

# THE VANCOUVER CONFERENCE

## DR. A. A. LONDON TALKS

### Very Interesting Criticisms

Having learnt that Dr. A. A. London, who recently returned from Canada, was to present last night to the council of the Royal Geographical Society (South Australian Branch) his report as their delegate at the Fourth Triennial Conference held under the auspices of the National Council of Education of that Dominion, our representative sought an interview with the doctor, and obtained from him the following interesting information:—

In the year 1919 there was founded the National Council of Education of Canada; it is therefore a post-war activity. Now, if there be one thing more than another that the continent of North America likes it is a conference. The National Council immediately proceeded to hold conferences. Presumably, as they are held triennially the first took place in 1920, and I suppose at Ottawa; the topic may have been Education, pure and simple. Presumably also, this conference was a success, for a second was held in 1923 at Toronto, when the subject was Education and Life. Amongst the speakers were Sir Michael Sadler, Sir Robert Baden-Powell, Sir Henry Newbolt, and Lord Cecil. In 1926 Montreal was selected as the place, and I think the Duchess of Atholl, then a member of the Government, was a speaker. Now, in order to extend the range of interest beyond England and France, and two mother countries of Canada, it was decided to invite delegates to attend this fourth conference from the uttermost parts of the Empire, as well as from foreign countries. Again, specially to interest New Zealand, about which Canada knows something, and that more distant country, Australia, which Canada vaguely thinks is an appendage of New Zealand, it was decided to send an ambassador to the Antipodes to en-deavour to arouse an interest in the conference. Accordingly, Professor Osborne, of the Manitoba University, was dispatched at the expense of Mr. J. W. A. Richardson, the grain king of Winnipeg.

I met Professor Osborne in Adelaide last year—I think he "professes" French language and literature—and I heard him address a meeting. The previous intention of taking a holiday crystallised into one of crossing Canada. I told Professor Osborne I thought of coming, and he assured me of a hearty welcome. Meanwhile, he had arranged with the Lord Mayor of Adelaide and the Director of Education to nominate further delegates. Professor Sir Archibald Strong was chosen as our leader, and the other members were Mr. Alick Melrose and Mr. George Jeffrey. The latter was afterwards appointed by Mr. Bruce as the Commonwealth delegate. On the Aorangi, in which we sailed from Sydney on March 7, we met Mr. L. B. Franklin, headmaster of the Melbourne Grammar School, Mr. S. H. Smith, Director of Education for New South Wales, and Miss Buring, M.A., a social worker. Later, at Auckland, we were joined by Mr. Frank Milner, another headmaster, and his daughter, also a teacher, and a Miss Wilson, all three being delegates for New Zealand.

#### Tagore and Raymond

I soon learnt that the expectations of the women of Victoria were centred not on the Anzac delegates, but on one well-known personage from India, the poet Tagore, the arrival of whose steamer was eagerly awaited, and upon an equally well-known English writer, Ernest Raymond. As far as I could ascertain, those who gushed so much in anticipation over Tagore had never read his poetry, nor could they give me any ideas about his scheme of philosophy. I was in the same delightful state of ignorance. I had to confess, too, that I knew nothing about Raymond. "Oh," they rejoined, "why he wrote 'Tell England.'" I had to confess that I had never read the book, whereupon it was promptly handed to me, and I enjoyed it. When later I met and chatted with Raymond, I became much more interested in him and in his book. I may explain for the benefit of those who are not familiar with this work that he is the outstanding figure in the second half of the book, if not exactly the hero. Educated at St. Paul's School, Raymond entered the Church and served both in France and on Gallipoli as a padre. After the war he took to literature, and resigned his orders. He is over six feet in height, slim and wiry, somewhat ascetic in appearance, but with a pleasing smile, but he is not exactly a handsome man for his long nose spoils his features. On the other hand, Tagore was a great contrast. Of medium height, well-nourished, and with good features,

he was picturesque to a degree. With his well-combed white hair flowing down over his ears and neck, and his long straggly beard, if you had only dressed him up as a cowboy he might have been mistaken for Aloysius Horn. Tagore wore neither hat nor turban, and indeed appeared but little in public. At the meetings his face assumed a mask-like appearance, devoid of any expression, or full perhaps of repression. He seemed to have an extensive wardrobe; certainly he had a different costume to suit each address on the occasions on which I saw him. He gave one the impression of constantly posing for a photograph. He was not popular with the men; it was known that he had been awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, and that he came of an aristocratic Indian family, and that he had been knighted for his eminence in literature. But he had recently resigned his knighthood after some 15 years—a gesture of disloyalty to the King-Emperor was it, or of sympathy with Indian anarchists? He was billed on the programme as Dr. Tagore, not Sir Rabindra Nath Tagore. One qualified to express an opinion assured me that there was nothing original in his writings. An English delegate went so far as to designate him "that old Blighter," and I was not disposed to quarrel with the term. We know that later he fell foul of the United States authorities at San Francisco; yet, on the whole, I think he was posing.

Of Tagore's addresses, I can only recall a thin piping treble voice, and a deluge of beautiful sentences churned up by the amplifier. If eloquence could have made clear what was very obscure, he might have carried the house with him, so eager were the audiences, to appreciate his merits, but I regret to say that I could make little out of the addresses, and nothing more after reading them in the papers; that was practical or that I could carry away. It was what sailors call "dry hash." Again, I say I think he was posing. He had a sort of native "trainer" with him, one Professor Chanda, and also an admiring English clergyman, the Rev. Mr. Williams, well known to Anglo-Indians, who appeared to act as what is called a "barker" in the States.

After Tagore, what a joy it was to listen to Raymond. He preached in the small wooden cathedral at Victoria at a sort of full-dress service for the conference. Lord Willingdon, the Governor-General, read the lessons—why precisely I don't know, but I noticed he did it elsewhere. I think he rather fancied the job. His A.D.C.'s were in full military uniform. Raymond's sermon was quite good, the only unusual feature being a short tale, not from Scripture, which made the whole congregation laugh and the dean look serious.

#### "An Old Master"

The next time I listened to Ernest Raymond was in the Vancouver Theatre. Mrs. R. F. McWilliams, the president of the National Council of Women of Canada, was in the chair, and introduced the first speaker, Sir Archibald Strong, who gave a learned address on the drama, and prophesied its revival in full Elizabethan glory. Raymond was to have followed with two short topics, but instead of these he switched himself on to a different one, which he termed "An Old Master." It was a remarkable tour-de-force, a thumb-nail sketch of an assistant master at St. Paul's School named Elam, a clergyman, slipshod in appearance and uncouth in manner, contemptuous with respect to his colleagues, and disloyal to his chief, the high master, neglectful of the duties assigned to him in teaching, but with a flair for teaching boys, who were receptive, things that mattered, in history, in science, in religion, or what-not. It was this educational "out-law" who gave Raymond his first insight into, and love for, literature. They say the story is told in his "Through Literature to Life," but I should be almost sorry to read it and destroy the impressions of the address as delivered in the theatre, which took the house by storm. In the audience too, was Franklin, of Melbourne, who had been the head prefect when Raymond was a small boy at St. Paul's, and who could verify everything Raymond had said. Raymond spoke on other occasions, and there was one other address on folk songs and dances which was of special interest as it did full justice to the work of Cecil Sharp, formerly of Adelaide.

#### Other Speakers

Besides the addresses at the regular sessions, there were many lunches and dinners at which less formal speeches were expected, and the audiences were not disappointed as regards quantity, even if quality were rather uneven. As

representatives of the British Government and of the Education Department, Sir Aubrey Symonds, the permanent head, was always called upon first. He struck one as being a living embodiment of Charles Dickens's Circumlocution Office, with his fixed monocle, his stiff manner, his immaculate dress, he awed us with formal speeches. A more interesting speaker was Dr. Rushworth Williams, the representative of the Chamber of Princes in India. For Australia and New Zealand, Mr. Jeffrey and Mr. Milner divided the honors. The former held his audience with an eulogy of Mr. Bruce, a reference to this family gathering of British peoples, and the necessity for religious education, and was voted "a dear" by the ladies. Mr. Milner assailed the meetings with his graceful and fluent eloquence. In private conversation Milner had somewhat the same fault that Queen Victoria noticed in Mr. Gladstone—he addressed you as though you were a public meeting.

#### Objects of the Conference

We have next to consider what were the objects of the conference, and how far they were attained. In the first place, I can say what the conference was not. It was not a gathering of teachers assembled to discuss the technique of their profession, or their grievances. There was such a gathering going on in Vancouver about the same time, and some of our delegates addressed it. If anything the conference was a sort of post-graduate course for adults; again, not for teachers in particular, but rather for the lay public in general. The prevailing theme was Education and Leisure: what should be done to counteract the abuse of leisure such as is due to drink or to the want of healthy recreation and innocent amusement. The one point they failed adequately to stress in my opinion, and yet which they were vaguely trying to make all the time, was the necessity for special education to make the most of our "Horae Subsecivae," which, under modern legislation and with modern machinery are steadily increasing. The average person becomes bored unless he has been taught to do something with his leisure time. At school or at the university, athletics and outdoor games are instilled into him, but there is comparatively little done to equip him for rainy days when he has to stay indoors. The organising committee meant all this, but they wrapped it up in rather obscure and high-brow language. What it seemed to me was the basic object of the conference was to demonstrate to the world the essential unity of the British Empire, and hence the ambition of the committee to attract delegates, however ineffective, from distant parts such as Australia, and to exhibit them to the admiring world. But, you will ask, why was education chosen as the handle for this purpose? Well, it is possible that it was thought by the executive that they might demonstrate that Education within the Empire was aiming at a different form of "culture" to that which prevailed in Central Europe before the war, and at a higher form of culture for the general public than that obtaining still in the rest of the world outside the British Empire, and to the Western Canadians this outside world means the United States of America.

Although this might appear a trifle conceited, there could be no grave objection to such aims, if there were nothing ulterior about them. But could there be? Well, I may mention some significant straws which show how the wind blows in the North American hemisphere. There were delegates from Europe generally—Germany, France, Italy and Chekoslovakia were represented—as was Japan. But there were no representatives from the United States, though I understand some were invited. Surely here was a mistake. Again, one cinema exhibit was that of the literature to be found on the book-stalls in Vancouver City. The magnificent outside covers, and some of the titles of the articles and illustrations were shown, and they were all U.S.A. magazines. They certainly, if chosen indiscriminately, formed a heavy indictment against the States for the material dumped as literature across the border.

#### Jealous of the United States

But I am sorry to say further that in Western Canada I found a most outspoken hostility to the States: a jealousy as regards their greater efficiency, an anxiety as regards their peaceful penetration in commerce, and a fear lest Canada itself may be some day absorbed into the States. Naturally, the Australian delegates could not countenance any feeling of this sort, nor were they asked to, but that the feeling was there was extremely obvious. The other question as to whether the objects, real, or as I have imagined them, were attained is hard to answer. The conference was undoubtedly a success in many ways, thanks chiefly to Major Fred Ney, the executive secretary. There was a vast amount of interest felt in it, and the audiences filled the theatres, where the sessions were held, to overflowing, hundreds literally turned away at the doors. Undoubtedly, too, some of the

addresses were distinctly above the average. The delegates were the victims of an overflowing amount of hospitality—private, municipal, and provincial. The billeting, which I dreaded, turned out to be a most pleasant penalty—possibly I was extra lucky, but I was at once a petted distinguished guest, and an adopted member of the family, in each of the charming houses in which I stayed. Nothing was too great trouble for my hosts that would conduce to my comfort and make me feel quite at home.

One other thing I may perhaps mention. The Australian delegates were asked to meet a committee of the Board of Trade at Vancouver at a round-table conference—the best means of encouraging greater trade with Australia and New Zealand was discussed—the solution suggested was inter-Imperial freetrade. At a lunch the same day Sir Archibald Strong carried the Board of Trade with him when he demonstrated the advantages to commence of a training in arts. I expressed the opinion that Mr. Halmes, the new Commissioner for Trade with Canada, was exactly the man for the present situation.

## SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

### DR. RICHARDSON IN FAVOR EVIDENCE BEFORE PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE

The Commonwealth Public Works Committee met at the General Post-Office on Saturday, and took evidence from Dr. A. E. V. Richardson, director of the Waite Agricultural Research Institute, regarding the proposed establishment at Canberra of laboratories for the division of economic botany for the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research. There were present Mr. M. D. Cameron, M.H.R. (chairman, South Australia), Senators J. Barnes (Victoria), H. J. Payne (Tasmania), and M. Reid (Queensland), Messrs. J. Francis (Queensland), D. S. Jackson (Tasmania), P. E. Coleman (New South Wales), and D. C. McGrath (Victoria), M.H.R.'s, and Mr. G. Whiteford (secretary).

Dr. Richardson said he thought there was sufficient field to warrant the Commonwealth establishing the laboratories at Canberra. Two years ago the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research met the State Premiers, and asked them if they thought there was room for the Commonwealth to enter the field of research work, and the Premier replied in the affirmative. They said the States should confine their attention to those matters which particularly affected the States, leaving to the Commonwealth those which were of national interest. He was acquainted with Canberra, and did not think there would be any disabilities in the establishment of the laboratories there, which would not disappear with the increase of population. One drawback was the absence of a university, and it was not an agricultural centre, but the central organisation of research need not necessarily be in any particular place, but the subsidiary research work would have to be undertaken where the troubles specially investigated existed. The prickly pear problem, for instance, must be tackled in Queensland, wheat troubles in the wheat areas, and so on. The central scientific organisation could be at the national capital, but there was no one centre which was outstanding in its requirements for botanical research, where the organisation could be established. Remembering that Canberra was the political and administrative home of the nation the central laboratories might be there also. This had been done in other countries. There were parts in the Federal capital area suitable for laboratory work, although it might not be in the capital itself. He did not think there would be any overlapping with the States' activities, as the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research had taken the necessary precautions. Research workers were too precious to be overlapping.

#### The Toll of the Pests

In every agricultural country in the world large sums were spent to reduce the toll taken by insect and fungus pests. In the United States 15 per cent. of the total production had been lost, representing the loss of the work of a million men in the primary industries. In Australia the blowfly had cost £3,000,000 or £4,000,000 annually, and "takeall" caused the loss of £5,000,000 a year to the wheat yield. Australia was decidedly behind the United States, and, in point of population, behind South Africa in research