

Address given by David Rees-Williams at the Ceylon independence ceremony (10 February 1948)


Caption: On 10 February 1948, David Rees-Williams from the Colonial Office gives an address during the festivities held to mark the independence of Ceylon.

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Mr. J.E. Ashford, CRO 6

CEYLON'S DOMINION STATUS:
MR. D.R. REES-WILLIAMS AT GOVERNMENT RECEPTION

"YOUNG NATION WITH A NOBLE CULTURE"

Speaking at the reception given by the Ceylon Government at the Savoy on Tuesday evening (February 10) to celebrate Ceylon's attainment of Dominion status,

Mr. D.R. Rees-Williams (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies) said:

"Tonight we are celebrating an event of unique significance in the history of the British Commonwealth. For the first time, a colony not settled by British people has emerged as a member of the Commonwealth. We in the Colonial Office view this as an elder brother at his younger brother's 21st birthday party. Our brother has come of age. Ceylon has been given the key of the door, and is now a fully-fledged member of the family.

"This young Nation can, however, boast of an old civilisation and a noble culture. More than 2,000 years ago the Sinhalese were great architects and great artists. The irrigation system that brought water to Anuradhapura was a masterpiece of engineering skill. It is being restored and the jungle around it cleared; and it may be that in an independent Ceylon the great days of Anuradhapura will come again.

"Three European Nations have had their influence on Ceylon. It has been said that Portugal gave Ceylon a religion and a mode of dress; Holland gave her Dutch law and Dutch architecture; Britain gave her cricket. I think it is only fair, however, to claim that Britain also gave her her Constitution.

"The 150 years of British rule in Ceylon were marked by

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a steady progress in Mutual trust between the British and the Sinhalese. The Sinhalese officials under the British Agents of Government were always given a wide jurisdiction, and used their power for the good of the people. As for the British, their policy was summed up 140 years ago by Governor Sir Thomas Maitland when he said: 'The sole object of Government is and always ought to be to ensure the prosperity of the Island, solely through the medium of generally increasing the prosperity and happiness of the people.'

"In Mr. Senanayake Ceylon has found a leader of wisdom and ability. A charming incident occurred during his last visit to this country. Among the other diversions arranged for him was a visit to the Zoo, and there he spotted a fine upstanding elephant. To the delight of his friends and the surprise of the other visitors, Mr. Senanayake marched up to it and spoke to it in Sinhalese; whereupon the elephant obediently knelt down and invited him to mount! ~~~~~~~~~

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~~~~~~~~~ At Ceylon I had my first introduction to the East; the exotic vegetation, the vivid colours, the strong light, the busy, gay, brightly dressed people made a deep impression on my mind - not lessened by the sight of a Mango tree slowly rising from a rather elderly looking seed beneath a silk pocket handkerchief.

"Well, the time has come for us in the Colonial Office officially to take leave of all our friends in and from Ceylon. And indeed we have many good friends, not the least of them Mr. and Mrs. Corea, our Host and Hostess. Mr. and Mrs. Corea have once again displayed the Sinhalese characteristic of generous hospitality. We are very grateful to them for giving us this opportunity to assure Ceylon

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of our sincere wishes for her future prosperity.

"Finally, may I remind Mr. Corea that now that he has no longer the excuse of business to come and see us we would welcome a visit for an even stronger reason; namely, the mutual discussion of a brew of Ceylon tea around about 4 of the clock on any afternoon."

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