Illness of the Sultan.

1. THE Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs brought to the notice of the War Cabinet a telegram (No. 970) which had been received yesterday as to the serious condition of health of the Sultan of Egypt, and stated that the question arose as to the succession in the event of his death. Two problems presented themselves: one was to retain the present system of a Protectorate; the other was annexation. Mr. Balfour thought that Sir Reginald Wingate inclined towards annexation, but personally he thought that a Protectorate was highly desirable, in view of international politics and the bad effect that annexation would have on the new
Kingdom of Hejaz, and the opportunities it would offer for propaganda on the part of our enemies. Mr. Balfour stated that if the present system was continued there were two relatives of the present Sultan who might be nominated to the Sultanship, namely, the brother and the son of the present Sultan. The son, whom the Sultan would wish to succeed him, was reported to be a desirable personality, but pro-German and pro-Turk, and had on these grounds refused the succession when it was previously offered. The brother, though not a great personality, was pro-British. Mr. Balfour stated that this was a matter that ought to be settled before the death of the present Sultan, and that he had already discussed the matter with Lord Hardinge and Sir Ronald Graham, but that he had not had the advantage of obtaining the views of Lord Milner and Lord Curzon.

The War Cabinet requested—

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to obtain, if possible, the views of Lord Curzon and Lord Milner, but to communicate again with the War Cabinet before taking any other action.

**Education Bill.**

2. The War Cabinet accepted the following formula put forward by Mr. H. A. L. Fisher (Paper G.T.-2060), as regards Higher Education finance, and authorised the President of the Board of Education to state the same—

"The Government feels that if these developments are to be secured within a reasonable time a large part of the burden must be borne by the Exchequer. I am not in position to give you a figure, but I am authorised to state that, in the view of the Cabinet, the development of Higher Education contemplated under the Bill should be as liberally subsidised by the Treasury as is compatible with giving to the Local Education Authorities, upon whom it will devolve to administer the Act, an interest in its prudent and economic administration."

**Co-operation of Allied Universities.**

3. Mr. Fisher raised the question of the co-operation of the Universities of the Allied countries, and Mr. Balfour stated that whilst in the United States of America he had been approached on this subject, both by Americans and by members of the French Mission. It was pointed out that, in the past, students from the United States had to a large extent gone to Germany for their education, where they had been welcomed and encouraged. It was now felt in the Allied countries that such procedure should in the future be discouraged, and that reciprocal arrangements should be made between the Universities of the Allied countries for the exchange of students and professors.

Mr. Fisher pointed out that as President of the Board of Education he had no jurisdiction over Ireland and Scotland, and accordingly suggested that if an invitation to a Conference was to be sent to the Universities of Great Britain and Ireland it should be issued by the Foreign Secretary.

The War Cabinet requested—

Mr. Fisher to draft some definite proposal on the subject, and to forward the same to Mr. Balfour for his consideration, and for such action as he thought fit in connection with the Allied Governments.
4. The First Sea Lord reported that the destroyer "Contest," while screening a torpedoed ship which belonged to an outward-bound convoy, had herself been torpedoed and sunk. There were apparently few casualties, but no detailed report had yet been received.

5. With reference to War Cabinet 235, Minute 7, the First Sea Lord stated that the steamship "Arabis" had fallen out of the convoy owing to machinery troubles, and not by reason of a foul bottom.

6. The War Cabinet took into consideration a Memorandum by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff (Paper G.T.-2006), relative to the supply of aircraft for Home Defence, in which it was pointed out that the Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief Home Forces considered that five day-flying fighting squadrons were necessary, and that only three were at present complete.

The Chief of the Imperial General Staff stated that the two additional squadrons could not yet be supplied, but it was hoped one would be forthcoming in October, and the other in November, but this would obviously depend upon output and the demands of the Western front.

Lord French stated that, though it was desirable to get the five squadrons complete as soon as possible, defence by day was not now considered to be of the same degree of urgency as night defence, and that experiments were being carried out, with a view to improving the latter.

The War Cabinet decided that—

In view of the serious situation arising in France consequent upon the improvement in the German Air Service, it was undesirable further to consider this question until they had had the advantage of reading the Report by General Smuts on the Air Situation generally (War Cabinet 228, Minute 6).

7. The War Cabinet, in view of the frequent demands which come before them for settlement, considered the question as to whether some organisation should not be instituted to co-ordinate the various demands which were made by the several Departments. It was felt that the proposed Inter-Allied Council would not meet this want, as it dealt primarily with material to be obtained from the United States. What was required was that certain members of the Cabinet should be requested to act as a Committee, being assisted by technical experts, in order to adjudicate upon all questions of priority in home production after due consideration of what was being obtained from America and elsewhere.

Sir L. Worthington Evans pointed out that a Priority Board already existed in the Ministry of Munitions, which exercised an elaborate control over the output of that Department.

General Smuts undertook to place his views on this subject before the War Cabinet, and consequently the matter was deferred for later consideration.

8. The War Cabinet had under consideration certain correspondence which had taken place between the Italian Ambassador and the Ministry of Munitions, as set out in Paper G.T.-1957, with regard to the supply of steel plates to Italy.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs drew the attention of the War Cabinet to letters which had been received from our Ambassador in Rome, pointing out the serious conditions that prevailed and the action which would probably be taken by the
Germans in exploiting the economic condition of Italy with regard to their efforts for peace.

The War Cabinet felt that we must adhere to our promise to supply, during the course of the year, the 40,000 tons of steel, but that if there were further requests for other commodities, such as wheat, &c., the opportunity should be taken to set the supply of such commodities against the agreed supply of steel, with a view to releasing as much of the latter for our own shipbuilding, where it could be more economically and expeditiously used; and that in the meantime the supply of steel plates to Italy should be continued at a slower rate than had been originally intended.

In connection with this decision the War Cabinet requested—

The Shipping Controller to satisfy himself that any ships built in Italy with steel supplied from the United Kingdom should, on completion, be put into Allied trade.

9. Sir Eric Geddes stated that the Admiralty felt anxious with regard to the shortage of airships, that it was not so much an air matter as a fleet matter, and that the scouting powers of the Navy in a year’s time would be very seriously handicapped if some such policy as had been put forward by the Admiralty in Paper G.T.–1912 was not carried out. An alternative, though not so effective, would be a new programme for light cruisers, which would necessitate far more steel than was contemplated in the provision of the airships and their sheds now asked for, which had been reduced from 20,000 tons to 14,000 tons, spread over a period of eighteen months.

The War Cabinet considered that the airship policy should be dealt with in conjunction with our future aeroplane policy (see Minute 6), and requested—

General Smuts to confer with the representatives of the Admiralty and the Ministry of Munitions, and to put forward his recommendations, so that the matter could be further considered by the War Cabinet at an early date.

2, Whitehall Gardens, S.W.,
September 19, 1917.