

TOPICS OF THE DAY

“BUTTING IN”: UNDERMINING THE CONSTITUTION: CHINA AND
BRITAIN: THE BRITISH RECORD.

REMARKS made by Mr. Bruce, Prime Minister of Australia, on several public occasions during his recent passage through Canada on his way home from the British Conference in London, have evoked considerable discussion and criticism. They have been praised, and they have been censured. Mr. Bruce is, no doubt, well content. He is notoriously of that class of public men who would rather be abused than ignored. Publicity, at any price, is dear to his heart. A few years ago he meddled grossly in the local political affairs of Great Britain, and seemed to enjoy the ungentle snubbing which he received. So, if the echoes of the opinions expressed concerning his utterances in Canada reach him in his distant home, they will probably feed his vanity and add much to his contentment. What is the use of criticising when a passing visitor resorts to what he must know is universally regarded as “bad form” for the express purpose of being criticised or, in other words, being talked about? Let us be glad that we have no surviving public man in Canada who, were he the guest of Australia, would be guilty of the egregious *faux pas* of reading the people of that state a schoolmasterly lesson on their duties to the British Union, while in undeniable ignorance both of their conditions and of their intentions.

Canada in the past has never shown herself in need of lecturing on her future conduct from an Antipodean politician who has, or should have, all he can attend to at home. Australia, up to the opening of the late war, had, so far as is known, done little but exist. True, it had fairly lived down its rather doubtful infancy, and entered upon a quite healthy if rather swaggering youth, if its politicians are to be accepted as representative of its character. But it has never expanded, and is not now expanding abnormally except in speech. Its interests always have been and still are mainly local and principally egoistic. While the people of Canada were shedding their early blood for the saving and building up of their country for the Empire, Australia was vegetating under her sunny southern skies. It was Canada which led the way in Confederation, and in introducing the practical help of

the British Preference. And, in doing so, Canada made no attempt to work off a political "gold brick" on the Motherland. She did not first specially raise her duties on British imports that she might get credit for greater generosity by afterwards removing a percentage of the increased duties which still left her "adequately protected."

Canada is not now asking Great Britain to expend a single pound for her peculiar or exclusive benefit, or for any purpose whatsoever not in Britain's own interests. Canada has at all times, from the very beginning, paid her way. She has never asked Great Britain for a pound, except as a loan on valid security, or received a pound which she has not returned with interest. Since the day that Quebec was captured for purely European reasons, Great Britain has not fired a shot in defence of Canada and has never been involved in trouble because of her. Yet when Great Britain was in danger in the Great War, Canada hastened to her defence with all her utilizable sons and all her resources of every kind. Canada came out of the war with a burden of debt which it will take generations to pay. Yet she is neither sorry nor complaining; although as long as the debt stands, her development must be hampered and her progress impeded.

Canada continues to-day as true and firm a supporter as ever of the British Union. But she is not to be dragooned or wheedled into further present sacrifices at the shrines of Bogies set up by individuals with perfervid imagination. Canada is as safe from foreign dangers as any independent state on this side of the Atlantic. She has neither temptation nor thought of making war on others. She has not the slightest cause to fear that war will be made upon her. So she has turned her mind to peace and its opportunities.

Canada has quite as little reason to fear at present for Great Britain or any other portion of the Empire as for herself. Never in all British history was the British fleet more completely supreme over that of any or all foreign enemies who might conceivably contemplate war. All Europe in combination could not appreciably shock that fleet, rigorously pruned and reduced though it has been since the war. The United States fleet exists for its own purposes. Those purposes are not in conflict with or antagonistic to British interests and purposes. Conflict between them is admittedly unthinkable. Co-operation in almost every direction is not merely possible but highly probable. Why, then, should anyone urge upon Canada the strengthening, at her expense, of the British fleet which for an indefinite time to come must and will exist solely for domestic reasons and purposes, and which they

of the Mother Country are still engaged in reducing to lessen their own taxation and enable them to get rid of their war debts?

Australia as well as its Prime Minister would appear to have been suffering recently from what the French call *une crise de nerfs*, in plain English, a fit of hysterics, because of Japan, which is, and promises indefinitely to be, fully engaged in minding her own business strictly at home. Australia wants Great Britain to construct an enormously costly naval base at Singapore, in south-eastern Asia, mainly for her imaginary defence against Japan. On her side, she proposes to contribute probably a few hundred thousand pounds to that many-millioned scheme, and to maintain possibly two or three unimportant warships for the supposed defence of her coasts against Japan, which has probably as little intention or thought of assailing her as of attacking Canada. And because of this imaginary future "contribution to the Empire" the Prime Minister of Australia fancied himself justified in delivering lectures to his recent Canadian hosts on their "duty to the Empire", especially the Australian part of it, and in making insinuations against their "loyalty" as well as their generosity. It is unnecessary to reply to an impertinence of that sort. It answers itself.

THE chief corner-stone of the British parliamentary democratic system is Representation. The word "Parliament" tells its own tale of a representative body in which public questions are freely and impartially discussed, and legally decided by a majority of the chosen representatives of the people concerned. The word "representative" also has a fixed and definite signification of its own. Its meaning is much wider and yet more precise than the designations of those composing the legislatures of most foreign countries, with constitutions supposed to be imitative of our system of government. In some states they are called "deputies"; in others, "delegates." In all British states, each Member of Parliament is not merely named but is constitutionally regarded as a "representative" of the nation at large, and not specially, except to a limited extent, of the constituency which directly elects him. This accounts for the great acceptability of their parliaments to the British people, and the faith which they are wont to place in parliamentary procedure.

A "delegate" is, primarily, one who is given a particular commission of a restricted character to transact certain specific affairs entrusted to him by those who select him as their *commissioner*. A "deputy" is one who is sent or appointed to act in place of others

who cannot conveniently be personally present to transact their own business. He is, in a sense, a representative, but not in the British sense. He represents and takes his instructions only from his own immediate constituents. He is not a representative at large of the country. His personal independence is strictly circumscribed. Instead of deciding, after due parliamentary debate, for the good of the whole country, he is bound to support the selfish or short-sighted will of those whose special "deputy" and *servant* he is.

It is of the utmost importance that these far more than verbal distinctions should be got clearly into the British public mind, for on the understanding of them largely depends the maintenance of our institutions which insidious attempts are being constantly made to undermine by various classes and organizations among us. On a full appreciation of the foundations of our parliamentary system depends directly its effectiveness for democratic purposes. If one elected to the parliament of a British State should come to be regarded as primarily and exclusively the "delegate" or "deputy" of a particular body of voters, instead of as the parliamentary representative of the state as a whole, the end of the free democratic institutions of the state would have come.

This is no vague or alarmist assertion. It is not a mere theoretical proposition. It is the plain statement of an actual, present menace. In the open, it would have little or no chance of success. Those who are clamorously demanding the "referendum" and the "recall" as constitutional amendments are mere extremist groups misled by ignorance of the real character of their own institutions or by a desire to be "up to date" with similar foreign agitators. They may be disregarded. The common-sense of the public may safely be trusted to keep them in check and in subordination. Our danger lies in underhand encroachments on parliamentary freedom by organized propagandists of special "causes". It has been through the manoeuvres of such organizations that liberty in the United States has been made a laughing-stock at home and abroad.

These are the especial days of such organizations and such tactics. Whenever they exhibit a tendency to interfere with public policy in Canada, except through mere propaganda with a view to the legitimate influencing of public opinion, they should be sternly and promptly repressed. It is nothing short of high treason against the state for an organized body of individuals within it to attempt to influence in advance, by direct means, the decisions of parliament. This applies to ecclesiastical bodies as

well as to lay combinations of citizens. The "Church court" which seeks to overawe the elected representatives of the country by declarations of its supposed opinions, and threats of its political disfavour if its opinions are not accepted, constitutes itself a direct enemy of popular freedom. Those lay organizations which presume to approach candidates for popular parliamentary election, for the purpose of extorting or attempting to extort from them personal pledges of parliamentary votes in support of their particular "cause" should the candidate be elected, are urgently in need of drastic treatment. They are making open assaults on the liberty and independence of parliament and on the very foundations of our Constitution.

It is clearly the duty, and should be the pleasure, of parliament to take the necessary steps for its own and the country's protection in this matter. An elected member who comes to any British legislature pledged in advance to the support of any private proposition or scheme before listening to open debate in parliament, and learning how the proposition would be likely to affect public interests in general by giving effect to the fads or fancies of those to whose will he has had the almost inconceivable ignorance or cowardice or mean selfishness to bow, is no fit person to sit in any British parliament. Any self respecting British parliament, on becoming aware of his baseness and lack of personal independence as well as his total misconception of the character of the Constitution which he is elected and sworn to uphold, should eject him at once as one foresworn and unworthy of a place among its members. The independence of parliament as well as the interests of general freedom and safe government demand such action.

No person elected to any British parliament should be tolerated by the body of which he becomes a member a day longer than when it is definitely known that he has given any direct personal pledge to others than his own constituents, or even to them regarding any matter other than one affecting their own peculiar interests. To that extent, and to that extent only, he is the "delegate" or "deputy" of his constituency. In all other respects he is the representative not merely of them, but especially and always of the whole country whose general interests he must regard as paramount over any mere section of it, much more over any particular or special organization in the country no matter what its claims or professions. The custom of pledging candidates in advance to the whims of the promoters of some "cause" has become an absolute and alarming menace to public welfare.

BY far the most important, though still perhaps not the most interesting, "topic of the day", the world over, is China. It is important because all sorts of possibilities for other countries and for the future are involved in it. It is more or less uninteresting to all but the few, because of lack of knowledge of that ancient and puzzling country. Even at the present time, when it looms so large on the diplomatic and military horizon, it is difficult to get reliable or really valuable information about China. One is forced, therefore, to pick up what one can from various contemporary sources.

The general ignorance with regard to China is almost inconceivable, or would be if conditions there were not what they have been. Many, of course, are aware that China boasts a very old civilization, dating thousands of years behind that of Europe and the new western world—as old as, if not indeed older than even the civilization of Egypt of which the more or less reliable history antedates that of all other countries. But as to the time when and the means by which China was brought within modern western ken, how many are informed? Much light is thrown on this side of the subject by George W. Keeton of Hong Kong University, in an article in the *Nineteenth Century and After* for February. Mr. Keeton is one of a trio of writers on China in the number of that Review mentioned. His subject is *A Retrospect of Anglo-Chinese Relations*.

There had been some British trading with China as well as India prior to that, but the first attempt to establish diplomatic relations with China was made by Lord Maccartney's mission in 1792, only 135 years ago. It seems almost incredible. Prior to that, China was nothing but a name to any but daring eastern navigators and traders. It appears that Queen Elizabeth had sent one John Mildenhall to the Court of the Great Mogul at the end of the sixteenth century, but there are no available records of his experiences. This would appear to have been a very wise adventure; for China, at that time, had not become exclusive to foreigners, and if friendly relations could then have been established, subsequent failures might have been avoided.

The earliest commercial intercourse with China was begun by Captain Widdell's expedition in 1637. The Chinese authorities were unwilling to receive him, and ended by firing on the British ships from their coastal batteries. Their guns were easily silenced, and Captain Widdell proceeded to Canton where he loaded cargoes of sugar and ginger. Between 1637 and 1689 a number of British expeditions reached China, but were unable to make satisfactory

trade arrangements. In 1685 a Chinese imperial decree threw open all the ports of the country to foreign commerce. The East India Company sent its first ship in 1689 and established a factory or trading post at Canton. In 1715, two years after Nova Scotia was finally ceded by France to the British, a permanent staff was installed in the Canton factory, and trade increased throughout the century.

The new liberal policy of the Chinese Government came to an early end, and Canton was soon after once more the only port open to foreigners. Even there, all sorts of irksome or dangerous restrictions were enforced. At the end of each season all foreigners were compelled to withdraw. This unsettled and unsatisfactory state of affairs continued until the Maccartney mission was sent out in 1792.

The secretary of that mission on its return issued glowing reports of its success; but one Anderson, valet to the Ambassador, published, on his own account, a very different tale which had a wide vogue and such sensational success that it had to be bought up and suppressed by the Government. It was thus disclosed that the boats carrying the British Ambassador up the river to Peking had to display flags inscribed with the legend: "Ambassador bearing tribute from the country of England". That was nearly fifty years after the founding of Halifax. At Peking Lord Maccartney was informed that he must perform the usual prostrations—*kotow*—before the Emperor. This he refused to do. In the end he was allowed to act as if in the presence of his own sovereign. Nothing else was conceded. As one has put it—"He was received with the utmost politeness, treated with the utmost hospitality, watched with the utmost vigilance, and dismissed with the utmost civility".

No further proceedings were taken until 1816, a little over one hundred years ago, when an embassy with aims similar to those of Lord Maccartney's was sent out under Lord Amherst. Amherst had to sail up the river to Peking to meet a new Emperor under the former notifications as bearing tribute to the Emperor from Great Britain. He was insisently required to *kotow* to the Emperor. He was rudely hustled at Peking, and refused admission to the Court. It was suggested to him that he should leave at once, which he gladly did. The representatives of other nations were treated with even greater indignity. They were despised for performing the prostrations which Britain's representatives had scornfully refused. Of their experiences it has been written: "They were brought to the capital like malefactors, treated when

they were there like beggars, and then sent back to Canton like mountebanks to perform the three-times prostration at all times and before everything their conductors saw fit”.

So matters continued in China with regard to foreigners until 1833, when the East India Company's monopoly of the China trade was abolished. Immediately afterwards Lord Napier was commissioned to China as Ambassador and Superintendent of Trade. His dual functions caused trouble at once. As a “chief trader”, the Chinese despised him. As Ambassador, they resisted him. His messengers were treated with indignities and even violence. The story of his manoeuvres is intensely interesting. War was imminent when Lord Napier contracted a fever and suddenly died without achieving anything of importance. He had merely carried a stage further than Lord Maccartney the British demand for the diplomatic equality of Britain with China.

The tale of the first British war with China is well led up to by the foregoing. Britain has incurred much odium on account of that war, both at home and abroad. It has been called “the opium war”, and has been denounced by “philanthropists” who too often seem to love all mankind except those of their own nation. It has been made the most of by Britain's rivals in trade. So, perhaps, it will be better to let the story of it be told in his own words by Mr. Keeton, “the man on the spot”. According to him, the war had many proximate causes. “The two most important were the opium question and the extra-territoriality issue, and of these the second was more directly responsible for the conflict”. Mr. Keeton continues:

The opium question had arisen as a result of the efforts of the imperial commissioner to stamp out traffic in the drug in Kwangtung. One of the steps he took was to force the surrender of over 20,000 chests of opium from British merchants, without compensation, by virtually imprisoning them within the factories for a period. In order to free his hands for subsequent negotiations Captain Elliot, Chief Superintendent of Trade, withdrew all British residents to Macao, and thence later to Hong Kong, then only sparsely inhabited by a few fishermen. During this period the chief difficulty as far as opium was concerned was that the imperial commissioner wanted all British merchants to sign a bond declaring that they were in no way concerned with the opium traffic, and agreeing to submit to Chinese jurisdiction if they were detected smuggling. Since the punishment for smuggling was at this time death, signing the bond was therefore practically equivalent to conceding the whole issue relating to jurisdiction. To this Captain Elliott could not agree, but was prepared to accept all reasonable proposals short of this, even

to the extent of co-operating with Chinese officials in the detection of opium. A settlement of this question would have been achieved in the autumn of 1839 had not another intervened. During an affray between some British seamen and Chinese villagers, a Chinese named Lin-Wei-hi was killed. The Chinese demanded the surrender of the murderer. Captain Elliott replied that he had held an enquiry, and had convicted five seamen of rioting, but that the murderer could not be found. The Chinese refused to accept this explanation, and ultimately sent a fleet of twenty-nine war junks to compel the British to surrender the culprit. The result was the battle of Chuenpi, which resulted in the total destruction of four war junks and the withdrawal of the others greatly damaged. On the English side not a single life was lost, and very little damage sustained.

The results of the war were of the first importance. The Chinese gladly negotiated on a basis of equality, but still refused to receive a permanent embassy. The condition of British merchants at Canton was nominally improved, and by the cession of Kong Kóng they were assured of a place to which they could withdraw in times of difficulty. Moreover, the treaty of Nanking guaranteed to British subjects a limited form of extra-territoriality, a privilege which was secured pacifically by the United States and France in 1844, for the sole reason that the Chinese had just been beaten and had no desire to risk another war. The decisiveness of the British victory is proved by the fact that other European Powers (which, with the single exception of Sweden and Norway in 1847, did not obtain treaty rights until 1860) were tacitly allowed by the Chinese the same rights as the British, Americans and French in China enjoyed.

What has happened in China since then, up to comparatively recent times, is not in need of special recounting. A great deal of it is within living memory. Now, once again, serious trouble is imminent, if we may judge by the latest Chinese mental and moral manifestations. But that is a matter for future developments to solve. Britain's attitude towards China in the past has, in the main, not only been forbearing beyond reproach, but considerate in the extreme. There is every indication that it is at present and will continue hereafter to be equally admirable.

“**W**HATEVER record leap to light”, Great Britain “never shall be shamed” for her dealings with China, past or present. The more fully the records are known, the better are they seen to be. Her reputation has been blackened by ignorant sentimentalists at home and malignant enemies abroad. Time and information have vindicated her, except in the eyes and minds of the wilfully

blind. She has been represented as forcing herself and her wares upon an unwilling nation, as wantonly invading the rights of a gentle and seclusion-loving people. Nothing could be further from the truth. She had to deal with one of the most arrogant and ignorant, usurping tyrannies known to history. The Chinese people were eager to trade with their fellowmen. Their rulers scorned trade, and were determined to prevent it lest their own seclusion and fancied dignity should be disturbed.

We have heard it repeated over and over again that China had an inalienable right to live in isolation if she saw fit. But had she? This earth is not a heaven, populated by perfect angels on perfect wings. No one people has either moral or legal right to exclude all other peoples from the territory occupied by it; to refuse to enter into normal diplomatic relations with others and decline to tolerate the presence of representatives of the others to see that their rights and interests are not wantonly violated. This is what the Chinese Government, not the Chinese people, did for centuries, until their ill-treatment of peaceful foreigners became intolerable and had to be curbed by force for the good of the whole world. Great Britain took the initiative in asserting the rights and redressing the wrongs of humanity. Thus and thus only did she offend. The nations loudest in abusing her, because of the advantage which they feared she might thus have gained, were the first to make use of her action for their own benefit.

As it was in the beginning and is now, whether it shall be evermore or not, Great Britain has been pursuing her unchanging policy with regard to China with, as usual, the nations snarling at her heels. During the Great War it became clearly evident that ancient China was breaking up, if it had not already fallen to pieces. The royal line had been deposed, to be followed by what was called a "republic", which was as little like a republic as a gaol is like a public-house. The country was a welter of conflicting, petty, military ambitions and tyrannies. Great Britain alone among the nations acted as if she understood and desired to improve the situation for the good of the people of China and the world at large. The welter has resolved itself into a contest between personal military ambitions personified by the South and the North, by Canton and Peking.

After repeated futile attempts to secure international co-operation in dealing with a situation which had once again become menacing in the extreme to all foreign nations and their respective interests, Great Britain decided, as of old, to take courageous diplomatic action. For over a year she had exerted every possible

effort to induce the Powers to join her in a friendly movement towards China. In December last she determined to proceed alone.

A memorandum was prepared and despatched to foreign representatives, containing an explicit statement of British policy, and formulating a set of proposals to the Powers as the basis for a revision of their diplomacy with respect to China. This memorandum was despatched to the Powers on December eighteenth. Garbled accounts of what the memorandum contained at once began to appear in China and elsewhere. In consequence, the memorandum was given to the British press on Christmas Day last. Its main proposition was that the Powers should adopt and act on a policy which would meet as far as possible the reasonable aspirations of Chinese nationalism, to convince China as a whole that the Powers had no desire to subject the country to foreign domination of any kind, and to relieve the fears of the Chinese on that account.

It was a leading declaration of the memorandum that China must be regarded as an entity, and that she must decide for herself which internal faction was to form the central Government of the country. Nothing could have been more straightforward, more disinterested, or less selfishly partial. Yet it was at once misconstrued and misrepresented. Soviet propaganda was redoubled in southern China, where the ground had been so thoroughly prepared by Sun Yat-sen. The Cantonese leaders are advanced Bolshevists of a Chinese sort. Russian agents succeeded in directing all their malevolence against Great Britain, whom it is their special mission to injure in every possible way.

The British memorandum can scarcely have been issued in the hope of producing harmony among the Powers. Its aim was rather to clear Britain's skirts from blame in the future. For over a year British representatives in Peking had tried to persuade the representatives of the United States, Japan, France, Italy and Belgium to abandon the pre-war attitude towards China, and to recognize that China was a grown-up Nation which ought to be treated as such. It is certain that the representatives of those Powers knew, in 1925, that Great Britain was prepared to grant complete Customs autonomy, to abolish the extra-territorial judicial system, and to revise the treaties so as to make them less one-sided.

Such is and has been the British attitude with regard to China; and all the Powers know it. Yet they have refrained from making a supporting movement. Britain has had to bear the whole odium and expense of preparations for the defence of the foreign settlements at Shanghai against the advancing Cantonese Bolshevists.

Yet the other Powers stand to profit as largely from her activity, at present, as they formerly did from her defence of international rights in the first Chinese war, since called by ignorant fools or cunning knaves "The Opium War." If the British record were as stainless and admirable in all parts of the world as it has been in China, there would be no fairer record in all history. Without the "if", is there, has there ever been, any record to compare with it, the world over, in general merit?

W. E. M.