

# DANUBIAN REVIEW

## (DANUBIAN NEWS)

A REVIEW DEVOTED TO RESEARCH INTO PROBLEMS OF THE  
DANUBIAN BASIN

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# RANDOM THOUGHTS ON POST-WAR SETTLEMENT

BY

COL. SIR THOMAS CUNINGHAME

Assuming — as perhaps we may — that the present war ends before this generation passes, in favour of the Democracies, and without having made Europe unrecognizable in the meantime, some pretty problems await settlement.

The frontiers of *Versailles*, *St Germain* and *Trianon* are gone as surely as the structure of the old Habsburg Monarchy. We need not waste time in mourning for them! No one in his senses could possibly wish to see the revival of a political Bedlam like *Czechoslovakia*, nor indeed could wish to see important blocks of one people placed, or left placed, under the dominion of another without their own consent: for clearly it can be asked now, if one alien race is to lord it over another, why choose the *Czechs*? Or, in other words, if the *Czechs*, why not the *Germans*? In this connexion it is to be noted with interest and with hope that *Mr. Chamberlain*, in his references to our war aims, referred to the restoration of *Czech* independence — to which there can be no objection whatever, — and not to the restoration of *Czechoslovakia*, — to which there would be every sort of objection — in this country as well as locally. Incidentally he also referred to the willingness of *Great Britain* and *France* to co-operate with other nations in finding a solution to a tangled problem: a solution, in fact, which would be agreeable to all parties. The thought is kindly, but we know, unfortunately, that an effort to please everybody often results in pleasing nobody, and even now perhaps the ghost of the late *Mr. Augustine Birrell* is hovering near us to remind us that Minorities must suffer.

There are some nostrums in the atmosphere already to which the ultimate creators of the *New Europe* may have

recourse, such as Federation — with its rider in the form of Limitation of Sovereignty —, Plebiscite and, failing all else, Shifting of Population. Some accord between the rival systems of Co-operation and Separate Entity may yet prove possible, even if today it is difficult to see how it can be reached.

It seems a pity that the old *Danubian Empire* cannot be reconstructed by marriage, in the same way as it was originally formed, or that its ex-component parts cannot agree to send Delegates to an over-riding Council having power to deal with special subjects, on the principle of the *Austro-Hungarian Delegations*, or indeed some similar specific which will attain the aims of the *Pan-Europa* crusaders.

Sympathy with a Nation which has lost its independence, and sets itself to recover it, is a sentiment that has not been in the least weakened by the manifold inconveniences which "*Balkanization*" brings in its train. Freedom — in the abstract — has ever appealed to the generous side of man and, perhaps for the very reason that it affects the heart rather than the head, is often illogical and never susceptible to argument. The break-up of the *Habsburg Empire* brings today into sharp light the difference between the Nationalistic and Federal systems of Government in the basin of the Danube. At the back of the former stands the principle of "*Sinn Fein*" — "*Ourselves Alone*." At the back of the latter is, not a wilful desire to dominate, but a wish to avoid unnecessary inconvenience.

Modern life being excessively complex, the simplification at which the *Federalist* aims, has become almost a necessity, and yet it is the last thing of which the Nationalist thinks and the first thing to which he objects, even when the term "*Empire*" is softened down to Federation. In Central Europe now, since the old war, the inconveniences involved can be illustrated — in what may be termed their hampering effect — by the added difficulty of bottling prunes. The effect of liberating the *Succession States* was to put the fruit in one country, the bottles in a second and the corks in a third! The ardent Nationalist may think — and will certainly say — that the bottling of prunes is a soulless

business and, if the evil spread no farther than that, it might be accepted with equanimity. Unfortunately it goes much farther and much deeper: extending to all the ramifications of Commerce: to swollen costs in administration: to High Tariffs and Prohibitions: to restricted facilities for Finance and, finally, to enforced resort to systems of barter and to the canalizing of Trade.

What may be termed the "*irritating*" side of these inconveniences can be illustrated by reminding ourselves that before 1919 there was no customs line between Vienna and Prague. Between 1919 and 1938 the system of stopping passengers by road and rail was introduced. Now again the route has been freed from these time-wasting formalities and there is little doubt that for 19 years every individual subjected to them wondered — while they persisted — whether the creation of a new State out of the debris of the fallen Monarchy, to which their imposition was due, was worth the expense, exasperation and hamper involved.

To query whether the imposition of *Customs* — and the safe-guarding of them — is a necessary concomitant of *National Freedom* and undiluted Sovereignty, puts us on delicate ground. *Finance Ministers* see in them a source of income and are indifferent to the contention that what is gain to the individual is loss to the general community. The "Finanz" staff also of a State see in them a promise of employment at a living wage and are equally indifferent to their ultimate results. Neither care the least for the inconvenience caused to travellers, nor for the delays caused to the transaction of business.

As we live today, however, the formation, or re-formation, of a new independent State means the pegging out of new frontiers, the erection of *Customs Houses* and the establishment of toll-bars. It provokes the query whether National satisfaction cannot be obtained without recourse to such hampering concomitants. The United Kingdom of *Great Britain* and *Ireland* affords examples to prove that it can, and also to suggest that it cannot. The racial traditions of Wales and Scotland are not the least lessened by the fact that neither country has a *Parliament* of its own, let alone an independent ruler or *Viceroy*. Yet both have frontiers:

both insist upon a measure of special treatment and *Scotland* has its own code of Laws. Ireland however is, on the contrary, not even satisfied with Dominion Status, which both gives the fullest scope to political patronage and affects the validity of the King's writ, but demands full independence, which is clearly desired more as an emblem of prestige than as a bringer of substance or profit.

Countries such as *Norway, Sweden, Finland* and *Ireland*, on the fringe of Europe, are not high-ways nor are they component parts of a great commercial region like the *Succession States* of the Danube areas are. It is to the latter that the advantages of Federation will more aptly apply, in the terms of the old quip "*We must all hang together, or we shall all hang separately*" and this applies as much to Defence as to Commercial prosperity. The Past has shown that it is one thing to lay down new frontiers, another to keep them staple; and the world will believe in permanent disarmament when it sees it applied and maintained, — and not before.

This question of permanence is at the root of everything. It is the shifting sand of *Central Europe* that drives statesmen to despair. It provoked the statement that if *Austria-Hungary* did not exist, it would have to be invented! The question is really whether that obligation does not still persist. It would seem in any case that solution should be sought, as far as possible, in homogeneity and, from this point of view, the blunder of breaking up the old Kingdom of Hungary should be remembered even if it is now too late to rectify it. In her case History, Geography and Topography combined to give her a consistency that ought to have been respected, the claims of varying races within her frontiers being settled on lines of local autonomy and not on lines of separation.

Alexander Hamilton pointed out that Nations which maintained a just balance between agriculture and industry avoided the inconveniences of a lop-sided development. This very nearly means that only such Nations are desirable wherein such balance naturally exists. What is the use to anyone of an independent *Slovakia*? Where are the cornlands of *Deutsch-Oesterreich*? The efforts of States which

were not naturally balanced to make themselves artificially so even to the point of "*Economic Self-sufficiency*", aggravated the evils from which Nationalism is never entirely free. It could be quite fairly asked of the old Poland, "Why are you building up this industrial population?" "To eat our corn!" "But what will you do with your surplus manufactures?" "God knows!"

It is interference with the natural balance of a large area as a whole that brings difficulty; and one of the aims of the new Statecraft in Europe will be to see that this interference is reduced to the minimum that Nationalism permits. After all, the population of the *United States of America* is just as diverse as that of *Central Europe*, but even in their case a bloody war had to be fought to put a limit to the scope of States' Rights.

Consent of the governed is no doubt in all cases to be sought, and the persistence of old traditions of Sovereignty is sentimentally desirable; but it does seem as though common acknowledgment of the plain interests of the Whole should temper the otherwise just claims of Nationality.

Országos Széchényi Könyvtár