

# THE WEEK.

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## IMPERIAL FEDERATION.

THE demand for close ties between Britain and her outlying dependencies came originally from the parent land, and has found but a feeble echo in the colonies. Australia has given the matter more attention than Canada, probably because of the greater danger which she encounters of descents upon her coasts by enemies of Britain. In both countries the project has found a few warm supporters, but as yet no one has developed a scheme of Parliamentary union worthy of a moment's consideration. These gentlemen generally ignore the fact that Imperial Federation is already in existence, and working with a smoothness and efficiency which is a cause of wonder and admiration to other nations. No British colony, except the famous Thirteen, has ever abandoned the Mother Country, and they were driven away by an intolerable sense of wrong, and of the unfitness of the then rulers of England to appreciate their position. The rebellion in Canada followed the refusal or neglect of the Home authorities to grant complete self-government to the people, and it produced the desired effect—the introduction of the British responsible system. The collision with the Boers in South Africa cannot be regarded as an insurrection. It was rather an attempt of the Cape colonists to conquer the Dutch settlers who had left British territory in order to enjoy self-government and liberty to enslave the black population.

The ties between the Mother Country and the colonies are said to be slender, but a very little examination shows that they are so strong that it is impossible to suggest a method of making them more binding. The Queen appoints the Governor of every colony, and she has power to veto any measure passed by the Legislature. It may be said that she would not venture to use this power in defiance of the fully expressed will of the people of the colony. But the possession of the power entrusted to the representative of the Queen confers great influence, more particularly in matters relating to the Imperial connection. He can dismiss his Cabinet, form a new one, and order an appeal to the people. He is the symbol of authority, the flag under which conservative opinion rallies. What additional power could be given to the Crown under a revised system?

It has been suggested that colonial members might be admitted into the House of Commons, but to what end? Taxation is said to be impossible without representation, and it may be fairly held that taxation should follow representation. That would give the Imperial Parliament the right of taxing the colonies, lying thousands of miles away, of the affairs of which seven-eighths of the Lords and Commons would know nothing, and care less. The House of Commons is one of the worst legislative bodies in the world. Its members are unpaid, and have a hundred temptations to scamp their work. While an Irish or Scotch local question is under discussion, it is almost impossible to muster a quorum of forty in a House of over 650 members—what interest would such a body show in an Australian or Canadian matter, to say nothing of a Fijian or a Jamaican? An insurrection with loss of life would be necessary to secure a quorum. But supposing the House of Commons capable of legislating for the Antipodes, what would be the result? If the English Government desires anything from the colonies, it can obtain it now by negotiation, if the colonists are willing. If, under closer ties, the Central Government by legislation forced measures distasteful to the colonies, how

certain would be the creation of resentments tending to disunion between countries far apart, whose populations differ widely as to modes of government, and hold their opinions with British tenacity. Distance alone supplies insuperable obstacles to such legislation. How could a New Zealand representative gather the views of his constituents on a question of importance demanding prompt solution? And yet New Zealand would justly demand an opportunity, at least, of entering a protest before her interests or rights were invaded.

What complaint has Britain to make against the colonies, to remove which legislative union is advisable? The question of defence has already been dealt with in these columns, and it is only necessary here to point out that the Colonial Legislatures are much better qualified to deal with it than an Imperial Parliament. They alone know the dangers their constituents run, and the means of guarding against them. Whatever the Imperial power might demand would have to be granted or refused by the Local Legislatures, and the demand might as well be formulated by the present House of Commons after consultation with colonial representatives, as by a new Imperial assembly. No reasonable request from that source would be denied, but the people who would find the means would have ample opportunity to pass judgment upon it. In no war in which Britain has been engaged has she failed to receive the moral support of colonists. The Thirteen Colonies gave material aid to the Mother Country against the French in America. Canadians raised the 100th Regiment; and for the last Egyptian campaign an Australian battalion and a corps of Canadian voyageurs crossed the sea at the call of the Mother Country. As to colonial contributions of men or money in carrying on war, much would depend upon the locality of the cause. If a colony provoked war, every man and every dollar would, of course, be thrown into the scale. In case, however, of war with a European power on questions of dynasty, or British trade in which the colonies had no interest, less would probably be asked and granted. The ancient Greeks asked aid from their colonies in times of trouble, but the amount granted was based on the need for the service, and the quarters from whence the danger came. From time to time, as circumstances demanded, arrangements would be made on these points until precedents would be established, having almost the force of law.

In trade matters would Federation contribute to a better understanding between Britain and her colonies? Some Canadians cling to the idea that Britain might be induced to make a league with the dependencies by which Free Trade would be established throughout the Empire, and custom duties levied only upon foreigners. But Great Britain could not afford to hamper the trade of nine hundred and fifty millions of people to secure a larger benefit from ten millions. Canada itself also would suffer under this plan, from a tariff war with her neighbour. Britain has complained, but not loudly nor persistently, that the Canadian and Victorian tariffs are hostile to her manufacturers. Would a common Parliament remove this stumbling block? Imperial interference on that question would result in separation. The essence of the colonial tie is freedom on both sides to seek profit, in unison whenever it is mutually advantageous, but separately when paths diverge. To preserve union there must be full acknowledgment of the great differences existing between the Mother Country and the colonies, and between one colony and another. Without this, harmony would be impossible. "Constitutions under which great nations have been successfully governed have been the growth of time; they have slowly broadened down from precedent to precedent." Great men as Thomas Jefferson and his compeers were, the American constitution was not perfect as it came from their hands, and is not even yet complete. The British people will err grievously if they adopt a paper constitution for the Empire. A conference now and then on questions as they arise, discussion in British and Colonial Parliaments, and the embodiment of the results in contracts or acts of Parliament, will, in the course of years, produce a code under which all points at present unsettled will be adequately defined.

Many persons in Britain and the colonies question whether the connection can be maintained permanently or even for a considerable length of time. The present writer can only express his belief that the British Empire may be preserved as it exists at present to the end of time. The arguments for continuance, if ordinary prudence and skill are shown, are far stronger than those against it. Ties of blood and lineage, of religion, of patriotism, and of habit, are very strong, but stronger than all is self-