

spheres of human activity and influence. The unregulated unity of the British Empire saved France, Britain, and civilization from that catastrophe.

Our present troubles are bad enough. Victory has its cares as well as defeat, but they are ephemeral and will be soon surmounted. Defeat would have reversed the engine of progress, and democracy would have been driven back centuries on its tracks. If I may venture to quote what I said at the Imperial Conference of 1907, when Sir Thomas Smartt and I first met—I think we two and the present Colonial Secretary are the only survivors—I ventured to say, in reference to the Empire, “We agree with our colonial comrades of the Dominions that all this unity is worth concerted effort, even if that effort at the outset costs us something. The federation of free commonwealths is worth making some sacrifice for. One never knows when its strength will be essential to the great cause of human freedom, and that is priceless.” I venture to say that that prediction has been gloriously proved by great events.

EMPIRE BASED ON GOOD WILL.

The British Empire is a saving fact in a very distracted world. It is the most hopeful experiment in human organization which the world has yet seen. It is not so much that it combines men of many races, tongues, traditions, and creeds in one system of government—other Empires have done that; but the British Empire differs from all in one essential respect: it is based not on force but on good will and a common understanding. Liberty is its binding principle. Where that principle has not hitherto been applied it is gradually being introduced into the structure.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE EMPIRE.

It is that willing and free association of many nations and peoples which this Conference represents. Think of what we stand for in this room to-day: first of all, the long political development of the British Isles, with all its splendours and its pains, the crucible from which the framework of the whole great structure has emerged: Canada, British and French; South Africa, British and Dutch—both now great Dominions whose unity is due to the free and willing combination of two proud races in a single nationhood; Australia and New Zealand, British civilizations both, but planted and developed with a genius of their own by the sheer enterprise and grit of their peoples in the furthest antipodes; India, a mighty civilization, whose rulers were known and respected throughout the western world before the first English post was planted on Indian soil. Side by side with these the wonderful varied Colonies and Protectorates in their different stages of development, which the Secretary of State for the Colonies is here to represent. In all the marvellous achievement of our peoples which this gathering reflects I am most deeply impressed by the blending of East and West—India with her far-descended culture and her intensely varied types, so different from ours, present in this room to concert a common policy with us in the world’s affairs, and to harmonize, as we hope, still more completely her civilization and ours. It is our duty here to present the ideals of this great association of peoples in willing loyalty to one Sovereign, to take counsel together for the progress and welfare of all, and to keep our strength, both moral and material, a united power for justice, liberty, and peace.

OPENING SPEECH BY MR. MEIGHEN.

MR. MEIGHEN: I think we might utilize a little more time to-day in hearing statements from some of us of a general character, and then proceed to lay down the agenda. As far as I am concerned, I do not think that anything I might say in advance of our discussion of concrete subjects would be of sufficient importance to warrant a day or even half a day’s adjournment for preparation. I have listened to the illuminating introduction of the Prime Minister, and I cannot bring myself to think that such a pregnant and impressive address will not receive full publication.

It is unfortunate that the obligation of speaking first should fall upon me, the least experienced representative of the Dominions, but it is well that the traditional order of precedence be followed.