



RECTORIAL ADDRESS

BY

The Rt. Hon. Sir ARCHIBALD SINCLAIR, Bt.,
P.C., C.M.G., LL.D., M.P.

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW,
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LIFE, LIBERTY
AND THE
PURSUIT of HAPPINESS

Address delivered at the
University of Glasgow
7th February 1940

by

The Right Hon.
Sir Archibald Sinclair, Bart.
P.C., C.M.G., LL.D., M.P.

on his

INSTALLATION as LORD RECTOR

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LIFE, LIBERTY AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

Far be it from me to attempt to explain why you have conferred upon me so coveted and so undeserved an honour as to be elected your Lord Rector ; but your election came to me as a call from the young men and women of the greatest University in Scotland, and I will tell you how I interpret it.

First of all it said this—Scotland expects her representatives at Westminster to remember that she is and intends to remain a nation. She is proud of her part in world history ; she accepts willingly her share of responsibility as a partner in the British Empire ; it is no small thing that over a quarter of the surface of the globe peace and

justice reign within a political structure largely built up and now in no small part maintained by Scotsmen. But she has played that part in the past, and means to go on playing it in the future, not as an assimilated but as a distinct nation with traditions, institutions, culture and ideals of its own ; and, if Scotsmen are to play that part in the future as worthily as they have played it in the past, they must continually develop the material resources, improve the condition of the people, and strengthen and enrich the spiritual and intellectual life, of their own country.

We must not take a narrow or petty view of so big an undertaking. Let us stamp out that inferiority complex which afflicts some Scotsmen who sneer and cavil at the English and complain about injustice and anglicisation—and count up all the Scotsmen and Scottish firms working in England and all the Englishmen and all the English firms working in Scotland and by some elaborately

contorted mathematical process manage to lump them all together on the debit side of our national ledger. Disparagement of England (and of the value to both countries of working closely together) is unnecessary to confirm our faith and pride in Scotland.

There are great fields for constructive improvement in the political, economic, industrial, rural, social and even, I would say, the educational conditions of Scotland. Let our approach to these problems be not reactionary and sentimental but progressive and practical. Let us take for our motto the saying of the French philosopher Bergson :

*Think like men of action—act like men
of thought.*

Let us remember this too: that the solution of those problems which so grievously tax our thought and energies—the problems of poverty, health, housing, nutrition, education, of enabling our universities to keep pace with the expanding needs of the times—

a problem into which you have enabled me to gain some insight in recent months—of regaining our export trade, of unemployment and of improving the organisation and widening the range of our industries—let us remember that the solutions of these and many other problems must be studied and worked out, not primarily by politicians but primarily by the educated, practical men and women like yourselves whose energy and leadership can alone give health and vigour to our national life.

And when we talk glibly of problems and statistics let us keep the reality of human lives behind them always in our minds—the struggle of the crofter to win a livelihood from his soil and to keep his son or daughter at a University; the hard, perilous, and ill-rewarded toil of the fisherman, who is now playing his part so bravely in the defence of our shores and shipping; the frustration of men and women's lives by unemployment, the enslavement of men's

bodies and minds by poverty, disease and vice, the common fairness and prudence of giving to children a fair start in life—food, clothes, decent housing, education, and room to play.

For the full solution of these problems action on a wider scale than we can work on in Scotland—indeed on an international scale—will, of course, be necessary. But meanwhile much can be done by action inside Scotland to reduce some of these evils. Some powers exist of which full use is not being made. Others could be obtained when plans of action have been framed by Scottish organisations or local authorities. Much more still could, in my belief, be done if Scotsmen would unite in demanding wider powers of regulating Scottish domestic affairs through an assembly of the elected representatives of the Scottish people. But until the day dawns, there is not a man in Scotland so weak or humble that he cannot by his exertions or example contribute to the im-

provement of our Scottish standard of life.

So I take to heart your message to stay true and loyal to Scotland, but I ask you too so to pledge yourselves. For from your ranks will spring the leaders in the spiritual life of Scotland and in the fields of medicine, law, science, scholarship, industry, art, letters, education, and local or national politics. Every one of you is equipped for holding a position of responsibility, of authority, of trust in one or other of these fields of activity. On your character and sense of duty, on the soundness and honesty of your work day by day, on your vision and purpose and on your faith, which is moral energy, the quality of our national life will depend.

Let us then pledge ourselves to work together in our several fields to enrich the lives of our fellow countrymen and to add the lustre of peaceful and progressive achievement to the glorious traditions of our race.

And another part of your message was

surely this—that we in Scotland are born, and mean to remain, free men and women, that for no specious promises of imperial glory, or of economic security, will we barter that freedom and that we will yield it neither to vested interests or totalitarian demagogues at home nor to ruthless and threatening tyrants abroad.

Every nation, as indeed every individual, has its ups and downs. No man or woman can go through life without tasting the bitterness of failure and defeat ; but sometimes defeat itself proves the very stepping stone to victory. That we in Scotland have passed through hard times in recent years, that our consciences have been stung by the condition of our people in their homeland, these are not signs of decadence but of the need of radical adjustment to new conditions. The worst sign of decadence in a nation is indifference to freedom—the growth of the herd instinct, the unwillingness of men and women to think for themselves and to defend

unpopular causes, the desire to find a man on whom to throw the responsibility for government which in a democratic country belongs to the individual citizen. So it is that, as Milton says :—

*But what more oft in nations grown
corrupt*

*And by their vices brought to servitude,
Than to love bondage more than liberty,
Bondage with ease than strenuous liberty.*

Never did I expect, when I first read that as a young man, to see such grim and ghastly illustrations of its truth as now in the willing self-subjection to cruel and corrupt tyranny, of the German and Russian peoples. Nor, on the other hand, did I ever hope to see in these days, when aeroplanes and mechanization have conferred such overwhelming advantages in war on big and rich nations, such a glowing and heroic example of the power derived from moral energy in defence of freedom as is shown to the world to-day by the valiant Finns.

Who are the dangerous enemies of freedom in this country? Not the Fascists or the Communists—they are merely the thorns on its stem. No, the dangerous enemies are, first, those who insist on putting their own personal or sectional interest before those of the people as a whole—in defiance of John Stuart Mill's definition:—

*The liberty of each limited by the like
liberty of all,*

and the like liberty of all surely means in these days that our democracy must find the means of providing a decent standard of housing, food and useful employment and, especially for the children in this country—in nutrition, education, physical development and start in life—real equality of opportunity. Let me observe in passing that it is a mistake to use the words democracy and liberty as though they mean the same thing. Democracy is merely a form of government which may work well or ill. Its main principles are the rule of law, to which even govern-

ments are subject, and the responsibility for government of the individual citizen—a responsibility which he exercises through the choice of his representative in Parliament, to which the Government is responsible, and through his influence on public policy by writing, or speaking, or through political, economic or social organizations. For my part, I believe that democracy is the form of government under which we are most likely to achieve and maintain the widest and fullest measure of liberty—and one vital test of its efficiency as a vehicle of liberty must be its success in clearing the pathway of life for talent and merit wherever it can be found.

Other enemies of freedom are those who, perhaps inspired by faith in a good cause, are soured by defeat or delay and demand a short cut—even unconstitutional action—in order to gain their ends. There are many examples in history of good causes which have been advanced by unconstitutional

action, but in a country in which majority rule prevails such victories are rare and the advocacy of unconstitutional short cuts, instead of reliance upon reason and persuasion to convert a minority into a majority, must impair the foundations of democracy.

Then there are those enemies of freedom who on one pretext or another would tamper with the freedom of the Press. Newspapers are not infallible ; nor are they, nor ought they to be, immune from criticism ; but the best corrective of the mistakes of either newspapers or politicians is an educated and enlightened public opinion and, in normal times, the stronger the currents of controversy which surge through Parliament and the Press, the cleaner (for publicity is the best antidote to corruption), the more vital, progressive and robust our national life will be.

But the worst enemies of freedom are those who are intolerant of the rights of others—those, for example, who demand freedom of

speech for themselves but refuse it to others. In our domestic politics, intolerance creates friction which delays reform, but, in international relations, it creates enmities and jealousies, which find expression in great armaments (in themselves a menace to freedom) and impel us towards the catastrophe of war.

In this shrunken world, in which the nations are indissolubly members one of another, we must never allow ourselves to disregard foreigners, or unfairly to exploit the Imperial power and possessions which our forebears have bequeathed to us to the detriment of foreigners, or to make it a reproach against any of our fellow countrymen that they remind us of our duty to our foreign neighbours. Far from envying or desiring to curb the economic development of other nations, we must realise that with the return of peace and confidence and the revival of international trade, the prosperity of other nations will be an essential condition

of our own. Freedom imposes upon us the obligation to respect the rights and dignity of others, to recognise the brotherhood of man, and, while remaining loyal to our own country, to be steadfast always in our adherence to those moral principles through the universal application of which humanity, including our own people, can alone attain to happiness and peace.

Peace—that was the last but not the least part, I think, of your message to me. Not that you feared war, but you and I hate it for its cruel unreason, for its wastefulness in treasure and still more precious life, for the tragic sorrow it brings into our homes. So I strove for peace but I was sure of this—that peace is not the mere absence of war. There is no longer any war in Poland but innocent men and women are being led out to mass executions on flimsy pretexts merely to make room for German colonists. There is no war, and has not been, in Czecho-Slovakia; yet batches of

students, men and women, have been shot without trial merely to terrorise the people. The Jews are not at war with the Germans, yet they are being deliberately humiliated, enslaved, deported and starved. Whole populations of Jews, Poles, Czechs and even Germans are being rooted out of their homes where they and their families, and perhaps their forebears before them, have lived, and are being herded about Europe like cattle, while the Nazis relentlessly assail the ideals and practices of Christian civilisation from Catholic Poland to the Bohemia of John Huss.

That may not be war but assuredly there is no peace but only torment for millions of unresisting people in Europe to-day. So I say that you cannot have peace merely by refraining from war; on the contrary, failure to resist evil must ensure its triumph, and the triumph of Nazi Germany would mean the extinction of freedom and justice in Europe.

Nor can you obtain peace by passing resolutions praising or invoking it. It is only in a community, the government of which rests upon consent and law, that the passing of resolutions has the slightest influence on events and upon the formation of public opinion. For Scotsmen and Englishmen can no more deflect Herr Hitler from his pursuit of world domination or from the persecution of innocent men and women on racial, religious, or political grounds by passing resolutions than could the Czechs or Poles or the Jews, because his government rests not on law or consent, but on force.

Nor is it true that the blessings of peace and order are the natural rights of man. On the contrary they are prizes which he can win only by constructive achievement and hold by resolute guardianship. Peace, then, must be the supreme object of a constructive policy of world order, and those who wish to substitute the rule of law for the anarchy of power politics must first impose their

will on the rulers of Germany and then accept responsibility for the maintenance of peace and order—responsibility, which is the self-discipline, involving if necessary self-sacrifice, of free men. Our object must be, in the words of Pascal, to ensure that whatsoever is just is mighty and whatsoever is mighty is just.

To the attainment of that aim we must direct our thought and study even during the present War. For no peace is worth the name that does not do two things. First, it must cast down the altars of the Moloch State and establish upon a firm basis of individual liberty the rights of man. Let those rights be proclaimed after the war in a formal document like the Scottish Covenant, or Magna Carta, or the Bill of Rights, bearing the signatures not only of the victors but also of the representatives of all the nations of Europe which are prepared to accept the responsibilities of maintaining the fabric of our Western Civilisation—the equality of

man before the law without distinction of colour, race, nationality, religion or class ; his right to a standard of life and education sufficient to enable him to realise his full possibilities of mental and physical development ; his freedom of speech, of writing and of access to information ; and his right to the protection of the law against intimidation, torture and imprisonment without trial. So let the civilised nations of Europe, following the example of the United States of America a century and a half ago, declare the right of the individual citizen to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

And the second thing that the peace must do is to break down the barriers between the nations of Europe—the barriers of the mind and spirit, the barriers to trade and intercourse, and the barrier of competitive national armaments. It is no more necessary to sacrifice to this object the historical, cultural, and spiritual identity of nations or their distinctive domestic institutions than it

has been to sacrifice those of Scotland to the pooling of national sovereignty in these islands ; but the evil spirit of nationalism and especially of economic nationalism, must be exercised. A few years ago, even a few months ago, such words would have fallen on your ears with a Utopian ring ; but now, under the heat and pressure of war conditions, unity of policy and command between Britain and France in the military, diplomatic, financial and economic fields is being forged. Mr. Daladier proclaims it with pride and adds :—“ This wide economic collaboration is open to all peoples who wish to associate themselves with it. It is not exclusive,” and Mr. Chamberlain responds in the words—“ There is nothing which would contribute more towards the permanence of its results than the extension of Anglo-French collaboration in finance and economics to every nation in Europe and indeed perhaps, to the whole world.” The mood of Statesmen and peoples has changed

in the last seven years under the harsh teachings of experience, and it may change again with the fluctuations of fortune. Let us then be resolved to keep their feet so far as we can on those Liberal paths along which they are now travelling towards the goal of peace and good-will among men. And when the fighting is over, it is from Glasgow and other Scottish and English Universities, those citadels of learning and enlightenment, that men will look for leadership in a new Renaissance and for workers with skill to help build the new world. Nor will they look in vain to Glasgow.

But the indispensable condition of attaining such a peace is Victory. For the Nazi system is a cancer in the body of Europe devouring all the healthy tissues of civilisation—the ideals of freedom, justice, mercy, tolerance, the search for truth, sanctity of contract, and the rule of law—replacing them with perhaps the most cruel, remorseless and perfidious, and certainly the most

efficient tyranny that the world has ever known and erupting, into whatever country it penetrates, in those loathsome festering sores, the concentration camps. To root out this evil thing, to prevent its pollution from spreading to other innocent but weak nations and even to our own homes, to bring the healing touch of liberty to Poland and Czecho-Slovakia and to Germany itself is as noble a cause as any to which free men have ever dedicated their lives and fortunes.

Let us then hold our banner high—and not stain it with any taint of hatred or self-seeking. In fighting Herr Hitler's foul conspiracy against the principles and decencies of Western Civilisation, none can doubt the justice of our cause. But destiny will require of us something more—will, energy, sacrifice in its defence; for it is a gigantic and hazardous enterprise to which we are committed—one which calls for the greatest effort that the whole nation and every individual man and woman can exert.

Our forebears, faced by more terrible odds than now confront us, resolved in the Parliament of Aberbrothock to continue the war for freedom "which no good man loses save with his life."

You, their descendants, must not and will not fail in service to a cause even greater than that for which they fought so valiantly and well—the cause of freedom, not for one nation only, but of freedom for every nation limited by the like freedom of all.