

**McGill University**

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**TWO ADDRESSES**

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*By order of the Board of Governors*



*The last Founder's Day Address delivered by  
Sir Arthur Currie, Principal and Vice-Chancellor,  
October 6, 1933*

*An address prepared by Sir Arthur Currie and  
on account of his illness read for him by  
Lieut.-Colonel Allan A. Magee, D.S.O.,  
at the University Veterans Dinner,  
Toronto, Armistice Night,  
1933*

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# FOUNDER'S DAY

OCTOBER 6th, 1933

*Address of Welcome to the Visitor and  
Annual Founder's Day Address to the Staff  
and Students by Sir Arthur Currie, Principal  
and Vice-Chancellor of McGill University.*

One hundred and twelve years ago our University obtained its Charter. It functioned at first as part of "the Royal Institution for the Advancement of Learning," which had been organized twenty years before by His Majesty's authority, by virtue of an Act which provided for "the establishment of Free Schools and the advancement of education" in the English-speaking communities of what was then Lower Canada. McGill was the corner-stone of that early educational structure. Thus, in its origin, it was in a large sense the product of Royal Authority; the educational child of Royal interest and guidance; the six Governors or Directors of the Royal Institution appointed by the Crown were specifically commanded to visit the University frequently,—with the title of Visitors,—and to report to His Majesty and His Majesty's Government upon its condition and its progress.

The early years passed, years of great difficulties and discouragements, which at times bordered on despair. The little College struggled with internal dissensions, with lack of funds, with want of local sympathy, with rapid changes in administration and teaching personnel. The Visitors, or Governors, of the Royal Institution, were themselves at variance, on policies and remedies. There was no agreement, no unity of effort. It was reluctantly thought that in the circumstances the College could not longer survive, that its doors would close, that the hopes of its Founder for its usefulness were forever shattered.

But its Royal connection, the fact of its existence under Royal interest and guidance, again came to its aid. After investigation by Her Majesty's Government, the Charter was amended in 1852 "for the better and more easy management of its affairs and the government of the College." Because of their constant disagreement, the responsibility of the Governors of the Royal Institution, as Visitors, was ended, and to the representatives of the Crown in Canada was assigned that duty. The amended Royal Charter reads:—

"And we do appoint as our Visitor in and over the said 'McGill' College our Governor-General of our said province of Canada . . . who shall exercise, use and enjoy the powers

and authority of a Visitor, for and in the name and behalf of Us, our heirs and successors, in all matters and things connected with the said College."

It is, then, one of our proudest, our most honoured and cherished traditions, the fact that His Excellency the Governor-General of Canada is by our Charter the Visitor to our University, with Royal authority to report to His Majesty and His Majesty's Government, as occasion requires, upon our condition and our progress.

It is a far cry from those early days of struggle to this Founder's Day with its equipment, its facilities, its achievements, its hopes, and its opportunities for continued service. We record to-day another notable page in our splendid story, we erect another milestone in our march of progress. In the vanished years, His Majesty's Representative has always given to the University his interest, his guidance, and the benefit of his wisdom. We rejoice to-day that we are honoured by the presence of His Majesty's Representative in our Dominion, His Excellency the Governor-General. McGill has had many Visitors in the years that have gone, but none more interested in our welfare and our service than His Excellency Lord Bessborough. We are proud to welcome him to-day, not alone

because of his distinguished office, but as the University's friend, as our McGill Visitor.

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Your Excellencies, Fellow Students, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I always look upon this intimate assembly in Moyses Hall at the beginning of each college term as a family gathering, a day when we come together, Governors, members of Corporation, professors and students, to pay reverent homage to the educational mother who has nurtured us. For we are all members of this one great entity, McGill, sharing the responsibility for its welfare and progress. To-day the family gathering is complete. We have the head of the house and his gracious and charming Lady, His Excellency the Visitor and the Countess of Bessborough.

To-day, October 6th, is the birthday of James McGill; it is Founder's Day, a day of remembrance and reverence, of gratitude and challenge, a day of vision. Past, present and future are gathered at one focussing point. Every element in the present occasion provides a stimulus and a summons.

There is first *The Outward Vision*. We come up to the Fall Convocation of our University from our various homes, some near and some far

remote. Many are here for the first time; for others the scenes are familiar. But in all cases, it is inevitable that we should look around. The setting of the University on the slopes of Mount Royal, beautiful at all times but particularly at this time of the year; the City, the great, interesting, cosmopolitan City, which is her home; the nation of which she is a part, all are included in our vision.

We are not content, however, with the mere material factors. The eyes of the mind see deeper than the eyes of the body. We are compelled to consider the time in which we find ourselves, a time of difficulty and danger, an hour that challenges youth to adventure. He must be blind and deaf who cannot see and hear the signs and sounds of a great travail that promises the birth of a new era. It's a fine thing to be a university man to-day, to be going out into the world at one of the most difficult and challenging periods in history, to have the opportunity of sharing in the shaping of these unprecedented new times,—that's the tremendous responsibility and privilege of those who are graduating to-day. And our College in particular is not to be regarded as a local institution for the training of provincial students. McGill has a national, yes, an imperial outlook and mission. Education must have a broad sweep if it is to meet the demands of the new day. All

the circumstances of this hour compel us to lift up our eyes and look outward towards the farthest horizon.

Founder's Day, however, peculiarly obliges us to look *backward*. Our minds revert to that solid and enduring personality whose name this University so proudly bears across the years. James McGill was a pioneer in many ways, but over and above all his exploits in the business world stands his interest in education. We cannot meet to-day without a tribute to his memory and a fresh examination of his purpose in founding this institution. Deeply interested in the future of his adopted country, he realized that a nation can only be great if it has educated leaders, men of vision, knowledge, culture and inspiration, and he knew that these can only come through a due sense of all the values of the past. His zeal for young men of character moved him to make provision for the establishment here of a school for training and discipline. There was a particular reason for his choice of Montreal as the site of his College. He came to Montreal only thirty years after the battle between the two great races on the Plains of Abraham. In our day to speak about tolerance between the two races and creeds is perhaps a platitude, so obvious and simple of fulfilment has that ideal become. But in James McGill's day the bitterness of the war had not yet disap-



peared. He knew that to the great Canadian stream of national life two tributaries gave their strength, the French-speaking and the English-speaking. He knew that without the harmony of these two great races there could be no great future for this country. And I believe that this College of his has been one of the instruments through the years in bringing about the unity and concord that exists and that has made possible to-day a great Canadian nation.

But the vision of a University cannot be limited even to James McGill's personality and time. We must recognize our indebtedness to all the past. We are the heirs of all the ages. The heritages which are ours came out of the yesterdays. All the inspirations and traditions, all the ideals and discoveries, all the nobility of life and human accomplishment, are here for the use of the students who come up to the University. Every hour of your stay here you will be drawing upon the inexhaustible resources of yesterday. Your contacts will be with the great souls of history. They are the foundations upon which you build.

Someone has wisely said that the types of leaders are but three, The Hero, The Teacher, and The Saint. The hero provides us with courage and fortitude, the teacher with truths and ideals, and the saint with righteousness of character. Mighty is the army of past leaders.

They challenge us to-day to be worthy of their adventure.

But what of *the future*? The past is our inspiration, the present is our opportunity, but the future is our hope. We cannot change by one single act the records of yesterday, but the affairs of tomorrow depend entirely upon the efforts of to-day. That is just what makes the opening of a university so critical and solemn. What are we going to do with the future? What ideals are to guide us, what motives will actuate us, what objective have we in view? I do not know how you feel about it, but, as I have said, for me the challenge is irresistible, and heroic. The next few years will be significant beyond the power of exaggeration. To have even a small part in the building of a new order ought to stir the most sluggish blood. It's a testing time for everybody, but more especially for the younger generation. While it *is* possible to overstate the failures of humanity in the last few years, I think we must all agree that the blunders have been many. It remains for the uprising generation to find the better way.

I have already said that the main purpose of a university is creative. But she does not stand merely to create knowledge, to pass on the heritage she has received. That would leave things unchanged,—and the present demand is for change. Humanity can never be content

with leaving things as they are. "As you were" is not a fitting motto or order for a college. No, we must step out into larger areas, assume new tasks, find out improved ways of ordering life. In the long story of the human race, it's the unexpected that happens; at stated intervals new thoughts emerge, every now and again some hitherto unknown factor comes to birth. This is the very opportune hour for such emergence. Everybody is waiting for it. Who knows? Perhaps this generation of students will give it to the world!

But it will not come about without hard thinking. And to you who are spending this year within college walls, let me say that here no shackles will be placed upon your thought. Truth must always be free. No bondage of custom and tradition will here interfere with your researches. Put your passion into your studies and your researches, rather than into your advocacies. We do not want you to be the echoes of a thousand platitudes, but the originators of new and larger ideas. The purpose of the University is not to cram the student's mind with knowledge, but to make him *think*. The primary office of knowledge is to make men *alive*, to send them out alive at more points, alive on higher levels, alive in more effective ways. An education is not just a matter of having more information than your neighbour possesses; it is not a mere getting of the ability to sell your

efforts at a higher figure than unlearned men can do (some of you have had occasion to realize that fact in these years of depression, when often neither the educated nor the uneducated can find work). Neither is an education the possession of that admirable thing called culture. *These are only by-products of education.* The main, sole purpose of education is to make you a thinker, to make you a creator, with an enlarged capacity for life. The reward for reading books is not in the ideas acquired, but in the mental stimulus afforded in the power to think for yourself, to produce ideas of your own.

I bid you welcome, therefore, to the life of creative thought and study. I congratulate you on the privilege that is yours in having a hand in the guiding of a new world order, and I look forward confidently to your acquitting yourselves with honour and distinction, so that you may join the family circle, the company of McGill men and women, standing shoulder to shoulder, poor in ready resources, perhaps, but filled with the breath of life, proud to have surmounted all difficulties in the past, and capable of surmounting the adjacent heights of difficulty, so close and so menacing. Yours is the precious opportunity of erecting a structure on the foundations laid down by the man whose memory we honour today. May it be a worthy temple,

“As lofty as the love of God,  
As ample as the needs of man.”

ARMISTICE NIGHT, 1933  
UNIVERSITY VETERANS DINNER  
TORONTO

*Address prepared by Sir Arthur Currie and  
on account of his illness read for him by  
Lieut.-Colonel Allan A. Magee, D.S.O.*

I deeply appreciate, as always, the privilege of meeting again tonight so many members of the Old Corps and of saying a few words to so many of my comrades of other days. The circumstances of our lives and places keep us for the most part far away from each other, but tonight, and always on Armistice night, whether we are gathered in assembly as we are here, or listening by radio to Armistice programmes, perhaps far distant, or alone and unaccompanied, we who were once members of the Canadian Corps are bound by the ties of a common remembrance. I know that to all who lived through the war years, and more particularly to those who saw active service, today has been a day of sacred memories, different perhaps in detail to each one of us, but yet all based on similar experiences and similar emotions.

With the lapse of years, Armistice Day becomes naturally less demonstrative. The ranks of those who saw service grow yearly smaller, as we pay our toll to time. And in future the day

will grow less weighted with meaning to the generation born in the years between. As our country looks back to it from a widening distance of years, its memories will perhaps remain vivid only in the minds of the veterans, to whom its importance was then so colossal. But whatever changes may come, and however slight may be the recognition of future generations, I hope that Armistice Day may never cease to be impressive. I hope that the two-minute interval of solemn silence will always be more than a formal, statutory gesture, that it will always mean a reverent pause, in which we gladly remember, with tender and grateful thoughts, those who nobly died for our country's ideals. I hope that the graves of the Unknown Soldiers, and our National Chambers of Remembrance, will have their eternal tributes on this day, and that our country, in the years to come, and the generations that knew not war, will not forget.

Tonight, we who came home, move back in memory fifteen years to the hour when our army halted where it stood, when the firing died suddenly away on the Western Front, when the few last straggling shots echoed down the mightiest battle-line the world had ever seen, and were swallowed up in utter silence. Tonight, we cannot recall the frantic cheering and the frenzied rejoicings of the folks at home, as they gave expression to their sense of relief when they

realized that the long nightmare of the years was ended. We recall rather the silence of exhausted effort and of daring hope; we recall that still moment when after four years of a strange life, in which death was ever present, the fighting men were suddenly conscious of the fact that the strain was over and that they had now to adjust themselves to the new world of promised peace and justice and content, which they had been led to believe they were, after all, about to enter. But, like all other silences, there was a puzzled question in it by those fighting men. Was all the agony they had gone through for four years really to achieve its end? Were the hopes which had sustained them, and had sustained their folks back home, through their unparalleled sacrifices, actually to be realized at last? There was a pause without an answer. It was the most impressive and portentous pause in history.

Today the pause—the silence—was reverently repeated. But after fifteen years of the promised new world we were told we fought to create, the puzzled question it tacitly conveyed is still unanswered. The lurid lights of the battle front we knew have been long extinguished by our hands, the mutter of the guns and the crackle of the musketry have long receded down the years. Yet the war and its aftermath are still with us, more terrible even than fifteen years

ago. Its effects have *not* been fully mastered, its issues have *not* been settled,—that is the simple truth, the confession which today brings its shame. Our soldiers, living and dead, performed their part with unquestioned herosim and devotion in those battle days. But in the years since then, the fifteen years misnamed years of peace, the peoples of the world have not so well performed their tasks of understanding the vast forces that were then released, of controlling them and of making good the victory. It is not, therefore, surprising that the men who fought are sometimes, with reluctance, but with the compulsion of obvious circumstances, of the opinion that their sacrifice and that of their comrades who fell was all in vain.

We remember tonight, and it is well that our country should remember, the high resolves of that time fifteen years ago. There was unspeakable sorrow for the great army of youth that had gone so early to its death. We were told that the world would henceforth be safe for youth. But what of youth today, and the opportunity for youth in our modern world? Where, ask the men who fought, is that new world of justice and good-will they suffered so keenly to create? Has the world, has our country, in the fifteen years since the Armistice, kept its promised faith with the unreturning dead? Has the great sacrifice really turned to glory,



the glory of a better time? Has the world done anything more in these fifteen years than give lip-service to the ideals for which our fallen comrades gave their lives? The answer to these questions is found in the actual conditions of the hour. And these conditions are such that Armistice Day should smite the conscience of the world.

I need not dwell tonight on these conditions, with all their horrible and terrifying possibilities. They are known, and some of them deeply felt, by everyone in this room and by everyone listening elsewhere to my voice. We are told in cabled dispatches this week that the international situation in Europe today is practically what it was in 1913 on the eve of the late war. And the rest of the world, like Europe, is haunted by the fear of war, a stalking fear, which for the past nine or ten months has dominated the press and private conversation. There is no sense of security in the minds of European countries today. We are told that all that happened before 1914 is now being repeated; that behind the scenes secret agreements for a new balance of power are being made; that war propaganda is at work again, with the old subtle appeals to what is called national honour, national prestige, or national patriotism; that sooner or later another war will wreck our civilization, and we will stand helpless amid the ruins. The outlook

for humanity is not hopeful, if we take seriously to heart these persistent and disturbing aspects of the world's condition today. And all this is but fifteen years after the signing of an armistice we thought was to end war,—when we said “never again,” when the whole world said “never again,” as a pledge made by the living to the dead. That pledge is now but a faint echo, for old hates are reviving, old fears have come back, and on this fifteenth anniversary of a peace which was to silence battle fronts forever, peace is *not* a fact, but still a dream.

Apart from the threat of war, with its growing cloud, other conditions in our world are equally disturbing. Bitterness and hate, selfishness and greed, are still entrenched in our social and economic and political life. National finances are disorganized throughout the world, taxes are overwhelming, agriculture and business are everywhere prostrated, and unemployment is more widespread than at any time in history. Our world is a world of suffering, of uncertainty, of demon doubts and fears. Our world is not yet done with the necessity for heroism and sacrifice. Returned men are called upon today as never before to aid every movement to establish a just and lasting peace throughout the world, to lighten the burden of armaments, to usher in a new era of good-will and fraternity among the peoples of the earth, to help solve the

new and changing problems of these later years, to rehabilitate the social and economic life of our country, and to compose the hates and prejudices and deep animosities which smoulder and threaten in our land and in other lands. We need, as never before, the healing qualities of devotion and fidelity and self-sacrifice and goodwill and comradeship and friendliness, so that suspicion may be vanquished and justice and mutual trust may be permanently enthroned. All this desire is in harmony with the real spirit of Armistice Day,—the day dedicated to sacrifice and loyal remembrance of others.

It is sometimes suggested—and not, I think, frankly, without some justification—that in the fifteen years of reconstruction or rededstruction that have gone since the Armistice was signed, returned men everywhere have not themselves done all they should have done or could have done to establish that better time to which they looked forward when the war ended; that they have not applied to conditions around them the qualities and the principles of life that carried them through to victory along the battle-line. It may be that we have not been sufficiently aggressive, that having done our bit in other fields, we have too far withdrawn in silence or inaction from subsequent events, and have not imposed or inculcated our ideals and the results of our experiences upon our peace-

time guides and leaders. This criticism of veterans of the war is heard today in every country that had a part in the conflict. If it has truth, behind the truth are, in my judgment, some potent reasons.

Men returned from the front in a spirit of weariness, but in a spirit of hope, looking forward with confidence, after years of trench life to the peace they had been promised. They soon found that their new world was still a world of struggle, a world of bargain and of battle. They found that they had escaped from one ugly world and one disaster, only to plunge into another. They had to struggle and fight for what they felt and knew was a simple right,—some slight form of rehabilitation, and, what was more discouraging, for adequate help for their wounded and incapacitated comrades, and for adequate protection for the dependents of their comrades who had given their lives for their country. I can say without evasion or hesitation that the great mass of returned men in Canada never had the thought that because they fought for their country they were entitled to preferred treatment by their country, in comparison with other citizens. They never, as a rule, contended that because they wore the uniform of our Corps they had therefore a right-of-way to exceptional benefits. There were perhaps some exceptions, as there are always exceptions in every way of

life, but these exceptions are infinitesimal compared with the mass of our men. But on one right all are united,—the right of the wounded and the broken, the right of the dependents of the dead for adequate provision and care.

I am not going to recall the struggles of these fifteen years. There were disappointments. There was even bitterness. There was cynicism. The result is not surprising—that many returned men withdrew from the struggle, in despair, with the feeling that their participation in the making of the new world was not desired. There were disappointments because of administration of soldiers' affairs, disappointments because of inadequate machinery, and indifference. The struggle still goes on. We read in the press of every Province today of the disappointment of different branches of the Legion because of the most recent changes in Pensions Administration and the readjustments of methods. But the voice of the veterans, even on their own affairs, is unheard, or at least unattended.

One of our defects or weaknesses in the past has been, doubtless, a lack of unity. We have not had the same cohesion, the same unanimity that was ours in the old Corps. Naturally, geographical conditions keep us apart as groups of men; but geographical distances may be conquered by a spirit, the spirit of service that should bind us into one great and useful force.

You are a group of University graduates, who are also veterans. You have done honour to your respective colleges by your service to your country in the war years. Your action, and that of your fellow college men who died, incarnated the finest principle which a university can seek to develop—a self-forgetful sense of corporate responsibility. The university is a place of quiet thinking, even of dreams, preparatory to action. It is a training-ground for future activity, in which effort is the product of sound and sane thought. The war combined, as no other way of life, these two qualities. We had to think and dream and plan, and then quickly put the thought into action. In the trenches there was needed more than anything else the sound, calm mind and the sound body—the old idea of true education. The head and the hand acted in harmony. You have had the most remarkable experience that can come to man. You have the privilege of college training, a training in ideals, and you have played your part in the most practical and most disillusioning effort in the world's history, the late war. Whether you should establish within the Legion another body or group is a matter on which opinion is not unanimous. It is for you to decide. But I may say, frankly, that there are many university veterans who are doubtful of its wisdom. Their opinion is that the one tie that binds us, and should bind us, is the fact of service, that the

affirmation "I have served" is superior to all other qualifications; that any other test, whether of birth or training or unit or native place, tends further to destroy our unity. These are considerations, well-meant and kindly, which should be scanned. One thing is sure, that in the troubled days to come we of the old Corps must continue to be as in the battle-hour, not of East or West, of one race or another, of one college or another, but Canadians with a common objective, the happiness and progress of our country.

I am not a pessimist when I think of the future. And I am sure that the returned men who are listening to me tonight are not pessimists, however cynical some of them may be with respect to certain phases of our national life. We have seen dark nights together. And we have also seen the dawn of new and spacious days. I know that as in the battle hours we will again take the morning into our hearts. In our deliberate and final thought, as returned men, we have faith that these moments of discouragement are fleeting, and perhaps misleading; that those whose memories we especially cherish did not make their sacrifices in vain, and that in the end the stern determination of millions of men and women, who are tainted with no spirit of unworthy pacifism, will prevail over those whose views would tend to perpetuate the horrors of war, even though some of these latter may be

seated in the high places of national executive and legislative power.

Armistice Day is primarily a commemoration of the dead. But a commemoration of the dead should be likewise an appeal to the living not to deplore the past, but to awaken our sense of responsibility to make our world less deplorable. The disappointment—even the bitterness—of many who came back may be traced to the monstrous paradox that only because of the nobility of individual sacrifice does war in any way ennoble civilization. We saw at first hand the sacrifice of much that was best in our country. But the weariness and the disillusionment from which we could not escape are no longer fitting to a new generation charged with the tasks of peace. We know from experience the stupidity of war, and the stupidity of those who made or caused wars. Does our responsibility end with condemning the follies of the stupid or the vicious twenty years ago? What can we do as veterans to make the world less deplorable? Are we bestirring ourselves in this night of hysteria which may end in war? Ours is a man-made world, and in it are we doing all we can do to prevent a catastrophe which we will later deplore? Are we fighting to the last, as we fought fifteen years ago, for the vitality and the continuity of civilized standards in public and private affairs, in national and



international life? Are we fighting so that the next generation of youth will not condemn *our* stupidity as we condemned in the trenches the stupidity of our elders in 1914 and the era immediately before it? On those nights and days of suffering and death, when we saw our comrades fall in the fire of savages fed by the so-called gods of civilization, we endured and "carried on," in the firm hope that out of the embers and the broken human dust would rise a new order, in which war and greed and injustice would have no place. That hope will yet be realized, despite discouragements, even in a world which has to make its way out of sickness and despair, if we but keep our shield and our faith, and if we insist on leadership in all affairs—~~all affairs~~ that is not leadership for apathy. If another war comes, the responsibility will not be upon the militarists, but on ourselves, because of our inertia. We are to blame if we allow others, interested only in greed, to take the reins from our hands and drive us into another abyss.

The truest commemoration of our honoured dead will be in the vigorous enlistment of our own lives and capacities in the struggle between unselfishness and greed, honesty and corruption, justice and injustice, and in the serious application to our national problems of those qualities which distinguished our Corps in the war days, and enabled us always to advance and conquer.

Armistice Day reminds our country of the steadfastness of our fighting troops. It should also be a reminder to every citizen that he still has a duty to discharge, if the war is to be fully won and its high objectives permanently secured. It should call us to a realization that we still have to complete the unfinished task of our dead comrades who speak to us tonight with a voiceless eloquence—the task of replacing the present system of suspicion and fear and conflict with the enduring fabric of confidence in humane law and order.

And so, in conclusion, we drop the rose of remembrance on the supreme devotion of our sacred dead. We linger, like our country, in our tribute of reverent memory of our glorious youth who gave their lives to defend our liberty:

“Sleep well, heroic souls, in silence sleep,  
Lapped in the circling arms of kindly death!  
No ill can vex your slumbers, no foul breath  
Of slander, hate, derision, mar the deep  
Repose that holds you close.”

And on this Armistice night, as we recall the nobility of your sacrifice, we turn away from trenches and wounds and death and we re-dedicate our lives with hope to the still unfinished work which you so gallantly advanced and for which you died.



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