

THE NAVAL QUESTION

From *THE MONTREAL DAILY STAR*, October 25th, 1912

To the Editor of *The Montreal Star* :

SIR,—Mr. Cahan, in his fourth letter to *The Star* again attempts to obscure the real issue. He says:

Persistent appeals are made to Canadians to assume a share of Great Britain's financial burdens, on the plea that Canada has financial obligations to Great Britain which have never been liquidated. These appeals are based on the assumption that Great Britain, in the wars with France that were ended by the Treaty of Paris in 1763, in the war of the American Revolution 1775-1783, in the war of 1812, expended hundreds of millions of dollars, of which Canada is morally bound to assume and pay a certain share, which varies according to the fanciful computations of the arithmeticians who seek to impose these new obligations upon us.

Personally, I never heard it suggested before that Canada rests under such a moral obligation. The expense of founding and maintaining the Empire has, up to the present time, been cheerfully borne by the British nation, and no Britisher (English, Scotch, or Irish) considers that any moral obligation rests upon Canada, Australia, New Zealand or South Africa to return to the British exchequer one dollar of the money so expended; but a feeling is growing in Great Britain that the wealthy Dominions beyond the seas should now contribute according to their means and resources, towards the expense of maintaining the Navy upon which the very existence of the whole Empire depends. This is a very different matter to the Overseas Dominions returning to the British Treasury any portion of the money which Great Britain has expended in building up the Empire.

Mr. Cahan proceeds :

But, admitting for the moment, that Canada has obligations to Great Britain, to whom are we in duty bound to make payment? To the present generation of Englishmen who have inherited English estates, for which the present holders have neither toiled nor spun, which consist of a thousand years of accumulated wealth, greater than is possessed by any other European State?

Are we, Canadians, of this generation to pay to the present generation of Englishmen, resident in England, the expenses, or a share of the expenses, incurred in the past by fifty generations of Englishmen in creating new markets and extending their trade and commerce upon every sea and to every land, protecting their investments, increasing their profits, until they have become and continue to be the richest and most powerful commercial community in the world?

It seems to me that the present generation of Englishmen, resident in England, fortunate heirs-in-possession of the accumulated wealth of England, must be considered as entering into their entailed estate, only upon condition that they shall assume the fixed charges that have hitherto attached to it; and even so their surplus wealth is beyond comparison with that which we in this country can hope to create for several centuries to come.

The meaning of these rhetorical utterances is extremely obscure.