

TOPICS OF THE DAY

THE IMPERIAL CONFERENCE: THE PARTITION OF PALESTINE:
DIVORCE: WAR.

THE IMPERIAL CONFERENCE, which followed on the Coronation ceremonies in London, must be evaluated by means other than those provided by the published reports. If we were entirely dependent on what was issued to the press during the Conference and at the conclusion of the sessions, its attenuated and nebulous character would suggest that our imperial statesmen did nothing more serious than to prolong the enjoyments of a magnificent social occasion by indulging in an extended pan-British tea-party. Though we make allowance for the natural and pardonable desire of men ordinarily cumbered by pressing domestic problems to escape for a time into the regions of higher politics, not to speak of their yielding to the seductions of public entertainment, such considerations can hardly account for a Conference of twenty-one sessions lasting over a month. In this case, the unofficial rather than the official accounts must provide clues for the interpretation of the event.

The results of the latest Imperial Conference are probably to be measured by the intangible yet powerful forces that belong to the region of psychology. All the setting of the proceedings threw the balance of emphasis on the unity of the Empire. The focus of interest was the one Imperial Crown that had emerged from a time of difficulty and anxiety with an even brighter lustre. In the Coronation ceremonies the Dominions were given a place and prestige in which every suggestion of tutelage had gone. Nevertheless, for representatives assembled from the four corners of the earth with all the dignity of equality and co-partnership in the life of the British Commonwealth, it was a sense of belonging together that made its most profound impression on the leaders of the separate Dominions. Beneath their differences of outlook and habit, behind their diversity of individual condition, they were still one, and determined to remain one in the British tradition and outlook. So far as it is possible to estimate the general result of the Conference, we must look for it in a re-emergence of the Empire as a powerful single entity among the nations of the world.

The condition of world-affairs external to the British Empire also had its effect on the deliberations of the Conference. In-

ternational life assumes an aspect in London that is very different from the outlooks of Ottawa, Canberra, or Capetown. While the post-Coronation mood naturally reduced controversy to a minimum, the interchange of talk behind the scenes, the emphasis on considerations that cannot be weighed except when they are realised as part of a great world-drama, doubtless had their own sobering effect on the minds of the delegates. Members of the Conference must have been impressed by the colossal military preparations that are going forward steadily in Great Britain. From the lips of British statesmen they must have heard of the serious view Mr. Chamberlain and his colleagues take of world affairs. Moreover, they must have become increasingly aware that while talk of isolationism may sound very fine in Dominion parliaments, the story is very different when it is related in view of the harsh and stern facts of the modern world. If the survival of democratic freedom is the very issue of the day, it may be worth while to maintain at least one Commonwealth of Nations among whom, by tradition and heritage, such ideals continue to flourish. And, in a world in which political annexation has been accomplished by overt military action, and in which a clamour has gone up for a re-distribution of territories, there may be a good deal to say for a determination among the members of the Empire to hang together even in the cogent interests of self-preservation.

The most probable effect of the Coronation Conference will be a distinct tendency towards a re-integration of British imperial life. There has never been any threat of disintegration. In an organisation of such subtle and intangible quality as our Empire, we look for emphases and trends of opinion, rather than calculated and deliberate action. Successive Imperial Conferences have indicated the land-marks in the general movement of our Commonwealth life. Following on the Great War, there has been a steady and effective movement towards a complete and unequivocal recognition of Dominion independence within the Imperial unity. The events of the world-conflict gave the Dominions a new sense of their capacity to make an individual and distinctive contribution towards the preservation of the Empire. In their very zeal to assist the Motherland, they entered into a fresh self-consciousness of their own independence. The prevalent spirit of nationalism coloured their political outlook. A certain mood of disillusionment followed on the exalted emotions of the war years, and resulted in a prevalent disposition to keep clear of international entanglements with which the Dominions had no immediate concern. Moreover, the stress of world economic conditions directed com-

mercial and industrial leaders to give a realistic turn to aspirations of independence by an emphasis on the right to conclude separate trade agreements. Export trade is the life-blood of Dominion economy, and the seeking of profitable markets, with all the resultant hard bargaining that follows thereon, became a major issue in imperial affairs. These tendencies within the Commonwealth came to a satisfactory issue in the *Statute of Westminster* and in the more dubious transactions of the *Ottawa Agreements*. A cryptic remark of Mr. Ramsay Macdonald with reference to the latter, that Great Britain also might be expected to enjoy Dominion-status, was a foreshadowing of the reverse movement in imperial politics which is now making a very definite appearance.

A re-integration of the Empire will not rob the Dominions of a single right to independent self-determination. The Coronation was a spectacular expression of the true national dignity enjoyed by the separate peoples that are associated in the British Commonwealth. There will be no going back to even the suggestion of subordination. The assertion of independence on the part of the Dominions was an essential stage in the evolution of Empire, which now is strong and may become stronger in its essential unity because of the self-respect which its component elements enjoy. Rather, as we have indicated, we are dealing with a question of emphasis, and the import of that new stress cannot be denied.

What will be the effect of this new sense of imperial unity on world-politics? We cannot doubt that although hardly a whisper of the subject was heard in the official reports, long and anxious discussions took place on questions of armament and defence. Allusive remarks in subsequent speeches by Dominion Prime Ministers have provided the tell-tale straws that have indicated the direction of the currents. We may be sure that there have been no commitments, but we may be almost as sure that there have been understandings and agreements that are of the type proverbially associated with the relations of gentlemen. The Dominion of Canada has probably been the foremost member of the Imperial family in the assertion of independent status and liberty of action. Mr. Mackenzie King, who headed the Canadian delegation, is not a man accustomed to indulge in rash or unguarded speech. The Government he leads is particularly sensitive to movements of nationalist aspiration in our Canadian life. Yet even he, with all his studied caution, has expressed in public what we have every reason to believe he must have first said in private, that so far as imperial emergency is concerned, the Empire can look to Canada. There he said no more than every right thinking Canadian will be

glad to affirm. In a world that seems to move from madness to madness in military effrontery and dictatorial caprice, we may as well intimate now to all concerned that blood is thicker than water, and if any foolhardy opponent of political liberty thinks he can count on a disunited British Empire, he had better be warned in time. The democratic ideal is still worth fighting for, and the British Empire is easily the greatest bulwark of that system of political liberty in the modern world. Since the meetings of June, 1937, that rampart may be sturdier than even we ourselves suspected.

THE PARTITION OF PALESTINE is the remedy proposed by the Royal Commission appointed by the British Government to deal with the gravely disaffected condition of that ancient land. Its drastic character indicates the intractable nature of the problem which has confronted the Commissioners. A surgical operation is the last resort of desperation when some malady has passed beyond all hope of cure by the processes of internal restoration to health. We must conclude that the responsible investigators were compelled to decide upon such a solution only after every other avenue of conciliation had been explored. Evidently, their submissions have been sufficiently persuasive to convince the British Government that, however distasteful, no other way opens up any promise of settlement. It now remains to be seen whether the League of Nations will be forced to accept the same decision.

Our interest in Palestine has distinctive features. The roots of our traditional religious life go down deep into its sacred soil. From earliest years we have been familiar with its place-names and topography. Bethel and Bethlehem, Nazareth and Galilee, Jerusalem and Jericho have almost come to be invested with a mythical, and sometimes with a mystical significance for our minds. Next to our own native land, no other country so impresses itself upon our imagination with the affectionate regard of long acquaintance. Until these disturbances of recent years forced Palestine upon our more immediate attention, we thought of it as a land with interests lying only in a far remote past, much in the same way as we dream over the glory that was Greece. But such romantic attitudes have been rudely dispelled by the current realities of life in the Holy Land, where irreconcilable antagonisms have developed into massacre and rebellion.

The soil of Palestine, and especially of Jerusalem, its capital city, is sacred for three world-religions. For Christians, the

affectionate veneration that is associated with its sacred rites belongs to history rather than to politics. But, alike for Jews and Moslems, the claim to possess the land is invoked in the name of a divine authority. For the sons of Abraham, Palestine is the ancient Land of Promise and Jerusalem the very City of God on earth. The devout longings of the Jew for a restored Zion have been intensified rather than diminished by centuries of exile. The Jews are probably the most singular people of all history. Without *patria*, without visible political authority, they have preserved their identity through exile, persecution and execration, abating nothing of that mystical hope which has been inspired by a restoration of their ancient patrimony. For the sons of Mohammed, Palestine represents attachments hardly less potent. The sanctity of Jerusalem is surpassed only by Mecca itself. The splendid Mosque which now dominates the area of the former Jewish Temple is the outward token of the supersession of Judaism by Islam, which Moslems believe to be the divine ordering of history. You cannot approach the Palestinian situation without stirring up emotions that are deep as life itself. It is in the light of such considerations that we have to understand at once how difficult and how desperate are the problems presented by the government of this ancient country, and with what repugnance the solution proposed by the Commission has been almost universally received among both parties to the dispute.

At the Versailles Conference, an attempt was made to establish a new settlement as between the rival claims of Jews and Arabs. The method of making Palestine a mandated territory under the friendly care of Britain seemed to hold out hope of maintaining a balance of interest between the contending parties. Unfortunately, the good faith of Britain had been compromised by the previous issue of the notorious *Balfour Declaration*, in terms of which a national home in Palestine had been promised to the Jewish people. Probably we shall never fully know all the circumstances that led up to the making of that historic promise. Its terms were sufficiently vague and general to mean almost anything, and they provoked, at once, active suspicion among the Arabs and extravagant hopes among the Jews. The Arab fears have been only too well founded. A flood of Jewish immigration has been sweeping the Arab off the land. The Arab sees himself being crowded out of authority and possession by the more alert and aggressive Jew until, at last, his resentment has broken out into fierce and fanatical hostility. There seems to be little doubt that he has been encouraged in his rebellion by powerful anti-British interests, which have not been

slow to exploit the situation to the damaging of British prestige in the Orient.

The Royal Commission has proposed that Palestine shall be divided up into two separate states, one Jewish and the other Arab. A buffer state in the shape of a British corridor is to be placed between the two communities; the sacred sites and other places that are occasions of serious dispute are to be included in the British supervision. Nobody can pretend to accept this proposal with any sense of satisfaction. The country is small, and much of it is poor. Even under the suggested arrangement, there will require to be considerable re-adjustment of population. Jews and Arabs will continue to inhabit Jerusalem, and there is no reason to believe that there will be any lessening of the mutual disfavour with which the rival religionists regard each other. And yet, distasteful as may be the solution, there seems to be none other that is practicable. Conciliation, in the meantime, seems hopeless. It appears that we must accept the inevitable, and if Jew and Arab cannot agree to live together, the task of forcing them to do so is one that is thankless and unprofitable, if not altogether in the region of the impossible.

DIVORCE in England has become at once easier and more difficult as the result of recent legislation. The grounds on which marriage may be annulled have been extended to include such reasons as desertion, cruelty, and incurable insanity. On the other hand, the hardly concealed practices of collusion entered into for the purpose of ending intolerable unions have been rendered more difficult. Now that the debates are over, and the new law has received royal sanction, most people will agree that the result has been a considerable clearing of the air, and, in the end, a healthier type of relationship between the sexes will emerge.

The amended marriage laws are the result of a long-sustained agitation. While there was almost a dramatic quality in successful passage of the particular bill that led up to the new legislation, Mr. A. P. Herbert's parliamentary triumph is not quite so spectacular and single-handed as we might be led to suppose. We must recognise the pertinacity of that interesting character, and not seek to rob him of any personal satisfaction he is entitled to derive from the success that has attended his advocacy. Already the very parliament that has now enacted the extended conditions of divorce had rejected a similar bill, on which event it is recorded that Mr. Herbert publicly recorded a vow that before the expiry of the same

parliament, the bill would become law. Nevertheless, his pleading was addressed to minds that must have been sensitive to a sustained pressure of public opinion. The subject had been thoroughly traversed by a Royal Commission, which recommended changes in the marriage law that have now been substantially adopted. The cause had been urged by sober-minded advocates, whose public reputation places them beyond the suspicion of any desire to acquiesce in moral attitudes that are directed by the caprice of appetite and convenience rather than the counsels of ethical responsibility and self-control. Among such advocates were learned judges who were wearied or outraged in their moral sense by the pitiful evasions and disgusting situations to which they were compelled to turn a blind eye. The insertion of such provisions as the necessity for a lapse of five years after marriage before divorce proceedings can be initiated is proof that those who voted for the bill were not induced to give their support because of any desire to give free-play to loose ideals of the marriage-bond.

Opponents of the amended marriage laws have sometimes been branded as narrow-minded bigots or pharisaical hypocrites. Ecclesiastical leaders have been specially singled out for opprobrium in this respect. The Church has been accused of a desire to maintain standards of married relationship that inflict intolerable hardship on innocent people, especially women, in the name of an obsolete morality. Some roundly assert that marriage is entirely an affair of civil concern, and that the attempt of the Church to impose its ethical opinions on the State is unthinkable in the twentieth century. However, the case for caution in dealing with the relations of husbands and wives is not quite so easily dismissed.

Marriage is concerned with one of the most fundamental human relationships. The union of the sexes touches the whole range of human nature, from an impulse of instinct to the most spiritual of affections. It requires no surrender to a Freudian interpretation of life to realise that you cannot deal with this basal biological relationship without producing effects on every other relation of social existence. To suggest that it can ever become merely a matter of mutual arrangement between the respective partners, to be maintained or suspended without social restraint, is to misunderstand completely the implications of married life. Nature clearly intended the sexual relationship for the propagation of the race. Too often, marriage has been discussed as if it were simply an affair between a husband and a wife. But the rights of children are involved, with all the attendant obligations of creating a home, and the home still remains the fundamental social institution.

Unless we are to dismiss the counsels of religion altogether, surely matrimony can be regarded in its true light only as a holy estate involving solemn vows made in name of the Creator Himself, and properly issuing in the fulfilment of duties as well as in the exaction of rights. That high view may be too exalted for current acceptance by many in the modern world; but, at least, it is a defensible position. Even if divine sanctions for such an attitude towards marriage fail to awaken pious respect in a secular age, the intelligent observer of civilisation must be impressed by the social values this view is calculated to conserve.

Dean Inge once contended that the way out of the modern impasse lay in the acceptance of a double standard of married morality. Let those who still adhere to a religious view of matrimony keep to their principles, while those who maintain a more secular outlook may be allowed to proceed upon a basis more in conformity with their conviction, or lack of conviction. The solution has the merit of honesty, but it has obvious difficulties and inconveniences. The married relationship has legal as well as moral implications, and the law is rightly intolerant of double standards. Unless we are to accept the view that under no circumstances whatsoever is divorce permissible, we may agree that the extension of conditions under which marriage may be legally terminated has been a wise step, undertaken ultimately in the interests of public morality and for the elevation of marriage itself into a new dignity.

As a result of this alteration in the marriage laws of England, it is not improbable that a similar movement will be suggested in Canada. Living in such close proximity as we do to the United States of America, where there is such a diversity of practice and outlook in this respect, Canada has remained marvellously unaffected. There are probably few respects in which the prevalent Canadian sentiment is so completely British and un-American as that which is concerned with the attitude towards married life. The domestic virtues are still held in honour among us, and when we come to deal with the question, we would do well to remember that no civilisation ever rises higher than the level of its home-life.

WAR on an appalling scale is raging in a world that is technically at peace. The aggressive nations proceed from effrontery to effrontery in their outrages. Their evasions, denials, and palpable falsehoods leave what conscience may be said to remain in civilisation stunned and bewildered. In the fight for world-power,

the gloves are off, the rules have been torn up, referees hustled out of the ring, and a general free-for-all has been declared, in which the only canon of conduct that seems to prevail is the reputed Irish maxim "Where you see a head, hit it!" The fact is that international affairs are drifting into a condition of horrible and terrifying entanglement, which brings the possibility of a new world-war nearer every day.

Formal declarations of war have gone completely out of fashion. The new method of engaging in hostilities is to insinuate yourself into some existing conflict and to dispatch expeditionary forces in detachments, without official notice. It is usual to select some high moral purpose in justification of the subsequent outrages. The slave-trade in Abyssinia must be ended, and the massacre, on sight, of every able-bodied male inhabitant of the country is the chosen method in this mission of civilisation. A Communist plot aiming at world-domination is hatching in Spain, and the torpedoing of neutral merchantmen under cover of night, some hundreds of miles from the Spanish coast, is selected as a means of arresting the red peril. China is bandit-ridden and without authoritative government, and the vehicle of amendment is a bomb directed on a crowded department-store in the International Settlement of Shanghai. When the ambassador of a friendly power steps out of his car to see what is happening, you machine-gun him from the air, and then declare that you cannot be certain whether or not you did it. The protestations of innocent intention, alternating with frank declarations of carrying through war-like operations, present a bewildering phenomenon in world-politics, which reduces all efforts at localising areas of conflict and well-intentioned offers of mediation to occasions for ridicule and contempt. The time has come for some more resolute action, and of the only kind that can be understood by such prevaricating powers.

The latest phases of the struggle in Spain make the actual civil war that is ravaging that unhappy country almost a side-show. The whole Mediterranean Sea has become involved. Neutral ships are being sunk on sight by unidentifiable submarines. Italy no longer conceals the fact that she is quite definitely in the fight on General Franco's side. Centred on Shanghai, a widespread blockade of the Chinese coast is being maintained by Japan. If shells happen to fall on American or British warships in the famous international port, it is a simply a warning to them that they had better withdraw to a less dangerous location.

It is very evident that British, American and French effort is

being strenuously directed towards the prevention of any general spread of hostilities. With that attitude every intelligent mind is bound to agree. Nevertheless, patience is being strained to the limit. In this case, discretion may be the better part of valour, but very soon a decision will be forced upon the powers that still believe in civilisation as to how far policies of outrage and contempt are supportable. Already, surrender to the impudence of dictators has taken a ghastly toll of innocent lives. Abyssinia has been immolated. Honest British seamen are being drowned like rats in their sunken ships. Terror-stricken Chinese women and children are being butchered in the streets of Shanghai, and inhabitants of the great International Settlement have had to be evacuated. Doubtless British statesmen have weighed all these facts, and have decided that even such a cost is not too great as the price of refusing to be embroiled in what must be conflict to which no man has the wit to see an end. We do not envy them the gravity of their responsibility. But the time is now very near when they must begin to reconsider their policies, and take risks perhaps of a very different kind.

There is a certain pathos attaching to the forthcoming meeting of the League of Nations. The question that inevitably proposes itself is whether, if some kind of resolute united action had been taken in the affair of Manchuria, there would have been a very different story to tell in the modern world. Did we then put our feet on the slippery slope of non-intervention that has landed us where we are to-day? Could we have done otherwise? These may be foolish or vain questions. At the same time, even now, one cannot avoid at least considering the question whether some concerted policy on the part of nations that still believe in civilisation and honour between peoples could not give rise to some dramatic and effective course of action announcing to the troublers of the world-peace that we are weary of their evasions and defiance. There ought to be enough power in the world with a strong moral purpose behind it to give notice to the destroyers of humanity that the international gangsters are to be rounded up, and told they had better behave themselves or suffer the consequences. It could be done, and perhaps the experiment would be worth trying before it is too late.

J. S. T.