

8 DEVELOPMENT OF THE IMPERIAL CONFERENCE

to show that Great Britain could not grant a preference to the colonies without unduly enhancing the cost of food and of raw materials for manufacturing. Of course, the British attitude defeated the proposal. The British Government had once more refused, even more resolutely than before, to be drawn into any system of preferences that would interfere with her system of free trade.

Although, on a number of subsidiary questions, important decisions were reached, the results of the discussion of the three main topics were very disappointing to men of the Chamberlain school of thought. An *Imperial Conference* had been established, but in it the representatives of the colonies now met as delegates of national governments, not as members of an imperial parliament, or an imperial council. Almost no progress was made in imperial defence. Finally, an impasse had been reached with regard to trade within the Empire.

Naval Conference, 1909.—During the early years of the 20th century great changes were taking place in the relations of the European nations. At the opening of the century the chief continental powers were grouped in two rival alliances. The triple alliance of Germany, Austria and Italy had been formed in 1882, and the dual alliance of Russia and France had been openly acknowledged by 1897. As a result Great Britain was isolated. She was a member of neither alliance, and was on bad terms with both France and Russia. But a great change was brought about during the reign of Edward VII, and partly through his influence. In the first place, an entente was established with France. Great Britain was to have a free hand in Egypt, and France a free hand in Morocco. Then, partly through the influence of France, Great Britain and Russia were led to settle all their differences in Asia, and thus make possible the triple entente between Russia, France, and Great Britain. But Germany viewed these rapprochements with misgivings, and not only continued to press her claim to a place in the sun, but built a larger and larger fleet to protect her commerce and to assure her position in *Weltpolitik*.

German naval rivalry at last alarmed Great Britain so thoroughly that in the spring of 1909 Sir Edward Grey told the Commons that the British navy would have to be rebuilt. Such a pronouncement from a cabinet which had been markedly non-imperialistic, and was interested primarily in schemes of social and political reform, startled the colonies and called forth immediate offers of colonial assistance. As a result of these evidences of the desire of the Dominions to assist in an emergency, the British Government summoned a subsidiary conference to consider naval defence. The natural preference of the larger Dominions for local

¹ Jebb's *The Imperial Conference* is the standard history of the Conferences up to 1907.