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1901-09-18

House of Representatives.

Mr. Speaker took the chair at 2 p.m. and read prayers.

DEATH OF PRESIDENT McKINLEY

Minister for External Affairs

Mr BARTON

- It lessens the misfortunes of humanity that occasions such as that on which the House meets to-day occur so seldom. An upright, great, freely-elected citizen has been struck down by the hand of an assassin, who, if his friends believe with him, is banded against the representation of liberty in any form and in any country. The victim has been, as all will admit, whether in their politics they sympathize with him or not, a great President. He was, moreover, the head of a very great people, a people coming largely from a common stock with us. The occasion was well described by Lord Rosebery, when, in moving a resolution upon the death of the late President of the French Republic, President Garnot, he referred to the occurrence as one of those events which overleap the boundaries which separate men into nations, and go straight to the great human heart which beats alike in all countries and in all ranks. | Lord Salisbury, in seconding that resolution, spoke of the great President of the French nation words which might equally well be spoken of the President who has just passed away from the United States of America, when he referred to "his dignity, his self-restraint, his spotless integrity, his unchallenged patriotism." Lord Salisbury on that occasion referred to the fact that there had been within the life-time of living men four terrible assassinations of ruling authorities. "One," he said, "was successful upon a monarch" - he referred to the late Emperor of Russia - and "three have been executed upon Presidents elected by universal suffrage." Since then two more have been added to the list - one the assassination of a monarch, the late King of Italy, and the other the assassination of a President elected by the suffrages of his people. Do not these facts seem to show to us that the forces which are in crafty and cruel operation are not confined to attacks upon monarchs upon some absurd supposition that they are not trustees for their people but extend to those who are directly made such trustees by popular election? What can that mean but that there is a force at work which will not recognise authority, even when that authority is elected by the people themselves for the enforcement of their liberties; and what inference can be drawn except that these agencies are enemies not of authority only but of authority even when it typifies freedom. Surely there will be some bond of cooperation and connexion between the powers of the world which will enable them to say that such agencies must be dealt with for the sake of the liberties of free men, and and of those whom they put into power to represent and enforce their opinions. I have no more to say on that aspect of the question, because the murderer will be dealt with by the people against whom he has offended. I wish, however, to say a word or two about the departed President, and I should like, in paraphrasing some remarks of the great Sir Henry Parkes, not quoting his words, but using his ideas, to say that President McKinley, without reckless ambition, was equal to any claim his countrymen might make upon him to the full measure of his intellect, his strength, and even of his life. Besides the eminent man who has fallen there is another close to him who is deeply stricken - the noble woman whose life and devotion are from day to day so signally evinced to us, and who suppresses her grief and despair because he would have had it so. One word more about the nation with which we sympathize. We speak the same language, we both live under the federal form of free government; the principles of British freedom permeate their laws and ours. The ardent desire for purity of race which we feel ourselves, and which is so direct an outcome of our very pride of race, must find a responsive echo in their hearts. It is ordained by the mighty forces of our racial impulse and our common origin that we shall draw nearer together, just as we shall both cleave closer to the mother of us both, in whose generous breast the fountain of freedom cannot dry. I move -

That the House agree to the following motion: - "We, the members of the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Australia, express our deep sympathy with the people of the United States in the death of their President, and our abhorrence of the crime which has removed from the scenes of his memorable labours an earnest, upright, and honorable man, whose loss the civilized world deplores."

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Sir WILLIAM MCMILLAN

- On behalf of the members on this side of the House I join with my right honorable friend in expressing the profoundest sympathy with the 80,000,000 of English-speaking people on the other side of the ocean who, by [a fanatical and dastardly act, have lost the services of their constitutional ruler. As regards that act, and the horror which it has created throughout the civilized world, language is insufficient to depict our feelings. It is a very dark and mysterious providence which has brought about the fall, at the very zenith of his career, of a man who stood high in his people's estimation, a man of strong character, of spotless integrity. But perhaps under the dark mantle of that cloud there may be a little gleam of light. Such an act &gt; as this, as it "thrills throughout the civilized world, creates one idea of the universal brotherhood of man. But, to us, as English-speaking people of the old stock, who are now in all parts of the world, divided by seas, by mountains, and by local institutions, it has a reference and deep import more than it can have to any other people in the world. Just as when our great and noble Queen gave up her life early in this year, America mingled her tears with ours, so now, when we hear of the death of their great chief, we give them the utmost sympathy of our hearts, and this may be another link in the chain by which these people to whom we may apply the name of foreign, but to whom we never can apply the name of aliens, may in the distant, though, perhaps, far distant, future, be gathered into the fold of British nationhood. One word as to the noble woman to whom my right honorable friend has so finely referred. To her this loss is absolutely irreparable. She has nothing to look forward to in the years to come but the sympathy of her fellow countrymen. But it may be some solace to her to know that she bears a great name, a name gathered from the old hills of Scotland, and one which, so long as the historian pens the story, will go down down into the hearts and win the sympathies of her countrymen. To her, in her inconsolable grief and to the great people of whom we are kith and kin, we offer these few imperfect but heartfelt sentiments of our sympathy and love.

Mr WATSON

- I think the Prime Minister and the acting leader of the Opposition have expressed what is in the minds of all Australians to-day towards the people of a sister Federation across the seas. While we put this resolution forward as our expression of sympathy, we trust that they will appreciate it in the spirit in which it is offered- as the only consolation we can proffer against a crime, the detestation of which we all share. To those of us who believe that some of the inequalities of life may be softened and smoothened by beneficent legislation, it comes as a shock to find the efforts of those who also believe in that way so frequently of late liable to be set back, perhaps for years, by crimes which, to my view, must be held to be born of a wild desperation following political insanity. It is particularly lamentable, perhaps, in this case, because the object upon whom the assassin's fanatical vengeance fixed itself was a man upon the lustre of whose name not the faintest breath of suspicion had ever cast a stain. I, for one, join with the House and the people of Australia in offering a tribute of respect to a man who was a good citizen, a loving husband, a valiant soldier, and a patriotic statesman.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr BARTON

- I now move-

That the House agree to the following address to His Excellency the Governor-General : -

May it please Your Excellency :

We, the members of the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Australia, in Parliament assembled, respectfully request that your Excellency will be pleased to forward by cable to the Right Honorable the Secretary of State for the Colonies the accompanying resolution for presentation to the King, with an expression of a respectful hope that His Majesty will be pleased to give instructions for its communication to the President of the United States.

Sir WILLIAM MCMILLAN

- I second the motion.

Minister for External Affairs

Mr BARTON

- Reluctantly, but I think inevitably, because this crime has been a crime against representative government, I think we should further mark our sense of sympathy and our horror at the atrocity which has been committed, by adjourning. I move -

That the House do now adjourn.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

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14:10:00

House adjourned at 2.10 p.m.