

PROCEEDINGS OF THE
CENTRAL ASIAN SOCIETY

OUR POSITION IN TIBET

BY

COLONEL SIR FRANCIS YOUNGHUSBAND, K.C.I.E.

Read November 2, 1910

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IN the absence of the Earl of Ronaldshay,

SIR ALFRED LYALL took the chair. He said he thought there was no one among living Englishmen more competent than Sir Francis Younghusband to speak on 'Our Position in Tibet,' and perhaps there was no subject in relation to Central Asia which was of greater and more immediate interest at this moment for the Empire.

SIR FRANCIS YOUNGHUSBAND :

It was only after I had sat down to write this paper on our position in Tibet, that I realized that I had no idea what our position is. I know pretty accurately what it was six years ago, when I left this country. I know with as much accuracy as can be extracted from a Blue Book what it was six months ago. And I have my own very definite opinions as to what it ought to be. But of what it actually is now, in November, 1910, I must confess myself wholly ignorant. Tibet has ever been a mysterious country. It seems destined by Nature to be hid behind a veil. When the Tibetans themselves do not draw this veil, the Chinese draw it for them. But of late years we ourselves have been just as anxious as Tibetans or Chinese to preserve Tibet's mysterious character. The Tibetans have been willing to let Europeans travel in Tibet. The Tashi Lama was ready to give Sven Hedin every assistance. It is we ourselves who have raised the obstacle. The Tibetans have asked us to send a British officer to Lhasa, but their request was not acceded to. And whether it is want of enterprise on the part of British journalism, or whether it is the modesty of Government, who, liking to hide its good deeds behind a bushel, lets no information of its actions come to light, certain it is that only the scippiest pieces of information have lately reached this country.

We know from the recent Blue Book that the Dalai Lama and his Ministers fled from Lhasa to India last February ; that he asked the Viceroy to aid him, and to preserve his right of direct communication with us. We know that his Ministers asked for a

British officer and troops to be sent to Lhasa, and for an alliance between us and Tibet on the same terms as our alliance with Nepal. We know also that, while our Government definitely refused to help the Dalai Lama, it nevertheless had already made representations to the Chinese Government, insisting upon the maintenance of an effective Tibetan Government. We know, too, that in July a considerable body of British troops was ordered to the frontier to protect our Agent at Gyantse, halfway to Lhasa. But after that the mists gather again.

The Chinese report from their side that all is tranquil, and that the Tibetans have lethargically accepted the new conditions. Reports from Darjeeling, on the other hand, say that the Tibetans bitterly resent the deposition of the Dalai Lama and the threatened execution of the Abbot who acts as his Agent in Lhasa. The movement of our troops to the frontier has been countermanded, so we may presume that our Agent at Gyantse is not in danger; but whether the obstructions which, up till last April, the local Chinese had placed in his way have been removed, we know not, and we know nothing of the result of our representations to Peking.

And while we know so little, there is also little demand here in England to know more. Tibet is vastly distant. Crippen, airships, revolutions in Portugal, strikes in France, and riots in Berlin are near, and naturally attract more attention. Yet our line of action in Tibet is entirely dependent on the state of opinion in this country, and the whole question of the North-East Frontier of India was never in a more critical stage than it is at the present moment. Force may not be required to settle it, but foresight, forethought, and foreknowledge most assuredly are. Indifference and a bored desire to wash our hands of the whole business, or a lazy trust in the good feeling of the Chinese, will not suffice. We hear a great deal nowadays of the awakening of China. All down our North-East Frontier, in Tibet and Yunan, bordering on Burma, the wider awake the Chinese are the wider awake we ourselves must be. This is the point to mark and remember, for our practical experience in India has been that these very wakeful Chinese have not been so well-disposed to us in detail as their more somnolent predecessors. We formerly had reason to complain of the lethargy of the Chinese in Tibet, but not of actual obstructiveness, and at Lhasa the Chinese Amban, or Resident, was of considerable help to me in 1904 in effecting a settlement. Now the complaint is not merely of lethargy, but of positive obstruction.

We have every reason, then, to be awake. The British public should be aware of the essentials of the position, and what is really necessary to know for the purpose of forming a judgment, enterprising journalists and inquisitive Members of Parliament should find out.

Meanwhile, there are a few permanent factors upon which I will dwell this afternoon. Firstly, there is the physical factor. There is no need in a society like the Central Asian Society to emphasize the fact that Tibet lies behind the mighty range of snowy mountains which bound our Indian Empire on the north-east. But because India is thus bounded by Nature, we must not run away with the idea that we can afford to be unconcerned with what takes place on the other side. Snowy mountains are not absolutely impassable, even in the depth of winter, as our expedition to Lhasa proved. There is always some amount of intercourse, and we must always be concerned to a certain degree in the state of affairs on the other side. If, instead of the English Channel, a range of snowy mountains separated us from France, we should still be interested in the question whether a general strike turned into revolution or subsided as quietly as it arose. Intercourse between us and the French might be slight, and our interest in French affairs small. We would, however, necessarily take *some* interest, and similarly those in India are compelled to take some interest in Tibet, though opinion will differ as to how far that interest should be practical and how far merely academic.

Now, it is a fact worth remembering that our interest in Tibet has constantly been quickened by action from the Tibetan side. We ourselves have ever been prone to sluggishness in regard to Tibet. The British public takes very little interest. Manning, the only Englishman to reach Lhasa before 1904, was given so little encouragement or assistance that he refused on his return to make known the results of his journey. British officers in India have always been discouraged from entering Tibet, and now are definitely forbidden by their own Government. The clever and enthusiastic Colman Macaulay was able for a short time to awaken the interest of Government, and obtain permission to proceed to Lhasa; but the interest was evanescent. It soon died down, and his mission was countermanded before it had left Darjeeling. Even when, as the result of Lord Curzon's strenuous advocacy, we had obtained certain tangible results in 1904, apathy soon set in again. One after another the results were thrown away. The Chumbi Valley was abandoned after *three* years, when we had the right to occupy

it for *seventy-five*. The right we had acquired for our Agent at Gyantse to proceed to Lhasa was given up. The indemnity was reduced from 75 lakhs of rupees to 25 lakhs. The right to disapprove of commercial and mining concessions to any other Power was foregone. Any many little points which we had acquired the right to insist on we did not trouble ourselves about. Personally, I think we were wrong to let anything we had so hardly and so expensively acquired slide from us in this indifferent fashion. But whether we were right or wrong, the point I wish here to make is that on the whole we have been extraordinarily apathetic in regard to Tibet. We have had no settled, pushful, aggressive policy. Through long course of years we have been supine and sluggish to what, for my own part, I consider a reprehensible degree.

But as I have said, it has been action from the Tibetan side which has from time to time stirred us into action. Before a single soldier of ours had crossed the frontier into Tibet, 10,000 Tibetan soldiers had crossed the frontier into Sikkim. As you will remember, in 1886, they, under the instigation, it now turns out, of a magician, occupied a position well inside Sikkim, a feudatory state of the Indian Empire, and far on the Indian side of the Himalayan watershed. We applied to their Chinese suzerains to have them removed, but the Chinese expressed themselves as powerless to do this. We wrote to the Dalai Lama, but received no reply. We wrote to the Tibetan commander, but again received no response. At last, after nearly two years of diplomatic effort, we had to use force to turn them out ourselves. They returned, and again we had to remove them. Eventually we had to pursue them into the Chumbi Valley. But we retired the next day, and, though these operations had cost the Indian tax-payer about three quarters of a million sterling, we exacted no indemnity nor occupied any portion of territory as guarantee for the fulfilment of the treaty the Chinese now pressed us to make.

Again, in 1903 it was action on the part of the Tibetans which was the final determining cause of action on our part. We had for years allowed the Tibetans and Chinese to disregard their treaty obligations, and would probably have remained indifferent to our rights for many years more, but constant Tibetan Missions to Russia, and rumours from many different quarters—from China, India, and Russia—of some kind of an understanding between the Tibetans or Chinese and the Russians caused the Indian Government to bestir itself. The Russians, as is well known, subsequently assured us that the Missions only related to religious matters, and that they had no

political intentions in regard to Tibet. But comings and goings between Lhasa and St. Petersburg had taken place at the time when our letters from India were refused, and the very natural result of these Missions was, that the Tibetans believed that they could count on Russian support in flouting us. And it was the existence of this attitude which caused us to wake up and pay regard to our treaty rights.

Now again, in 1910 it is action on the Tibetan side of the mountains, though this time by the Chinese, that is arousing us to wakefulness. We had lapsed again, after 1904, into our usual lethargy, when Chinese action woke us up. Chinese are not generally believed to be hustlers. Nevertheless, they are capable at times of very strenuous action. For years they are absolutely inert and motionless. But suddenly and without warning they will vigorously bestir themselves. In 1886, when the Tibetans were aggressing on us, they were unable or unwilling to do anything to prevent it. After we had concluded a treaty, at their own request, they were unable to see it observed. In 1903-04, the Chinese Resident took over a year in reaching Lhasa from Peking, and when he got there could not leave the place to meet the Mission or to have the slightest influence upon the Tibetans. But suddenly, in 1908, the Chinese aroused themselves. A man of altogether higher standing than usual was appointed to the control of Tibetan affairs, Chao-erh-feng, the acting Viceroy of Szechuan, who had already distinguished himself by his effective measures to reduce the lawlessness of the semi-independent states of Eastern Tibet. In 1906 he had converted Batang from what we would call in India a native state into a Chinese district, to be administered in future by Chinese officials. He had also taken special action to break the power of Lamaism in this new district. The chief monastery was razed to the ground. Orthodox temples were to be constructed by Chinese officials, but no Lamas were to be allowed to reside in them, and the number of Lamas was to be restricted and their names registered. New taxes were to be levied on the temple lands, and the custom of making donations in kind to the Lamas was to be abolished.

Somewhat similarly Chao-erh-feng had converted Derge from a native state into a Chinese district. Of two rival brothers to the chieftanship of this state he had assisted one to supplant the other. The successful protégé had then requested Chao to be allowed to hand over the whole of the state to the Chinese Emperor, and the Reform Council at Peking had recommended that 'the native

state of Derge should be allowed to adopt our civilization and come under our direct rule.'

After Chao-erh-feng's appointment as Resident in Tibet, he advanced to the other native state of Chiamdo, which was not a part of Lhasa territory, though it was ruled by an incarnate Lama as Tibet Proper is governed, and this also as well as Diaya and Kiangka he occupied.

Early in the present year he turned his attention to Lhasa itself. About Christmas Day of last year the Dalai Lama, who had fled when we approached Lhasa in 1904, had returned, but only to hear of the advance of Chinese troops to his capital. The number of Chinese troops stationed in Lhasa in ordinary times is about five hundred and is generally considerably less. Now 2,000 additional troops were advancing on the capital. The Tibetans were thoroughly alarmed. They had heard what had taken place in Batang, Derge, Chiamdo, Diaya, and Kiangka. They knew that this powerful Chao-erh-feng was making a dead set against Lamaism. So when, on the arrival of these troops, the Chinese sent ten soldiers to the house of each Minister while the Ministers were in conclave with the Dalai Lama, that Pontiff and his Councillors thought it time to flee from Lhasa before they could be made prisoners. They consequently departed that very night. Before the Dalai Lama could reach Darjeeling an Imperial edict deposing him had been issued at Peking. The Tibetan mint, arsenal, and arms, were seized by the Chinese; a guard was placed on the ferry over the Brahmaputra, and no one without a permit from the Chinese Resident was allowed to cross. The sole remaining Tibetan Minister was not allowed to do anything without the consent of the Chinese Resident. Chinese replaced Tibetan police. And to all intents and purposes the Government of Tibet was taken over by the Chinese.

Again, then, by action across the Tibetan border we were forced to take action on our side. That the Chinese should check and curb the power of the Lamas, which had vastly overgrown all reasonable proportions, was only to be expected, and to such action we could have no possible objection. That they should bring the Dalai Lama under more effective control was also an evident necessity. And that in general they should establish better order in Tibet, and make their suzerainty properly effective, so that they could insure the Tibetans fulfilling their treaty obligations, was obviously desirable. But the Chinese were going a good deal beyond this. They were going a long way towards turning their

suzerainty into sovereignty and making Tibet a Chinese province as they had just made Batang and Derge Chinese districts. And, far from making the Tibetans fulfil their treaty obligations, they were actually preventing them. The Chinese prevented the Tibetans from having direct dealings with our trade Agent as provided for in the Treaty of Lhasa, and the administration and policing of the trade-marts had, inconsistently with the trade regulations, been taken over by the Chinese. Besides, there was, in the words of Lord Morley, 'a marked absence' of friendly relations with our officers, and of a desire on the part of the Chinese local officials to co-operate with our own in a friendly manner. These officials had, indeed, in a newspaper published at Lhasa, attempted to instigate the Tibetans against us. They had explained that the soldiers of Chao-erh-feng were not intended to do harm to Tibetans, but to 'other people.' In Tibet were 'some wicked and aggressive foreigners,' and the Tibetans were to join hands with the Chinese, Nepalese, and Bhutanese to preserve their religion and 'resist the foreigners.' The number of Chinese troops marched into Tibet was disproportionately great for the mere preservation of order. Unsettlement was caused thereby among the frontier states on our side of the border, and this and the rumour of the location of a garrison at Yatung constituted in the opinion of the Indian military authorities a menace to the peace of our border. Yatung is at the far end of the Chumbi Valley, which is on the Indian side of the main watershed, and stretches out like a tongue from Tibet in between Sikkim and Bhutan, so that Chinese troops stationed there with any inimical purpose would clearly cause trouble for us in those two protected states.

So the position in the spring of this year was that we had had to protest against this disturbing action on the part of the Chinese. We disclaimed any intention of interfering in the internal administration of Tibet, but we stated that we could not be indifferent to disturbances of peace in the country which is both our neighbour and is on intimate terms with other neighbouring states upon our frontier, and especially with Nepal. We complained that the Chinese had tendered us no friendly explanation before embarking on a policy which, in the absence of such explanation, could not but appear intended to subvert the political conditions set up by the Lhasa Convention and confirmed by the subsequent Convention with China. And we claimed that, whatever the intentions of the Chinese Government might be as regards the future of Tibet, an effective Tibetan Government should be maintained, with

whom we could, when necessary, treat in the manner provided for by those two Conventions.

The Chinese Government, in reply, stated that they intended no modification of the *status quo* and no alteration in any way of the internal administration. The troops were merely sent to tranquillize the country, protect the trade-marts, and see that the Tibetans conformed to their treaty.

To this statement of the case, however, the Indian Government demurred. Their reports showed that all power at Lhasa had been taken by the Chinese into their own hands, and that they did not allow the Tibetans to deal directly with us as laid down by treaty. We therefore entered a renewed protest. We took note of the assurance of the Chinese Government that it would fulfil all treaty obligations affecting Tibet, and informed it that we should expect that pending negotiations and representations on the subjects of tariff, trade Agents, monopolies, tea-trade, and so forth, would not be prejudiced by delay or by any change of administration. We further clearly intimated that we could not allow any administrative change in Tibet to affect or prejudice the integrity of Nepal or the rights of a state so closely allied to the Government of India. Sikkim had long been under British protection, and by a recent treaty the foreign affairs of Bhutan were under the control of the British Government, and it was accordingly intimated to the Chinese Government that of these states also we could not allow the change in Tibet to affect the integrity or rights. The Chinese Government were pressed to send strict orders to their local officials to co-operate with our officers in a friendly manner, since, without such friendly relations, friction between the two Governments was certain to arise. Finally, we impressed on the Chinese the inadvisability of locating troops upon the frontier of India in such numbers as would necessitate corresponding movements on the part of the Indian Government and the rulers of the states concerned.

Such were the representations we made to the Chinese. We have no cause, in my opinion, to fear a Yellow Peril. The Chinese, indeed, have much more reason to fear a White Peril. Nor need we fear a Chinese invasion of India through Tibet. But rough, tactless handling of the Lamas and movements of Chinese troops in Tibet cause unrest all along the North-East Frontier. They necessitate movement of troops on our part, and might conceivably involve us in a permanent increase of our garrison. We have, then, need to be in a position to know what is going on beyond the

mountain-barrier, and to prevent, by diplomatic means, troubles, such as the present, ever arising. Until there are symptoms that the Chinese intend to act in a neighbourly way, we are bound to resist any curtailment of that influence in Tibet which we established at so much cost. It was the slackness of the Chinese as suzerains which necessitated the establishment of that influence at the expense of the Sikkim campaign and the Lhasa Mission, and we cannot afford to let it go until we are assured of the friendliness of the attitude of the Chinese towards us. The representations we made are therefore the minimum we could have made, when, by reducing the indemnity and evacuating the Chumbi Valley, we had given such tangible evidence of our own good-will.

What we want to know now is the result of those representations. If the Chinese officials in Tibet have changed their attitude and shown themselves as ready to co-operate with us as Yu-tai was to work with me in Lhasa in 1904, and if they are disposed to treat the Tibetans sensibly and reasonably, then we need have no objection to the increase of Chinese influence in Tibet. But if the Europeanized Chinese officials who have recently flooded Tibet are to continue their anti-British propensities, then we shall have to stick tenaciously to every little right we have, and even to every little point of etiquette, for otherwise that prestige, which is so intangible and so little understood in England, but which is of such immense practical value in the East, will dwindle away to what it was in 1903, and its place will have to be taken by permanent garrisons on that frontier.

Those who know the Chinese best, speak the most favourably of their high character, of their sterling qualities, and of their reliability. We have, then, good grounds for believing that in the long-run they will prove excellent neighbours on our Indian frontier. At the same time we, in this Society, received a warning only last spring from that well-informed and acute observer, Mr. Barry, that the cry of 'China for the Chinese' was becoming more pronounced, and might not improbably turn eventually into the cry of 'Down with the foreigner.' It is possible, therefore, that for twenty or thirty years to come we shall have to contend with an unfriendly spirit on our North-East Frontier. At any rate it behoves us while China is awakening to be more, not less, vigilant on our own side. It is impossible for us in England, with a constitutional crisis, impending General Elections, budgets, and fiscal changes, to exercise the needful watchfulness. But we can at least support those men on the spot whose duty it is to be vigilant.

We are just sending to India a Viceroy who must know this question completely from the international and Imperial sides. When he has also studied it in India, and realized what sacrifices India has made, and how often she has been thwarted by international and Imperial considerations from making a settlement which would satisfactorily meet Indian requirements, we should have confidence that what he and his Councillors then recommend is a reasonable solution of the problem how to keep the North-East Frontier quiet without periodical expeditions, Missions, and assemblages of troops.

We want to be as little as possible troubled with Tibet. But by merely ignoring its existence we do not, thereby, avoid trouble. Events occur on the far side of the mountains which force us into action. What we need, then, is some agency for influencing those events, or, at least, for intelligently anticipating them before they occur. It is not sound business to be continually at the mercy of events. And the urgent need is some warning agency on our North-East Frontier which will enable us to take timely precautions against any threatening trouble before it arises. The Tibetans are now asking for a British officer to be sent to Lhasa, and I can see no better solution of our difficulties than to permanently establish an officer there.

DISCUSSION

THE CHAIRMAN: I am sorry, and we are all sorry, that our Chairman, Lord Ronaldshay, has not been able to come and preside at this meeting. One of the many reasons for which I am sorry he cannot be with us is that I have reason to know that he is altogether in sympathy with the views of Sir Francis Younghusband, and he would have advocated them without hesitation. He would also have added a certain amount of criticism of the policy of our Government towards Tibet. We are very much indebted to Sir Francis for his lecture, and we shall all look forward to the publication to-morrow of his book, which will give a full and complete account of everything concerned in this question. We must remember that Sir Francis is the only Political Officer who has guided a military expedition which forced its way up to Lhasa, a place which for so many years had never been visited by any Englishman. For this very successful expedition very great credit is due both to the military and to Sir Francis Younghusband. While I do not myself agree in the policy of the Lhasa Treaty, I doubt whether Sir Francis Younghusband's very meritorious services have been adequately recognized. (Hear, hear.)

Upon our general policy in regard to Tibet there is this to be said: the Tibetans have proved very troublesome, intractable neighbours—stubborn, ignorant, barbarous. They would have no communication with us, they rejected all our advances, and they actually invaded our territory, and would not leave our frontier quiet. Their power has now been taken from them, and the Chinese have introduced their own authority. One cannot say what the result may be. But we do know that the Chinese have been our neighbours, in what Sir Francis would call their somnolent state, along a frontier more than a thousand miles in length for a very long time. On that frontier they have given us no trouble at all. Therefore we may hope, as Sir Francis Younghusband said at the end of his lecture, that they may probably in their awakened state have the prudence and policy to give us no future trouble. It is to their interest to do so; they know that any collision with England on the land frontiers might bring us upon their ports and coast where they are practically defenceless.

You cannot well wonder at the policy of China in taking Tibet. Tibet, you must remember, was a sort of buffer land between themselves and us, and Asiatic kingdoms have reason to distrust European neighbours. That buffer land was left untouched for a very long

time; it was not invaded or encroached upon. But latterly there were perceptible indications that the Russians might come in there, and force of circumstances compelled us to march right to the capital. I do think the Chinese cannot be blamed for being rather alarmed at this prospect. They did, so far as I can understand, very much what we should have done in the same case; they substituted sovereignty for suzerainty, as we have done in a good many cases ourselves. They said: 'This buffer state is not strong; therefore we will go in and make it strong.' I do not think we can blame them for doing what most nations would have done for their security. Our business now is to keep on good terms with them if possible. I hope they will understand in their awakened state that the best thing for them is to be neighbourly to us, having regard to the immensity of our resources and power in so many directions. I have to admit that it is not possible to say what sort of Government the Chinese may get within the next nine or ten years. A strong movement for what they call representative institutions has turned into a sort of impatient democracy the very oldest Empire in the world, and what will become of that movement we cannot yet tell. But I do think that on the whole we may trust the Chinese, a long-headed, patient people, to behave prudently in their relations with us on the other side of the border in Tibet.

SIR J. D. REES said that, though he had not heard the paper, he had had the pleasure of reading it, and he was not very clear what it was Sir Francis Younghusband thought ought to be done. The reversal, if they so called it, of the policy of the expedition Sir Francis so admirably conducted was not the work of any one party in the State. It was first initiated and carried out by a Conservative administration, and was then adopted and approved by a Liberal administration. That being so, he would like to ask what Sir Francis thought ought to be done, and what he thought had a fair chance of being done.

SIR FRANCIS YOUNGHUSBAND said that the question put by Sir J. D. Rees had been answered in the concluding paragraph of his paper. It was that they should accede to the Tibetan request to send a British officer to Lhasa. He thought it was by the personal influence of a British officer at the capital that we should have the best means of preventing serious trouble arising on the frontier. The Tibetans had gone so far as to ask for an alliance with us on the same terms as our alliance with Nepal. He knew it was considered to be dangerous to have an Agent quartered so far away from our frontier. But at the present time we maintained an Agent at Gyantse, halfway to Lhasa; and he could not see that an Agent would be in any more danger at the capital than at Gyantse, whereas at the capital he would have the chance of knowing what was going on, of intelligent anticipation of

events before they occurred. If we had had an Agent there last year he would probably have been able to prevent the trouble then brewing, and in particular to prevent the Dalai Lama fleeing from Lhasa. If it were said that Tibet were now a Chinese province, his answer was that we might as well have a representative in the Tibetan province as in Turkestan, Yunan, Manchuria and other parts of the Chinese Empire.

SIR J. D. REES, while thanking the lecturer for his answer, asked him whether in pursuit of his solution of the problem he was prepared to see a revision of the Anglo-Russian Convention. If we sent an Agent to Lhasa—even on the same footing as the Agent we sent to Kabul—the Russians, under the terms of the Convention, would be entitled to follow suit. If Sir Francis felt that it was a pity that the trouble we took and the treasure we squandered in getting to Lhasa had not been turned to more fruitful account, he felt much sympathy with this view; but he would like to know what should be done within the limits of our existing engagements with a friendly Power.

The CHAIRMAN said he did not think the question quite fell within the limits of the discussion; but he would leave it to Sir Francis to answer if he desired to do so.

SIR F. YOUNGHUSBAND said he had already expressed in public his views on this point. He thought the time would come—he did not know whether it had come at present—when, instead of two great Powers like ourselves and Russia agreeing to have nothing to do with Tibet, we should agree to both be represented by Agents at Lhasa. That, in his view, was the permanent solution of the Tibetan problem, as affected by the Anglo-Russian Convention.

The CHAIRMAN said that the very interesting paper they had heard had elicited only slight discussion, but the reason was plain. Tibet was a long way off, and none of those present, except Sir Francis himself, had been there. That explained why they had not felt competent to criticize his lecture. All that remained was to join in a hearty vote of thanks to him for what he had told them, and for his general indication of views as to future policy.

SIR F. YOUNGHUSBAND thanked the meeting, and the proceedings closed.