

(February 6, 1914.)

## Imperial Federation: The Lesson of the American Colonies.

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**A**T a special luncheon of the Club held on the 6th February, Mr. Low said:

When your Secretary honored me with an invitation to appear before your Club, he suggested a topic fitting for the occasion, and I countered with the suggestion that if he did not object I should prefer to talk on "Imperial Federation: The Lesson of the American Colonies." I do not have to tell the members of this Club what a diplomat their secretary is. He delicately intimated that itinerant Englishmen of high and low degree had inflicted their views on Imperial Federation on the defenseless members of this Club without having got any "for'ader" (laughter), but if I had something practical to say he supposed the Club would listen. I need hardly assure you that his letter was couched much more gracefully than the crude way I have expressed it, but between the lines I could see the warning finger.

Remembering that, I shall talk as a practical man to practical men. This is a Club, I understand, composed of men actively engaged in large affairs (hear, hear, and laughter), not men who theorize but men who do, the men who in the last decade or so have put Canada on the map, who have developed its marvellous resources, who have built its railways and its cities, who have reclaimed the wilderness and subdued barren places, who have made the Dominion the wonder and admiration of the world. To such men the practical appeals, as it appeals to me. And Imperial Federation, gentlemen, is essentially a business question. (Hear, hear.) It is a question properly to be dealt with by business men and not by politicians or doctrinaires. If the Empire is federated, and I hope it will be for the reasons I shall later give, it will be because the men who made the Empire and gave it vitality, our great traders and merchants and bankers, see that it is necessary as a matter of business.

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Some years ago I began a study of American history as a preliminary to writing a book on the psychology of the American people. I wanted to ascertain the reasons for the Americans having departed from the original stock and developed a race that, while showing English characteristics, is unlike the parent stem. That study involved greater research than I contemplated at the time. Among other things it made me see that if the work was to be properly done I must have a thorough knowledge of American history, especially that phase of it leading to the rupture between the colonies and the Mother Country.

If I had the power I should make every Britisher learn American history; and when I use the term Britisher I mean not only those of us who were born in Great Britain, but the sons of the Empire wherever accident caused them to be born, the sons of Canada, as proud of their native country as they are loyal to the Empire; the children of Australia as well as those of the Union of South Africa. It would not be time wasted, I assure you. If that study were made philosophically and impartially, with an open mind and a desire to profit by the mistakes of the past, and to apply that lesson to the problems of the present, then the follies of our ancestors would not have been in vain, and there would be less danger of their descendants repeating the same blunders.

We lost the colonies not because the ministers of King George put a tax on tea or made the colonists pay stamp duties, which is the belief common to the average Englishman and American, but because the old bond between the colonies and the Mother Country had become attenuated. The seeds of independence were sewn long before dependence had ceased. To the men of Massachusetts and Virginia, and the other colonies their own colonies had become the first consideration, and were to them more important than the affairs of England. Their own continent was now the seat of their thoughts, a historian has said. The more powerful England became, and the less the colonies had to fear attack of European nations, the more the colonists were persuaded that they were able to take care of themselves, and were no longer dependent upon the Mother Country for protection. Heretofore they had leaned on England, now they were able to stand alone. In fact, some of the colonists believed that they were giving assistance to England and fighting England's battles because the colonies furnished men in the wars against France. The colonists ought to have realized that it was to the Mother Country they owed their security; it was her genius that made them masters in their new home.

Here, I think, is one lesson that we may heed. The American colonists had been made secure on their own continent because England had made them so, and not through their own efforts. I believe in peace, and cultivating the most friendly relations between all nations; friction between nations is as stupid as the senseless quarrels between individuals, and I shall say nothing to wound the sensibilities of even the most sensitive neighbor and friend, but I have no sympathy with the man who is too lazy or too cowardly to look facts squarely in the face. (Hear, hear, and applause.)

These days we hear much about the unbroken years of peace; idealists are fond of pointing to a border three thousand miles long on neither side of which are forts, nor great armies watching each other, ready always for the feared attack; and we are told that two nations at least have beaten the sword into a typewriter. (Laughter.) No man rejoices more than I in the fact that the border is not walled by forts but connected by bridges, that two great countries can live side by side in amity, that its people are free to come and go as they please, that a Canadian feels as much at home in the United States as an American does in Canada; but in our enthusiasm let us not lose sight of realities. War between the United States and the British Empire, of which Canada is such an important part, is of course unthinkable and impossible, but would Canada feel that she had no necessity for forts or ships were it not that she is fortified by the armies and fleets of the Empire? (Hear, hear, and applause.) No part of the Empire is weak, no part need fear attack, so long as the whole is strong, and its defences are true.

We have at the present moment an impressive object lesson of what may happen when two nations, the one more powerful than the other, live side by side. No forts mark the border between the United States and Mexico. No steel sheathed ships guard the shores of Mexico. And yet, all is not well with Mexico.

Let us return again to the American colonies, and draw from them another lesson. One of the great men of the revolutionary period, James Otis, of English descent, as all great Americans of that time were, was wiser than the Britisher statesmen of his day, wiser even than statesmen, with few exceptions, of the present day. He not only saw the danger, but he was wise enough to propose the remedy to avert it. He saw the colonies breaking away because there was no nexus to hold them. He was the first man of whom I have been able to find any mention who used

a word that should make his name very dear to this audience, the first man in speaking of the Colonies to term them "Dominions." (Applause.) He anticipated by more than a hundred years—marvellous as the fact is—the passage of the British North America Act, which has given to Canada the control of her own affairs. "The Colonies," this man of far seeing vision wrote, "are subordinate dominions," and it was "best for the good of the whole" that they should "be continued in the enjoyment of the subordinate legislation, not only for their own benefit but for the good of the whole."

But Otis did not stop there. He was the pioneer among Imperial Federalists. Not only should these "subordinate dominions" be given autonomous powers but—mark how he blazed the trail for us to follow—they were to be "represented in some proportion to their number and estates in the grand legislative of the nation: that this would firmly unite all parts of the British Empire in the greatest peace and prosperity; and render it invulnerable and perpetual."

"Invulnerable and perpetual!" How those words thrill. How they stir the blood of patriotism, at times to run sluggish. The British Empire invulnerable and perpetual, facing with lofty serenity its envious rivals and jealous foes; in its strength without fear; an Empire to endure. (Applause.) Otis saw that the colonies could be held to the Empire so long as they were bound by a political tie; that they were not represented in the "grand legislative of the nation," that is, in the Imperial Parliament in Westminster, was the centrifugal force to tear the Empire asunder.

This then is the grand lesson. We lost our American colonies because there was not wisdom enough in the statesmanship of that day to grasp the salient fact that an Empire must be legislated for as a whole and not in detached parts; that politics is as necessary to hold an Empire intact as affection is to keep a family united. Shall we turn that lesson to account or remain deaf to its teachings?

I should be careless of the injunction of your secretary to be practical if I was content merely to recount history without trying to make it serve a useful purpose. When I read what Otis wrote, and other men of his time said it was plain to me that the danger Otis foresaw, but which he was powerless to avert, because in an age of folly he was the one man of wisdom, is a danger as real to-day as it was in the eighteenth century, a calamity that will come upon us now as it did then unless we are wise enough to forestall it.

It rests with Canada and the other self-governing Dominions whether the Empire shall be federated for the advantage of all its parts, to be invulnerable and continue perpetual, or whether it shall remain loosely knit, vulnerable and in danger of passing as have other Empires that in their day ruled the world. (Applause.) The United Kingdom is the predominant partner, but the United Kingdom can put no coercion upon the other members of the firm. The Dominions can have federation if they desire it, and see that it is for their advantage. Federation will continue to be discussed as an academic abstract unless they take the initiative. It is a question Canadians must answer for themselves. Will they gain or lose by federation?

Canada is in truth as well as poetic fancy daughter in her mother's house and mistress of her own. The old theory that a colony was to be exploited for the benefit of the Mother Country has long since been discarded; it was an immoral and vicious doctrine, and it had to go down before progress. Canada controls her own affairs, as properly she should. Politically and economically she is independent of the home government. In effect she makes her own treaties, political and fiscal. No arrangement would be entered into by the British Government that affected the interests of Canada without first consulting the responsible governors of the Dominion. This is a happy and correct relation, but can it last, does it not have the germ of dissolution, is it not taking us on the path that leads to destruction?

It will perhaps be said that the interests of Canada, and those of the rest of the Empire are not in all respects identical. Canada has certain material interests that not only are not identical with those of the rest of the Empire but distinctly clash with it. I was told by a Canadian statesman a few years ago when I discussed with him a certain proposed policy, which I ventured to think would be of doubtful advantage to Canada, and of distinct disadvantage to the rest of the Empire, that I spoke as an Englishman, and he thought as a Canadian, and the duty of a Canadian, he added, was first to consider the interests of Canada, even though they conflicted with those of the United Kingdom. That, I confess, came as a shock to me. It convinced me what I had long feared, that the component parts of the Empire thought locally and not imperially. (Hear, hear.)

It was local thinking in the time of the third George that cost us the American Colonies. (Applause.) Englishmen in England were able to think no further than the water's edge.

Englishmen in America thought in terms of their own continent. Between them the ocean rolled. It drowned a common understanding as it drowned so many of those hardy adventurers who were the first and truest imperialists, who set forth not to weaken the mother, but to make her strong through her children; not to set up a kingdom of their own, but to perpetuate and make invulnerable the Empire bought in the price of blood. Unfortunately the old habit remains. We are still thinking locally, we in England as much as you in Canada, if I may be permitted to say so; we are still too prone to think that our own interests are paramount, and are too little willing to subordinate them for the general good. I do not believe this is selfishness or indifference, at least I hope not; rather it is ignorance and the stunting effect of localism. We of the English strain are not given to emotion. When the emergency demands it we show our passionate devotion to the Empire, and all that it stands for; no sacrifice is too great; the appeal to patriotism is not in vain. Should the call to arms sound we shall stand shoulder to shoulder as in the past. The bugle will thrill the men of your far west as it will electrify those of the east; Australia will hear and respond; to India, to Africa, to the far corners of the earth its notes will penetrate; English and Scotch, Irish and Welsh will fall into line; from the far flung Empire its legions will be massed in battle array; the roll of county and province, and dependency and colony will be called, and their sons will answer "present," ready to die to protect the mother of all. (Applause.)

I have no fear that in a crisis we shall forget our traditions or be traitors to our heritage. What I fear is that when the crisis comes it will be too late; and it would be as foolish for us not to keep the future in mind, as it is for a man to waste his strength in youth and take no heed of the day to come when he can no longer labor. An emergency in the life of a nation is very similar to death-bed repentance; it is then too late either to do good or to regret evil. (Applause.)

It is in time of peace that we must be prepared for war, it is before emergency arises that we must take steps to be able to meet it with serenity. What I propose, to bind the loose strands of Empire into a rope of steel that neither the sword in the hand of our foe nor our own folly can sever, is federation in the widest use of that term; but realizing that there are prejudices to be overcome and difficulties to be met, I would proceed slowly, always, however, with a definite end in view. My end, I venture to claim, is logical, practical and beneficial. It is an experiment for which warrant exists. It

is easily tried. It can be abandoned without injury if it is found not to be workable, although I believe that danger need not be apprehended. It cannot do harm, it may be anticipated that it will do much good. It involves no surrender of rights now enjoyed by any autonomous Dominion; it necessitates no change in any constitution or organic act; it does not take from the people the control of their own affairs. In a word, my hope is to bring the Empire into one room. Is not that an appeal to imagination? (Applause.)

How can that best be done? By the creation of an Imperial Council. That Council would consist of delegates representing the Empire. Without going too much into detail, let us take Canada as showing the working of the plan. Each Colony or Dominion represented in the Council would elect or appoint delegates in the manner it saw fit. Personally I believe that the wisest course would be for each province to elect say two delegates and the Prime Minister to have the appointment of two, thus the delegation of Canada in the Imperial Council would consist of twenty members. The delegates elected by the Province at large would fairly represent the sentiment of its majority, and they would be elected for a fixed term; those appointed by the Premier would be removable at his pleasure. The council would be a permanent body sitting in London, its sessions probably lasting about six months in the year, so that there would be plenty of time every year for delegates to return to their own countries, and by personal contact test the sentiment of their constituents and the people as a whole on any controversial subject. In addition to the delegates representing the United Kingdom the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Secretaries of State for Foreign Affairs, War and the Colonies, and the First Lord of the Admiralty would be *ex officio* members of the Council. Prime Ministers of self governing colonies, and members of their cabinets, while in London would automatically become *ex officio* members.

Delegations would vote as units, consequently it would make no difference that Canada was represented in the Council by twenty delegates, and the Commonwealth of Australia by fourteen (on the same basis as that suggested for Canada, namely, two delegates representing each State, and two appointed by the Premier), the United Kingdom by thirty, and so on. Each delegation would in private decide whether to support or to oppose a proposition, the majority of that delegation would control, and in the Council the delegation, through its chairman, would cast a single vote.

The object in treating each Dominion as a whole in voting is fundamental. The Council is the voice of the Empire. A question arises, let us say, of vital interest only to Canada, of slight interest to Australia, of no interest to South Africa, and of interest only to the United Kingdom because of the political considerations involved. What the Council desires is the opinion of the Empire. Canada being the party most in interest it is necessary for the Council to know what Canada feels and thinks, not what Alberta or Ontario thinks, but the Dominion as a whole. Every delegate of course would be accorded the freest opportunity for debate, so that the diverse views of Canadians themselves would be known, then the position of Canada as a whole would be stated, then it would be for the Empire to determine how far it could go; whether it must yield or will resist; whether sacrifices must be made by a part for the good of the whole, or the whole is prepared to make sacrifices to sustain one of its members.

Statesmanship would give the Council plenary powers, but I am aware this would arouse too much opposition at the beginning, and therefore I am forced to compromise, although compromise is a word I very much dislike, as it is usually only a politer term for cowardice or surrender. The Council would be limited to conference, discussion and recommendation, but it would have no power to impose its will upon the Empire, or to enforce a decree. The Council would have advisory powers only. It would be for the Empire, through its responsible ministers, to say whether that advice should be accepted or disregarded.

Would anything be gained by the creation of such a Council? Would any practical results follow? Would the Empire be strengthened? Would we be able to feel more confident of its invulnerability and perpetuity? To me these questions answer themselves.

If the Council did nothing else than to bring the Empire into one room it would have justified its existence. At present no arrangement exists by which that can be done. It is true that at long intervals delegates representing the Empire meet and discuss imperial questions, but that is a very different thing from a permanent Council whose members are brought in daily intimate contact, who can understand not only each other but the people they represent and learn that although we are all Britishers the Canadian does not always see eye to eye with the Englishman, nor the Englishman with the Australian. That is knowledge not to be acquired in a few days. And think how it would enlarge the vision of men naturally inclined to be self-

centred, by inclination and education believers in their own superiority, for let us be frank with ourselves and admit that self satisfaction is a national vice. I do not hesitate to say that it would be immensely for the benefit of the English delegates to be able to look at England from the outside, that is through the eyes of Canadians and Australians, perhaps they might hear some truths that would be salutary; for

What can they know of England

Who only England know?

And it would be equally for the advantage of their Canadian colleagues to get an English perspective, and thus be brought to realize the burden of Empire. (Hear, hear, and applause.)

Can anyone doubt that this would help enormously to break down that pernicious habit of local thinking, and cultivate the habit of thinking imperially? To nearly every man that which he knows best is of greatest importance. To the average man his city is of higher consequence than his province, his province than his country. Let him understand that great as his province is, and great as his country is they are small compared with the Empire, that his present welfare and his future safety depend not upon what his neighbors do, or the provincial authorities decree, or his country's lawmakers enact, but upon something so remote that he neither sees it, nor does it touch him at the moment.

It will perhaps be said that the Dominions and Colonies are now represented in London by High Commissioners and Agents General, who, in a sense, constitute an Imperial Council. But these men are virtually ambassadors, and the first duty of an ambassador is to his own country. That is the very thing I am aiming to break down: the conception of the Empire legislated for separately instead of as a whole. That is our danger. The Empire no more than a family can endure whose members have antagonistic interests. The bond is perpetual only when the interests of the family or nation are considered as a whole, when the common good is the policy of statesmen as well as of peoples.

I think if we made a beginning with the creation of an Imperial Council we should eventually extend the powers of the Council so that, to use the memorable words of Otis, it would come to be "the grand legislative of the nation," and be clothed with the power to legislate for the entire Empire. Let us pause for a minute on that striking word used by Otis. He spoke of a "nation." We know well enough what that word connotes. It means a people united in a common cause, and ani-

mated by a common purpose. To Otis, although Englishmen in England and Englishmen in America were separated by tumbling seas—and that separation was much greater in his day than in ours, because steam was undiscovered and electricity undreamed—it was still possible to unite them in the bonds of nationality. Was that fancy of a dreamer or wisdom of a statesman? Is the genius of the twentieth century incapable of doing what the eighteenth saw so true? Can we live and endure unless we are, in fact, as well as in name a nation—not Englishmen or Canadians or Australians, but the great British nation.

The "grand legislative," then, would concern itself not with matters of local interest but only with national questions. It would carry out on a grander scale the system now existing in Canada. It would recognize the principle of autonomy, and the subordination of autonomy to nationality. Each of your provinces is sovereign, and yet subject; each possesses wide powers, and yet cheerfully yields some of them for the good of all. A system that is no longer an experiment, that has been tried and worked well in Canada, can surely be extended and made to work well in a larger field.

The "grand legislative" would, as I have already indicated, concern itself solely with the affairs of the Empire, and not with those of its component parts. The common defence, the common progress and welfare, the relations of the Empire with the rest of the world, the means whereby the great British Nation can keep in the van—these would be the problems to be discussed and solved.

Objections of course will be raised. Will England, it will be asked, consent to be outvoted by Canada or Australia, will Canada willingly risk the danger of finding herself in a minority? If selfish considerations prevail, if we are British in name only, and not in nationality, what has been proposed here to-day is impossible, but if we are willing to yield for the general good, to make sacrifices even if necessary, the scheme does not offer any insurmountable difficulties. As I have already said, it is a business rather than a political question. Reduced to its lowest terms what we have to ask ourselves is this: Will it pay? Will it pay in the broadest sense? not Will it pay England at the expense of Canada or Canada at the expense of Australia, but shall we all profit by it? And that is not lowering a high ideal or making statesmanship sordid. Statesmanship, statesmanship of the highest order, concerns itself with the practical, for this is a practical age, and all the progress and advancement that have been made, all the improvement

which we see around us, and in which we share, everything that makes man better and happier, and more humane is the work of the practical mind and not the visionary, the mind able to envisage the future, forecast great movements, understand the drift of forces, and either turn them in the right direction or be by them engulfed. This is the lesson that is offered to us, this is the lesson by which we shall profit or ignore at our peril. This is my message. Shall we strive by every means in our power to make the British Nation, and the British Empire invulnerable and perpetual, regarding ourselves as trustees for our children, or spend our substance foolishly, cursed by our children for our folly?" (Applause.)