

2 DEVELOPMENT OF THE IMPERIAL CONFERENCE

minister issued the invitations, acted as chairman of the Conference, decided that representatives of the press should not be admitted to any but the opening meeting, and reserved the right to settle the mode of treatment of any subject. Both he and Lord Salisbury, who as premier made the opening address, deprecated the discussion of the constitution of the Empire, and laid stress on defence.)

(Out of twenty sittings ten were devoted to the question of the naval defence of Australia and New Zealand. These colonies were so impressed with the danger from Russia, and from the colonial activity of France and Germany in the southern Pacific, that they not only wished a larger British fleet stationed in their vicinity, but were anxious that it should be tied there at least in time of peace.) Moreover, they were willing to pay something for this additional protection. The British Government objected strongly to the principle of a tied fleet; but, in order to establish the principle of colonial contribution to naval defence, finally agreed that, in return for an annual contribution of £126,000, a certain number of additional ships should be stationed in Australasian waters, and should not be withdrawn in time of peace except with the consent of the contributing governments. Thus was established a system which lasted down to 1912.

(Next there came up the question of the defence of certain harbours and coaling stations in Australia and South Africa which were of commercial importance to these colonies, and of strategic importance to the British navy.) The colonial representatives were anxious to establish some basis of contribution, but the British Government contented itself with simply getting from each colony all it could. It is interesting to note in this connection that, although Great Britain was still paying for the fortification of Esquimaux and Halifax, the British representatives did not urge that Canada should either assume the maintenance of these stations, or contribute to the upkeep of the British navy.

(Both Queensland and Cape Colony had suggested that the question of imperial preferential trade should be discussed, and their representatives came armed with definite proposals, which met with a good deal of support from the other colonial statesmen. But the British people were firmly wedded to free trade, and nothing definite resulted from this discussion of a question which was to come up at every conference for thirty years.)

(Many other subjects were discussed, ~~some of them of great importance~~, but one is of more interest than the rest to Canadians. Mr. Sandford Fleming, one of the two Canadian representatives, persuaded the Conference, ~~despite the lobbying of the Eastern Extension Telegraph Co.~~, to vote in favour of a survey to determine the feasibility of laying an all-British cable between Canada and Australia.)