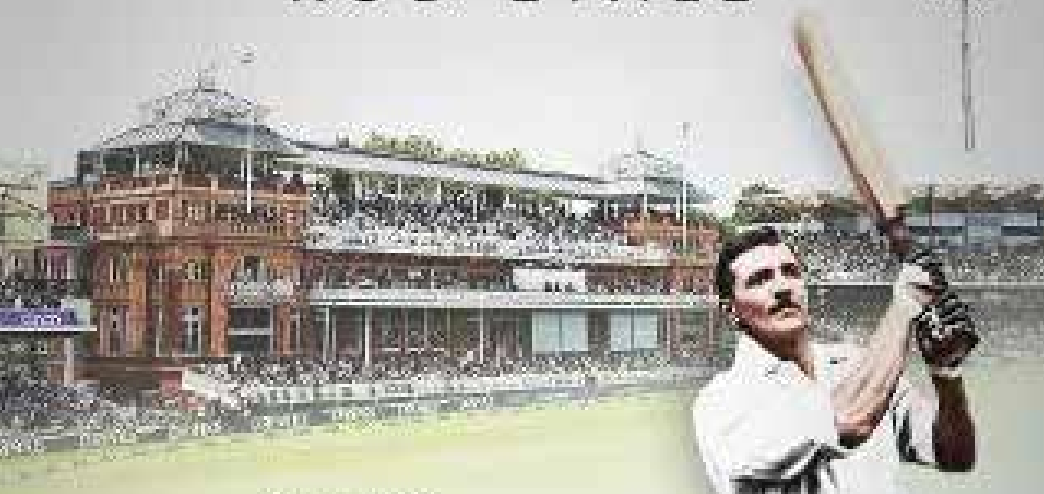
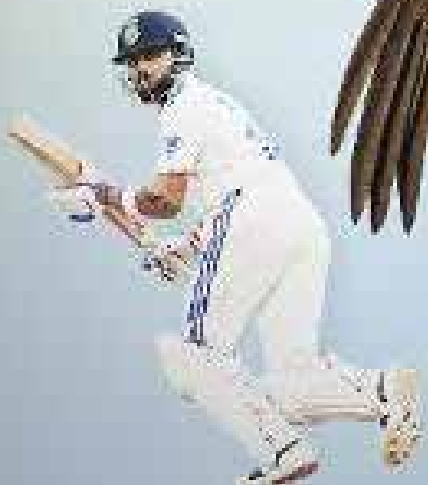
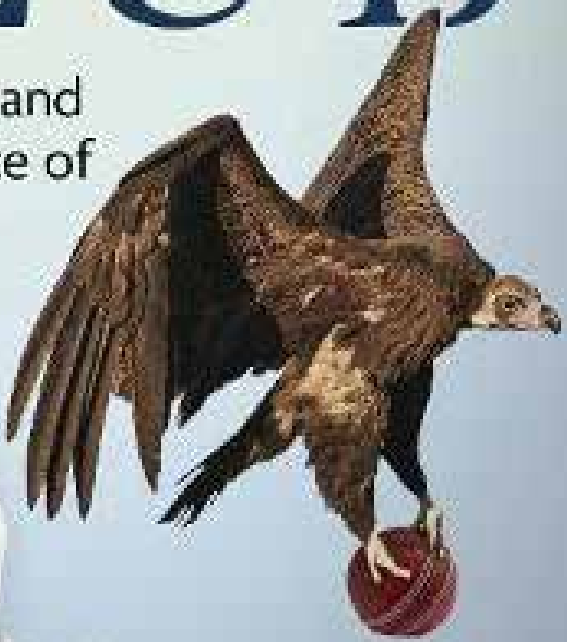
ROD LYALL



THE CLUB

Empire, Power and the Governance of World Cricket





THE CLUB

Empire, Power and the Governance of World Cricket

ROD LYALL

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The Imperial Dream

THE CLUE was in the name. When representatives of England, Australia and South Africa assembled at Lord's on 15 June 1909, with a second meeting on 20 July, the most important issue facing them was a proposal for triangular Test tournaments between the three countries, with the aim of tightening the bonds of Empire. It was, moreover, to become a conference, rather than the Board of Control which had initially been envisaged by its instigator, the 43-year-old mining magnate, Imperialist politician and cricket administrator Abe Bailey. It had taken rather longer to reach this historic moment than Bailey himself had hoped, but the context of the occasion would have far-reaching consequences, determining the future shape of world cricket in ways its participants could not have imagined. The new body's scope would be firmly limited to countries within the Empire, and it would be a relatively informal conference with vaguely defined powers.

The dream had begun with Bailey, who had watched the progress of the South African team on its tour of England in the summer of 1907, and who then conceived the notion of a triangular series involving England, Australia and South Africa. The germ of Bailey's idea existed as early as August, when it was reported in the London *Daily News*, but he formally introduced it with a letter, written on board

the *Walmer Castle* on 30 November as he was returning to South Africa, to Francis Lacey, the secretary of MCC. He envisaged, he wrote, 'a triangular or imperial cricket contest' and the choice of the term *imperial* was clearly not incidental, since 'inter-rivalry within the Empire cannot but fail [*sic*] to draw together in closer friendly interest all those many thousands of our kinsmen who regard cricket as their national sport; while, secondly, it would probably give direct stimulus to amateurism.' The first step, Bailey suggested, 'would be to form an Imperial Cricket Board, to formulate the necessary rules and regulations'.

Bailey's project flowed naturally out of his political convictions: having long been an associate of Cecil Rhodes and involved in the planning of the 1895/96 Jameson Raid which attempted to overthrow the Afrikaner-controlled South African Republic, he was one of 59 participants in that coup to be subsequently tried in Pretoria, receiving a sentence of five months' imprisonment. He subsequently served on the British side in the Second South African War, and immediately after the Treaty of Vereeniging brought that war to an end in May 1902 he was elected unopposed to the Legislative Assembly of the Cape Colony, succeeding no less a figure than Cecil Rhodes himself as the pro-imperialist Progressive Party's member for Barkly West. By early 1908 Bailey had become the Progressive member for Krugersdorp in the newly established Transvaal parliament, and the party's senior whip. Earlier in his career, in March 1894, he had played two Currie Cup matches for Transvaal, taking 3-28 and 4-51 against Natal at Newlands, and four years later, as the war clouds were gathering, he had brought his own Transvaal XI to Durban to take on Natal. In the aftermath of the war British policy was to bring the four colonies into a single union; two – Transvaal and the Orange Free State – had been Afrikaner republics and were now to be self-governing British colonies, alongside the Cape Colony and Natal. But international teams from the four

colonies had been playing cricket as South Africa since 1889 and rugby union since 1891, and it was evident that sport could be a powerful unifying influence. For men like Bailey, it was equally important that South Africa should become an integral part of the British Empire, and as president of the South African Cricket Association he saw an opportunity to reinforce the point through his 'imperial tournament'.

The proposal fell upon receptive ground in England where, on 10 December 1907, Lacey promptly put it before the secretaries of the first-class counties at their annual meeting at Lord's. It was claimed by the promoters of the scheme, he was reported as saying, 'that if it were carried out it would be an important factor in keeping alive those currents of friendship which move between the countries mentioned, and he felt certain that they ought, if necessary, to make some sacrifice to carry the scheme into operation'. The latter observation was a shrewd one: a triangular competition would self-evidently disrupt the Championship programme and distract public attention from it, and Lacey attempted to head off objections of this kind by appealing to the county administrators' better natures.

An article in the following day's *Lancashire Evening Post* indicated that not everyone would be as enthusiastic about the idea as the MCC secretary. 'Another step in the invasion of the domain of sport by the Imperial idea,' it began, going on to observe that 'the counties will have to consider how the scheme will affect them, for after all they have to consider themselves first' and adding that 'it is just possible that in seeking after fresh contests people are forgetting that the backbone of first-class cricket is, and must be, the inter-county matches.' But this reservation may have also reflected a certain scepticism about the Imperial project itself: immediately after its discussion of Bailey's plan the *Post* announced the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature to Rudyard Kipling, commenting that while the prize was fully deserved:

'There is only a touch of regret among many that in later years the author has used his pen on behalf of a somewhat tinsel Imperialism, the Imperialism that glitters and fades, rather than for the greater objects of Imperialism, which have been left to more practical and not less earnest minds to advance.'

The paper left unstated its view about whether Bailey's proposal for an Imperial cricket tournament was part of 'a somewhat tinsel Imperialism' or whether he was one of the 'more practical and not less earnest minds'.

The scheme was, of course, notable for what it excluded as much as for what it envisaged. In 1907 only three countries had played what were already being called Test matches, but cricket was being played at a good level in other parts of the Empire as well. Indeed, Ernest Wynyard, whom Bailey had nominated as his representative in England, had toured New Zealand, the West Indies and North America with MCC teams in the previous three years, while an observer at the counties' meeting on 10 December was none other than K.S. Ranjitsinhji, the former England Test cricketer who had recently been installed by the British as Jam Sahib of Nawanagar. Although there was as yet no first-class competition in India, the game had been enthusiastically adopted by most communities, and there were regular inter-communal tournaments in Bombay (now Mumbai) and elsewhere. Furthermore, the meeting heard of plans for a tour the following season by the Philadelphians, while the Gentlemen of Philadelphia, who had already had full tours of England in 1897 and 1903, were acknowledged as one of the finest first-class teams anywhere. Yet they were excluded when cricket was viewed through the narrow prism of Bailey's Imperial project.

Bailey was able to marshal influential support for his proposal. C.B. Fry, one of the most influential of cricket writers as well as being among the greatest players of his day, declared himself in favour; his arguments, however,

were practical rather than ideological. Only at the very end of his article in the March 1908 issue of his *Magazine* did he declare that 'Cricket is the one game common to our race everywhere, and alone of all games holds the British imagination,' adding that the proposed tournament was 'the one and only medium for the realisation of the ideal of a Pan-Britannic Olympia'. In January Dr Leander Starr Jameson, the Prime Minister of the Cape Colony, who had instigated that 1895 raid upon the Transvaal which led ultimately to the Second South African War, had declared that he welcomed the scheme 'not only as promoting healthy rivalry in the great national game, but also in its broader significance, which no doubt actuated the mind of the author of the proposal – namely, a popular agency for drawing closer the ties which united the scattered peoples of the Empire, contributing as it must do to influences which served to make them conscious of the national and manly characteristics which they possessed in common.' These sentiments were soon echoed by the Earl of Selborne, the High Commissioner for Southern Africa and Governor of Transvaal and Orange River, who deemed the project both as 'a splendid thing from the point of view of sport' and as having 'a real political value': 'Foreigners may not understand it, but I am quite sure that every time a team of Springboks or cricketers is brought together, representing the whole of South Africa … the sense of South African unity is increased, and this without distinction between Boers and British. There is no doubt that the Boers followed with intense interest the Springboks' triumphs.'

The political value of the scheme, however, was not restricted to South Africa: 'The more the reality of the Empire is brought home to its people in any shape or form the more the idea becomes part of their natural being, and as there are more people interested in sport than in politics, art, literature, or business, there is a larger number who are touched by the influence of such a contest.'

One could scarcely imagine a more transparent avowal of the ideological intentions of the proposal's supporters, or of the close interconnection of sport and politics.

The MCC committee had referred the scheme to the Advisory Committee of the Counties and on 27 January they supported it in principle, although *The Sportsman* reported that 'the opinions as to how the same might be carried through were very divergent'. The resolution which was passed declared that the counties 'are prepared, subject to the consideration of a detailed scheme, to assist MCC if MCC see fit to invite elevens from Australia and South Africa in 1909 for the purposes of an Imperial Cricket Contest'. Welcoming this decision, Bailey stated that he was 'of opinion that the committee had been influenced by the Imperial aspect of the case' but added that it must be practicable in the view of 'the level-headed businessmen who formed the meeting'.

Meanwhile, lively public debate continued. J. Astley Cooper, who had long been a proponent of a 'Pan-Britannic Games' (which would ultimately come about as the 1930 Empire Games), while believing 'in sport as a healthy federating force for the Empire', described Bailey's scheme as 'too complicated, too artificial, and will ultimately, if it is ever attempted, break down of its own weight'. He would prefer a challenge system, whereby the principle of the Ashes would be extended to allow any Test-playing country to challenge the current holders of the Imperial championship. To this the formidable Lord Harris replied that all the MCC was doing was asking Australia and South Africa whether they wished to take part in a triangular tournament, 'and if they would not like to there was an end of it'. But Cooper insisted that his concern was that 'other communities of the Empire' might emerge at Test level and then be entitled to take part in a tournament which would thus become too unwieldy: 'It would be a simpler plan,' he observed, 'but just as Imperial in its effects, if now that Australia had defeated

England, the South Africans should try their fortune at the Antipodes for the rescue of the "Ashes," and so on.'

On 6 March 1908 MCC unveiled its detailed proposals, which included three-match series of three-day Tests between the three participating countries, running from 31 May 1909 to 23 August. The tours by Australia and South Africa would involve matches against all the first-class counties and MCC. Cables were promptly sent to the Australian and South African authorities inviting them to take part, with South Africa cabling its acceptance by return. Overjoyed, Bailey told Reuters that South Africa appreciated the spirit in which his proposal had been accepted by MCC and the counties, adding that they no doubt realised 'the great importance from an Imperial point of view of such contests'. It was, he said, necessary to convene an Imperial Cricket Conference, where 'all details as to the future carrying out of the game shall be thoroughly thrashed out'.

Even in England, not everyone shared Bailey's views. Commenting on the 'frigid reception' which MCC's draft rules had received, the *Observer* coupled its dissent with a rather unfair attack upon the South African himself: 'It needed no millionaire Maecenas, to whom the glories of cricket were suddenly unfolded, to preach the imperialism of the greatest of all games. The very nature of cricket is imperial; and the best side of its imperialism is not seen when England and Australia are engaged in six-day trials of endurance … but in that real cricket of the counties, when two more or less indigenous sides are striving in chivalrous sport for the honour of their shires.' Bailey was, of course, no newcomer to the game, but the *Observer*'s Little Englandism was a genuine challenge to the imperialism which he so enthusiastically espoused.

In Australia, too, there were doubts about the whole idea, although there was plenty of support for the imperial concept there and Australians had fought in large numbers on the British side in South Africa. Already towards the end

of December 1907 the former Test cricketer Frank Iredale had cabled the *Daily Mail* to declare that 'the possibility is remote of the Australian Cricket Board of Control agreeing to Mr Abe Bailey's proposal', and when MCC's detailed plans became available at the beginning of March the Sydney *Daily Telegraph* commented that 'it is known … that a majority of the delegates [to the Australian Board] consider the scheme financially impracticable'. The board held a special meeting in Melbourne on 29 May 1908 to consider MCC cables as well as letters from Bailey himself and its own representative in England, the 31-year-old medical graduate and first-class cricketer Dr Leslie Poidevin. Iredale led the charge, moving 'that a Cable be sent to the Marylebone Club Stating that Australia declines to accept proposed Triangular Scheme'. The motion was seconded by the former Australian captain Joe Darling, who went on to propose that should MCC not immediately invite Australia to send a team to England for a bilateral series the board should ask whether such a visit would be welcome. At the same time, the board rebuffed a separate approach from the South Africans regarding an Australian visit to the Union in 1909, Iredale and Darling again combining to move that 'they must first return Australia's visit before any further matches can be played by Australia in South Africa'.

The board cabled MCC the same day, officially declining the invitation to take part. No reasons were given, and a furious debate ensued. Interestingly, at least one newspaper juxtaposed this news with the financial outcome of the recent MCC tour of Australia, for which the states would have to contribute a levy of almost £2,600 to cover the tourists' guaranteed £10,000 and noted that '[p]ossibly these figures will gave pause to those cricketers who think Imperially, especially when it is known that three matches during this tour caused a loss'. That money was at the heart of the Australian position is confirmed by an article in the Melbourne *Herald* of 5 June, in which a columnist calling

himself 'Old Cricketer' discussed the board's decision to reject the proposal for a tournament in 1909. 'Although money matters are not the only, or even the chief, cause of the Board's present decision,' he wrote, 'the financial side of the question contains its genuine problems. Australian cricketers prefer to make their own financial arrangements, and they may decide that the triangular prospect is "not good enough". Under such circumstances, the Board would be compelled either to guarantee our men, or seek guarantee from Marylebone, as the London Club did from the Board. Another alternative would be the selection of players who would be prepared to represent Australia, and either accept any financial risk involved in so doing or accept such terms as the Board of Control could offer.'

But other factors undoubtedly played a part as well: when a Reuters correspondent interviewed several members of the Australian team, the view that South Africa should prove itself in Australia before being admitted to a triangular contest was also seen as an issue, while according to a letter from Monty Noble, perhaps the most sympathetic of the Australian players, it was the question of the Tests lasting only three days rather than being played to a finish which most influenced the Australian position.

Australia's refusal triggered an internal debate in England, some taking the view that if Australia were not prepared to take part in a triangular tournament, they should not be invited to tour England on their own. Others – including the MCC committee – favoured such an invitation. The Advisory Committee met on 3 July, and Fry's motion that the counties support the triangular contest was carried by 14 votes to 3. And when Dr Russell Bencraft proposed that MCC should impress on the Australian board 'that the Counties are so strongly in favour of the Triangular Contest that MCC would not be in a position to invite any Colonial Eleven in 1909, except for that purpose', his amendment too was carried, by 11 votes to 3. Not everyone was happy with

this, and the minutes proved so contentious that a further meeting was held on 29 July, where a debate worthy of a Savoy opera ensued about who had said what during the earlier discussion. It was unclear whether a formal invitation had already been issued by MCC for Australia to tour in 1909 irrespective of any triangular tournament, although it was quite evident that the Australian board's rejection of the latter proposal had effectively ended the possibility of it taking place that season. 'That,' the chairman, Lord Harris, declared, 'has all passed away; there is no chance of that now.' And after a tortuous discussion the meeting agreed that the invitation to the Australians should be renewed.

This was a reverse for Bailey, but he was far from beaten. *The Sportsman* revealed on 7 September that he now planned to invite the Australians to visit South Africa on their way back from their 1909 tour of England, and to hold his triangular tournament there. That scheme, too, came to nothing, but by the end of 1908 it had at least been agreed that in the course of the following summer a meeting of representatives of the three countries would be held to agree on the future basis of international cricket. In his annual report in December 1908 the Australian board's secretary, William McElhone, noted that its decision to reject the idea of a triangular tournament had 'caused considerable feeling in England and South Africa and at one time it had appeared as if such a decision would result in the visits of Australian Teams to England being seriously prejudiced'. He continued: 'In the end, however, mainly through the able manner in which the facts were placed before the English public by our Representative Dr Poidevin, England admitted that the Board's decision was a just one.'

Perhaps arising from Bailey's proposal for a triangular competition, MCC had also begun to consider the need to regulate international cricket and had also drawn up draft 'Rules for Imperial Cricket.' The Australian board examined these at its meeting on 29 May 1908, and agreed that 'the

word "Imperial" be interpreted "International Cricket Matches between Nations".' (It went without saying that the nations in question were still England, Australia and South Africa.) The proposed rules only addressed the issue of player eligibility, suggesting that 'A Cricketer who has played in a Representative Match for a Country can never play for any other Country', adding that except where this first restriction applied a player should always be allowed to represent his country of birth, and that in other cases there should be a residence requirement of 'not less than 4 Consecutive years'. The Australian board found the first of these rules too restrictive, proposing the addition of 'Provided that any Cricketer shall always be eligible to play for the Country of his birth after two years continuous and subsequent residence', and further argued that 'continuous' in the third rule should be replaced by 'previous', again relaxing MCC's proposed restriction.

This was one of the topics on the agenda when, on 15 June 1909, the representatives duly assembled at Lord's: the Earl of Chesterfield (president of MCC), Lord Harris and Lord Hawke for England; Dr Poidevin for Australia (since his fellow delegate, P.A. McAlister, was currently batting in the second Test outside); and H.D.G. Leveson Gower and G.W. Hillyard for South Africa. It was agreed that Test matches were to be defined as between the three countries represented, and that any player should be allowed to represent the country of his birth; there was no immediate agreement on the proposal banning players from turning out for more than one country. Setting a pattern which would persist for more than a century, a decision on this was deferred, along with payments for amateurs and professionals and rules for the appointment of umpires, where England had recently violated the principle that the visiting team should be consulted about the home board's nominations. The concept of a triangular tournament was accepted in principle, although it was acknowledged that existing

international commitments meant that the earliest such a contest could take place would be in the 1912 English season.

When the representatives met again on 20 July it was clear that a good deal of negotiation had taken place in the intervening weeks. There was now a schedule of tours through to 1916/17, and there were detailed regulations, including the division of the takings, for the proposed imperial tournament. The contentious issues from the first meeting had been resolved with compromises: a player could not transfer from one Test country to another 'without the consent of each of the contracting parties' and a four-year residence qualification was established for those who had not previously played Tests, while it was agreed that '[t]he umpires in Test matches shall be selected by a committee equally representative of each country'. There was discussion, too, of the arrangements for the series, including such crucial issues as the distribution of complimentary tickets for the participating countries. Whatever had been agreed at Lord's, however, Australian doubts about the triangular scheme lingered: on the eve of their team's return after their tour the manager, Frank Laver, told reporters that his players regarded it 'as an experiment to be tried once in England, and once only'. He thought it was unlikely that such a contest could be held in Australia or South Africa, because of the countries' comparatively small populations. McElhone was able to state in his annual report that as a result of the conference 'the suggestions now before you are such as may result in the Scheme being acceptable to Australia'.

The eligibility rules continued to give trouble. When the Conference again assembled on 16 June 1910 the South Africans sought the removal of the clause about the contracting parties' consent to a player's transfer from one country to another. This was referred to the constituent bodies, and when the Australian board discussed the matter on 17 October it was resolved that 'the Clause be adhered to'. The awkwardness of the Conference's status

became clear during the South African tour of Australia in 1910/11. The Australian board conferred directly with SACA representatives during the Sydney Test in early March to discuss possible dates for an Australian return visit 'and the proposed alterations in the schedule' suggested at the 16 June meeting. On behalf of the South Africans, R.P. Fitzgerald read a long letter from his board stating that 1913/14 was the earliest point at which the Australians could be received, and it was agreed that 'the Secretary of the Imperial Conference be informed as to the views of the South African Association … and the reasons for the position taken up', with the suggestion that the Conference should be convened when Australia and South Africa were both in England in 1912, 'or earlier if necessary'. Once the South Africans had withdrawn from the meeting the Australians determined that 'this Board is prepared to send a team to South Africa at a date to be mutually agreed upon during or after the triangular contest in 1912'. Bilateral discussions remained crucial, then, although the existence of the Imperial Conference was now a complicating factor.

In fact, the Conference met twice in 1911, at Lord's on 30 June, where the dates of the matches in the 1912 triangular tournament were agreed, and at The Oval on 11 September, where some amendments were made to touring programmes in England. The first meeting had referred such matters as playing times and the distribution of gate money to the Board of Control for Test Matches at Home, effectively an MCC committee, while the second brought forward the starting date of the match at The Oval between England and Australia by three days 'to enable the game to be continued, if necessary, beyond three days without a Sunday intervening'. This, it would seem, was a concession to the Australian view that a deciding match should be played to a finish. When the Conference met again on 30 April 1912, it was to appoint the umpires for the forthcoming tournament along with many other minutiae, including a

requirement for the umpires to confer with the captains regarding the choice of balls and to inform them when a new ball was being taken.

On the eve of the tournament a lavish volume appeared, edited by Pelham Warner and entitled *Imperial Cricket*. In his preface Lord Hawke described the series as 'the outward and visible sign of the climax of Imperial Cricket' – the echo of the Christian Catechism was doubtless not coincidental – adding that 'the spirit of the game is exactly the same as the spirit of all that is best in our great Empire'. Abe Bailey contributed a chapter, observing that, 'If the strengthening of the bonds of Union within the Empire is one of the many outcomes of this great Tournament, I am hopeful that contemporary cricketers, and those who are to come, will agree that the Triangular Tests of 1912 were not held in vain.'

There is, however, a marked contrast between the conception of Warner's book and the operation of the Imperial Conference. Whereas the former's 20 chapters take in such cricketing outposts as Ceylon (known as Sri Lanka since 1972), Egypt, the Sudan, British Malaya, and Samoa and the Islands of the South Seas (Tasmania, curiously, was given a chapter to itself), there was, of course, no sign of such inclusiveness among the gatekeepers of the Conference and its three constituent boards. Playing standards were, it is true, a legitimate concern, but the development of world cricket would have taken a radically different course had the Conference been more like the Federation of International Football Associations (FIFA), which by 1912 had 20 members, including Luxembourg, South Africa, Argentina and Chile.

And when play finally began on 27 May 1912, the doubts about the tournament's competitiveness were soon realised. South Africa lost their first two matches by an innings: Australia ran up 448 against them at Old Trafford, and then despite a fine 127 from Aubrey Faulkner the South Africans were dismissed for 265, collapsing to an ignominious 95

all out following on, and the match was over in two days. They started even worse against England at Lord's and were bowled out for just 53, Frank Foster claiming 5-16 and Sid Barnes 5-25. England replied with 337, and with Barnes taking a further six wickets for 85 runs the South Africans could only manage 217 at their second attempt, losing by an innings and 62 runs. The first encounter between England and Australia, at Lord's towards the end of June, was ruined by rain: even England's declaration at 310/7 was not enough to breathe some life into the match, Australia making 282/7 with Charlie Macartney very unfortunate to be out for 99.

Barnes was again South Africa's nemesis when the second round of matches began at Headingley: he took 6-52 and 4-63 and England, with 242 and 238, comfortably beat the South Africans' 147 and 159. At Old Trafford a week later, the Australians posted 390 in reply to South Africa's 263, and when the latter were dismissed for 173 Syd Gregory's side were left with just 47 to make, which they did without losing a wicket. The weather was once more the victor when England and Australia met again, this time at Old Trafford where 92 from Rhodes took the hosts to 202, but Australia were 14 without loss when play ended on day two, and the final day was completely washed out.

The last day was again lost when Australia and South Africa met for the third time, but the South Africans had put up a much better performance, half-centuries by Dave Nourse and Gordon White seeing them to 329, by a distance their highest total of the tournament, and they then dismissed Australia for 219. But they still had no answer to England's Sid Barnes, and he took 5-28 and 8-29 as South Africa were bowled out for 95 and 93, England's first-innings total of 176 meaning that they only needed 13 for another ten-wicket win. The two rain-affected draws between England and Australia made their final encounter at The Oval the tournament decider, and it ended in a comprehensive victory for England. Jack Hobbs and Wilfred Rhodes put on 107

for the first wicket after Fry won the toss, and then Frank Woolley made 62 to see his side to 245. Woolley then combined with Barnes to bowl the Australians out for 111, Charlie Kelleway's 43 the only significant contribution, and although Gerry Hazlitt claimed a career-best 7-25, England extended their lead to the tune of 175, leaving Australia with an unlikely 310 to win. Woolley picked up another five wickets to finish with match figures of 10-49, and with Harry Dean taking 4-19 the visitors were all out for a miserable 65.

A further meeting of the Conference took place at Lord's on 16 July, during the second match between Australia and South Africa. The main business was the confirmation of the touring schedule through to South Africa's proposed visit to England in 1917. Australia would visit South Africa in 1915/16, but there were no plans for a repetition of the South Africans' 1910/11 tour of Australia. No statement was made, but the Australian board had sent a cable reading 'Opinion Board against continuation Triangular Contest', and it was inferred that the Conference had no intention, either, of repeating the experiment; the meeting had, *The Sportsman* concluded, 'practically killed any suggestion of another Triangular Tournament'. More disturbingly, it had failed to reach a decision on 'an equitable reckoning' of the current event, should England and Australia finish level, preferring to wait until the necessity arose. In the event, of course, England's victory at The Oval settled the issue, but the Conference's reluctance to commit itself in advance may have been a straw in the wind. In Australia, the board secretary Sydney Smith's annual report was both damning and quietly triumphant. 'The Triangular Scheme,' he wrote, 'proved, as was anticipated, a failure, and as it cannot possibly be carried out in Australia or Africa, will doubtless be not heard of again for many years to come.' More ominously for the future operation of the Conference, MCC had raised doubts about whether it would be prepared to assume 'the same amount

of responsibility in financing teams to Overseas Dominions as in the past' and it was agreed that in future independent bilateral arrangements would be made with the other boards.

The original purpose for its creation having been accomplished, however unsatisfactorily, the Conference did not meet again before the outbreak of war, next convening on 6 June 1921. The Australian board actually met on 11 November 1918, the very day of the Armistice, taking the opportunity to state that it 'rejoices at the prospect of an early peace, and joins in the general feeling of thankfulness and pride in the glorious triumph achieved by the Empire and her Allies'. The response of the world's cricketers to the 'Call of Empire', the board added, had 'upheld the best traditions of the national game', and it looked forward to a speedy resumption of the international programme. An 'Australian Imperial Forces' team in fact toured England in the summer of 1919, taking in a visit to South Africa on their way home, and by the time the Conference met in 1921 MCC had visited Australia and a full tour to England by the Australians was taking place. The playing conditions for such tours continued to be arranged bilaterally, without any reference to the Imperial Conference.

There was, however, some widening of the Conference's role once it met. Faced with proposals from the Australian board for changes to the covering of pitches the length of the over (currently eight balls in Australia and six everywhere else) and the follow-on, MCC responded that 'conditions governing imperial cricket are always open to a friendly settlement', adding that this could 'usually be effected at the Imperial Cricket Conference'. While amendments to the Laws remained the responsibility of the Marylebone Club, there was clearly a growing acceptance that the Conference was a suitable forum for the discussion of suggested changes. So the 1921 meeting, in addition to the perennial question of touring schedules, dealt with possible changes to the Laws, the Australians bringing three issues to the table:

the duration of the over; an increase from 150 to 200 in the deficit required for the follow-on; and a ten-minute extension in the time allowed for rolling before the day's play where there had been rain. The meeting was also notable for the fact that Jamaica were permitted to send a representative, their board secretary William Morrison – the first hint of a possible widening of the magic circle of the three Test-playing countries – and he joined England and South Africa in opposing the Australian proposals. It was, however, agreed that Australia would provide the text of its proposed revisions to a further meeting, to be held at The Oval on 15 August, and it was there decided to refer all three questions to a special meeting of MCC. This was duly held on 3 May 1922, and after a long debate on the question of Law 9, relating to the rolling of the pitch, the proposal that the extra ten minutes should be allowed *in Australia only* was carried by the necessary three-quarters majority. The other two measures were subsequently passed as well.

Some matters considered by the Conference were too sensitive even to appear in Smith's report to his board. The minutes of the 1921 meeting reveal that, 'Lord Harris stated that he considered the Imperial Cricket Conference should know that the Australian captain [Warwick Armstrong] had at a recent meeting of the Board of Control announced that a great deal of professional betting took place in England on cricket and that in consequence the Umpires should not be appointed until a few days prior to the Test matches and that the reports of the County Captains on the efficiency of the Umpires were valueless.' Having received an assurance from the Victoria Club, the centre of bookmaking in London, that such allegations were unfounded, Harris informed the Conference that they were unsubstantiated, and Smith and Dr Ramsay Mailer, the Australian representatives, declined to support Armstrong's views. The Conference duly resolved that 'those playing in International contests should not have any authority to interfere in the management off the field

or in the appointment of umpires, but their views should be consulted as far as possible'. Confronted for the first time, however implicitly, with the question of corruption in cricket, the administrators firmly looked the other way.

Lurking in the background, however, was another Australian preoccupation: the duration of Test matches played in England. This was currently limited to three days, but so strongly did the Australians feel that this was inadequate, especially when the weather intervened, that during the final Test of the 1921 tour at The Oval, Armstrong had made his disgust at the inevitability of the draw quite clear. Asked about this, Pelham Warner stated that the question of whether the final Test of a series should be played to a finish was now before the ICC. In fact, the Australian representatives did not press the point, Smith simply asking when the Conference reconvened on 15 August, the second day of The Oval Test and the day before Armstrong's protest, 'that the question of playing Test Matches to a finish in England might be further considered'. The can, the first of many, was kicked down the road.

If the invitation to Jamaica to take part in the 1921 meeting was a small step, there were other signs that change might be in the air. In February 1922 the chairman of the New Zealand Cricket Council reported that the council had been asked to 'draw up a definite scheme regarding New Zealand and Australian tours of those countries [presumably England and South Africa]', that A.C. MacLaren had accepted an invitation to bring an English team, and that a visit by South Africa was also on the cards. Even more interestingly, the distinguished English cricket writer J.N. Pentelow surveyed the current state of the world game in the 1924 edition of *Ayres' Cricket Companion*, concluding that 'for genuine Test matches, New Zealand cricket is not quite ripe', and noting that 'the West Indies, India and the Argentine, if not Philadelphia, would all be justified in claiming parity of place with New Zealand'. This willingness to look, not

just beyond the present circle of three Test-playing countries but also beyond the limits of the Empire, was, unfortunately, not shared by the administrators, although slowly but surely the possibility of admitting more countries of the Empire to Test status was beginning to register on their radar.