

BRITISH FREEDOM

The assistance which the Dominions Overseas are giving and offering to the Mother Country in this great European struggle is not to be measured by its material strength. The moral effect is, perhaps, more important even than the fighting strength which Canada, Australia, South Africa and the other Dominions and dependencies of the British Crown are bringing to British arms in the field. This is evidenced by the enthusiasm which the offers of help from Overseas have aroused in the United Kingdom. The Manchester Guardian, the great Liberal paper of England, says that the hearts of the people glowed as they read the wonderful succession of telegrams from every part of the Empire. No sooner was Britain's danger known than "the most splendid and spontaneous help" began to flow in on her from every continent in the world. Australia instantly set to work to raise a contingent for the army; Canada came forward with tens of thousands of picked men, a vast gift of food, and a hospital ship. In South Africa even the most exclusively Dutch, as distinct from English, political group threw aside at once all party preoccupations and put itself simply at the service of the Empire in its day of trial. From India came a long procession of generous gifts or offers of service from feudatory princes and from bodies which can speak for native India as a whole.

"In the modern history of the Empire," says the Guardian, "there has been nothing so thrilling and so infinitely cheering. In one week it has dispelled the accumulated apprehensions, rumors and sinister predictions of a generation. How many times have we been confidently told that our hold upon the loyalty of native India had weakened; that the Boers in South Africa would despise us for giving them freedom to govern themselves and would turn on us in our first hour of danger; that the older free Dominions were drifting away from us, forming new connections, based on trading interests, elsewhere, and certain soon to leave us altogether unless we could outbid these alien suitors for their business and affection? But now, almost in an instant, the whole truth of the unmarred happiness of our relation with all our own people is brilliantly lit up."

"The Illumination," the Guardian continues, "is a delight and an extraordinary encouragement. Also, like every sudden avowal of an unknown intensity of devotion in a friend, it is rather humbling and searching. It makes us ask ourselves what have we done that all these diverse, diversely placed peoples—British, French, Dutch, Indian, even German, for the German Australians are as ardent as others—should rush to merge their own interests, so far as they can, in the interest of these two small islands anchored in a sea so remote from them all. It cannot be race, it cannot be language, it cannot be religion, for none of these is common to the whole mass. It cannot be the assimilating effect of an identical form of government, for there is none. The Canadian, South African, and Australian federal systems are all different, and India has not got one at all. Indeed, the forms of government are so many and various that this very fact makes us wonder whether it does not itself give us the true explanation. Is our headship of the Empire loved, and its secure continuance so ardently desired, precisely because its spirit is patient of the diversity of human nature and sanely tolerant of all men's preferences in the ordering of their own lives?"

The writer supplies the answer by noting a striking contrast, from the field of war, between the attitude of the lost Provinces of France and the people of other races in the British Dominions:

"The other day there was an extraordinary spectacle in Alsace. For forty-four years a Government of great strength, and with many of the ablest brains of Europe at its command, has been trying to incorporate in its Empire a province mainly inhabited by people of its own blood. At the end of the forty-four years an invading army marches in, and the population crowds to cheer it, weeping and hanging on the necks of the invading soldiers. Contrast that with the British patriotism of the South African Dutch, alien in race and language, and opposed to us less than fourteen years ago in one of the most bitter and desperately fought-out of modern wars. Can we doubt that Alsace hates and re-

radiate Germany because Germany tried to hold her by sheer force and terror, by the mere mechanics of annexation? And can we doubt that French Canadians, Boers and Indian dependent princes have grown swiftly into the British Empire and become flesh of its flesh because it was not so timid as merely to terrorise—because it always dared to do the bolder thing, to take the risk of saying to a beaten enemy or to a dependency of doubtful loyalty, 'There—take your freedom; we leave loyalty to your sense of honor.' Our liberal and chivalrous Colonial policy has produced today's glorious inflow of contingents and rich gifts as naturally as Bismarckian Imperialism led to the spectacles seen at Zabern and Mulhausen."

There have been moments in the last twenty years, the Guardian adds, when "many Englishmen were tempted to abandon the English temper of empire for the Bismarckian. It became a fashion to say that subject races 'understand no argument but force.' There was an inclination to pooh-pooh as 'sentimental' the spirit in which great Englishmen like Lawrence and Durham acted in India and Canada. The intellectual domination throughout Europe of the coarse and shallow political philosophy of 'blood and iron' was for a time so great that our Government was strongly urged by many men of distinction to treat the Transvaal and the Orange Free State as Germany treated Alsace and Lorraine. The cynical materialism of Bismarck's 'practical politics' was preached to us seductively in brilliant verse and in romances of genius. Where would we be now if there had been then a victory for the German over the English political spirit? But we must not merely congratulate ourselves on that escape and on its happy consequence. We have to gather up in ourselves, for the settlement which will follow this war, the whole force of the brave and generous English political tradition. It is the print of it, and not that of the very Bismarckism we are overthrowing, that we must strive to leave upon Europe when the war is over and when the nations are trying to find some way to live together more tolerable than the past forty-four years of sleepless terror."

True it is that freedom is the cornerstone of Britain's greatness. Her vast Imperial development has been founded upon the principle which is admirably expressed in the famous phrase, "Local Autonomy and Imperial Unity," and today that policy is being magnificently vindicated in the response which is coming and will yet come in greater and greater measure from every section of Britain's far-flung Empire. Let us hope and pray that out of this cruel war and titanic struggle there will emerge freedom for the battle-scarred and war-ravaged nations of Europe, and that, as the Manchester Guardian says, the British traditions which have worked wonders in our own Empire will be indelibly imprinted upon their institutions.