

THE BRITISH EMPIRE AND THE WAR.

AT this epochal moment in the history of the world, we recall with some surprise that it was as recently as the Victorian era that Alfred, Lord Tennyson, then poet Laureate of England, wrote:—

“For I dipt into the future, far as human eye
could see,
Saw the Vision of the world, and all the
wonder that would be;

“Heard the heavens fill with shouting, and
there rain’d a ghastly dew
From the nations’ airy navies grappling in
the central blue;

“Far along the world-wide whisper of the
south-wind rushing warm,
With the standards of the peoples plunging
thro’ the thunder-storm;”

Few prophecies have been as daring in conception, and few have been as speedily fulfilled. The Europe of to-day was strikingly foreshadowed in the poet’s thought; and yet at the time, so unreal was the picture that no one would have said there was other than wild imagination in the poet’s art.

Lord Tennyson was not only a great poet and philosopher, he was also a great Britisher. He loved England, he gloried in her expansion, he revered the Crown, and he helped to further its lustre throughout other lands. He was not afraid of Britain’s greatness, and, in his verse, he gave expression to its source in morals and politics alike. His teachings were based on a wide observation of men and affairs and reflected his intimate association with the best minds in Church and State. At this time, when political philosophers in the Old World and the New are concerning themselves with the future of the British Empire as the most important of the tasks of British statesmen, once the War is won, the thoughts of this illustrious Englishman may not be without the value of inspiration.

If men are to see the destiny of the British Empire as Tennyson foresaw it, there will be little focussing of thought upon hasty alteration in constitutional arrangements. The work of re-construction will look more to the World’s vast horizon without, than to impatient change of what has stood the test of peace and war within. The danger with some of those who are seeking to fashion the Empire anew is not that they are looking too far ahead, it would seem rather to be that their vision is not broad enough. Tennyson had the vision and in his verse it followed immediately the dark prophecy which even to-day is being literally fulfilled. The next two stanzas run:

“Till the war-drum throb’d no longer, and
the battle-flags were furl’d
In the Parliament of man, the Federation
of the world.

“There the common sense of most shall hold
a fretful realm in awe,
And the kindly earth shall slumber, lapt in
universal law.”

But, it will be said, this is nothing short of a World Federation, a League of all the Nations to maintain law and order upon the earth! Is it not the essence of Prussian arrogance to assume a future destiny so vast as this? Yet it is this very ideal which the peoples of the British Empire more than any other peoples are entitled to cherish as peculiarly their own, for have they not already achieved this very aim in part?

The Force of Example.

There are two methods by which World conquest looking to World Federation can be attained; the one, the force of arms, the other, the force of example. The former is the Prussian method, the latter, the British. Wonderful as have been the vast achievements of this tremendous war, it is doubtful if it has presented any spectacle comparable to that of a united British people spontaneously rising from their several nationalities, scattered as these are, in all quarters of the globe. Thither have they gone to the fields of Flanders, across continents and seas alike; to Belgium, to Salonika, to Egypt, to Mesopotamia, to wherever the enemy is to be found; gone with full equipment of war, not from the British Isles alone, but from Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India and Newfoundland, and without a summons, other than Freedom’s call to Duty, in the maintenance of the liberties of smaller nationalities, and to stay the aggressor’s wrong.

Speaking in London on the 1st of November at a gathering of the Associated Chambers of Commerce to honor the Duke of Devonshire on the occasion of His Excellency’s appointment as Governor-General of Canada, the Earl of Derby, His Excellency’s most intimate friend, said:—

“New relations may arise after the War between ourselves and the Dominions, but none can be as strong as those which are binding us now. People talk glibly of a new Constitution. Well I am a Conservative, and the old Constitution is good enough for me when it gives such results as during the present War. Anything that can bind us together more closely, let it be done; but do not let us think that by making a cast-iron constitution for ourselves or the Dominions we are going to increase the affection they have for us.”

Is it surprising that in sending to Canada this portion of the Earl of Derby’s address, the cable despatches referred to it as “felicitous,” and should have mentioned that it was heartily applauded by the large assemblage?

Surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, all concerned with the re-organization of the British Empire will do well to reflect upon the political considerations and conditions which have given the Empire, constituted as it is, the enviable position it occupies in the eyes of the World to-day, they will do well to move cautiously in matters of re-construction where such involve a departure, however