

# AUSTRALIA AND EMPIRE PROBLEMS

## Advantages of Imperial Co-operation

### ADDRESS BY THE GOVERNOR

#### Opportunities for Young People

His Excellency the Governor dealt with Imperial problems in an inspiring address before members of the University Union Club yesterday.

The recently-formed University Union Club has arranged for the delivery of addresses at the luncheon at the University. At the first, held on Thursday, his Excellency the Governor (Sir Alexander Hore-Ruthven) spoke to a large gathering of students on Empire matters. Sir Alexander was met by the officials of the union, and the president (Mr. H. Thomson) occupied the chair.

The Chairman said his Excellency had so endeared himself to all sections of the community that he now needed no introduction to a South Australian audience. The students were grateful to him for having given up the time necessary to talk to them during their luncheon hour.

#### A Valuable Institution

His Excellency congratulated those who were responsible for forming the University Union Club, and said he felt that the educational value to be derived from it must be very great indeed. They got a great deal of valuable instruction from their teachers and professors, but could learn a lot from their fellow students as well. The knowledge they gained from books would carry them a certain distance, but unless they added to that knowledge, knowledge of the world, knowledge of human nature and knowledge of men, they would be unable to apply the knowledge they



Sir Alexander Hore-Ruthven

gained from books to the best advantage. Discussions of the problems of the day with men of different points of view with minds of varying bent must broaden their minds and enrich and enlarge their outlook. He had been asked to address them on the problems of the British Empire. It was a very big subject, and the first problem that he found himself up against was a very tough problem from his point of view, for as they knew he was debarred constitutionally from expressing any opinion whatever on any controversial subject. Through the problems of the Empire themselves might not be a subject of political controversy, the method of their solution invariably became so. So if he merely pointed out some of those problems and failed to produce from his pocket an infallible and entirely satisfactory solution to every single one of those great Imperial questions, they would, he hoped, give him full credit for the reason.

#### The Most Cosmopolitan Empire

Before they could attempt to discuss this great question at all they must first have a clear idea in their minds as to what was the nature of the British Empire; of what was its extent, of what did its component parts consist, and what great principles and ideals did it stand for? The British Empire contained 500 million people and covered 15,000,000 square miles. It

was composed of widely different types of States; first, of the self-governing Dominions like their own, populated by their own kith and kin, imbued with the spirit of independence, and enjoying full liberty of action; and secondly, exercised the limitless powers entrusted to them. It was, in fact, a European, Asiatic, African, and an Australasian Empire. It included white, brown, yellow, and black men, Christians, Mohammedans, Hindoos, Buddhists, and all kinds of other religions. The Empire was so distributed that it brought them into close and constant touch with all the great Powers and Dominions of the world. It was the biggest and most cosmopolitan Empire long the world had ever known, an experiment which had never been tried before since the world began. It was easy to see that the maintenance of this great Empire was filled with difficult problems.

#### Some Problems

Let them think for a minute what some of those problems were, for though they could not enter into a discussion as to the methods of their solution, the first step towards that solution was the realisation of their existence, and the education of public opinion to the fact that sooner or later those problems had to be faced and dealt with. They were: How to ensure that each of the self-governing Dominions had a say in the shaping of the foreign policy of the Empire, and to frame a foreign policy which would commend itself to all the Dominion Governments; how to organise into some complete and perfect form those communities without interfering with their freedom, and at the same time to foster that spirit of unity which would enable them to make a common effort when any great crisis arose; how to maintain and develop good relationships between the various parts of the Empire without entrenching upon the liberties or ideals of one to the interests of another government thousands of miles away; how to organise the defence of the Empire; and then they had the difficult problem of the relationship of European, Asiatic, and African races when forming part of the same community, a problem which had not touched them so closely in Australia, and he sincerely hoped never would, but a very live problem indeed in some other parts of the Empire.

#### Capable of Solution

At first it might appear that those problems were incapable of solution, but he felt confident that they could be solved if they were grimly determined to solve them, if they brought a wide outlook to bear on them, a substantial amount of give and take, and ability to see and appreciate each other's point of view. The British Empire as it existed to-day was no doubt a great experiment, but that was the result of free and natural development, and therein lay its chief source of strength. Many difficulties had beset the problems of Imperial organisation that there was not one which goodwill could not overcome. He could not do better than to quote the sayings of Mr. Baldwin on the question of the solution of those problems. Mr. Baldwin had said—"British problems in our history have always been solved ambulando. Let us go on doing that. Let us not be in a hurry to define. Definitions and the desire for definitions split Christendom into fragments in its early days, and it has never recovered yet. Do not keep plucking up the plant to see what the roots are doing." There had been held Imperial Conferences, where full and free expression of opinion had been given, and no doubt they had done a great deal in clearing the air. At the last conference in 1926 great strides were made in settling certain general principles on which all Dominions agreed to act. The wording of a formula which made clear the position of the Dominions and the mother country was that Great Britain and the Dominions were autonomous communities within the British Empire, equal in status, in no way subordinate one to another in any respect in their domestic or external affairs, though united by a common allegiance to the Crown and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of nations. It was unanimously agreed that internal matters which were likely to affect the common weal without counting what effect its own action had on other parts of the Empire, and without giving those parts an opportunity of expressing

their views, and that no Government might be entitled to take any steps which might involve an active obligation on other self-governing parts of the British Commonwealth without definite consent in writing of those other parts. That formula was founded on two principles, the equality of status of all the self-governing parts of the Empire, and the unity of the whole Empire under the Crown. The conference also came to the wise conclusion that the great merit of the relationship between the mother country and the Dominions was its elasticity, and it was better not to attempt a too rigid definition of that relationship, to adapt themselves to circumstances as they arose, and to confine themselves to some form of flexible machinery which could be adapted to the changing circumstances of the world; in fact, much on the lines suggested by Mr. Baldwin; and that the unity of the Empire would depend in the future on the wise restraint with which its rulers exercised the limitless powers entrusted to them.

#### Communication and Space

The chief problems of Empire government were practical problems of communication and of space. Those difficulties were being rapidly overcome. They were bridging the vast distances which were separating the cities of the Empire. In a short time they would be able to converse with their friends in England, and before long they would probably be able to see them. They had seen that the Southern Cross had reached London in 13 days. When they considered that it was now possible to travel from London to Karachi in 48 hours, the time was not distant when the journey from London to Australia would be performed inside of a week. It was the improvement of communications which had made the British Empire possible. Had some of the problems which now confronted them, as, for instance, how to give the Dominions an equal say in fashioning the foreign policy of the Empire, occurred a decade ago, they would have been unsurmountable. But to-day they were possible; to-morrow they would present no difficulty. Fortunately development in modern science had gone hand in hand with the growth and development of the British Empire. Had this not been so the growth of the Empire would have outrun their means of co-ordinating it. Misunderstandings arose from ignorance of each other's points of view. They should concentrate on bringing the people of the Empire into close touch with one another by rapid and economical transport by rail, sea, and air. Every day and every hour by which the journey from England to the Dominions could be shortened, and every individual who travelled from one part of the Dominions to another and saw for himself their problems and points of view, was instructed in furthering the unity of the Empire. Written words were all very well, but they were a poor substitute for personal discussion, and it was only by personal discussion that a real understanding of each other's difficulties would be reached.

#### The Advantages

They might ask themselves, did the British Empire and its method of government tend to the betterment of component parts, or would the millions now under its influence be better off without it, or under the influence of some other nation? Would each of the communities which constituted the British Empire be better off outside this great family circle, or were they better off under the aegis of the British Crown? First, let them consider what benefits the self-governing Dominions derived from membership of the British Empire. They could consider this from the point of view of Australia; and the same point of view applied equally to the other Dominions. They wished Australia to be at peace and secure from dangers, and to feel that if she found herself embroiled in a just quarrel, she would have sure and certain allies by her side. Could she find that except as a member of the Great British Empire? They wished her to prosper in a material sense. How could she do that better than through the co-operation and partnership that exists between the nations of the British Empire to-day? They wished Australia to be honored among the nations of the world. Were there any nations so honored as those of the great family of the British Commonwealth? Would she not lose in status, in dignity, and in prestige if she ceased to be a member in the family of British nations? These were potent factors, and when they added those material inducements to the sentimental considerations for remaining members of the British Commonwealth of nations, which were innate and deep-seated. They had every reason to feel confident that so far as the self-governing Dominions were concerned, the unity of the Empire was assured for many a long day. Germany had concluded that under the strain and stress of the Great War the Dominions would count for little, that they would not take part or sacrifice their young manhood in a quarrel in Europe, which did not directly affect them. This prophecy showed how little Germany had

appreciated the sentiments which bound the British Empire, for not only did the Dominions come forward in a manner which amazed the world, but also the heat of war made possible the moulding of an organisation that had no counterpart in the world's history, and that saved civilisation from German oppression.

#### Racial Problems

There were some, he believed, who doubted the value of their influence over the colored races of the world. Would those races, which were under their influence and protection be better or worse if that influence and protection were withdrawn? Let them turn for a moment to the colored races, for whose welfare they were responsible. He had had a certain amount of experience in observing the effects of just, equitable British rule over colored races, and was firmly convinced that there was not a colored community in the British Empire that had not benefited materially, morally, physically, and mentally from its association with British rule. Whenever the Empire had assumed control of those native States they had always felt compelled to do something to improve the lot of the people they had undertaken to govern, but they had not tried to impose upon them their own ideas of religion or to interfere with their local customs so long as those were consistent with the ordinary standards of humanity. They had set to work to uproot the old tyrannical systems of government and replace them by a system of impartial justice, and, above all, to gain the confidence of their new fellow-subjects. For, as an eminent statesman once very truly remarked, the Englishman's success in dealing with native races was his power to inspire confidence. That had been the keynote of their success in dealing with their Crown colonies. The principle in dealing with colored races had been to consider not so much the aspirations, laudable or otherwise, of those who were seeking power, as the welfare of the under-dog, of the inarticulate masses who constituted 90 per cent. or more of the native population. That was the test which they had always applied before granting increased powers to Eastern rulers, and as long as they stood by the result of that test they would merit the gratitude and goodwill of millions of their fellow-subjects. They had in every case sown the seeds of prosperity and good government, and he felt sure that if they gave those seeds time to take root, in spite of temporary setbacks, they would flourish and prosper, provided their growth was not unduly hurried. If, however, the guiding hand was withdrawn a day too soon, and the young sapling was deprived of the support it needed before it had reached full maturity, it would either wither and die, and the process of regeneration would have to start all over again, and whether they wished it or not, the task would once more fall on the already overburdened shoulders of the British Empire.

#### Effect on Civilisation

There was one more question they must ask themselves. It was—Would the civilised world, on the whole, lose or gain by the breaking up of the British Empire? The British Empire was not only a great World Power; it was also an essential part of the edifice of modern civilisation. As General Botha had put it, the British Empire was the corner-stone upon which civilisation must rest. The world was suffering from the shock of war; unrest, dissension, and bitterness were still rife in many countries. The last great barrier supporting the world from anarchy and chaos was the British Empire. Its influence was felt, in some form or other, by every nation of the world. If it was swept away the world would be thrown into chaos. So on the unity of the British Empire civilisation depended. If it held together it would be the greatest civilising influence in the world. If it was broken up each one of its component parts would be powerless and helpless.

#### Young People's Duty

They had touched lightly on some of the Imperial problems of the Empire, and commended those problems to their earnest consideration, because the time was not far distant when the young men and young women would be called upon to take an active and, he felt sure, an effective part in their solution. The problems of the age demanded the best brains they could produce. These were not the times for the parochial outlook, or times when they could live in watertight compartments. These were difficult times for old people, settled in their ways and ideas, to adjust themselves to new methods. Older men were apt to judge things, not as they were to-day, and still less as to what they would be to-morrow, but only by what they were ten, twenty, or thirty years ago. There never was a time for such opportunities for youth that would take the forward view and visualise what the world would be like during the years ahead. No doubt the problems ahead were many and were difficult, but few would be pessimistic enough to believe that the race which had triumphed over so many obstacles in the past and brought the British Empire to what she was to-day would fail to overcome the dif-

facilities with the future, power to lu delicate ma tion. Let of progress views, but look, and g cants. T might crea would reac

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And systems from non-living matter. In the realm of mind I venture, with the frank admission that my opinions are merely those of an interested onlooker, to state my conviction that similar advances will take place. Among the delusions, the fallacies, the absurdities, the substitutions with which

oblivion which awaits a discarded servant of mankind. WILL CHANGE BE GRADUAL? These changes, it may be hoped—but certainly cannot be guaranteed—will be

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