

**IMPERIAL ARCHITECTS: BEING AN
ACCOUNT OF PROPOSALS IN THE
DIRECTION OF A CLOSER
IMPERIAL UNION, MADE PREVIOUS TO
THE OPENING OF THE FIRST COLONIAL
CONFERENCE OF 1887**

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Imperial architects: being an account of proposals in the direction of a closer imperial union, made previous to the opening of the first Colonial Conference of 1887 by Alfred LeRoy Burt

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ALFRED LEROY BURT

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BY

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WITH AN INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

AT a time when the subject of the closer union of the Empire is much to the fore, and when the centripetal forces making for such union are stronger than they were in the past, the story of previous efforts at consolidation, as given in the following essay, will be of interest. Its author is a Canadian Rhodes Scholar; and, as such, likely to realize the advantages of closer union, and also to appreciate the difficulties that still lie in the way.

With regard to the first part of the volume, which deals with the various proposals made about the time of the American Revolution, little need be said. Such proposals had, nearly in every case, the motive behind them of extracting a revenue from the Americans without doing violence to the principle of

“no taxation without representation”; and, in my opinion, the national temper on both sides of the Atlantic made any real union out of the question. Even in the case of the more recent proposals, contained in the second part of the volume, we note a certain amateurishness and failure to get at the real heart of the situation, which accounts for, and perhaps justifies, their complete failure. One need not be a thick-and-thin supporter of the principle “the best has got to be,” to recognize that our present “imperial architects” are building more carefully and laboriously than did their predecessors; and, so far, are more deserving of success. Still, the opinions of past generations, which Mr. Burt marshals so clearly and succinctly, must be of interest to all—and fortunately their numbers are growing—who are interested in the problem of the British Empire.

H. E. EGERTON.

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IMPERIAL ARCHITECTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

THE first striking feature that presents itself in the study of proposals making for a closer Imperial unity, up to the meeting of the first Colonial Conference of 1887, is the division of the subject into two periods, separated by quite a lapse of time. The successful revolt of the American Colonies was responsible for this break in the continuity of the development of the Imperial idea, though other causes intervened later to protract it.

The accomplished fact of American Independence was a rude shock to all Englishmen, and also to many people in America. English ignorance easily accounts for the disbelief in its possibility which had taken such firm root in the British Isles. It is more difficult, however, to explain the similar belief in America.

Otis, in biting terms, satirizes the one, and in quite as enthusiastic language expounds the other. Illustrative of English ignorance, he tells how one Secretary of State conducted affairs, "without knowing whether Jamaica lay in the Mediterranean, the Baltic, or in the moon; letters were often received directed to the Governor of the Island of New England."¹ Concerning American loyalty, he is equally emphatic: "Nothing can eradicate from their hearts their natural, and almost mechanical, affection for Great Britain. . . . We love, esteem, and reverence our Mother Country, and adore our King. And could the choice of independency be offered the Colonies, or subjection to Great Britain upon any terms above absolute slavery, I am convinced they would accept the latter."² If the surprise was so great in America, how much greater was it in England! The shock occasioned by the upsetting of these beliefs was further augmented, in England, by the defeat of English arms.

As with the individual, so with the nation, the great shock compelled retrospection.

¹ Otis, *Rights of the Colonies Asserted and Proved*. Boston, 1764.

² *Ibid.*