

THE SAFETY VALVE OF EMPIRE

HOME RULE AND IMPERIAL UNITY

The population of the British Empire (says Mr. J. C. R. Lardner, M.P.; in the *Glasgow Observer*) is 409,000,000, and the area 11,500,000 square miles. These enormous totals include many races and nationalities, old as well as new, whose traditions, ideals, languages, religious tenets, or economic interests are widely divergent. Still more remarkable, these many-sized nations are distributed over all parts of the globe, near and far. Suppose a wayfarer from a distant planet arrived amongst us. A guide-book would be of little value. For a school atlas would necessarily constitute his introduction to the whereabouts of the land and the peoples who dwell thereon. Soon he would ask the reason why portions of the map are colored red. On being informed that all the red patches form part of one great Empire, called the British Empire, his education could be said to have commenced. Presently he would enquire how such widely scattered elements continue to form parts of one whole, and whether there would not be an almost certain tendency amongst the parts to cut themselves adrift and go alone. In answer to which he would be told that undoubtedly any attempt to watch over the interests of all these people through one centralised system would surely end in failure, but that owing to the wonderful form of self-government which prevailed in the British Empire, many of these parts—called colonies—were free to enjoy a self-centred life, and yet, by forming part of one Empire, they were a support and encouragement to one another. Therefore there was no tendency to cut themselves adrift from the Empire—least of all amongst the self-governing colonies.

Our wanderer would also be told that many years ago a large tract of country—now called the United States of America—belonged to the British Empire. At that time, however, the Empire had not adopted the principle of conceding to the various parts the right to govern themselves. In fact, the rulers of the Empire interfered so much with the internal affairs of their American subjects that the latter became exasperated, and eventually cut themselves adrift. Finally, our celestial wanderer would learn that the system of allowing each part or nation to govern itself had been tried with all manner of races and nations, hostile as well as friendly. It had proved such an unqualified success that the Imperial rulers now proposed to extend its application to other parts, one by one, according to the urgency of the case. For example—pointing to a spot marked Ireland—the case of these people is urgent, and the Imperial Parliament is at present engaged in considering an Irish Home Rule Bill. Eventually every part of the Empire would be self-governing, and yet united. Without this arrangement the Empire could not expect to hold together. Self-government was the safety of Empire. The wanderer would nod assent, and express a desire to learn more about 'this wonderful Home Rule system.'

The foregoing may be little more than a mental picture, but does it not visualise the logic of the British self-governing system? Home Rule is at once the greatest achievement of British statesmanship, and withal is the only possible system. It is the secret no less than the safety valve of Empire.

The Secret.

The British self-governing system is the greatest in the world. The countries that compose that system are nations in fact as well as in name. This successful combination of Empire with full national liberty has not been achieved by other Empires. Thus while Canada and South Africa are devoted to the interests of the Empire at large, they are at perfect liberty to transact their internal affairs. All Imperial affairs—such as those concerned with the making of war or peace, or the diplomatic service—are reserved to the Imperial Parliament. Again, the Home Rule system is not a cast iron one. For what may suit New Zealand need not necessarily suit the Isle of Man, and the

requirements of Newfoundland are not those of Ireland. Hence each nation has been, or, as it is suggested, shall be given that measure of self-government which it requires, consistent with the dignity of the Empire. The result is that each country is free to develop its own resources, intellectual no less than material. In the meantime the Imperial Flag is a guarantee of their national existence. In a word, the Greater Britain is made up of peoples—large, like Canada; small, like the Isle of Man; new, like New Zealand; old, like Ireland—each entertaining separate social and intellectual ideals. So it gives, or proposes to give, each of them ample room in which to develop those internal concerns of their own, and yet retains them by a bond of loyalty to itself and to one another. British Imperialism is a federation of nations: This is the secret of Empire.

A Safety Valve.

History has shown that without Home Rule it would be impossible to retain some of the self-governing colonies under the Empire. Canada is a case in point. In the first half of the last century Canada was actually in armed rebellion against Great Britain. There was a fierce conflict of race and creed between French Canadians and British Protestants. The Catholics were in a majority, but the Protestant minority was the ascendancy party, the monopolists—as in Ireland today. The situation was much more serious, however, than that which has been created by the small band of 17th century Unionists from N.E. Ulster. For the Canadian majority *en masse* threatened to cut the connection with the Empire. Lord Durham was sent out to enquire into the causes of the rebellion, and bring it to an end. It was fully expected that he would advise 'stern measures.' On the contrary, he reported that the only justifiable policy would be to accede to the wishes of the majority by conferring a large measure of self-government on Canada. This was done by the famous Canadian Act. To-day religious differences are no longer accentuated, and Canadian races have fused into one nation, solely desirous of promoting the prosperity and good government of the country, and loyal to the Empire.

South African Home Rule, although the outcome of a different set of circumstances, is an event too recent to need recapitulation here. Let it suffice to note that Home Rule again became the safety valve, and turned a warring nation into a friendly colony. Internally the effects were equally remarkable. For the Transvaal and the Orange River Colony actually combined with Natal and Cape Colony in forming a South African Union.

So satisfied with their lot are the self-governing colonies that the Colonial Legislatures have again and again recommended the application of Home Rule to other British possessions, as a complete remedy for all forms of discontent. For example, each of the self-governing communities has recommended Home Rule for Ireland, summarising the situation from their own standpoint. At the last Imperial Conference all the Colonial Premiers present had previously expressed themselves in favor of Home Rule for Ireland.

The Glory of Empire.

The grant of Home Rule to Ireland will pave the way, if necessary, for self-government in other parts of the Empire, and will prove to be the corner-stone of a Federal system in these islands. As soon as these great schemes shall have reached maturity the Parliament at Westminster will be free to devote unlimited attention to many pressing Imperial problems. Perhaps the crowning achievement will also be at hand when representatives of all the sister nations shall meet in one Imperial Parliament to take counsel for their individual and collective welfare.

Wherefore should there be any hesitation in bringing about the reconciliation of Ireland. As Sir A. Conan Doyle put it—'On broad Imperial grounds almost any sacrifice is, as it seems to me, justified in order to attain such a result. No Imperialist can be blind to the evil effects which spring from the disaffection of the Irish, both in the United States and in

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