

(October 27, 1908.)

The Imperial Question.

BY RIGHT HON. VISCOUNT MILNER, G.C.B.

LORD MILNER: *Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen*,—It is perhaps rather unfortunate that the subject on which I have undertaken to address you to-night is a political subject. I think that even the most ardent devotee of political discussion must feel a certain satiety on the day after a hotly contested election. All I can promise is, that if my subject is political it is not at any rate in party politics; that is, it has nothing whatever to do with the subjects which at present form the staple of party politics in this country. My opinions, no doubt, and my subject no doubt will excite, they must excite, differences of opinion, but those differences will not be on the lines of ordinary party cleavage. Now may I make one or two preliminary remarks. I have not come to this country as a lecturer or as a propagandist. The object of my visit, in so far as it was not a purely private one, was to become acquainted with Canada, and the opinions of its people. From that point of view my visit has been an immense and unmitigated success. I have derived more instruction from it than I can say. Whether it would not have been better to allow me to improve my own mind without being compelled to exhibit its emptiness by making speeches is another question, but whatever may be the charms and advantages of the role of silent observer I have been deprived of them by the vigilance and enterprise of your Canadian Clubs. (Applause.) Like the robber barons of old whose castles lined the great mediæval trade routes, they insist in taking their toll from the passing traveller. I have successfully avoided several of them. Where it is hopeless, where evasion is hopeless, I pay up cheerfully and look as if I liked it. And perhaps it would be rather mean when one has been received everywhere by everybody with so much helpful kindness and hospitality, it would be rather mean to try and avoid the visitor's tax, but I want you to understand that it is not a voluntary contribution. I am not volunteering my opinions. I am called upon to stand and deliver them. Under these circumstances I can only do so frankly. Any other course would neither show respect for you or self respect, but if these opinions, being pronounced ones, their expression

knocks up against the prejudices of some, and disturbs the contented inertia of others, I decline to be responsible for the moral and intellectual damages resulting therefrom.

And now, not to detain you too long, may I take one or two things for granted. In the first place it may seem conceited of me but I will take it for granted that the bulk of this audience at least is acquainted in a general way with the spirit in which I approach the question of the relations of Canada to the Mother Country, and to the other parts of the British Empire, and I will assume further, and this is perhaps a somewhat bolder assumption, that that spirit is in general harmony with the spirit and temper almost of all those in Canada who have thought much and earnestly on this question. I believe that it is the predominating, I will not say the universal, desire of the people of this country not only to maintain the ties which happily unite them to the other states under the common crown, not only to maintain the ties, but to draw them closer, and foster more intimate commercial and social relations, a better mutual understanding, a greater mutual helpfulness. (Applause.) Underlying that desire is a conception, imperfectly grasped perhaps, but growing constantly more definite and stronger, the conception of the Empire as an organic whole, consisting of nations completely independent in their local affairs, and possessing distinct individualities, but still having certain great ideals and objects in common by virtue of which they are capable of having a common policy and a common life. Well now if that is the general desire the question is how to realize it? and here opinions differ widely. My own opinion is that if people, already friendly and closely related, are anxious of becoming more friendly and more closely related, to develop, to increase their mutual intercourse the only way is for them to do something together. (Applause.) To do a big thing if possible, but in any case to do things of some moment, things that are worth doing. To take up this or that or the other piece of practical business and co-operative, not to stand talking of your great sympathy and affection. That seems to me to be the true method, and there are many opportunities for practical co-operation between each part of the Empire. Some have been taken, many more there are that have not been, and are rather being missed. It is quite a mistake to suppose that nothing can be done. An enormous deal can be done even with our present instruments, and if these instruments are imperfect it is only by using them that we can devise better instruments. I know that there are many people who think that you can do

nothing unless you have as a preliminary some Imperial Council or Parliament representative of all parts of the Empire. I do not agree with that. Don't misunderstand me. I am and always have been a federalist. I cannot conceive myself how any permanent, all-round, effective co-operation of the different parts of the Empire, for the protection and development of their common interests can be possible without the creation of some common organ, an executive body, representative of all parts, each several part of the Empire, which every part of the Empire shall regard as belonging to it, definitely charged with the care of common interests and armed with the means of protecting them effectively. For my own part I do not think that the creation of such an organ presents as many difficulties as it is commonly supposed to present. While I hold that opinion I regard the creation of this executive as being at the end of the process of substantial development and not at the beginning. (Applause.) It may come more or less quickly or there may be some other solution which with our present knowledge and experience, on the basis rather our present knowledge and experience, I personally may not be able to conceive. What is certain is that we can only arrive at the best system of co-operation by actual co-operation with the instruments at present in our hands and with regard to the problems immediately before us. (Applause.) Do not let us allow differences of opinions as to the ultimate constitution of the Empire—I do not deprecate the discussion of it, in fact I welcome it, but I do not wish it to absorb us and that everywhere we can work together for the purpose which we all, at any rate a large majority recognize as desirable, in fine, while steadily keeping the ideal in view let us pay some practical attention to one practical thing or another which we can do here and now. (Applause.)

Now there is one form, one direction, in which I believe that everybody is agreed that something may be done to draw closer the bonds of union, and that is by the development of our trade relations. (Applause.) But that is a tie of which, great as is its importance, I do not propose to deal at all to-night. I shall have another opportunity of doing so and the field that I have to cover is so wide that I really cannot cover it all in one evening. There is, however, another possible sphere of co-operation which is also of immense importance, and that is co-operation for defence. (Applause.) Now in approaching that subject I wish to avoid a common cause of misunderstanding. This thing is often put in this way. It is put in the form of an

appeal, or something like an appeal, from the United Kingdom to Canada, Australia and the other places, to remove the immense burden of defence at present resting on the Mother country. Now, personally, I do not like that way of putting it for many reasons. In the first place I think that there is force in the argument that at any rate as long as the United Kingdom retains India and the other dependencies should be compelled to keep up at least as large an army and navy as she does at the present, even if she did not have to consider the protection of the self-governing states, if they were wholly separated, and if there were no need for anxiety about them. I think that there is force in that remark. Moreover, I think that even under present conditions, even in our present state of imperfect organization their mere partnership in the Empire, the mere fact that they belong to it adds more to its collective strength than liability for their protection add to its responsibilities. (Applause.) But no doubt the position would be very much stronger if the self-governing states generally were to do what Australia at any rate proposes to do, which is to create a national militia and to lay the foundations of a fleet. (Applause.) I for one would welcome such a policy wherever adopted, not as affording relief to the United Kingdom but because of its adding to the strength of the Empire as a whole, to its influence in peace as well as to its security in war. It is not a question of shifting the burden, it is a question of creating new centres of strength. For this reason I, personally, have never been a great admirer of the idea of the self-governing states simply contributing to the army and navy of the United Kingdom though as an evidence of the sense of the solidarity of the Empire such contributions are valuable and welcome pending the substitution of something better. I am sure that the form which Imperial co-operation for defence will likely take, and which it ought to take, is the form that is most likely to sustain the sense of dignity of the several states and most conducive to collective strength, and to political union, is the development of their several defensive resources in material and in manhood, I know that it may be argued, it has been argued, that the growth of individual strength makes for separation, but I have no sympathy with that way of looking at the thing. I think that the stronger they grow the more they will desire to share in the responsibilities and the glory of Empire. (Applause.) But apart from any danger to the imperial spirit, which I do not fear, I do see that there are certain practical difficulties in the way of the creation of separate defensive

forces, and that there is a danger of their development on lines so dissimilar that they in joint action, if it became necessary, would not be effective. I feel that that is especially the case in regard to the navy. Indeed the professional and technical, not to say the strategic arguments in favor of a single big navy are so strong that it may possibly overcome, as it has to some extent overcome already in the case of New Zealand, the political objections to all the self-governing states simply contributing something to the existing navy. Now I admit it is a very difficult and complicated question and I do not wish to be dogmatic about it, but I do feel that the political objections to that form of co-operation, the contributory form, are very strong, and I say that, as an Imperialist, if the self-governing states were going, under our present form of constitutional arrangement, merely to contribute either money or better still men and ships to the navy of the United Kingdom, I am afraid that they would not take the pride and interest in the welfare of it which it is absolutely essential that they should take. They would remain immersed in their local affairs, and even if they recognized the duty of contributing to imperial defence they would rest content with this contribution and take no further concern in the matter. The contribution under those circumstances would probably not be large, but that is not the real weakness of this method of procedure. The fatal weakness about it is that the participation of the self-governing states in the Imperial affair would begin and end with the contribution. The responsibility for the whole direction of the Imperial forces, the policy, would still remain entirely in the hands of the United Kingdom. That might save trouble in the beginning. It would save statesman the trouble of finding out a method of consolidation and co-operation. It might save trouble in the beginning, but it would be a very poor substitute for the idea of a real Imperial partnership. (Applause.) I know that this cannot be achieved at once, but I want to move along lines which lead towards it, and which do not lead away from it. The true line of progress is for the younger nations to be brought face to face themselves, however gradually and however piecemeal, with the problem of the defence of the Empire; to undertake themselves a bit of it, so to speak, a bit of it provided, whatsoever they do, be it much or little, is done for the Empire as a whole, not for themselves, and is a part of the general system. I might illustrate my idea by the analogy of a firm, in which different partners, with shares perhaps of very different amounts, take charge of different centres, but

always of the interests of the firm, not merely of their individual interests. I can see in my mind an arrangement in the first instance, possibly a number of separate and individual arrangements, by which the self-governing states would supplement, with their own forces, acting under their own control, but on a mutually agreed plan, the efforts already immense, but not even thus sufficiently covering all the ground, which the United Kingdom does, to make the presence of the Empire felt in every portion of the world. You know what the presence of a British ship of war means in any waters. For once that they have to fire a shot our sailors render a hundred invaluable, and little recognized services, to the Empire and to civilization in times of peace. But they cannot be in all places where their presence is desirable. Without firing a shot a gunboat in the Southern Pacific may prevent a recrudescence of slavery, or in the North Pacific act as a salutary warning to poachers. Imperial interests would be as well served in either case by an Australian or a Canadian, as by an English gunboat.

I hope I have said enough—time will not allow me to say more—about the spirit in which the object with which I desire to see the self-governing states develop for themselves that fighting strength which has once already, at a moment of great emergency, contributed so greatly to the safety of the Empire. It was not so much in the matter of the men who volunteered as in the important bearing that it had on the diplomatic situation that that contribution had its value.

Let me say one word as to method. It is of the highest importance not only for strategical reasons, but as a contribution to Imperial unity, that these forces, without being forced into one rigid mould should be trained, armed, and officered on similar lines, so that in the details of military and naval organization, as in policy, these separate efforts may dovetail into one another. From this point of view I think Mr. Haldane's idea of a general staff of the Empire is an idea of great value. The soldiers and sailors of different parts of the Empire will be under the control of their several governments, and these governments must arrange for the manner and degree of their co-operation. But they will all be the servants of the Empire, and under its common sovereign, and they cannot know too much of one another. We need not wait, indeed we ought not to wait, for a war to bring them together. The same object can be served by a systematic interchange of services in times of peace. It would be of immense value for any British officer to serve for a time in a Canadian, or an Australia-

lian force. It would be of no less advantage for the Canadian or Australian to put in a period of service in a part of the Empire other than his own. At a further stage of development the process might be applied not only to individuals but to ships and regiments. This idea of interchange of service can be, and ought to be, applied in many other directions than that of Imperial defence. It is not only the military and naval service of the Empire to which it is applicable, but to the civil service as well. The civil service of the self-governing states has been largely fashioned, as their political institutions have been almost wholly, on the model of the Mother Country. No doubt that is less true of Canada than of some of the sister states. But in Canada also there is a tendency, and a wholesome tendency, to adopt at least the main features of the system which a long and dearly bought experience has led us to adopt in the United Kingdom. But if we are going forward on the same lines why do so in water tight compartments? Why not have a common standard at any rate in the higher grades of the civil service? The men who possess that qualification would then be available for administrative work in any part of the Empire, and the government of any one state would have the best ability and experience of the other countries to draw upon as well as that of their own.

I do not see why administrative ability should not flow freely between one part of the Empire and another, as professional ability already does. We have a Canadian Regius Professor at Oxford and several Canadian lecturers. That is an excellent beginning in one direction. I think it would be at least of equal importance to have Canadian attaches at some British embassies which I could name and Canadian representatives in some of our Indian districts. In any tariff-making commission the experience of men from any of the British countries which already have widespread tariffs would be invaluable. On the other hand there are probably men in some of the departments of the civil service at home who would be useful for your purpose. Permanent transfer might be the exception rather than the rule, but temporary transfers could, with great mutual advantage, become quite common. They would be of the greatest benefit to the individuals concerned, tend to keep up a high standard all around, and to militate against routine and stagnation.

Now these are only a few instances. I could go on giving other illustrations for hours of what I mean by doing things together. They are all in harmony with that which is the root

idea of Imperialist, namely, to develop the common life of the Empire. The basis is, of course, our existing common citizenship, and our all being, to use a technical term, British subjects. Yet we are still far, very far, from doing all that we could do to reap the benefits which our common citizenship offers, or even to show a proper respect for it. Citizenship of the Empire is an immense privilege. Yet how careless and haphazard is the manner in which it is at present conferred. There is no uniform system of naturalization in the different states. Each deals with the matter without regard to the others, and what is the result? Every man naturalized in the United Kingdom, where the period of residence required is long, is a British subject in every part of the Empire. But a man naturalized in Canada, Australia, South Africa, or New Zealand where the periods are shorter but different one from another, is only a British subject in the particular country in which he is naturalized. This is the beginning of chaos. There ought to be the same conditions precedent of naturalization in every part of the Empire, and they ought not to be too easy. But once admitted to the privileges of British citizenship a man should enjoy them to the full in every country under the common flag. That is by the way. The point which I am mainly insisting on is the opportunities of individual development and mutual helpfulness which our common citizenship affords. Are we doing all we can to increase these opportunities? I believe we are doing more than formerly but still not enough. We are only beginning to realize, and that not fully, the importance of directing the stream of immigration and of capital from one part of the Empire to another rather than to foreign countries. Yet every tie commercial, social, educational or political which causes men to pass and re-pass from one point of the Empire to another is of real importance in welding us together, and making us realize the meaning and value of the common citizenship. "Multi pertransibunt et augebitur scientia." Yes, and not only will knowledge be increased but patriotism, the wider patriotism of the whole Empire. People cannot all travel, but they can all read. How little do people in any part of the Empire read of the doings of their fellow citizens in the other parts? Yet they have time to read abundance of trash of all sorts. I believe there are many who would gladly read better stuff if they had the opportunity. Is it too much to hope that now we have cheaper rates for mail matter, especially if we can also get cheaper telegraphic rates, there may be a vast improvement in this respect? Assuredly there is the greatest need for it.

It rests largely with the enterprise of the Press, and I hope they will rise to the height of their great opportunity.

And now I have done. If I have only touched hurriedly, imperfectly, incoherently on a few aspects of the vast subject of which my own mind is full, I hope I have at least appeared to you to be grappling with a real problem and not engaged in phrase making. People often say to me in a light-hearted way, "We wish you would give us an address of twenty minutes or half an hour about the British Empire." Nothing is so difficult, so intensely conscious, am I of all it stands for, all it means throughout the world in the march of human progress. I am anxious, however, to give an unexaggerated expression to my sense of the privileges and responsibilities of British citizenship. Nothing is so odious as can't, and yet nothing is so easy. One misplaced word or turn of a sentence might make life-long convictions sound like empty headed bluster and rodunant rhodomontade. That I do not like to contemplate. When I think of the British Empire my feelings do not leave me to wave a flag nor sing "Rule Britannia," but rather to go into a corner and pray. So I pick my way carefully from phrase to phrase, so alive am I to the mischief that may be done by a few ill-chosen expressions. If it is painful—no, I won't say painful—if it is at times wearisome to have to go on talking about the British Empire it is bracing and inspiring to try and work for it.