother Country said, "We need them but we cannot send a pound bill to pay for them." We said, "All right, Old Mother, you have been good to us, maybe we can do something for you" (applause). We went to our people and said, "We want money to lend to Great Britain to enable her to buy food for her peoples and her armies." We got it and we have advanced to Great Britain

four hundred and thirty-two millions of dollars for these purchases.

We have gone to our country for six successive loans. We have raised upwards of two billions of dollars in Canada itself out of our earnings and our savings, and the last Victory Loan which was launched after the War and war enthusiasm was over, we went to our people and said, "We want more money. We must have at least three hundred, four hundred or five hundred millions, if you can make it, to pay our bills, give credits to the countries that need it and keep our country in position to 'carry on.'" The people responded, and instead of our objective of three hundred million they put into the till six hundred and seventy millions of dollars (ap-
plause). That is going some (laughter).

This result was due to the splendid working force we had. The business men of Canada banded themselves together. Parties were forgotten, creeds were forgotten, everything that tends to disunite peoples were forgotten, they all massed in one splendid co-operation of heart and sentiment, wrought together for an unselfish object—to sustain the national credit and to keep the country solid financially and to enable her to "carry on." Efforts like that have done much to bind our people together into a unity of work and co-operation, enabling us to build up and solidify the national sentiment, which is a great asset to us now and for the future.

I want to touch just two points more. One point I want to touch is this, I am not quite sure I ought to touch it first or last, but I will take it up as it occurs to me. Canadians went overseas to fight, not from a lust for blood, nor with a desire for conquest, with not a shadow of a hope or a thought or a desire for gain of any kind. Why did we go? Why did Britain fight? Why did France and Belgium fight, and the Allies with them? Did they fight simply to tear the crown off the heads of the military autocrats of Europe? Surely that was not the purpose of the War. Surely these were not the ideals that buoyed men up and carried them through in the great endeavor. We wanted to save Belgium, we wanted to save France, we wanted to strike down the Hun Autocracy, and we went in to do that and to make it impossible for that malign influence ever afterwards to

dominate Europe and the world. (Applause.) We went into war to secure the freedom of peoples who had been tyrannized over and set them up into a full manhood of national liberty and security and to guarantee the continuance of these conditions.

We took upon us when we went into the War the responsibility of seeing that the War was carried through, not only to the point of deposing the malign influence but of introducing in its place the benign dominion of peaceful constitutions, justice and liberty-loving measures. That is what we went in to do. (Applause.)

We in Canada think that the War is not over insofar as our duties are concerned, nor will it be over, we think, until we and all others that were allied together to perform the sacred trust which we undertook, shall confirm to Europe and its peoples the blessings of peace and good government, of national security and national strength. (Applause.)

If we fail to do this, what shall we plead before God's throne as to why we shed a single drop of the blood of our people in going "over there" at all? The work has been begun. Autocracy has been shattered but we are responsible in the face of the world and before God for seeing that the full fruits of victory are made sure and that the peoples we have liberated are established in that liberty.

When we leave these tables loaded with luxuries we will go to our homes, so happy, so comfortable. But, O, my friends, let our minds travel a little bit over Europe. Great God! What a state Europe is in this very day, this very hour! She is on the verge of chaos and anarchy! Millions on millions of her people are starving! There are millions in Europe today that know not where to look for help unless now that their oppressor has been deposed, the Allied Powers stay with them until they are erected into something like durable forms of security to ensure peace and human comfort. Can we leave them as they are now? Away with all our petty party strifes! Away with all our selfish individual notions! Away with all our national isolations, pleas for selfishness and indifference! Loose the flag of interested human brotherhood. Let us come within the warm light of that ideal

that lit up the fields of War and made its horrors endurable, and let us see that the torch of Liberty lighted by us for all the world shall not be extinguished in tortured Europe, that the hopes of freedom and security for these peoples which have been fostered in them by the splendid actions of the Allies in War, shall not be shattered and destroyed by our lack of action in times of peace. For if ever in this world the cry of "Come over and help us!" has been sent out from distant lands, it is sent to you people in the United States and to us in Canada, and to the Allied peoples the whole world over, "Don't leave us just now! Come over and help us!" The blood that has flooded the land of France and Belgium and other lands in Europe, the graves that have been dug there, the dead that remain there forever under the fair skies and blooming poppies, are all calling to us, "Don't leave your task half done!" Let us then finish it like men and forget our party quarrels and our national littlenesses in the face of a world duty owed to humanity!

I am confident that we will carry out the duty we commenced so bravely and continued so faithfully. If we do, we will have done for the world the greatest service ever chronicled in the annals of history and assured for ourselves the consciousness of a duty as gloriously completed as it was bravely assumed. (Applause.)

