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ADDRESS

DELIVERED BY

MR RAYMOND POINCARÉ

President of the French Republic

*Lord Rector of the Uni-
versity of Glasgow*

1914-1919

on NOVEMBER 13th 1919

Glasgow

MacLehose, Jackson and Co.

Publishers to the University

1919

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LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

I must offer you many excuses. I am first obliged to confess my ignorance of the English language. I saw in some too kindly-disposed newspapers of Paris and London that I had learned during the war to read and to speak it; but that was very likely a discreet and roundabout way of letting me know that the Rector of a great Scottish University ought to have, at least, a good British education. Unfortunately, the life I have led for a long time has left little room for leisure and holidays, and if I wanted to-day to be received among you as a matriculated student, I should need the indulgence of my masters, and I should risk exposing myself to the jokes and jests of my comrades, because of the defects of my style and the mistakes in my pronunciation.

These regrets are not the only ones I have to express to you. I have remained for five years a debtor of yours. I have derogated for five years from your traditions. Twice did you do me the favour of prolonging exceptionally my Rectorship, in order to give me the opportunity of delivering before you the usual address.

My debt has been therefore growing, surcharged with compound interest. I am unable now to pay it; but, at least, Gentlemen, I will always cherish for you an everlasting gratitude.

When informed, in 1914, of the great honour you had bestowed on me, I felt my heart full of pride and emotion.

Previously, as I have been told, you had never granted the title of Rector to a foreigner. I could not then help being very much alive to the token of friendship you gave spontaneously to the President of the French Republic. I understood that your delicate attention was addressed to my country, rather than to myself, and this thought has made me appreciate it doubly.

No other dignity could have been more precious to me than the one you have conferred on me. It bound me, as if with ties of kinship, to the family of one of the most glorious Universities in the world, and it gave me the delightful illusion of sharing the moral heritage of the masters who have taught in Glasgow from the fifteenth century till now.

I have been almost tempted to regard as one of my forefathers that famous Buchanan, the poet and scholar who was formerly a professor, sometimes in your town, at other times in Paris or Bordeaux, who was one of the private teachers of our Michel de Montaigne, and who thus, when living, was a powerful representative of the Scottish spirit in France, and of the French spirit in Scotland.

For one moment, I believe, I was even vain enough to fancy myself a successor of the other great men who have made your University so illustrious, as for instance Francis Hutcheson, James Watt, Joseph Black, William Hunter, Adam Smith, and, but yesterday, the wonderful genius whose discoveries relating to electricity and heat have caused such a complete revolution in science, I mean Lord Kelvin.

My self-love was also pleased in recalling the celebrated statesmen, living or dead, who had preceded me in the high office I have been invested with by the Students of Glasgow; and I felt greatly honoured in seeing myself introduced by the Scottish youth to such an eminent society.

But I was above all deeply touched to find, in my election, a fresh mark of that "auld alliance," which, in days of yore, united both our peoples, and which has received from these last years a revival of strength.

It is Scotland that, many centuries ago, sowed the first germs of the Cordial Entente; and there is no Scot, there is no Frenchman, who does not remember the words of Shakespeare:

If that you will France win,
Then with Scotland first begin.

Every French boy, when learning his national history, finds there, on each page, the name of Scotland, sister and friend of his own country. He sees our soldiers fighting side by side, either on the continent or on your borders and in your glens. He sees Joan of Arc riding with her Scottish escort. He sees the long line of the

kings of France, including Lewis the Fourteenth, surrounded by a Scottish Guard.

When I was quite a child, Romance itself joined with History in exciting my fancy and inspiring me with love for Scotland. We all had in the library of our grandfathers a French translation of the works of Walter Scott (I may say by the bye that my collection was burnt by the Hun shells during the war); and, when tired and a little bored by reading Greek and Latin, we used to steal one of those dear books from the reserved shelves, and our wandering thoughts took refuge in one of the Waverley novels such as *Rob Roy* or *Old Mortality*.

We thus accustomed ourselves to know, through the eyes of the mind, the landscapes of Scotland, and so old Caledonia was for us a familiar country, and we became acquainted with your land,

Land of brown heath and shaggy wood,
Land of the mountain and the flood.

As for myself, I must own, although I never came to Scotland till now, that I have spent in Scotland the best hours of my childhood.

Later on, when French boys are growing up, they are sure to meet the smiling face of Scotland at every step on their way. If they go to the "Quartier Latin" as students, they will find in the street of Cardinal-Lemoine a venerable house, above the doorway of which they will read this inscription: "Collège des Écossais" — "College of the Scots," and they will be reminded that of old, for several centuries, students from

Glasgow, from Aberdeen, from Edinburgh, thronged to this ancient building in order to attend, on the Mount Sainte-Geneviève, the public lectures of the Sorbonne.

To-day it is also in your Universities that this intellectual sympathy shows itself between both our countries, and you have just established, here at Glasgow, a chair for French Language and Literature, which you have confided to Mr Charles Martin, whose talents you have already long appreciated. I heard, with great pleasure, that, even before the war broke out, from 1898 to 1914, the number of the students of French rose from thirty to four hundred ; and that from 1900 onward, they have been able to form together a friendly society, a University French Club, which they have called "The Thistle," and that there are held numerous meetings, with recitations and dramatic performances, the entire business of which is conducted in French, in order to give the members the means of gaining confidence and fluency in speaking French.

I have a twofold reason in liking the name of this Club. The Thistle is not only the emblem of Scotland. By a coincidence that is very agreeable to me, it is also the emblem of a French town, which was the cradle of my family, the town of Nancy, and the device inscribed below this plant in the arms of the Lorraine capital—you know it perhaps—is the following : "Non inultus premor"—or, in the French language : "Qui s'y frotte s'y pique," "He who rubs against it, pricks himself." During the last war, the Hun rubbed himself against Scotland and Nancy ; he pricked himself till he bled.

Thus, when I came to Great Britain in 1913, the intimacy between Scotland and France was already consecrated by a long tradition; and I was not surprised when, in London, Lord Reay delivered to me a warm message from the Scottish branch of the Franco-Scottish Society.

At that time, neither of our countries dreamt of the terrible calamity that was soon to overwhelm the world; but we well knew that if, in opposition to our common wishes and efforts, peace were ever broken, Scots and Frenchmen would find themselves shoulder to shoulder on the battlefield.

No one has had more and better opportunities than I, of witnessing the deeds of valour and devotion performed during the last four years, on the soil of France, by the men and women of Scotland, and I am glad to assure them to-day of the gratitude of my fellow-countrymen.

I often saw the Scottish Red Cross at work, and I paid several visits to its ambulances, either in Paris or in the zone of the armies. I especially admired in the Hospital of Royaumont the services directed by a lady surgeon of great worth, Miss Mary Ivens. More than seven thousand wounded Frenchmen were taken care of in this one establishment, and during the offensives of the Somme, of the Chemin des Dames, of the Malmaison, of Montdidier, the Scottish doctors and nurses toiled with a deep feeling of self-abnegation and sacrifice to which to-day I rejoice to pay, before a Scottish audience, my solemn homage.

As to the Scottish soldiers, I had long known of their reputation: "Lions in the field and lambs in the home." I have myself verified, in many circumstances, that they have remained worthy of their old fame.

Among all the peoples of the British Empire, Scotland has afforded, in proportion to the number of her inhabitants, one of the most considerable contingents; and her recruits have shown proof of their great warlike spirit.

The youth of your Universities, and especially those of Glasgow, have enlisted enthusiastically. Their minds had been formed by masters who had inspired them with the sense of responsibility and with firmness of purpose: they were thus prepared for victory. The Scottish battalions have shared in the hardest fights, and have everywhere behaved with an indomitable gallantry.

As soon as your troops began to strive for liberty on the soil of France, the remembrance of past comradeship awoke in the hearts of our soldiers and yours.

Eight out of eleven Scottish regiments formerly went to the Crimea with the French army. Lately all the eleven, both Highland and Lowland Regiments, have had occasion to fraternize with those we have familiarly called our "Poilus."

I have often seen, in the French villages, intimately mingled with our peasants, the Scots Guards, the Royal Scots, the Cameron Highlanders, the Gordon Highlanders, the Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders, the Black Watch, the Seaforth Highlanders, the King's Own Scottish Borderers, and how many others!

And I heard, about the Royal Scots, an old anecdote in which is truly painted the emulation that animated the French and Scottish troops in times of yore. Some French Officers maintained that their own Regiment was so ancient that it was on duty at the tomb of Christ after the crucifixion. "Well, if the Royal Scots had been there with you," answered the Scottish officers, "no man would have slept at his post." In this war likewise, no Scot has slept at his post.

The three divisions which were entirely formed of Scottish troops, namely the Ninth, the Fifteenth, and the Fifty-First, have performed splendid achievements.

The Ninth twice took the field near the Somme in 1916; twice in Flanders in 1917; once near the Somme and once in Flanders in 1918.

The Fifteenth fought at Loos in 1915; twice near the Somme in 1916; at Arras and in Flanders in 1917; in Picardy and on the Marne in 1918.

The Fifty-First Division, that also gained everywhere the admiration of the Allies, signalized itself in 1915 at Festubert, where it lost fifteen hundred men; in 1916, on the Somme, where it lost eight thousand five hundred men, and on the Ancre, where it lost two thousand five hundred men; in 1917, at Roeux, where it lost three thousand men; in Flanders, where it lost, in two battles, two thousand five hundred men; round Cambrai, where it took Havrincourt, Flesquières, Fontaine-Notre-Dame, and lost two thousand five hundred men; in 1918, in the sector of Morchies-Bapaume, where it lost five thousand men, and was

honourably mentioned in the despatches of the Commander-in-Chief; and, lastly, in the month of July 1918, amidst the French armies of Champagne, where it bravely attacked the Huns before Rheims, and lost again two thousand men.

How many valiant Scots are thus lying in the soil of France, after fighting for the common ideal of both our nations? To the mothers and widows of these heroes, I give the assurance that their image will ever be engraved in the memory and the heart of my country, and that the French women will take care of their graves as if they were those where their own husbands and children are sleeping.

I had before my eyes, in 1917, a spectacle which fitly symbolized this national gratitude. The small town of Nesles had been just liberated by Scottish troops. I immediately hastened to see the poor people: the inhabitants were happy and cheerful: they had so long waited for their release! Release which, by the way, was unfortunately of short duration; for, the next year, the town was again taken by the Germans. But, in 1917, the population thought only of their present good luck. A Scottish battalion was drilling and marching in perfect order; a Scottish band was playing on the square tunes which were eagerly applauded by the crowd: "Scotland the Brave," and "The Kilt's my delight." The bagpipers went to and fro among the clapping of hands and the waving of hats, while the thundering of cannons was still heard in the distance.

Meantime the inhabitants kept repeating to me:

“What fine troops! and how pleased we are to welcome them! The Germans continually told us that the British Army was worth nothing, and that they had never seen any Scots before them in the field. We well knew they used to lie. Nevertheless we did not suppose that those soldiers, whom they pretended to disdain so much, were so remarkably trained! If the Germans have not seen Scots on the front, it is probably because the Scots saw their heels!”

You have not only provided the British Army with valorous troops, but also with chiefs, like General Horne, whom I had the pleasure of meeting many times at the head of his army, or General Hunter Weston, who commanded the Eighth Corps, and with whom I went last year through Valenciennes and several other towns his troops had freed.

But what am I saying? Is it not a Scot who was Commander-in-Chief, during the greatest part of the war, of all the armies of the British Empire which were fighting in France and in Belgium?

Two years ago, the French branch of the Franco-Scottish Society gave Field-Marshal Haig, as a token of high esteem, an old signet ring, and Field-Marshal Haig, when thanking the Chairman, my cousin and friend Mr Boutroux, wrote to him: “I venture to think that never before, not even in the days of the ‘auld alliance,’ did my Scottish countrymen appreciate the worth of the people of France so highly as we all do to-day.” Frenchmen also, in their turn, may say that never better than to-day have they appreciated the worth of the Scottish people.

And I will add without any flattery that Field-Marshal Haig has embodied, during this long war, all the finest qualities of your nation. I saw him in the most tragic hours, and I presided at times over important conferences where he gave proof of as much clear-sightedness as moral energy.

I was at his Headquarters with His Majesty the King, on the eve of the last great British offensive. He explained to us his plan, and pointed out his aims on a map with a masterly precision. On the morrow, everything he foretold was realized, and all had happened in the order he had intended and at the very time he had fixed.

This strategic science is accompanied, in your celebrated fellow-countryman, with a spirit of resolution and with a disinterestedness of which I am glad to evoke two striking examples.

In 1916, the French army was defending the town of Verdun against the German rush with a tenacity which filled the whole world with wonder and respect ; but it suffered enormous losses and, in spite of its courage, it was obliged to yield ground little by little, and the enemy slowly neared the walls of the town. All the houses were destroyed by bombardment. The streets were obstructed by the rubbish of crumbling buildings. The forts of Douaumont and Vaux were taken. Verdun was exposed to falling into the hands of the Germans.

General Joffre, General Petain, General Nivelle, were all three convinced that it was urgent to help Verdun

by attacking on another point of the front. A council of war was held under my presidency, to which Field-Marshal Haig came with willing courtesy. We requested him to support the great operations our Staff was preparing on the Somme. He readily agreed to do so; he gave exactly the faithful assistance he had promised; and Verdun was saved!

In the month of March 1918, I again met Field-Marshal Haig in still more dramatic circumstances. The Fifth British Army, commanded by General Gough, being violently assailed, fell back towards Amiens. English and French troops were threatened with being cut off from each other. If the enemy could succeed in stealing in between them, the way was open before him to Paris. The English army was then in danger of being driven into the sea, and the French army exposed to a great attack on flank and rear. The disaster would be irretrievable.

I went to the British Headquarters with the French Prime Minister, Mr Clemenceau, with Lord Milner, with General Foch, and with General Petain. It was obvious that the only means of preventing a catastrophe was to entrust one sole chief with the right and power of harmonizing the plans and the operations of both our armies.

Suppose that, at this moment, susceptibility, self-love, pride, or ambition had gained the mastery, and given rise to discussions: we were helplessly lost. Thanks to Field-Marshal Haig and to General Petain, that risk was at once avoided.

Both of them consented to yield the precedence to General Foch, with a patriotism and a loyalty which will make them still greater in the world's history.

As soon as they had agreed to receive the direction of the Chief who was afterwards raised to the dignity of Field-Marshal in Great Britain and in France, they became his surest and most devoted assistants, and Victory, that probably, without this unity of Command, would have eluded their grasp, rewarded their nobility of soul and inscribed her name on their banners.

I am speaking particularly of the British land forces, because during the course of these four long years I often went through the encampments and the trenches, and I was an eyewitness of the heroism the soldiers everywhere showed. But I do not forget the decisive part the British Navy has played in the war, and I know the great contribution Scotland, and in Scotland, Glasgow, has furnished as well in the recruitment of the crews as in active shipbuilding. Both by sea and by land has the Scottish youth, with the French youth, bravely defended right and freedom.

Thus, your ancestors opened the way to the "Entente Cordiale," and you, Gentlemen, you have successfully endeavoured in the war to strengthen our alliance for all time. How can the ties between our countries ever be severed?

We have henceforth to turn this revived friendship to good account ; we have to make it fruitful.

Let us meet one another more often and know one another better and better. You, Scotchmen, and above

all, you, young Scots, my friends, come to France ; we Frenchmen, let us go to Scotland.

Let us exchange our ideas as well as our products.

Let us see that our Universities become the source of a wide and fertilizing intellectual current between our two nations. Let us see that our manufacturers, traders, business-men, enlarge our commercial relations.

Let us advise France to study the past history and the literature of Scotland. Let us advise Scotland to penetrate as deeply as possible into the French mind, to discern our qualities, and even to understand indulgently our defects.

If we wish to reap all the advantages of peace, we ought to stand side by side in the works of peace. The nations that have borne together the sorrows of war, and that have learned through that fiery trial to esteem and love each other, must now unite their powers of labour and the resources of their genius for the sake of civilization and progress.

Yesterday has dictated to everyone the duty of to-morrow ; and, for a French Rector of a great Scottish University, the only means of not being too unworthy of the title he has received from the spontaneous kindness of the Students will consist in devoting the remainder of his life to this brotherly co-operation of both our peoples.

I willingly pledge my faith to you, Ladies and Gentlemen, that I will never forsake a task the greatness of which I know ; and which concerns not only the future of our nations, but also the very fate of mankind.



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