

LET'S FACE THE FACTS

No. 24

7

**Address to the Men and Women
of Canada**

BY

MR. ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Noted American Author, Actor and Radio Personality

**over a national network of
the Canadian Broadcasting
Corporation, Sunday night,
Dec. 29, 1940, at the invita-
tion of the Director of Public
Information for Canada.**

Text of the address of Alexander Woolcott, over the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation national network Sunday night, December 29, follows:

This is Woolcott speaking—one American speaking to as many Canadians as may happen to be listening. One American who lives just across the border in the state of Vermont, a lean and stubborn commonwealth which, as Mr. Roosevelt can tell you, is just as contrary now as it was back in the 18th Century when it declared itself an independent republic—without anyone paying much attention—long before the other colonies rose in rebellion—rebellion against the highly characteristic German who then occupied the throne of England. I refer to his Teutonic Majesty—his too Teutonic Majesty—King George III.

To get here this evening I trekked across a mile of ice for I have built me my house on an island in a lake and the lake is frozen from shore to shore. Some folks are islanders by nature and perhaps I am one of them. A great part of my life has been spent on two; this one in Vermont and another called Manhattan. Two islands! These days all my thoughts are with a third.

In my time I've told many a tale about Vermont and there are none I like better than those that deal with a certain young Britisher who moved into Vermont to make his home there half a century ago. A bank-failure had left him nothing but the cash in his pocket—a few pounds and some genius. His name was Rudyard Kipling. With his wife and baby he settled in a cottage near Brattleboro to work his way out of debt. With an old-fashioned Vermont winter closing in on him he sat him down, took up his pencil and started to write. On the foolscap before him there came to life the story of a wolf's cave with a hungry lion roaring in the distance. Down the jungle-path in the moonlight there toddled a man-child—a small, brown, naked man-child. And the name of the child was Mowgli. The story of Mowgli's adventures with the wolf-pack has gone round the world and has, I suppose, as good a chance to be read in the year 2100 as anything written in the English language in my life-time. I like to remember that "The Jungle Book" was written in Vermont.

WE ARE OF ONE BLOOD

Only yesterday I picked up the copy which is one of the two possessions I have carried with me for more than forty years. The other? Well, that's a book too. It's called "Huckleberry Finn." For the hundredth time yesterday I reread the great chapter called "Kaa's Hunting." You may remember that it begins with old Baloo, the brown bear, teaching Mowgli all the master-words of the jungle. In particular my eye was caught this time, as so often before, by the master-word with which Mowgli could claim protection from all the hunting people. Here it is: "We are of one blood, ye and I." May I repeat that here tonight in these closing hours of a fateful year? "We are of one blood, ye and I."

One American speaking to his neighbors in Canada. Next let me present my credentials. Late in October, the BBC came to me with an invitation to speak to the British Isles during the Christmas holidays. The allotted time was the evening of Saturday, December 28th—last evening. It was to be one of those broadcasts across the ocean by short-wave and then a rebroadcast from London by long-wave. I had done a good many of them in years past. All through the summer of 1939 I journeyed every Sunday to Schenectady and there, in a fancy leather and chromium studio, poured such thoughts into a microphone as elicited in due time many a friendly letter from listeners in the Cotswolds and the suburbs of Edinburgh and even the Orkney Islands. But that was before the war. What can any American say to anyone in England now? I know what I could truly say. Long ago an American poet put down on paper words which give voice to just what is in my heart. These words:

"Our hearts, our hopes, our prayers, our tears
Our faith triumphant o'er our fears
Are all with thee, are all with thee."

But if I faltered at the thought of this old voice of mine going now into English homes it was from embarrassment. Try as I would, I could not escape the paralyzing thought that an American speaking to England now might sound a little too like the late Mr. Charles Chapin. In my salad days as a journalist in New York, Mr. Chapin was a sprightly

monster who commanded a staff of reporters on the lively newspaper called *The Evening World*. There had been a thousand and one legends about him before that summer night in 1918 when he pensively shot his wife in the back and thereafter, until the day of his death, led the contemplative life inside the walls of Sing Sing prison. Of those legends the one I have in mind concerns the day when a Denver newspaper asked the *Evening World* to run to earth a rumor concerning the daughter of one of Colorado's wealthy cattlemen who had just eloped with a cowboy. Denver had got word that the fugitives were lodged at such and such a rooming house in New York and the *Evening World* was asked to investigate. Chapin sent a young reporter out on the assignment with orders to telephone in whatever he discovered. The young reporter got himself into the lodging-house disguised as a man come to read the gas meter. Sure enough, on the second floor front he discovered the runaway couple. He had no sooner started to interview them when the bridegroom picked him up by the collar, carried him out into the hall and threw him down a flight of stairs. Then taking an automatic from his hip pocket, the cowboy informed the prostrate journalist that if he came back with any of his fool questions, he would be answered with lead. The reporter thought it best to leave with all convenient speed. From the saloon on the corner he telephoned Mr. Chapin. Chapin was indignant. "You go back there," he said. "You go back and tell that cowboy he can't intimidate me."

Well, there's the story for you and for the life of me I cannot see how any American sitting pretty in a country beyond Hitler's reach—his present reach—can send any message to England which will not sound uncomfortably like a word of encouragement from the late Mr. Chapin.

ENOUGH WORDS TO ENGLAND

There have been enough words to England. I am one who would send ships and destroyers and planes and pilots but no more words. Yet even those Americans who feel a certain decent diffidence about sending words to England are still free to talk to one another about England. In Friday's newspapers, President Roosevelt, in advance of the

broadcast he is going to make later this evening, made public a telegram he had just received from more than a hundred and fifty citizens of the United States applauding his plan for lending armaments to Britain and asking him to make it the settled policy of the United States to do everything necessary — *everything* necessary—to assure the defeat of the Axis powers. One hundred and fifty signed that telegram. One hundred and fifty speaking for many. How many? No one knows. A great many, I think. Enough, I hope. The fact that I was one of the hundred and fifty provides the only credentials I offer for speaking here this evening—coming to Montreal to tell you a story about a song and a woman. A song that is almost eighty years old and a woman who is over ninety.

Americans talking to one another. Sometimes — not always but sometimes—I could wish that my friends in England might be eavesdropping. For example I could wish that they all might have tuned in on the evening of the first Wednesday in December when on the program called the *Cavalcade of America*, Deems Taylor and I did a broadcast on the *Battle Hymn of the Republic*. The noble words of that song were born in the first troubled years of the War Between The States. Born on a night in November, 1861, when Julia Ward Howe, the young wife of a distinguished Boston physician, had accompanied her husband when he went down to Washington to inspect the Army of the Potomac. As far as the eye could reach that army was sprawled in and about the still countrified capital. Young, fresh troops with no experience, no training and poor equipment—and, as yet, no general worth mentioning. It was a democracy limbering up. A free people—in the fashion of free peoples the world around — floundering to war. On her visit Mrs. Howe paid her respects to the uncouth, ungainly Abraham Lincoln who was new then in the White House, talked with the pickets on duty at every crossroad, saw from her hotel window the watch-fires of a hundred circling camps. And everywhere she went, day in and day out, from every detachment slogging through the mud she heard the song the soldiers liked to sing—"John Brown's Body." To the tune of an old camp-meeting hymn they had fitted words of their own and sang it as they

marched. "What a tune!" said Mrs. Howe wistfully. "Ah," said a friend, "if only you could find good words to fit it." To which she made answer. "I have often prayed that I might."

That night as she slept her prayer was answered. Literally, as she slept. When the dawn of the day to come was just showing gray at the window she woke to find the words on her lips. Such words are the stuff that dreams are made of and, like the dew, can vanish with the rising sun. Before these could vanish Mrs. Howe got up and put them down on paper, scribbling away in the dark as she had so often done when keeping vigil beside the cradle in the nursery at home. When she awoke again the sun was up and there the words were, legible enough for her to read them and pretty much as we in the States know them now. Know them by heart from coast to coast.

"Mine eyes have seen the glory
of the coming of the Lord
He is trampling out the vintage
Where the grapes of wrath are
stored
He hath loosed the fateful light-
ning of his terrible swift
sword
His truth is marching on."

When she had finished it to her satisfaction she sent it to the editor of the *Atlantic*, who, in a lavish moment, paid her Five Dollars for it and published it in the February issue. In no time it was hers no longer but public property. The whole North knew it by heart.

SERENADE TO A WOMAN

In words and music, Deems Taylor and I told this story on the *Cavalcade* broadcast and then as a climax to the program, the song itself was sung by a great chorus, sung as a serenade for the benefit of a single listener. The whole country might have been eavesdropping, but this serenade was for one woman who heard it in the gentle fire-lit living room of a house in the state of Maine—a yellow house which stands at the top of a hill in a town called Gardiner, Maine. This listener was Laura E. Richards, Mrs. Richards is held in great honor in my country but I think she has friends in every corner of the English speaking world, because it was she who, now more than half a century ago, wrote the perfect story called

"Captain January." To this day that story of hers comes to every boy and girl who reads it as a personal kindness. But it was not on that account that we ventured to sing the *Battle Hymn* under her window. We sang it to her because she is the daughter of Julia Ward Howe — sang it as some friends of mine in Montreal are going to sing it for you now.

Well, that was our serenade to Mrs. Richards. There is one fact I should like to tell you about her. She has reached that point in her journey where no woman minds if the neighbors know her age. Frankly, she is going on ninety-one. At the anniversary in February of this year she insisted on having three birthday parties and so help me she had them. One party for her neighbors in Gardiner, one for her children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren and one for the whole clan who came trooping in from every corner of New England bearing a great cake ablaze with ninety candles. By the light of those candles they drank her health and she replied with a toast. Rising to her feet and holding high her glass, she said:

"To Britain and down with all dictators!"

QUESTION TO AMERICA

The birthday messages had been pouring in from every corner of the country. Too many of us remembered the day. The avalanche of good-will that poured in over the wires from every state in the Union was too much, she protested, for one small and ancient woman. She could attempt no reply of her own but instead was content to quote the message her mother had sent on her ninetieth birthday. It was a brief message but since first I heard it I have never forgotten it and that elaborate *Cavalcade* broadcast earlier in December was just a device that would let me go on the air and quote the message sent on her ninetieth birthday by the woman who wrote "The *Battle Hymn of the Republic*." It was a message of only seven words and it seemed to me it was a good time in the history of the world for every American to hear those words. This was the message: "I march to the brave music still."

"I march to the brave music still." In every anxious American heart from coast to coast those words stir a question. Per-

haps the answer to that question lies just around a bend in the road of history. The next few months may bring the answer. Do we? Do we? Do we in the United States of 1940 and 1941—do we march to the brave music still?

Following the address of Mr. Woolcott, the Director of Public Information, Mr. G. H. Lash, in closing the series, spoke as follows:

Tonight you have heard the final broadcast in the series "Let's Face The Facts." Twenty-four weeks ago Miss Dorothy Thompson opened the series with a memorable address. Now, Alexander Woolcott, another generous, warm-hearted friend of Canada has closed it with a talk that we will long remember.

During these twenty-four weeks, we have had as our guests world-famous men and women. Like Mr. Woolcott, some of them have appeared on this program at considerable personal inconvenience and the sacrifice of hard-earned leisure moments. In your name and mine, I offer them a heartfelt "thank you."

To you, who, to the number of

nearly 60,000 have asked for printed copies of these talks, I say thank you and express my gratitude for your support and criticism. I hope you will listen to the series which replaces this one next Sunday night at this hour. It will be called "We Are Not Alone" and the first speaker will be Mr. Victor Podoski, Consul General of Poland.

If the talks which have been made in the series "Let's Face The Facts" have brought us an awareness of the issues for which we are fighting and of the perils which threaten us, then the program has fulfilled the purpose for which it was designed. I hope it can be said that it has. For, be sure of it, the New Year now at hand will be a year of dreadful happenings. We shall need all our faith and all our courage to see this thing through. But we can see it through if we muster the determination and the willingness to believe in democracy as a living, vibrant faith and freedom without which the hope and happiness of man cannot survive.

To that purpose, let us unite. Let us march to the brave music of free men, as one great, undivided nation. We have in this country, many thousands of citi-

zens whose names most of us find it hard to pronounce. We have here other thousands whose only fault is that they or their forbears came from countries with which we are now at war. They are as loyal Canadians as you or I who belong to the Anglo-Saxon and French majorities. Let us, therefore, cultivate the virtue of tolerance, tolerance towards these new Canadians who will swell and strengthen our ranks, if only we will offer them our hands in fellowship.

In the coming year we shall be called upon to make heavy sacrifices. To any who may be counting the cost in dollars, may I say that we can be more heavily taxed by our own folly than ever we can be taxed by government.

Let us then face the facts. But, in facing them, let us also remember that out of anguish, tears and blood was born the greatest blessing of mankind—Christianity. If we will face the facts; if we will nurture courage, calmness, tolerance, determination and faith, then, indeed, we shall win through to victory and to the high privilege of, one day, looking in retrospect upon 1941, for us and for the world, as a truly Happy New Year.

Unless you make a specific request to the contrary, you will automatically receive printed reports of the speeches which are to be made in the radio series, "We Are Not Alone," which starts Sunday night, January 5, 1941. There will be six or seven talks in this series and publication will be delayed until the final speech has been made at which time all of the talks will be incorporated into one booklet. Therefore, please do not ask for copies of these talks if your name has been on the mailing list of the "Let's Face The Facts" series.

DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC INFORMATION.

*When you have read this speech, it is suggested
that you pass it to a friend.*