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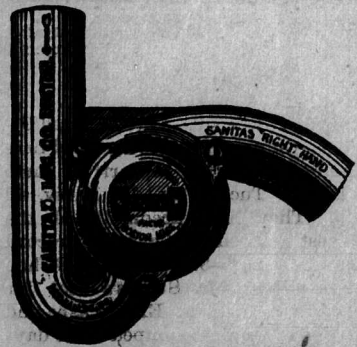
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WITHIN THE EMPIRE;

AN ESSAY ON

Imperial Federation.

BY

Thomas Macfarlane, F. R. S. C.

CHAPTER IV.

The Colonial Conference.

The study of the proceedings of the first Council of the Empire is exceedingly profitable to those who desire to understand the nature and defects of the present relations betwixt the Mother Country and her Colonies, and who are anxious to see a closer and more serviceable union substituted. In the speeches of the various delegates the disadvantages under which the several parts of the Empire labour at present, and the objects which it is considered desirable to accomplish for the common weal are plainly set forth, while the obstacles which present themselves have been as plainly recognised.

The subjects which were at first officially proposed for the consideration of the conference by the Home Government were the organization of systematic defence and the improvement of postal and telegraphic communication. Political Federation was expressly excluded, but the door was left open for the introduction of any other important question which, in the general opinion of the Colonial Governments, might properly and usefully be brought under consideration. In accordance with this latter supposition, the Colonial Secretary wrote to the Colonial representatives under date the 19th March, 1887, as follows:—"I shall be obliged 'by your communicating to me in 'writing the subjects which you have 'been instructed by your Government, 'and which it may be in your opinion 'desirable to bring forward.'" The representatives of Queensland, Victoria, Cape Colony, South Australia and Natal found themselves able to comply with this request, and a number of additional subjects were suggested and afterwards discussed. In this way the deliberations of the Conference spread over a very wide range, and it was even found possible to introduce gentlemen representing the West Indies, and to discuss and condemn the foreign sugar bounties. Leaving out of consideration those which interest only one particular colony, and those of a legal character, the matters which came before the Conference for consideration may be classed under the following divisions:—Naval and military defence; postal and telegraphic communication; inter-British trade relations; Imperial annexation; the census throughout the Empire; preservation of life at sea. To refer at length to all these subjects in the course of the present chapter is an impossibility, but there are points of special importance to which attention ought to be directed.

The chief subject discussed by the Conference, upon which positive action was reached, was that of increasing the naval force for the protection of the floating trade in Australasian waters. An agreement betwixt the United Kingdom, and the Australasian Colonies was arrived at, subject to ratification by their respective parliaments, according to which five fast cruisers and two torpedo gun boats were to be built by the Imperial Government and placed within the limits of the Australasian station. For this defence the Colonies of New South Wales, Tasmania, South Australia, New Zealand, Victoria, Queensland, and West Australia were to pay to the Imperial Government, interest at five per cent, on the first and prime cost of these vessels, such payment not to exceed £35,000. The Colonies are in addition to bear "the actual charges for maintaining "from year to year three fast cruisers "and one torpedo gun boat, which are "to be kept in commission in time of "peace, and also of the three other "vessels which are to remain in reserve, provided always that the claim "made by the Imperial Government "under this head does not exceed the "annual payment of £91,000." Although the Parliament of Queensland refused to ratify this agreement, there is no doubt that its terms will ultimately be carried into effect. The discussions at the conference regarding it are most interesting, and abound with evidence that a most generous and considerate spirit actuated all the representatives. The fact that this assessment of £120,000 annually was levied upon the Australasian Colonies, and agreed to by their delegates without any reference to the relative wealth,

population, shipping or trade of the contracting parties, is a proof of the readiness of the Australians to do their duty in the matter of naval defence. Mr. Service, of Victoria, called attention to the fact that no basis had been laid down upon which the contribution should be made, and his contention, that the arrangement proposed by the Imperial Government was destitute of any fundamental principle, was not seriously controverted. The most that can be said for it is that it seems to be roughly based upon population. The population of the Australasian Colonies amounts to about 13 per cent. of the whole population of the Empire, and the sum they have agreed to contribute is about one per cent. of the total British navy estimates, of which the whole Empire has the benefit. It seems unfortunate that this contribution should have assumed the form of a subsidy, and that it should have been fixed without reference to the relative magnitude of the trade, wealth or population of the other Colonies or the Mother Country. But after all, the arrangement is only temporary, and in carrying it out, experience will be gained regarding its merits as a plan for obtaining contributions from the Colonies.

It is much to the credit of the Australians that they agreed to this contribution so readily, because they might have taken the position that, according to the present understanding between Great Britain and her Colonies, naval defence is exclusively the business of the Imperial Government. The statement of Sir Alexander Campbell is especially explicit upon this point. He said:—"The Imperial Government had previously given us 'notice of their intention to withdraw 'from the Colony Her Majesty's 'troops, and they declared their resolution to carry that out. The Government here (i.e. in London) agreed 'to undertake the naval defence of 'Canada, the Canadian authorities 'undertaking the land defence of the 'Colony. Upon that basis the confederation of all the Provinces was 'formed, viz.:—That Her Majesty's 'troops were to be withdrawn (the 'withdrawal was then in course of 'being carried out), and that the local 'authorities were only to undertake 'the land defence." Other delegates spoke to the same effect, and all of them seemed to accept unreservedly the principle that land defence should be undertaken and paid for by the Colonies. A great amount of information as to what each of them had done in this respect was laid before the conference and led to expressions of much gratification from its members. Sir Alexander Campbell spoke for Canada, and described its military efforts and resources. He also claimed that the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway was a very solid contribution to Imperial defence. "By means of 'that railway," said he, "and by 'means of the Intercolonial Railway, 'we have extended the possible communication from London to the extreme North-West on the Pacific 'Ocean, and reduced the time occupied 'in traversing that distance to a period 'of a fortnight. So that now Her 'Majesty's Government could send 'reinforcements of men and material 'to Esquimaux in 12 or 14 days from 'this place (London). To construct a 'railway that can put such a power 'in the hands of Her Majesty's Government is undoubtedly a great contribution to the defence of the country. Few things can be more valuable to the defence of a country than 'the power of ready communication." The readiness with which this claim was admitted by the English representatives was one of the most remarkable and gratifying features of the conference. Mr. Stanhope, the Secretary of State for War, said, "I confess that I 'entirely agree with Sir Alexander Campbell in saying that it is not 'possible to exaggerate the advantage 'from a military point of view which 'the Empire has gained by the construction of the Canadian Pacific 'Railway." A similar and wider acknowledgment was made by Lord Knutsford in his letter of 23rd July, 1887, to the Governors of Colonies transmitting the Colonial Conference report. He writes thus:—"Summary 'statements, forming a valuable and 'interesting record of the progress of 'all the self-governing Colonies in 'matters relating to defence, were laid 'before the conference, and will be 'confidentially communicated to the 'Colonial Governments; but it is not 'desirable to include them among the 'published papers. These statements 'are extremely gratifying to Her 'Majesty's Government, as showing 'the energy, ability and self-sacrifice 'with which the Colonies have contributed their share towards the 'general defence of the Empire. Thus,

"dealing with personnel only, it appears that in the Dominion of Canada 'the available force of active militia, 'together with the permanent corps, 'amounts to nearly 35,000 men; 'in the Australasian Colonies the 'total armed strength is no less than '34,000; and in the Cape and Natal 'there are trained forces of 5,500 and '1,500 men respectively. There is, 'moreover, in each case a large reserve 'which can be drawn upon in case of 'need."

But between the naval armaments and the defence of shipping on the high seas by the Imperial Government on the one hand, and the military establishments of the Mother Country and the Colonies for land defence on the other, there are to be found defensive works of an amphibious character, the nature and cost of which gave rise to very interesting discussions. These are the first-class coaling stations which are being established and fortified "for the purpose of 'maintaining communication with the 'distant dependencies of the Empire, 'and protecting the floating trade in 'the event of war." Mr. Stanhope gave a description of the extent of the work of this nature which the Imperial Government proposed to undertake. Besides the Imperial fortress of Malta, Gibraltar, Halifax and Bermuda it has to maintain and arm coaling stations and forts at Sierra Leone, St. Helena, Simons Bay (at the Cape of Good Hope), Trincomalee, Jamaica and Port Castries (in the island of Santa Lucia). At other very important points the Home Government has supplied or proposes to supply the most modern and very expensive guns and other armaments, leaving the cost of the works to be defrayed by the Colony or dependency interested. This is the case with Table Bay, Mauritius, Aden, Colombo, Singapore, Hong Kong and possibly also with Esquimaux. It must not, however, be forgotten that a very great deal has been accomplished by several of the Colonies altogether apart from their military organizations. The defences, for instance, of Sydney, Newcastle and Melbourne, which are coaling stations as well as harbours, have been built, their armaments supplied and their forts manned wholly at Colonial expense.

If all this be well considered it will not awaken surprise that the various Australian representatives were disinclined to respond to the proposal of the Imperial authorities that their Governments should bear the cost of fortifying and defending the coaling stations at King George's Sound and Thursday Island, excluding only the cost of an armament which the Australian representatives did not regard as sufficiently modern and effective. They could not see that merely because these stations were situated upon Australian Territory, they should be differently classed from those which were being fortified almost at the sole expense of the Imperial Government. Sir Graham Berry said that "if these are the matured views of the Imperial Government, I feel quite satisfied that the 'Parliament, certainly of Victoria, 'and I believe of the other Colonies, 'would scarcely undertake the expense of works outside their own 'boundaries, if the Imperial Government repudiated all liability whatsoever towards the expenses of the 'fortifications of Australia. (Hear, 'hear). I thought it necessary to say 'this plainly, because it has come 'upon me by surprise to learn that 'the Imperial Government treats 'King George's Sound differently 'from other coaling stations of Imperial importance." Other delegates spoke in a similar way, and, in addition to such considerations, the absence of a proper basis upon which to proportion the contributions was again commented on. Mr. Service said, "I 'feel in dealing with this question as I 'did and as I expressed myself, in 'dealing with the creation of the new 'fleet, that there is no principle laid 'down upon which financial contributions should be made." He said much more to the same effect, and was followed by Sir John Downer, whose speech contains the following passage:—"As to what has just fallen from Mr. Service, I must say that I substantially agree with him; we sympathise with each other, I have no doubt; further, I have no doubt, the 'Imperial Government sympathises 'with us in our small way, and we, 'understanding their difficulties thoroughly sympathise with them and 'thoroughly understand the difficulties they have to deal with in 'carrying out that which they may 'think will be the best thing for the 'security of the Empire generally. 'But after all, as Mr. Service said, the 'time will come when this will have 'to be settled upon something like a 'fair basis. Whatever the difficulty

"of the Imperial Parliament, and 'whatever the difficulty of the 'Colonial Parliament, there cannot be 'that perfectly good, and proper relation of the United Kingdom to the 'Colonies, which we all desire, unless 'it is founded upon a substantial basis 'which must commend itself to the 'sense of justice of all."

In these remarks it is not possible to discover any trace of a disinclination on the part of the Australians to bear their share of the cost of Imperial naval defence, but they wish to arrive at an understanding as to what that share should be, and how the contributions towards this object from all the countries in the Empire should be apportioned. Some were of opinion that these matters are too much looked at from local points of view, to the exclusion of the Imperial aspect of the common defence of the Empire. Hints were even thrown out to the effect that these questions could only be dealt with satisfactorily, by a higher parliament than that of any of the divisions of the Empire. On this point Mr. Service said:—"We cannot find any fault with 'you for fending off, as it were, applications for no end of money to 'what is called the Imperial Parliament, because we see and feel from 'our own experience that the thing is 'absolutely necessary. But it brings 'into relief the fact that the Parliament sitting in London is really 'a trial Parliament for the United Kingdom, and that it is 'ceasing to some extent to have 'have Imperial functions, which is 'made manifest by another fact; the 'fact that growing colonies like these 'in Australia are called upon to take 'their own share—in fact the heaviest 'share in their own local defences, 'seems to me to show that the Imperial character of the Government 'and of the parliament in London is 'to some extent disappearing; and I 'fancy that that is a fact which will 'have to be dealt with in the near 'future. That would, of course, point 'to some body of an Imperial character which could deal with questions 'of this sort, not only from a defence 'point of view, but from a finance point 'of view." These quotations will show that the discussion travelled over ground situated at quite a distance from King George's Sound and Thursday Island. No decision was arrived at regarding the defence of these points, and Mr. Stanhope and Lord Knutsford were unable to do more than promise full consideration of the views put forward by the Colonial representatives.

The subject, next in importance to the defence of the Empire, which was discussed by the conference was Postal and Telegraphic Communication, but it cannot be said, with regard to these that any very positive results were reached. The scheme for an Imperial Penny Postage did not receive much consideration from the Colonial delegates who almost all pronounced it impracticable. One statement after another was made as to the amount of loss sustained in working the present postal arrangements of each Colony, and from this it was argued that additional outlay would meet with disapproval. Mr. Henniker Heaton's statements were placed before the Conference and he was invited to supplement them by verbal explanations, but after he withdrew they were not seriously discussed by the delegates. Mr. Heaton questioned the contention of the Secretary of the Treasury that the postal rates to the Colonies could not be reduced because there was already a loss upon that service of over £1,000 per day. He maintained that "the 'whole of this loss could be saved to 'the country, and an immense burden 'taken from the neck of our commerce, by the simple expedient of stopping the payment of the huge subsidies now received by certain steamship companies, or by shifting the 'obligation to pay the £800,000 now 'annually paid for our Foreign and 'Colonial Packet Service from the 'Post Office Department to the 'Admiralty, the latter department, 'moreover, paying only such sums as 'may fairly be claimed for the service." A very great deal can be said for Mr. Heaton's view. The term "Postal subsidy" even in the Colonies is a misnomer, and such grants are made quite as much for encouraging passenger traffic and facilitating trade as for carrying Her Majesty's mails. Mr. Heaton, however, did not suggest any other account to which the Colonial subsidies could be charged, and it was perhaps on this account that the Colonial delegates shewed so little interest in the matter. They looked at it from their own local stand point and made no suggestion of an Imperial method of meeting the difficulty.

The Australian and South African delegates very distinctly expressed