

WILL THE EMPIRE LIVE?

What will hold such an Empire as the British together, this great, laxly scattered, sea-linked association of ancient states and new-formed countries, Oriental nations, and continental colonies? What will enable it to resist the endless internal strains, the inevitable external pressures and attacks to which it must be subjected This is the primary question for British Imperialism; everything else is secondary or subordinated to that.

There is a multitude of answers. But I suppose most of them will prove under examination either to be, or to lead to, or to imply very distinctly this generalisation that if most of the intelligent and active people in the Empire want it to continue it will, and that if a large proportion of such active and intelligent people are discontented and estranged, nothing can save it from disintegration. I do not suppose that a navy ten times larger than ours, or conscription of the most irksome thoroughness, could oblige Canada to remain in the Empire if the general will and feeling of Canada were against it, or coerce India into a sustained submission if India presented a united and resistant front. Our Empire, for all its roll of battles, was not created by force; colonisation and diplomacy have played a far larger share in its growth than conquest; and there is no such strength in its sovereignty as the rule of pride and pressure demand. It is to the free consent and participation of its constituent peoples that we must look for its

continuance.

A large and influential body of politicians considers that in preferential trading between the parts of the Empire, and in the erection of a tariff wall against exterior peoples, lies the secret of that deepened emotional understanding we all desire. I have never belonged to that school. I am no impassioned Free Trader--the sacred principle of Free Trade has always impressed me as a piece of party claptrap; but I have never been able to understand how an attempt to draw together dominions so scattered and various as ours by a network of fiscal manipulation could end in anything but mutual inconvenience mutual irritation, and disruption.

In an open drawer in my bureau there lies before me now a crumpled card on which are the notes I made of a former discussion of this very issue, a discussion between a number of prominent politicians in the days before Mr. Chamberlain's return from South Africa and the adoption of Tariff Reform by the Unionist Party; and I decipher again the same considerations, unanswered and unanswerable, that leave me sceptical to-day.

Take a map of the world and consider the extreme differences in position and condition between our scattered states. Here is Canada, lying along the United States, looking eastward to Japan and China, westward to all Europe. See the great slashes of lake, bay, and mountain chain that cut it meridionally. Obviously its main routes and trades and relations lie

naturally north and south; obviously its full development can only be attained with those ways free, open, and active. Conceivably, you may build a fiscal wall across the continent; conceivably, you may shut off the east and half the west by impossible tariffs, and narrow its trade to one artificial duct to England, but only at the price of a hampered development. It will be like nourishing the growing body of a man with the heart and arteries of a mouse.

Then here, again, are New Zealand and Australia, facing South America and the teeming countries of Eastern Asia; surely it is in relation to these vast proximities that their economic future lies. Is it possible to believe that shipping mutton to London is anything but the mere beginning of their commercial development? Look at India, again, and South Africa. Is it not manifest that from the economic and business points of view each of these is an entirely separate entity, a system apart, under distinct necessities, needing entire freedom to make its own bargains and control its trade in its own way in order to achieve its fullest material possibilities?

Nor can I believe that financial entanglements greatly strengthen the bonds of an empire in any case. We lost the American colonies because we interfered with their fiscal arrangements, and it was Napoleon's attempt to strangle the Continental trade with Great Britain that began his downfall.

I do not find in the ordinary relations of life that business relations

necessarily sustain intercourse. The relations of buyer and seller are ticklish relations, very liable to strains and conflicts. I do not find people grow fond of their butchers and plumbers, and I doubt whether if one were obliged by some special taxation to deal only with one butcher or one plumber, it would greatly endear the relationship. Forced buying is irritated buying, and it is the forbidden shop that contains the coveted goods. Nor do I find, to take another instance, among the hotel staffs of Switzerland and the Riviera--who live almost entirely upon British gold--those impassioned British imperialist views the economic link theory would lead me to expect.

And another link, too, upon which much stress is laid but about which I have very grave doubts, is the possibility of a unified organisation of the Empire for military defence. We are to have, it is suggested, an imperial Army and an imperial Navy, and so far, no doubt, as the guaranteeing of a general peace goes, we may develop a sense of participation in that way. But it is well in these islands to remember that our extraordinary Empire has no common enemy to weld it together from without.

It is too usual to regard Germany as the common enemy. We in Great Britain are now intensely jealous of Germany. We are intensely jealous of Germany not only because the Germans outnumber us, and have a much larger and more diversified country than ours, and lie in the very heart and body of Europe, but because in the last hundred years, while we have fed on platitudes and vanity, they have had the energy and humility to

develop a splendid system of national education, to toil at science and art and literature, to develop social organisation, to master and better our methods of business and industry, and to clamber above us in the scale of civilisation. This has humiliated and irritated rather than chastened us, and our irritation has been greatly exacerbated by the swaggering bad manners, the talk of "Blood and Iron" and Mailed Fists, the Welt-Politik rubbish that inaugurated the new German phase.

The British middle-class, therefore, is full of an angry, vague disposition to thwart that expansion which Germans regard very reasonably as their natural destiny; there are all the possibilities of a huge conflict in that disposition, and it is perhaps well to remember how insular--or, at least, how European--the essentials of this quarrel are. We have lost our tempers, but Canada has not. There is nothing in Germany to make Canada envious and ashamed of wasted years. Canada has no natural quarrel with Germany, nor has India, nor South Africa, nor Australasia. They have no reason to share our insular exasperation. On the other hand, all these states have other special preoccupations. New Zealand, for example, having spent half a century and more in sheep-farming, land legislation, suppressing its drink traffic, lowering its birth-rate, and, in short, the achievement of an ideal preventive materialism, is chiefly consumed by hate and fear of Japan, which in the same interval has made a stride from the thirteenth to the twentieth century, and which teems with art and life and enterprise and offspring. Now Japan in Welt-Politik is our ally.

You see, the British Empire has no common economic interests and no natural common enemy. It is not adapted to any form of Zollverein or any form of united aggression. Visibly, on the map of the world it has a likeness to open hands, while the German Empire--except for a few ill-advised and imitative colonies--is clenched into a central European unity.

Physically, our Empire is incurably scattered, various, and divided, and it is to quite other links and forces, it seems to me, than fiscal or military unification that we who desire its continuance must look to hold it together. There never was anything like it before. Essentially it is an adventure of the British spirit, sanguine, discursive, and beyond comparison insubordinate, adaptable, and originating. It has been made by odd and irregular means by trading companies, pioneers, explorers, unauthorised seamen, adventurers like Clive, eccentrics like Gordon, invalids like Rhodes. It has been made, in spite of authority and officialdom, as no other empire was ever made. The nominal rulers of Britain never planned it. It happened almost in spite of them. Their chief contribution to its history has been the loss of the United States. It is a living thing that has arisen, not a dead thing put together. Beneath the thin legal and administrative ties that hold it together lies the far more vital bond of a traditional free spontaneous activity. It has a common medium of expression in the English tongue, a unity of liberal and tolerant purpose amidst its enormous variety of localised life and colour. And it is in the development and strengthening, the enrichment the rendering more conscious and more

purposeful, of that broad creative spirit of the British that the true cement and continuance of our Empire is to be found.

The Empire must live by the forces that begot it. It cannot hope to give any such exclusive prosperity as a Zollverein might afford; it can hold out no hopes of collective conquests and triumphs--its utmost military rôle must be the guaranteeing of a common inaggressive security; but it can, if it is to survive, it must, give all its constituent parts such a civilisation as none of them could achieve alone, a civilisation, a wealth and fullness of life increasing and developing with the years. Through that, and that alone, can it be made worth having and worth serving.

And in the first place the whole Empire must use the English language. I do not mean that any language must be stamped out, that a thousand languages may not flourish by board and cradle and in folk-songs and village gossip--Erse, the Taal, a hundred Indian and other Eastern tongues, Canadian French--but I mean that also English must be available, that everywhere there must be English teaching. And everyone who wants to read science or history or philosophy, to come out of the village life into wider thoughts and broader horizons, to gain appreciation in art, must find ready to hand, easily attainable in English, all there is to know and all that has been said thereon. It is worth a hundred Dreadnoughts and a million soldiers to the Empire, that wherever the imperial posts reach, wherever there is a curious or receptive mind, there in English and by the imperial connection the full

thought of the race should come. To the lonely youth upon the New Zealand sheep farm, to the young Hindu, to the trapper under a Labrador tilt, to the half-breed assistant at a Burmese oil-well, to the self-educating Scottish miner or the Egyptian clerk, the Empire and the English language should exist, visibly and certainly, as the media by which his spirit escapes from his immediate surroundings and all the urgencies of every day, into a limitless fellowship of thought and beauty.

Now I am not writing this in any vague rhetorical way; I mean specifically that our Empire has to become the medium of knowledge and thought to every intelligent person in it, or that it is bound to go to pieces. It has no economic, no military, no racial, no religious unity. Its only conceivable unity is a unity of language and purpose and outlook. If it is not held together by thought and spirit, it cannot be held together. No other cement exists that can hold it together indefinitely.

Not only English literature, but all other literatures well translated into English, and all science and all philosophy, have to be brought within the reach of everyone capable of availing himself of such reading. And this must be done, not by private enterprise or for gain, but as an Imperial function. Wherever the Empire extends there its presence must signify all that breadth of thought and outlook no localised life can supply.

Only so is it possible to establish and maintain the wide understandings, the common sympathy necessary to our continued association. The Empire, mediately or immediately, must become the universal educator, news-agent, book-distributor, civiliser-general, and vehicle of imaginative inspiration for its peoples, or else it must submit to the gravitation of its various parts to new and more invigorating associations.

No empire, it may be urged, has ever attempted anything of this sort, but no empire like the British has ever yet existed. Its conditions and needs are unprecedented, its consolidation is a new problem, to be solved, if it is solved at all, by untried means. And in the English language as a vehicle of thought and civilisation alone is that means to be found.

Now it is idle to pretend that at the present time the British Empire is giving its constituent peoples any such high and rewarding civilisation as I am here suggesting. It gives them a certain immunity from warfare, a penny post, an occasional spectacular coronation, a few knighthoods and peerages, and the services of an honest, unsympathetic, narrow-minded, and unattractive officialism. No adequate effort is being made to render the English language universal throughout its limits, none at all to use it as a medium of thought and enlightenment. Half the good things of the human mind are outside English altogether, and there is not sufficient intelligence among us to desire to bring them in. If one would read honest and able criticism, one must learn

French; if one would be abreast of scientific knowledge and philosophical thought, or see many good plays or understand the contemporary European mind, German.

And yet it would cost amazingly little to get every good foreign thing done into English as it appeared. It needs only a little understanding and a little organisation to ensure the immediate translation of every significant article, every scientific paper of the slightest value. The effort and arrangement needed to make books, facilities for research, and all forms of art accessible throughout the Empire, would be altogether trivial in proportion to the consolidation it would effect.

But English people do not understand these things. Their Empire is an accident. It was made for them by their exceptional and outcast men, and in the end it will be lost, I fear, by the intellectual inertness of their commonplace and dull-minded leaders. Empire has happened to them and civilisation has happened to them as fresh lettuces come to tame rabbits. They do not understand how they got, and they will not understand how to keep. Art, thought, literature, all indeed that raises men above locality and habit, all that can justify and consolidate the Empire, is nothing to them. They are provincials mocked by a world-wide opportunity, the stupid legatees of a great generation of exiles. They go out of town for the "shootin'," and come back for the fooleries of Parliament, and to see what the Censor has left of our playwrights and Sir Jesse Boot of our writers, and to dine in restaurants and wear clothes.

Mostly they call themselves Imperialists, which is just their harmless way of expressing their satisfaction with things as they are. In practice their Imperialism resolves itself into a vigorous resistance to taxation and an ill-concealed hostility to education. It matters nothing to them that the whole next generation of Canadians has drawn its ideas mainly from American publications, that India and Egypt, in despite of sounder mental nourishment, have developed their own vernacular Press, that Australia and New Zealand even now gravitate to America for books and thought. It matters nothing to them that the poverty and insularity of our intellectual life has turned American art to France and Italy, and the American universities towards Germany. The slow starvation and decline of our philosophy and science, the decadence of British invention and enterprise, troubles them not at all, because they fail to connect these things with the tangible facts of empire. "The world cannot wait for the English." ... And the sands of our Imperial opportunity twirl through the neck of the hour-glass.