

TIGHT BINDING.

representatives of the United Kingdom have been paid to some of the Dominions, and I am sure that these frequent personal contacts with each other will be fruitful in maintaining understanding and co-operation between us.

Meanwhile the work of discussion and consultation on all sorts of subjects of common concern by means of correspondence between His Majesty's various Governments has proceeded continuously and to an ever increasing extent.

Constitutional Developments.

The present Conference meets on the morrow of the Coronation of the new King and Queen. In the solemn service which we attended two days ago in Westminster Abbey there was the ancient ceremonial which has accompanied the King's crowning for centuries; but there were also innovations marking the constitutional developments which have occurred since the last Coronation twenty-six years ago. No other quarter century of our history has witnessed constitutional changes so profound, so far-reaching and so naturally achieved. The British Empire has never been a static organism. Bearing within itself seeds of development of which its founders were unaware, it has been moulded by, and itself has moulded, a political philosophy. Since the last Coronation there have been far reaching changes in status and mutual relationships; in particular, I would refer to the Declaration of the Imperial Conference of 1926, and to the passage into law in 1931 of the Statute of Westminster, and in 1935 of the Government of India Act. The self-governing communities of the British Commonwealth have become an association of peoples, each with sovereign freedom of its own but accustomed to co-operate closely with each other in matters of common concern and all associated under the Crown.

The Principle of Co-operation.

I have referred to co-operation and I have done so because I wish to stress this aspect of our relationship with one another. For in the whole process of change during these important years one principle has for us remained constant—the principle of co-operation. But if the free exercise of this principle is to be preserved it is necessary that the nations who believe in it should strengthen the foundations upon which it rests, not only professing it but practising it and being seen to practise it. It is our duty to realise at this moment that the maintenance of our ideals is a trust imposed upon us. And here I believe is the great service which the British Commonwealth of Nations can render not to itself alone but, by its example, to the world. We are partners in a great enterprise, jointly responsible for a new experiment, the success or failure of which must profoundly influence the future of mankind.

We believe in agreement as the mainspring, and in democratic institutions as the method, of Government; and we have set our trust in them because we think that they are the best means that mankind has devised of preserving these things to which we attach supreme value—liberty, and individual freedom of thought, of speech, and of conscience. But because of this we do not underestimate the value of that idea to which other ways of government attach supreme importance—the idea of service to the State. We ought, I think, constantly to remember this necessary aspect of life in a community, that individual right require to be completed by the fulfilment of duties to the community. And what is true of a community of individuals is equally true of a community of nations.

The International Situation.

The main lines of our Agenda have been settled between us in correspondence and have been published, and there is no need for me to recapitulate them in detail. Though we shall discuss other important

subjects, we are agreed that questions of foreign affairs and defence shall be our main subjects. It is fitting that they should be. For we are met at a time when the international situation is difficult and even threatening, and the responsibility rests upon us to see that our deliberations not only are of service to ourselves but also may help in some measure towards the solution of those international problems which are now perplexing the world.

It will be our task to examine the causes of the present international unrest, to exchange views upon them, and to consider whether there is any contribution which we, co-operating together, could make to their diminution or removal. No more important subjects could engage any responsible body of men than those which confront us round this table, but let us not be discouraged by the greatness or the difficulty of our task. I believe that we shall find that the principles on which we ourselves rely are the key to the solution of the rivalries, suspicions and bitterness which so grievously divide the world to-day.

Questions of Defence.

My predecessor, speaking at the Imperial Conference of 1930 said:—

"The strength of armaments in the world to-day and the general unwillingness of Governments to advance the cause of a secured peace by a reduction of military material, unless checked, must soon lead to a new race in armaments to which the most pacific of nations cannot be indifferent."

His words were prophetic of that ruinous race for rearmament which we are now witnessing. With so many of the most powerful nations of the world expanding their armed forces, we, in this country, have decided that it is our duty to put our own defences in order, at a cost the magnitude of which you know. We deplore the necessity, but we have no choice. We shoulder that burden for the security of this island, which is still the heart of the Empire, but also that we may be equipped to fulfil our responsibilities in guarding the security of the Empire overseas and as a loyal member of the League of Nations. Others of you here, impressed with the same dangers though equally deploring the necessity, have felt compelled to revise your own defence preparations, and it will be our task to consider whether, while preserving our individual rights of decision and action, we can co-ordinate our various policies in such a way as to assist one another and—as is, I know, the hope and prayer of us all—to help forward the cause of peace.

Other Subjects on the Agenda of the Conference

I have left myself little time to speak to the other subjects on our Agenda. The Government of the Union of South Africa have suggested for discussion a number of constitutional questions connected with inter-Imperial relations, and I am glad to know that we have been assisted in dealing with them by the preliminary talks which have been held in London during the last fortnight. I feel confident that we shall find the solution of these questions if we approach them in the light of the principles which I have already mentioned. As regards economic matters, it has been generally agreed that any questions connected with the Ottawa Agreements can best be dealt with by discussion between the individual Governments concerned, and some discussions of this nature have already taken place. The present Conference will, however, afford an opportunity for reviewing generally the progress of Empire trade since the Ottawa Conference and for considering shipping and certain aspects of co-operation in the economic sphere. It would also, I think, be of advantage if we could give some attention to the problem of the present trend of population, which is one requiring most careful thought.

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