

## THE COLONIES.

To the Editor of the Times.

SIR:—I venture to ask your insertion of some observations on the policy of England in regard to her colonial possessions.

I propose to consider the question wholly irrespectively of the recent correspondence between Earl Granville and the Committee, and to dissociate the special case of New Zealand from the general subject of colonial relation. Public opinion both here and in the Colonies, as I gather it, may be ranged under three heads. First, those who desire to get rid of the colonies, either on the ground that they bring no profit to, but are, on the contrary, a burden upon, and a source of danger to Great Britain, or that their own interests would be promoted by separation; second, those who, while they desire on the whole to continue the connexion, think that essential changes are needed, either by giving the Colonies a representation of some sort in Great Britain, or like Lord Grey, that the change must take the form of a surrender by the colonies of their present power of self government, and the devolution of those powers on the Colonial Secretary; and that it is necessary to determine now what the exact nature of the changes will be, and those who impressed with the advantage of the connection to both, regard its perpetuation as a paramount consideration; who believe that on the whole the existing relations do not work badly, but who are ready to consider in what respect they may be shown to work unfairly, and are equally prepared to revise them and to remedy whatever is inequitable, who deprecate the attempt now made to apportion with sharpness and precision, and by one general rule, the exact rights and duties of each in the future, and to supersede a system which answers all present ends by one which is wholly experimental, —out who, seeing in the present unsettled aspect of the question many elements of danger, consider that some authoritative expression of opinion or other form of action is called for, affirming the supreme condition of maintaining the integrity of the empire.

The merits of these various views can hardly fail to undergo discussion during the coming session. Indeed it would be most undesirable that discussion should be postponed, for, although I fail to perceive the existence of any tangible colonial grievance calling for relief by Parliament at present, it cannot be denied that the level of uncertainty and apprehension is doing its work in the colonies, from Canada to Australia; and the consequences of allowing the question to drift on without some guidance cannot be any other than pernicious. Continued speculation and doubt as to the probable immediate future is not a condition calculated to further contentment or the progress of a community. Men are distracted by the discussion of theories from the practical duties of the day; good administration and the adoption of sound views of policy are all subordinate, and becoming aspirations, either as Englishmen or as men founding a new nationality of their own, worthy of their race, are for the time wholly repressed.

Nor is this all, colonists abroad are, to say the least, as high-spirited as if they had re-

mained at home. They are sensitive to the charge of leaning in helpless dependence on the mother country, of clinging like frightened children to the skirts of the Old World, of adding to the burdens of her already overtaxed population; of being slack to use the functions of political maturity, and of being, in short, unworthy of Imperial protection. Would the English people desire to see their brethren abroad devoid of this susceptibility, or less ready than they are to resent the imputation of selfish and unmanly dependence?

The present danger lies in the continuance of misunderstanding on these points, and in discussing them in a captious spirit of recrimination. Separation in any case would be national calamity; separation now under emotions engendered by such imputations doubly so. It would serve no good purpose to inquire whether such feelings are warranted by anything that has occurred here. I believe that if danger from without actually menaced any part of the empire, however remote, England would as promptly in the future as in the past, throw aside all calculations of expediency, and that the whole power of the nation would be unhesitatingly put forth for its protection; but events have done a great deal to weaken that conviction in the minds of many in the remote portions of the empire. True, the words of no responsible Minister can be appealed to in advocacy of separation, still less words which would warrant the impression that the protection of England would be withdrawn, and it may be that colonial sensibility attaches undue importance to the apparent leaning of influential organs of public opinion on this question; but still the fact as it is has to be dealt with, and we cannot long postpone the practical consideration of the question whether the policy of England is to be one of abandoning or drawing the colonial family closer to her.

It would, however, be unfair to impute to the Colonial office the responsibility for any feeling that may now exist in the colonies. It is but simple justice to say, as I can do, after an experience of many years, that, whichever of the great parties in the state controlled it, I am aware of no instance in which representations or any important question were treated with indifference, or in which a full measure of consideration for the concerns and interests of any colony, or towards any colonists personally, was wanting.

The discussion of the subject itself will, I trust, for the present, be elevated above the arena of party, at all events, until a distinct separation of party opinion arises on the question whether it is not desirable to cement the connexion, rather than destroy it, assuming always that the relation shall be subject to such practical revision as time and altered conditions may call for.

Let me, then, proceed to sift the causes of misunderstanding here, and in the first instance to test the soundness of the separatist argument by considering in what respect the Colonies are either a source of danger, burdensome, or profitless. If public opinion can be put right in this respect, as I believe it will be by an impartial consideration of the facts, and terms of appreciation will in future supersede those of complaint in discussions respecting the Colonies, and a readiness to adjust present difficulties be shown on both sides, we shall have reached the turning point of better relations. My previous habits of thought may cause me to lean to the Colonial side, and therefore my arguments may be taken with some qualification; but I will endeavour to state them as impartially as I can.

In considering the supreme question of the alleged danger to both, which results from the present connexion, I will take the case of Canada, confessedly, by reason of its geographical position, the strongest illustration against me, and because I am most familiar with it.

It is urged that, in case of a war with the United States, Canada must either be abandoned, or, if defended, must be overrun, and that in either case national disaster would ensue. This argument, if well founded, ought, I admit, to have great weight, and it therefore demands more than superficial examination. The question, however, has two sides. The consequence of abandonment now, has to be considered as well as that of defending, and this not only as respects Canada and her defence alone, but as the policy of the abandonment may influence the other colonial possessions of England in deciding them to make common cause with her or stand neutral in her quarrels. On a mere calculation of relative strength, the chances of war may appear to be against a successful defence of Canada, which is a narrow strip of land, some 3,000 miles distant from England, with a population of 4,000,000, continuous for more than 1,000 miles to the United States, with a population of nearly 40,000,000. But as regards Canada, very exceptional considerations exist. A war between England and the United States will be a war of exhaustion; both nations may be fairly looked on as equal in courage and appliances. The United States will never, as any one who understands the public feeling on that subject must admit, go to war for the sake of conquering Canada. An attack on her will only be an incident in the war, never the object of it. Now Canada possesses some of the strongest positions known—Halifax, Quebec, St. John, and, if properly covered, Montreal and Kingston, and other places in the Peninsula between Lake Ontario, Erie, and Huron. These positions are all remote from each other, St. John being 250 miles from Halifax, that fortress in its turn being 600 miles from Quebec, Montreal being nearly 200 miles still more remote, and Kingston lying 180 miles yet further to the west. To reduce even these positions separate armies and fleets would be required. In the greater part of Canada no army could keep the field in winter, and unless the works were taken in one year, the siege must be raised and operations begun afresh in the spring. True, the two countries are in some places contiguous; but in the parts where this contiguity exists the country is wild, the climate is most severe, and winter operations wholly impossible. In other places where it might be possible for any army to exist in huts, it is all important to bear in mind that for many hundred miles the invader would have broad lakes in his rear. Admitting, for argument sake, that the enemy had command of them, they are impassible in winter, whether for ship or sleigh. The supplies for a largo force and all munitions of war would have to be drawn from beyond them, and the winter supply must be transported in summer, and stored in a hostile country. I do not believe that the elements of climate and distance and inaccessibility have ever had their due weight in considering the question of the defence of Canada.

I have supposed for the sake of argument that the enemy obtained a superiority on all the lakes. But as regards Lake Ontario, the conditions are all on the side of Canada, if the advantage be properly seized at the outset. The American tonnage on it is not greatly superior to the Colonial. True, on Lakes Erie, Huron and Superior, the United