

The Development of the Imperial Conference

(Continued from the April issue)

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London 1917. A few days after the 1911 conference the Laurier Government was defeated. The new Premier, Sir Robert Borden, not only halted the acquisition of a Canadian fleet, but visited London in 1912, and demanded a voice in foreign affairs. In 1913 the British Government answered the demand by announcing that, with regard to technical questions of defence, whenever matters affecting a Dominion were under consideration in the committee of Imperial Defence a representative of that Dominion would be summoned. As to foreign policy in general, any resident minister appointed by a Dominion Government would have at all times free and full access to the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary, and the Colonial Secretary.¹

The European political situation remained threatening. In 1911 Italy made war on Turkey, and before peace had again been made between these countries, the Balkan Wars had started. Finally, in 1914 the present great conflict began. It seemed to both British and Dominion statesmen, except those of Australia, that it was unwise and inconvenient to hold an Imperial Conference while Great Britain was struggling for her life, and so the 1915 meeting was postponed. But on December 20th, 1916, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom summoned the Dominion prime ministers to meet with the members of the British Cabinet in an Imperial War Conference to take counsel concerning the prosecution of the war, the terms of peace, and problems after the war.²

It had probably been intended that only one Imperial body should meet,³ but ultimately it was arranged that there should be (1) an Imperial War Cabinet composed of the British War Cabinet together with the Dominion premiers, (2) an Imperial War Conference composed of the Colonial Secretary, the Dominion premiers, and certain other Dominion ministers. The first body met three days in the week and the second body on the other three days. Concerning the work of the War Cabinet we have no information except the little given in speeches by the ministers who attended its meetings. Some of the discussions of the War

¹ Jebb, *The Britannic Question*, p. 53.

² Sir Robert Borden in House of Commons, *Canadian Hansard*, May 18, 1917, p. 1597.

³ *Hansard*, p. 1598.