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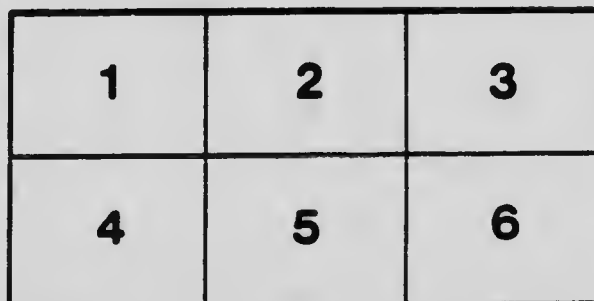
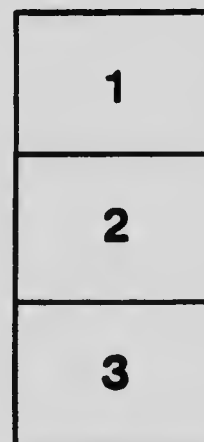
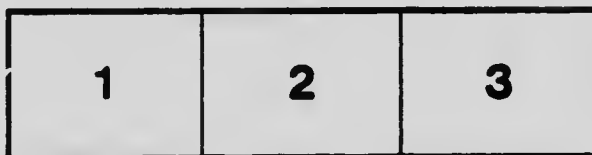
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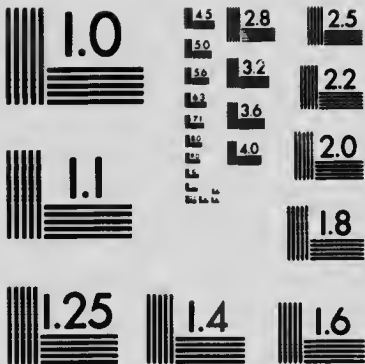
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The Development of the Imperial Conference

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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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minister issued the invitations, acted as chairman of the Conference, decided that representatives of the press should not be admitted to any but the opening meeting, and reserved the right to settle the mode of treatment of any subject. Both he and Lord Salisbury, who as premier made the opening address, deprecated the discussion of the constitution of the Empire, and laid stress on defence.)

(Out of twenty sittings ten were devoted to the question of the naval defence of Australia and New Zealand. These colonies were so impressed with the danger from Russia, and from the colonial activity of France and Germany in the southern Pacific, that they not only wished a larger British fleet stationed in their vicinity, but were anxious that it should be tied there at least in time of peace.) Moreover, they were willing to pay something for this additional protection. The British Government objected strongly to the principle of a tied fleet; but, in order to establish the principle of colonial contribution to naval defence, finally agreed that, in return for an annual contribution of £126,000, a certain number of additional ships should be stationed in Australasian waters, and should not be withdrawn in time of peace except with the consent of the contributing governments. Thus was established a system which lasted down to 1912.

(Next there came up the question of the defence of certain harbours and coaling stations in Australia and South Africa which were of commercial importance to these colonies, and of strategic importance to the British navy.) The colonial representatives were anxious to establish some basis of contribution, but the British Government contented itself with simply getting from each colony all it could. It is interesting to note in this connection that, although Great Britain was still paying for the fortification of Esquimaux and Halifax, the British representatives did not urge that Canada should either assume the maintenance of these stations, or contribute to the upkeep of the British navy.

(Both Queensland and Cape Colony had suggested that the question of imperial preferential trade should be discussed, and their representatives came armed with definite proposals, which met with a good deal of support from the other colonial statesmen. But the British people were firmly wedded to free trade, and nothing definite resulted from this discussion of a question which was to come up at every conference for thirty years.)

(Many other subjects were discussed, some of them of great importance, but one is of more interest than the rest to Canadians. Mr. Sandford Fleming, one of the two Canadian representatives, persuaded the Conference, despite the lobbying of the Eastern Extension Telegraph Co., to vote in favour of a survey to determine the feasibility of laying an all-British cable between Canada and Australia.)

C of 1894.

Ottawa 1894.—Two questions discussed at the Conference of 1887 continued to claim the earnest attention of colonial statesmen—preferential trade and a Pacific cable. The Canadian Government became more and more convinced of the importance of preferential trade within the Empire, and Mr. Fleming kept up an unremitting agitation in favour of a Pacific cable, with the result that the Government of Canada issued invitations for a conference to be held in Ottawa in 1894 for the discussion of commercial relations between Canada and Australasia. The question of preferential trade was discussed at great length, and the desirability of a general system of trade preferences between the self-governing parts of the empire was so clearly and forcibly urged by the Canadian ministers, Hon. George E. Foster and Hon. Mackenzie Bowell, that the Conference decided almost unanimously in favour of a system. Two years later the Conservative Government of Canada was defeated in a general election, but the new Liberal Government under Sir Wilfred Laurier brought in a measure granting a preference of 12½% to British goods, which was later increased to 25%, and finally to 33½%.

Mr. Fleming once more urged the importance and the feasibility of a Pacific Cable, and, in spite of the determined opposition of a cable trust, persuaded the Conference to take such action that in 1902 a Pacific cable, the property of the co-operating governments, was completed at a cost of \$1,800,000.

The conference of 1894 is usually called a subsidiary one. It was summoned by one of the colonies. Moreover, the British Government was represented only by the Earl of Jersey, who was not allowed "to bind Her Majesty's Government, or to express views on their behalf". Yet this Conference, which is given scant attention by some of the historians, had very important results.

London 1897.—Many very important things happened between 1894 and 1897. The Liberal Government of Lord Roseberry was replaced in 1895 by a Conservative one under the Marquis of Salisbury. A few months later, the unfortunate "Venezualan Affair" came up to disturb the good relations between Great Britain and the United States. On January 1st, 1896, Dr. Jameson undertook his wild raid into the Transvaal and on January 3rd the world was startled by the Kaiser's famous telegram to President Kruger, which was answered by the sailing of Great Britain's Flying Squadron. A few months later still, the Anglo-Egyptian advance up the Nile against the Khalifa was begun. The next year, Canada granted a customs preference to British goods. At the same time, active negotiations were going on in Australia looking to the federation of the Australian colonies. Surely it was an appropriate

time for anxious care about the defence of the Empire, and for an attempt to draw the colonies closer to the Mother Country.

The Colonial Secretary of the day was Hon. Joseph Chamberlain, who had chosen what, up to that time, had been regarded as a second-rate post, in order to carry into effect his ideas concerning the consolidation of the Empire. He sent invitations to the prime ministers of the self-governing colonies to attend a conference in London on the occasion of the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria. Eleven colonial premiers assembled, and Canada was represented by Sir Wilfred Laurier. In his opening address Mr. Chamberlain proposed three main topics for discussion, the political relations of the colonies to Great Britain, defence, and commercial relations. He advocated the creation of a central council to which the colonies would send representative plenipotentiaries, not mere delegates. He rejoiced that Australia had already set an example of contribution to the navy. Finally, he proposed that the delegates should consider carefully how the commercial bonds of the Empire might be strengthened. Mr. Goschen, First Lord of the Admiralty, urged that all the colonies should give cash contributions towards the upkeep of the British fleet. The Secretary of the Colonial Defence Committee explained the military measures the colonial governments should take, and the premiers present promised to take his suggestions under their serious consideration when they went home. But, in spite of the efforts of the most forceful Colonial Secretary Great Britain had ever had, almost no progress was made. The premiers expressed their unanimous opinion "that the political relations between the United Kingdom and the self-governing colonies are generally satisfactory under the existing condition of things". Only in the matter of trade did they suggest any change. They urged "the denunciation at the earliest convenient time of any treaties which now hamper the commercial relations between Great Britain and her colonies", and undertook to confer with their colleagues as to what preferences might be given to the products of the United Kingdom. As the debates of this conference have never been published, we are left to conjecture why so little was accomplished. Judging, however, by the records of other conferences, we may well believe that the growing national feeling of the larger colonies was an effective bar to any scheme for a central executive, and that the long-established devotion of the Mother Country to free-trade prevented even Mr. Chamberlain from arranging reciprocal trade preferences between Great Britain and her colonies.

Conference of 1902.

London, 1902.—Soon after the conference of 1897 the South African war broke out, and for three years the attention of British statesmen was centred on that struggle, which had led the colonies for the first

time to go seriously to the aid of the Motherland. While the conflict was still raging, Canada showed her desire to strengthen trade relations with Great Britain by increasing the preference on British goods to 33½% on July 1st, 1900. Only a few months later, January 1st, 1901, the Australian colonies strengthened the Empire by uniting in the new Commonwealth of Australia. At the same time, however, two colonies, Jamaica and Newfoundland, were trying to establish such reciprocal trade arrangements with the United States as would have interfered seriously with Mr. Chamberlain's plans for inter-imperial free trade. The time seemed ripe for another conference, and, moreover, a fitting occasion was at hand, since the colonial premiers would be in London in 1902 for the coronation of Edward VII.

On this occasion the colonial premiers were accompanied by other ministers, but the latter were allowed to take part in discussions only when their special departments were concerned. Canada was represented by Sir Wilfrid Laurier and Messrs. Frederick Borden, Fielding, Mulock, and Paterson.

In his opening address (Mr. Chamberlain urged the paramount importance of strengthening the bonds of the Empire, and proposed three subjects for their consideration, political relations, commercial union, and Imperial defence. He believed that imperial federation was feasible, but he preferred an imperial council. He urged the desirability and importance of a system of inter-imperial free trade. And, finally, he appealed strongly for adequate colonial participation in the defence and government of the Empire.) "Gentlemen, we do want your aid. We do want your assistance in the administration of the vast Empire which is yours as well as ours. 'The weary Titan staggers under the too vast orb of his fate'. We have borne the burden for many years. We think it time that our children should assist us to support it, and whenever you make the request to us, be very sure that we shall hasten gladly to call you to our councils. If you are prepared at any time to take any share, any proportionate share, in the burden of the Empire, we are prepared to meet you with any proposal for giving to you a corresponding voice in the policy of the Empire".

The question of defence came up first. Lord Selborne, First Lord of the Admiralty, urged that Great Britain was bearing more than her share of the burden of naval defence, and that the colonies should supply not only more money, but men for the navy. Moreover, he objected strongly to the policy of confining the Australian squadron within prescribed waters. The military needs of the Empire were presented by Mr. Brodrick, Secretary of State for War, who proposed that each colony should maintain a thoroughly trained expeditionary force at the call of the Imperial Government for service abroad. He

suggested that one-quarter of the colonial forces should be of this character.

(The results of these proposals must have been very discouraging to the British ministers. Australia and New Zealand agreed to give £240,000 a year towards the cost of an improved Australian squadron. Cape Colony agreed to give £50,000, and Natal £35,000 towards the general maintenance of the British fleet, and little Newfoundland was willing to pay £3,000 for a drill-ship and a branch of the Royal Naval Reserve. Canada offered nothing, as she was contemplating the establishment of a local naval force.) Great Britain got only half of what she wanted for the navy; and she fared still worse with regard to the army, for Australia and Canada successfully opposed Mr. Brodrick's proposal on the ground that the establishment of such special expeditionary forces "under the absolute control of the Imperial Government was objectionable in principle, as derogating from the powers of self-government enjoyed by them".

(The colonial representatives were not ready to accept such a system of inter-imperial free trade as Mr. Chamberlain suggested, but they were anxious that Great Britain should assist in establishing a system of Imperial preferences by remitting the war duty of one shilling a quarter on wheat and the corresponding duty on flour.) Because of the opposition of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the British Government refused this concession, and claimed that the Canadian preference was of no great value to Great Britain, since Canada still maintained a protective tariff. No general agreement was possible, but the President of the Board of Trade persuaded nearly all the premiers to agree to recommend to their parliaments certain preferences on British goods.

(The only reference to the question of political relations, after Mr. Chamberlain's opening address, was a resolution in favour of holding conferences at regular intervals of not more than four years.) The colonial representatives wished to turn the conference into a recognized and regularly organized means of consultation, but nationalist feeling was too strong in both Canada and Australia to permit the adoption of Mr. Chamberlain's scheme for an Imperial Council.

Many subsidiary matters proposed by the colonies were discussed, but little was accomplished with regard to them. Once more Mr. Chamberlain had been unsuccessful in bringing about a reorganization of the empire, and his ill-success had been partly due to Great Britain's unwillingness to offer any preference to colonial products.) This led him in 1903 to resign his post in the Government in order to lead an agitation for such a system of tariff reform in Great Britain as would enable her to offer trade advantages to her colonies, and thus to lay an economic

foundation for a closer and a more permanent union of the colonies with the Motherland.

London, 1907.—The conditions under which the conference of 1907 met were very different from those of 1897 and 1902. Not only was Mr. Chamberlain no longer Secretary of State for the Colonies, but the Unionist Government had been replaced by a Liberal one, thoroughly committed to free-trade and not at all convinced of the necessity for a more highly centralized government for the Empire. Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, the new Prime Minister, Lord Elgin, the new Colonial Secretary, and other ministers, represented the British Government. Sir Wilfrid Laurier and Messrs. F. Borden and Brodeur represented Canada. Among the other colonial representatives the more prominent ones were Mr. Alfred Deakin of Australia, Joseph Ward of New Zealand, Dr. Jameson of Cape Colony, and General Botha of the Transvaal.

Three main questions came up, all of which had been discussed at previous conferences. With regard to the constitution of the conference it was decided that an *Imperial Conference* should meet *every four years*, that a permanent secretariat for the conference should be provided by the Colonial Office, and that subsidiary conferences might be called on special occasions, or for the discussion of special topics. Thus was the colonial conference changed into an imperial conference with a definite constitution and with arrangements for regular meetings.

Once more (British ministers urged greater colonial participation in defence.) Mr. Haldane wanted an expeditionary force in each of the self-governing colonies, an imperial general staff, and an exchange of officers. Lord Tweedmouth wanted contributions in kind for the navy, preferably in submarines. This time less was secured than at the two last conferences. (The plan for an imperial general staff was approved, but the staff was to be advisory only. New Zealand, Cape Colony, and Natal agreed, either to continue their contributions to the cost of the navy, or to supply ships; but Canada made no proposal, and Australia announced her determination to create a navy of her own.)

(On one subject the colonial representatives were unanimous. They all supported a resolution moved by Sir Wilfrid Laurier, urging the British Government to grant "in the United Kingdom preferential treatment to the products and manufactures of the colonies, either by exemptions from, or reduction of, duties now or hereafter imposed".) Mr. Deakin supported the resolution in a speech that took up more than a whole session, and he was ably supported by others; (but the British Government was utterly opposed to the proposal,) and Mr. Asquith, Mr. Lloyd George, and Mr. Churchill all presented elaborate arguments

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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

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

navies under local control in time of peace, led to a tentative agreement that Great Britain was to supply two units and Australia one, for a proposed Pacific Fleet, and New Zealand was to build a dreadnought for the China unit. Canada, because of her double seaboard, was to build cruisers and destroyers.¹

Australia and New Zealand proceeded at once to carry out their part of the agreement, and their ships helped to round up German cruisers in 1914. Great Britain for some unexplained reason failed to establish her two units in the Pacific. Canada had only begun her fleet, when the Liberal Government of Sir Wilfrid Laurier went out of power in 1911.

London, 1911.—The period between 1909 and 1911 was one of continued anxiety for the British people. The Liberal programme of social reform had involved the Asquith Government in a bitter struggle with the House of Lords, which culminated in the Parliament Act of 1911. The imperialists of Great Britain were much concerned about the naval policies of Canada and Australia, which were laying the foundations of local navies. Abroad the situation was still threatening. Germany had been practically defeated at the Algeciras Conference, but she continued to increase her navy, and was certain to assert herself at the next favourable opportunity, which, indeed, came in July 1911, just after the close of the 1911 conference. On that occasion she sent the gunboat Panther to the port of Agadir, and thereby interfered once more in the question of Morocco. Other countries also were making warlike preparations. Anxious to be prepared for emergencies, they were spending so much money on their navies that the total expenditure of the seven Great Powers of the world on their navies for the year 1911 was \$629,045,000, an increase of \$251,451,000 over the total expenditure of 1901. It was under these circumstances that the regular quadrennial Imperial Conference was held in London in May and June 1911.

Great Britain was represented by her Premier, Hon. H. H. Asquith, who acted as chairman, and Hon. Lewis Harcourt, Secretary of State for the Colonies. Canada was represented by Sir Wilfrid Laurier, Sir F. W. Borden and Hon. L. P. Brodeur. Of the other members of the Conference the more prominent were Mr. Fisher of Australia, Sir Joseph Ward of New Zealand, and General Botha of the new Union of South Africa. Mr. Asquith, in his opening address, reviewed the peculiarities of the British Empire, dwelt on the advantages of the periodical conference at which "we may take free counsel together in the matters which concern us all", and then emphasized the importance of flexibility in the constitution of the Empire. "I am sure we shall not lose sight of

¹ Canadian Official Report of the Conference, Sessional Paper 29a, A1910.

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the value of elasticity and flexibility in our Imperial organization, or of the importance of maintaining to the full, in the case of all of us, the principle of ministerial responsibility to Parliament".¹

(Two very important matters were discussed, the constitution of the Empire and foreign affairs.) The first was brought up by the following resolution, moved by (Sir Joseph Ward, Prime Minister of New Zealand): "That the Empire has now reached a stage of imperial development which renders it expedient that there should be an Imperial Council of State, with representatives from all the constituent parts of the Empire whether self-governing or not, in theory and in fact advisory to the Imperial Government on all questions affecting the interest of His Majesty's Dominions oversea".² He was impressed with the necessity of having a better empire organization in order to meet the perils arising from foreign naval rivalry, foreign immigration into the Empire, the policy of local names, and the "yellow peril" which threatened Australia and New Zealand.

The above resolution, which had been forwarded to the Colonial Office in advance, called for the creation of an Imperial Council; but, on the way over from New Zealand, Sir Joseph had altered his plans, and, in a very long speech, really (advocated the creation of an Imperial Parliament. There was to be an *Imperial House of Representatives* elected by the white people of Great Britain and the Dominions (220 out of 300 elected by Great Britain); an *Imperial Council of Defence* of 12 members, 2 from Great Britain and from each of the Dominions; and an *Executive Council* of fifteen. This Imperial Parliament was to control matters common to the whole Empire and those which could be satisfactorily undertaken only by the Empire as a whole, such as foreign relations and defence. It was to get its revenue by levying contributions on the different parts of the Empire, contributions calculated on a per capita basis, except that for defence the Dominions would pay per capita only 50% as much as Great Britain. The Dominions were to raise their contributions in any way they liked.³)

Sir Joseph's scheme, the first of its kind to be presented in detail to a Conference, met with a very hostile reception. Sir Wilfrid Laurier objected particularly to the financial proposal. "Now if there is one system which I think is indefensible, it is the creation of a body which should have the power to expend at its own sweet will without having the responsibility of providing for the revenue to carry on the expenditure."⁴ Mr. Fisher was of the same opinion; "Sir Wilfred has really expressed my own view". Of all the Dominion statesmen, General

¹Minutes of Proceedings of the Imperial Conference 1911, Canadian Sessional Paper No 208, p. 25.

²Minutes p. 40.

³Minutes pp 60-63

⁴Minutes p. 73.

Botha expressed most fully his objections. His principal fear was that such a scheme as Sir Joseph had outlined would encroach on the autonomy of the Dominions, and thereby weaken the Empire. "But what are we asked to do now? It would probably mean, I submit, the creation of some body in which would be centralized authority over the whole Empire. Now this would in my mind be a step entirely antagonistic to the policy of Great Britain which has been so successful in the past, and which has undoubtedly made the Empire what it is to-day. It is the policy of decentralization which has made the Empire—the power, granted to its various peoples, to govern themselves. It is the liberty which these peoples have enjoyed and enjoy under the British flag which has bound them to the Mother Country. That is the strongest tie between the Mother Country and the Dominions, and I am sure that any scheme which does not fully recognize this could only bring disappointment and disillusionment. I fear that the premature creation of such an Imperial Council as is suggested would—rather than bring the different parts of the Empire closer together—tend to make the connection onerous and unpleasant to the Dominions. Let us beware of such a result. Decentralization and liberty have done wonders. Let us be very careful before we in the slightest manner depart from that policy. It is co-operation and always better co-operation between the various parts of the Empire which we want, and that is what we must always strive for."¹

Mr. Asquith, on behalf of the British Government, said that the existing Imperial Government could not share with any other body its responsibility for the conduct of such important matters as "foreign policy, the conclusion of treaties, the declaration of maintenance of peace, or the declaration of war". Moreover, he urged that the Dominions would not wish to run the risk of having measures forced on them by a body in which they were in a minority.² (The opposition to Sir Joseph's scheme was so strong that he withdrew his resolution.) He had presented his case very badly, but his failure was due primarily to the fact that centralization had no friends in the Conference except the representatives of New Zealand.

(The question of foreign affairs received a great deal of attention at this Conference.) At the 1907 Conference the representatives of Australia and New Zealand had vigorously attacked the policy pursued by Great Britain in connection with the New Hebrides, and Sir Robert Bond of Newfoundland had objected strenuously to the *modus vivendi* arranged with the United States in connection with the Newfoundland fisheries; but (in 1911, for the first time, all the Dominions joined in a definite demand for some voice in foreign affairs.) (The Government of

¹Minutes p. 74.

²Minutes p. 76.

12 DEVELOPMENT OF THE IMPERIAL CONFERENCE

Australia had sent in a resolution regretting that the Dominions had not been consulted prior to the acceptance by the British delegates to the Hague Conference of the terms of the Declaration of London, and objecting to certain articles of the Declaration. With one exception, the Dominion representatives supported the claim of Australia to be consulted, and the British Government promised through Sir Edward Grey that in future the Dominion Governments would be consulted in connection with the negotiating of international agreements affecting the Dominions, "where time and opportunity and the subject matter" permitted. In connection with the articles of the Declaration of London which had been challenged by Australia, Sir Edward urged that they marked a distinct advance in international law and ought to be accepted.¹ The Conference concurred in his view.)

At a meeting of the Committee of Imperial Defence the members of the Conference listened to a general exposition by Sir Edward Grey of the foreign policy of Great Britain and the state of international relations. For the first time Dominion statesmen were admitted, as Mr. Asquith put it, "into the interior, into the innermost parts of the imperial household".²

Many other matters were discussed, but they were dwarfed in importance by the two already mentioned. (No progress was made in the attempt to give the Empire a more centralized government, but with regard to foreign affairs a great change had been brought about. From this time on Dominion statesmen were to be admitted, at least periodically, to the secrets of the British Foreign Office, and they were to be consulted whenever possible about international agreements affecting the Dominions.) At the closing session of the Conference, Mr. Fisher expressed thus his view of the work accomplished: "I believe what has been done at this Conference has laid a foundation broader and safer than has ever hitherto been the case. I believe that the people do not yet fully understand what has taken place at this Conference. Hitherto we have been negotiating with the Government of the United Kingdom at the portals of the household. You have thought it wise to take the representatives of the Dominions into the inner counsels of the nation and frankly discuss with them the affairs of the Empire as they affect each and all of us. Time alone will discover what that means. I am optimistic. I think no greater step has ever been taken, or can be taken by any responsible advisers of the King."³

London 1917. A few months 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

¹ Minutes pp. 109-120.

² Minutes p. 454.

³ Minutes p. 452.

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 Conference were confidential also, and of them we have as yet no record; but we have the full debates on a number of exceedingly important matters and the resolutions passed concerning still others.

The work of the Imperial War Conference was very varied and very important, but three subjects of discussion stand out with special prominence. For the first time in thirty years a Conference passed unanimously a resolution in favour of imperial preference. Under the stress of war, ever Great Britain agreed that "each part of the Empire, having due regard to the interests of our Allies, shall give specially favour-

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

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

³*Hansard*, p. 1598.

able treatment and facilities to the produce and manufactures of other parts of the Empire."¹ (At previous Conferences, with the exception of the first, India had no representation; but she was represented in this War Conference by four men, and the other statesmen present were so highly pleased with the change that a resolution was passed in favour of "India being fully represented at all future Imperial Conferences."²) Furthermore, they recommended the removal of one great cause of India's discontent. "The Imperial War Conference, having examined the memorandum on the position of Indians in the self-governing Dominions presented by the Indian representatives to the Conference, accepts the principle of reciprocity of treatment between India and the Dominions."³

(The most important subject discussed was the constitution of the Empire. After private consultation with other members of the Conference, Sir Robert Borden moved a resolution which, with slight amendment, read as follows: "The Imperial War Conference are of opinion that the readjustment of the constitutional relations of the component parts of the Empire is too important and intricate a subject to be dealt with during the war, and that it should form the subject of a special Imperial Conference to be summoned as soon as possible after the cessation of hostilities. They deem it their duty, however, to place on record their view that any such readjustment, while thoroughly preserving all existing powers of self-government and complete control of domestic affairs, should be based upon a full recognition of the Dominions as autonomous nations of an Imperial Commonwealth, and of India as an important portion of the same, should recognize the right of the Dominions and India to an adequate voice in foreign policy and in foreign relations, and should provide effective arrangements for continuous consultation in all important matters of common imperial concern, and for such necessary concerted action, founded on consultation, as the several Governments may determine."⁴)

This resolution passed unanimously (according to Sir Robert Borden), but there was the same division of opinion with regard to the future government of the Empire as had been shown at the 1911 meeting. The representatives of New Zealand again favoured an Imperial Parliament, and Sir Joseph Ward repeated the arguments he had advanced in 1911; but the other speakers saw grave dangers in any proposal "for

¹It will be noticed that when framing this resolution the Conference had in mind the proceedings of the Paris Conference of the previous year. The problem of arranging a general system of imperial preference is certainly much complicated by the fact that the British Empire will wish, after the war, to give some form of preference to the produce and manufactures of allied countries.

²Extracts from Minutes of Proceedings, Canadian Sessional Paper No. 42a, 1917, p. 28.

³Minutes, pp. 126, 170.

⁴Minutes, p. 46.

an Imperial Parliament which should have taxing powers for certain purposes over all Dominions as well as over the United Kingdom." Sir Robert Borden later expressed in the Canadian House of Commons his conviction that such a proposal was "neither feasible nor wise,"¹ but it fell to the lot of General Smuts of South Africa to express most clearly and forcibly in the Conference discussion the objections of those who opposed the creation of a new Federal Imperial Parliament.

"If this resolution is passed, then one possible solution is negatived, and that is the Federal solution. The idea of a future Imperial Parliament and a future Imperial Executive is negatived by implication by the terms of this resolution. The idea on which this resolution is based is rather that the Empire would deve'op on the lines upon which it has developed hitherto, that there would be more freedom and more equality in all its constituent parts; that they will continue to legislate for themselves and continue to govern themselves; that whatever executive action has to be taken, even in common concerns, would have to be determined, as the last paragraph says, by the several governments of the Empire, and the idea of a Federal solution is therefore negatived, and, I think, very wisely, because it seems to me that the circumstances of the Empire entirely preclude the Federal solution. Here we are, as I say, a group of nations spread over the whole world, speaking different languages, belonging to different races with entirely different economic circumstances, and to attempt to run even the common concerns of that group of nations by means of a central parliament and a central executive is, to my mind, absolutely to court disaster."²

Important as were the discussions and the decisions of the Imperial War Conference, the precedent set by the meeting of the Imperial War Cabinet is of far greater importance. For the first time in the history of the Empire, a small group of men representing the self-governing parts of the Empire and India met together week after week to decide what action should be taken with regard to the conduct of a war. It is true that this Imperial War Cabinet is unlike any other British Cabinet, since it is not responsible exclusively to any one parliament, but it is an effective instrument for co-ordinating the war efforts of the autonomous parts of the Empire, and is likely to become a "permanent convention of the constitution." Both Sir Robert Borden and Mr. Lloyd George look forward to such a development,³ and other members of the Conference were deeply impressed with the importance of this new body. Mr. Massey, of New Zealand, expressed thus his conviction: "I think that when the Dominions were asked to send representatives

¹Canadian Hansard, May 18, 1917, p. 1603.

²Minutes, p. 53.

³Canadian Hansard, May 18, 1917, p. 1601.

from their Legislatures, from their Governments, to the Imperial War Cabinet, it was one of the most important events that had ever taken place in the history of the British Empire, and I am confident that posterity will look upon it from that point of view."¹

Very great progress has been made since 1887. At first the colonial representatives came to the conferences as inferiors who were summoned occasionally by their superior, the Secretary of State for the Colonies. Now the Dominion representatives go to London at regular intervals to sit as equals in conference with the British representatives. The question of preferential trade was debated for thirty years, and at last in 1917 the representatives of Great Britain voted in favour of the principle of preferential trade within the Empire. Colonial help in defence was repeatedly sought, and sometimes given in small measure, but now the Dominions, the Crown Colonies, and India are giving generously of men and money for the present great struggle. India was long unrepresented in the councils of the Empire; but in the future she is to be represented, and her citizens are to be treated in some measure at least as the equals of other British citizens. It long seemed that no progress was being made in finding a better constitution for the Empire. At the first Conference the Marquis of Salisbury said the discussion of Imperial Federation was premature. In 1897 and 1902 Mr. Chamberlain urged the creation of an Imperial Council, but accomplished nothing. In 1911 Sir Joseph Ward laid before the Conference his scheme for an Imperial Parliament, but failed to win any support. And yet all this time the Conference itself was developing into a recognized and highly useful instrument of government, which with the Imperial Cabinet will perhaps give the British Commonwealth all the central machinery it will require for a long time to come. Thirty years ago the British Empire consisted of a parent state, a number of self-governing colonies, and a large number of crown colonies and dependencies, loosely bound together by ties of sentiment. To-day it consists of a group of self-governing nations with colonies and dependencies, still held together by the strongest ties of sentiment, and possessing in addition a highly efficient means of consultation and concerted action.

¹Minutes, p. 51.

