



The Development of the Imperial Conference

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THE present war marks the end of an epoch in British history. We cannot tell what the future has in store for the Empire, but we ought to study the history of the past, and to learn from it all we can for our guidance in the trying period that will come after the close of the war. The year 1887 likewise marks the end of an epoch, the period of "Little Englandism", when responsible British statesmen looked forward complacently to the time when the colonies would choose to leave the Empire. Between 1887 and 1917, on the other hand, a growing attention was given to the problem of how the bonds of empire might be strengthened. The theory of successive "hivings off" gradually fell into disrepute, and the British public came to believe, not only that all the colonies might be retained within the Empire, but that the power and glory of the Empire depended upon such retention.

Between 1887 and 1917 six regular and two subsidiary conferences have been held for the purpose of strengthening the Empire. At first they were called "Colonial", but since 1907 they have been called "Imperial", and have come to be regarded by many thoughtful people as the most important agency for co-ordinating the activities of the self-governing parts of the Empire, and of gradually working out a more satisfactory form of political organization.

London, 1887.—The first conference met in London in 1887 on the occasion of the golden jubilee of Queen Victoria. The British Government was led to summon it by popular enthusiasm over the recent participation of colonial troops in Sir Garnet Wolseley's campaign in Egypt, and by a desire to secure, if possible, colonial assistance in bearing the ever-increasing burdens of the Empire. It was a period of great anxiety. There was continual unrest in Ireland. The Boers and the Zulus had been causing trouble in South Africa. An expedition up the Nile against the Mahdi had ended disastrously at Khartoum. The Russian attitude toward Great Britain was so threatening in 1885 that war was considered imminent, and the Australasian colonies were worrying over their comparatively defenceless condition. Such a time seemed very opportune for the summoning of colonial representatives to meet the Secretary of State for the Colonies. This

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