

The Britannic Alliance

Article Number Two, Concluded from Last Week; Being an Address Delivered at the United Empire Club in London, a Few Weeks Ago

By RICHARD JEBB

Author of "Studies in Colonial Nationalism," etc.

HERE and there you may find a man who looks at the Empire from more than one angle. England has many millions of one-angle men. Once all Englishmen were called Angles. In the development of the Empire a good many Englishmen have got more than one angle. Jebb is one of them. His article on The Britannic Alliance last week showed that in his estimate Imperial Federation may be a splendid theory, but that in sentimental practice it must fall down in comparison with an alliance of all the states in the Empire. In the following article he proceeds to show how this alliance can be practically worked out.

Mr. Jebb is about forty years of age. He has done thinking enough for a man of sixty. His Welsh temperament will not permit him to go slow. Some years ago he wrote a book on "Colonial Nationalism." This was his first attempt to co-ordinate his ideas about the Empire as he had seen it by actual travel and contact from the African kraal to the Australian sheep ranch; from the temples of prodigal India, with 300,000,000 population in unstable equilibrium, to the vaster reaches of Canada with at that time less than 7,000,000, all loyally devoted to Great Britain.

In 1910 Mr. Jebb was cabled by a number of Canadians to contest a seat in the British general election. People of both parties in Canada believed that Jebb would be a powerful accession to a parliament that had to deal primarily with Empire. He ran for Marylebone as a tariff reformer and was defeated. He has since done some revising of his Imperial opinions to bring them up to date. He has shifted his base without changing his mind. In his address on "The Britannic Alliance" he reverts in more practical detail to the doctrines set forth years ago in his book on "Colonial Nationalism." He makes his points clear to any man that takes even the mildest interest in politics outside his own ward or constituency. Jebb is an antidote to localism. And he is an apostle of reasonable, effective autonomy. Mr. Jebb does a good deal of his thinking on his 25,000-acre wild-land preserve in the hills of Wales.

MY second proposition, that Britannic Alliance is also easier to attain than Imperial Federation, perhaps need not detain us so long. As a practical policy Imperial Federation is always confronted with a certain dilemma. If you confine the Empire Government to the three subjects of Foreign Affairs, Defence and Dependencies, it cannot work. If, on the other hand, you give it powers sufficient for its work, you must take away so much from the state governments that they will not look at it. The root fallacy of the "settled view" of the centralists is, that they regard Foreign Affairs as a watertight compartment, having no essential connection with another watertight compartment which they label Trade, and which they leave to the state governments. Sir Edward Grey does not support that fallacy. The other day he was explaining what the Foreign Office has to do, and among its principal duties he referred to what he described as "the PARAMOUNT interest of our worldwide commerce outside the Empire, in promoting and encouraging which the Foreign Office co-operates closely with the Board of Trade." Is your federal Foreign Office, then, going to "co-operate closely" with each of five or six separate boards of trade, some of which are following the protectionist line, while others are following the free-trade line? Again, is your federal Foreign Office, trying to serve the cosmopolitan interests of British trade, going to drag along by the hair, even into war, states like Australia or Canada, which have to look for their main market to the food-consuming population of this country, and are always more interested in the development of their own virgin wealth than in the exploitation of foreign countries, such as South Africa, which compete with their own trade? I suggest that if you federalize Foreign Affairs, you must also federalize Trade; and if you federalize Trade you must federalize Posts, Telegraphs and Shipping, and if you federalize Shipping, you encroach on the field of Labour Regulation, and you must also federalize Immigration because the Asiatic question cannot be withheld from the Department of Foreign

Affairs. But what becomes then of the centralist's anodyne, that Imperial Federation involves no impairment of Dominion autonomy?

Autonomy in Foreign Policy

Britannic Alliance not only leaves all those matters to the individual governments, but goes so far as to recognize the constitutional right of each to govern its own foreign relations. It relies on the Britannic sentiment which has grown so wonderfully in recent years to create a desire for a joint policy. But it is one thing to desire something, and another to be able to do it. Liberal free-traders are always saying to me, "We like Britannic Alliance so much, if only you would leave out Tariff Reform." So they try to believe that sentiment is a sufficient basis for a joint foreign policy in perpetuity, and it is partly to win the support of this section that modern centralists of "the most serious school" have definitely "settled" that trade shall not be a federal interest. But the notion that five or six distant and independent States could continuously act together in foreign affairs seems to me to be utterly chimerical, unless they are bound not only by a common sentiment, but also by a community of those interests which it is the main purpose of foreign policy to protect. We need not have identical trade policies in each part. But our several trade policies must at least be based on common principles, and on a common interest in the same markets for the major portion of the trade. Supposing the policy of National Protection modified by Imperial Preference were adopted in this country, as it already has been practically by all the rest of the Empire, you would then have got a common principle established on which to base a common attitude in dealing with foreign countries. And if you could develop this Britannic trade policy, by extending the operation of Preference to all commercial and financial transactions, and by developing to the utmost the maritime communications of the Empire, you might then make the Britannic markets, and not the foreign markets, the paramount interest for all the partner states. If that could be achieved, I do not see why the voluntary alliance in respect of foreign relations should not work for as long a period as we need think about.

Mutual Aid in Living

But Jim Larkin is not excited about foreign policy. He is concerned for social betterment, and especially wages betterment. Well, the motto of Britannic Alliance is "mutual aid in living." Instead of telling the Australians that they must give up their idea of enacting better conditions for seamen in the merchant service than is allowed by the pressure of foreign competition, we would co-operate with the Australians so as to assimilate our standard to theirs, and to protect that standard by means of statutory preference to Britannic shipping. Instead of scolding New Zealand for trying to protect her local seamen in the inter-Australasian trade against the Lascar labour competition of the P. & O. Co., we would warn that singularly generous corporation—which lately forced even its officers to strike—that mail subsidies could not be had on such terms. The aim of Britannic Alliance is to level up, not to level down. We regard the sparsely peopled Dominions as the hinterland of crowded Britain, and we accept the highest extant standard of labour conditions within the Empire as the proper standard for our people at home. But that policy, to be fully effective, demands free trade within the Empire, and you cannot expect the leading Dominions to abolish their tariffs against this country until our wages rate, at least, approximates more nearly to theirs, so that the competition might be fair. How, then, can you raise the level of wages here? You can do it only by a policy which would stimulate the demand for labour without either discouraging emigration to the Dominions or encouraging the influx of pauper aliens from the Europe. In this club I need not go further into that.

Naval Defence

Let me anticipate one or two objections, arising out of the discussion a fortnight ago. Some seem to feel that the Australian fleet, however large it may become, can never be of any real use because

it cannot reach the North Sea in 24 hours. But Australia is doing her best to meet her immediate responsibility, which is to protect herself against attack by her nearest potential enemy. She may reasonably expect Britain to do the same. It is essentially our own business to make these islands safe against invasion and to protect the interests of the Empire in this part of the world. How can you say that the sea is all one, when the North Sea is divided by three or four weeks' steaming from the Pacific Ocean? Australia hopes that in an emergency we would try to let our local navy go to her help, and we hope that in an emergency hers might come to our help. But the Pacific Dominions should be able to meet singlehanded the first brunt of a Mongolian attack, and Britain should be able to meet singlehanded the first brunt of a German attack, unless Canada cares to station some of her future ships in our waters. The sooner Britain can get rid of the notion that she may finance her domestic legislation, or avoid the burden of National Service, by exacting battleships from the Dominions, giving them in return a representation which she could always over-ride, the better it will be for herself and for the Empire.

Optional Neutrality

Then there is the stumbling block, quite a recent invention, of what is wrongly called optional "neutrality" in war. Some people ask, indignantly, "Are the Dominions to stand in or out at will?" I reply, "Yes, certainly." They have always had that right. No one disputed it till the other day, and it has hitherto made for united action in time of need. Some day Britain may be glad to use that right herself. Why should we in Britain be taxed because Australia has some petty quarrel with Peru over some purely Australian affair? Of course, the Crown being common to us all, Britain is at war when Australia is at war. But Britain should reserve to herself, as the others have hitherto done, the right of deciding how far she will participate. If the war should spread, and the Empire were in danger, Britain's loyalty, let us hope, would be not less reliable than was the loyalty of Australia, and New Zealand, and Canada in the South African crisis, which did not immediately concern them. Some people think that centralization is imperative, because you cannot trust the French-Canadians or the South African Dutch, who may be in control of their respective Dominions when the crisis comes. Surely experience has taught us something in this matter. For coercing "Laurier" or "Hertzog," national patriotism is worth ten of Imperial sovereignty. Independent Canada sent the contingents to the South African war. Subordinated Canada might have backed Bourassa against the fiat of the Empire Government. The effective unity of Canada, or of South Africa, or of the Empire, is never a question of whether the call of the Empire evokes the call of local patriotism, of which the lifeblood is the acknowledged liberty to do or not to do.

Imperial Conference a Success

Then it is commonly argued that the Imperial Conference, which is the organ of Britannic Alliance, has proved ineffectual. I think that view is quite mistaken, even though the Imperial Conference as an institution is only in its infancy. Remember that it only got its regular constitution so lately as 1907, and it is only since then that it has had even the pretence of a permanent organization. What were the achievements of the Imperial Conference before 1907? Perhaps the principal were the formation of an inter-state partnership to construct the Pacific Cable; the definition of a certain policy in regard to Asiatic Immigration, which, however, has only been partially followed; and the definition of an Empire tariff policy, which has since been carried out by all except Britain and Newfoundland. Your Chairman, in his remarks of a fortnight ago, seemed to suggest that this question of Preference illustrated the impotence of the Conference system to get things done. To my mind it illustrates the contrary. Surely it is a big thing to have got so important a policy as that of Preference accepted within fifteen years by the Governments of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and the West Indies (which means the British Government itself), and also by the solid opinion of the native members on the Viceroy's Council in India. If you had had to wait, as you