

TOAST TO AUSTRALIA  
BY HIS EXCELLENCY MR. J. ALAN BEESLEY, Q.C.

AT THE ANNUAL ST. ANDREW'S DAY DINNER OF  
THE MELBOURNE SCOTS  
November 24, 1979

Mr. President, Your Excellencies, Distinguished and Honoured Guests.

It has been said by a very eminent Scot, "What a Scotsman is, only the Scotsman knows, and he will not tell". It was with some trepidation, therefore, that I accepted the invitation to speak tonight to this distinguished gathering, for I am not of Scottish origin. I did so, however, out of sensibility of the signal honour in being asked to propose the toast to Australia at the Annual St. Andrew's Day Dinner of the Melbourne Scots.

I speak to you as a Canadian descended from English and Irish ancestors, equally divided on both sides of my family tree - and on most other issues. I hail from a province called British Columbia, rather than from Nova Scotia, where, I am told, members of Prime Minister Fraser's family resided before coming to Australia, while others remained there. I am, however, from a city named, appropriately enough, Victoria. (Victoria is very like Melbourne, albeit a smaller edition, both cities being very beautiful state capitals, thought of by many as centres of the establishment, well known for their gardens and their wonderful climate, including the heavy dews - and Scottish mist - necessary to make the flowers bloom. There is, however, an important difference. Victoria is said to be the only city in the world where a dog can be seen chasing a cat down the street while they are both walking.) Moreover, unlike Melbourne, it is not famous for its massage parlours.

I am conscious, as are all good diplomats, of the fable of the great man who rode into a village seated on a donkey. When all the villagers bowed and spread palm leaves before them, the poor little donkey thought it was all

for him. So, since I am here in a representative capacity, as Canadian High Commissioner rather than as a Scot, in my own right I hope it will not be taken amiss if I begin with a few words about Canada, particularly the Scots of Canada.

Already I am treading on dangerous ground, for that well known Canadian in exile of Scottish descent, the economist John Kenneth Galbraith, is quoted as saying that when he was young "We referred to ourselves as Scotch and not Scots. Years later I learned that the usage in Scotland was different." I cannot refrain from wondering, however, what kind of an impression we would be giving if we were meeting under the auspices of a Society named "Melbourne Scotch". Perhaps before the evening is over the distinction will be blurred. (Indeed, on the basis of my recollection of last year's solemn but festive St. Andrew's Day Dinner, when I was privileged to attend as a new boy, an apprentice speaker to be, that may not be all that could become blurred.)

I seem to have wandered from my point, which was, as I recall, somewhat blurrily, to say something of Canada before toasting Australia.

It is a truism in Canada, and has been for generations, that the Scots are a vital element of the Canadian national mosaic. No less an authority than the noted surgeon Sir William Osler is quoted as stating "They are the backbone of Canada. They are all right in their three vital parts - heads, hearts and haggis."

Although I grew up in communities in which Canada's Scottish heritage was particularly evident, nevertheless, in preparation for tonight, I did weeks of serious research, as befits an apprentice, as I recall from my days as an articled law student, on the many, many Scots who have made such magnificent contributions to the exploration, settlement, development, independence and nation-building of both Australia and Canada. I have concluded, somewhat regretfully - for I could have been the one of whom it is said that he spoke three times longer than requested because his secretary had inadvertently stapled

three copies of his speech together - that even to attempt to record merely the names, yet alone the accomplishments of Scottish Canadians and Scottish Australians, would take far more than my allotted time. Moreover, to do so would be to bring coal to Newcastle. Surely this gathering needs no reminder of the great tradition which Australian Scots share with the Scots of Canada and of many other countries, including Scotland. Indeed, those of you around this hall tonight personify this great heritage.

As for Canada, the names of famous Scottish Canadians are legion, and the litany of Saints - and sinners - is a lengthy one. It is well known, for example, that one of the two truly great Canadians who together forged the Canadian Confederation was Sir John A. MacDonald, whose Scottish origins and familiarity with all Scotch qualities has never been called into question. (On that last mentioned point he was quoted as stating in the House of Commons "Look here McGee. The Government can't afford two drunkards ... you've got to stop.") If I may condense a hundred years of history, I need refer only to the fact that Canada's present Foreign Minister (our Secretary of State for External Affairs) bears the proud name of Flora Macdonald. None of that should surprise anyone. *Le plus ça change*, etc. What may be of interest, however, is that the great French-Canadian who also played, together with Sir John A. MacDonald, such a major role in the founding of Canada, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, had this to say: "If I were not French I would choose to be - Scotch". What more can be said? In the face of that statement who can quibble in choosing between Scots and Scotch.

There are more serious things which I would say to you, however, representing as I do a country so like Australia. I have been travelling around this wonderful country - this island which is a continent, this continent which is a nation - making speeches on the subject "Australia and Canada: Common

Interests and Values - Similar Problems and Opportunities". The title says it all. Nevertheless, being a lawyer as well as a diplomat, I shall spell it out. (I was once brash enough as a very junior officer - to tell the wife of my then Ambassador that I felt when offering some gratuitous advice to me that she was spelling out the obvious. She replied "Why not Alan, you always do that to me".)

It is my conviction that no two countries have more in common than Australia and Canada. Indeed, on the basis of my experience here over the past two years, it is no exaggeration to say that there is hardly any development in the art of Government in Australia which is not of interest to Canada, nor a comparable event in Canada which is not of some relevance to Australia.

Of all our common attributes, of course, the greatest heritage we share, next only to our common language, is the Westminster style of Government, and the legal, political, constitutional and cultural institutions which go hand and hand with that marvellous concept of parliamentary democracy for which we are so indebted to the British Isles. We have, of course, improved upon that system, or so we believe - with apologies to Bob Hawke - by combining it with a federal constitutional structure. I won't start a debate by asking if we have also improved upon the common language.

Canada also owes a great debt to the French, of course, who together with the British are one of the two founding peoples of Canada. We also are indebted to many other countries, however, for the Canadian national image is not so much that of the melting pot as that of the mosaic. More recently - and belatedly - we have begun to appreciate how very much we owe also to our own native peoples. It is not possible, however, even for the most objective observer, to comment upon what makes Canada or Australia what they are, what has shaped our destinies and coloured our visions of the future, without

paying tribute to the Scots who have played such an incredibly significant role in each of our two countries. Whether we consult the history books or the pages of Hansard, the art galleries or our very maps, there is overwhelming evidence that there is hardly a field of human endeavour in either of our two countries in which the Scots have not made an important contribution.

In doing my homework for tonight, as every good apprentice should, I leafed through the pages of a volume devoted to the Scottish contribution in Canada. Included in the chapter headings were: The Scot in the Fur Trade; Patterns of Settlement in the Past; Scottish Settlement of The West; the Highland Catholic Tradition in Canada; The Scottish Protestant Tradition; The Scottish Military Tradition; The Scot as Farmer and Artisan; The Scot as Businessman; The Lowland Tradition in Canadian Literature; the Gaelic Tradition in Canadian Culture; The Scottish Tradition in Higher Education; The Scot as Politician; The Scot and Canadian Identity; and Scottish Place-Names in Canada. Even that extensive litany is only a partial list. It omits, for example, the Scottish contribution to Canadian humour, on which I shall touch in a moment.

Even in the field of the media, which, according to that eminent Canadian of Scottish descent, Marshall McLuhan, is also the message, there is further such evidence. We Canadians have a national magazine called Macleans and I am informed that until very recently there was a strong possibility that Australia might have a national newspaper called Murdochs. What Marshall McLuhan actually said, in the city of Vancouver on July 30, 1959 was "the medium is the message". Less than ten years later he amended this famous statement to read "the medium is the Mess-Age".

Speaking of mediums, another great Canadian of Scottish descent,

William Lyon Mackenzie King, Prime Minister of Canada longer than any other Canadian politician, is now known to have regularly consulted with mediums of a different kind in reaching decisions as to how to govern Canada. Some say this explains a lot ... . This was not known during his lifetime, but perhaps the loftiness of his level of consultation should have been guessed from his campaign message of 1921 "Hark the Herald Angels Sing, William Lyon Mackenzie King". He settled for nothing but the best in his selection of Campaign Managers. Mackenzie King's more modest campaign slogan of 1935 was "King or Chaos", a Canadian version of the more well-known saying derived from the other founding people of Canada "après moi le déluge". Perhaps Mr. King's most memorable comment, and he was not famous for his humour, was that made in reply to a member of the opposition who asked him what he would do if confronted by religious demonstrators parading naked in his garden. He replied, "I would send for my honourable friend the Leader of the Opposition". (Many years later, Canada's first Prime Minister of neither British nor French origin, John Diefenbaker, when actually confronted by a group of naked women demonstrators from the same religious sect commented, somewhat ambiguously, "This is nothing new to me.") In fairness to Mr. King, I should quote a more typical comment in a more serious vein and in keeping with the inspirational tradition of his Scottish heritage. Mr. King later said: "Were man never to fail he would be a God; were he never to aspire he would be a brute." I'm not sure just why I quoted that.

Even in the linguistic field the Scots have made their own distinctive contribution in both countries. It is well known that Gaelic is spoken widely in that Canadian province so appropriately named Nova Scotia. Indeed, the only Gaelic College in North America is located in Cape Breton in the province of Nova Scotia. According to the Encyclopaedia of Australia "Gaelic is not often

spoken in Australia. There have been societies or clubs formed from time to time for the purpose of studying the language but attendance has been relatively small." Nevertheless, this gathering needs no reminder of the eminence of the great Australian Scotch College, nor of the contribution it has made to Australia through its many distinguished graduates, many of whom are here tonight.

One of the most distinctive linguistic contributions of Scotland was referred to by the best known of Canadian humourists, Stephen Leacock, when he said "I can write on this controversy with the friendly neutrality of a Canadian. In Canada we have enough to do keeping up with the two spoken languages without trying to invent slang. So we just go right ahead and use English for literature, American for conversation and Scotch for sermons."

The reference to a Canadian humourist reminds me of my encounter in Melbourne with one of the greatest of the many notable Scots of Australian origin, Sir Robert Menzies, a distinguished lawyer, politician and statesman, beloved and respected not only in Australia but in the world at large, particularly in the Commonwealth of Nations to which he made so significant a contribution. I had the good fortune of meeting him during my official calls in Melbourne. He gave several pieces of very sound advice, most of which I shall keep private. He did, however, make one observation on the Canadian sense of humour which he asked me to pass on to the Canadian Government. He told me "There have been many great Canadian politicians but lately they have all had one failing: they lack a sense of humour." I believed him sufficiently well that I did not report his comment to the Canadian authorities. I need not dwell on the greatness of Sir Robert here, for he is well known to this gathering as the former Chieftain of the Melbourne Scots, but I would have been remiss if I did not pay tribute to him on the occasion of proposing a toast to Australia.

I would not wish to conclude either without mentioning the name of another famous Australian of Scottish origin who has also not only risen to the highest elective office in Australia, but has achieved great distinction abroad in the field of international affairs, namely, The Right Honourable The Prime Minister, Malcolm Fraser, who is, unfortunately, unable to be with us tonight due to illness. The name of Fraser is revered in Canada as that of the renowned Scottish explorer Simon Fraser whose memory lives on in many ways, as in the title of a Canadian university, and, like Murray of Australia, in the name of one of Canada's mighty rivers - the Fraser - which flows through my own province. The early settlers, and particularly the gold seekers who attempted to navigate that river, especially in its most difficult parts, known as Hell's Gate, might well have been forgiven if they had been heard to mutter the phrase "Life wasn't meant to be easy". May I take this opportunity of expressing my sincere hope that Malcolm Fraser, Prime Minister of Australia, Vice-President of the Melbourne Scots, will recover very soon and rejoin us with his health restored to his usual hale and hearty self.

Last year Sir Zelman Cowen filled me with great admiration, as he has done on so many occasions, when he spoke to the Melbourne Scots on St. Andrew's Day. Sir Zelman stole my thunder completely, of course, in quoting from a speech made at a St. Andrew's Day dinner in Winnipeg in Canada, by the then Governor General of Canada, Lord Tweedsmuir, himself a famous Scot. I can do no better, however, than to emulate Sir Zelman with my closing quotation from the same speech, which, while delivered in Canada could just as aptly have been said in Australia, or wherever else the Scots have made their mark - which is to say, of course, almost anywhere in the world. I quote Lord Tweedsmuir again, the famous Scot from whom I quoted at the opening of my comments tonight:

"It is a high privilege to have Scottish blood, but it is a privilege

which involves a heavy responsibility. We are supposed to be dour and hard: that may be so, but we are also exceedingly sentimental. We are supposed to be careful about money. No doubt we are. But in any case which touches our heart or imagination we can be crazily generous. We are pragmatists and realists and critical of folly, but we are also dreamers. We are a reverend people, and yet we can be exceedingly free with our sacred things... . Even in our most serious and solemn moods we have touches of comedy. We are a law-abiding people, because we know the value of law and order and yet there is no race in the world which has so little real respect for constituted authorities. We accept them as an inevitable convention, but we refuse to do more than that. We are free thinkers in the best sense of the word."

If these phrases epitomize the Scots, they have much application to Australians as a whole. Perhaps Australia owes more than it knows to the Scots.

It was the great Scots Bard Robert Burns who wrote "O Wad some Power the giftie gie us to see ourselves as others see us!" Gentlemen, I see Australia as a magnificent country. I know Australians as a wonderful people. I regard the Scots of Australia as having a right to be justly proud of their contributions to both.

Will you join with me in proposing the toast to Australia.