

1944

(a)

Margaret-Brook
Prize. Class

a

B + + +
V. Good

(3)

"The British Commonwealth and Empire may well be found the
most convenient means of describing this unique association."

- Mr. Winston Churchill.

1. Outward Physical Attributes of the Empire.
2. Its Spirit - the Constitution.
3. The Four Main Divisions Within the Empire.
 - (a) The Colonial Empire.
 - (b) Semi-Autonomous States.
 - (c) India.
 - (d) The Dominions.
4. Past, Present and Future.

By: John Elgin Ferguson Hastings.

Address: 791 Queen Street East,
Toronto 8, Ontario,
Canada.

Date of Birth: [REDACTED]

School: University of Toronto Schools.

The British Commonwealth and Empire.

Before deciding the best name for the association of nations known as the British Empire, it is necessary to have a clear understanding of the Empire as it is today. This is the foundation upon which the choice must be made. It is a group of countries scattered throughout the world. It takes in territories on every continent and in every sea.

The people living within its boundaries number more than one-quarter of the entire population of the globe. They are of many races and of every color and religion. Their problems are as varied as the races. The peoples range in the scale of civilization from the very primitive to the most civilized and cultured. Mr. Malcolm MacDonald once quite truly said that there are more tongues spoken in the Empire than there were in the Tower of Babel. Never before in history have so many different races owed allegiance to one King and Crown.

These are some of the outward characteristics of the British Empire. But they are only the obvious physical attributes. What is not seen at first glance but is more important is the spirit which animates this great body. It is the constitution which animates the Empire. Unlike other constitutions it is an ever-growing one and not a static written one. Constitutional changes are taking place at all times. The various nations of the Empire are constantly moving forward politically. This is the proof that the Empire

is alive to every need and desire of the members within it. Thus the British Empire moves ever forward to its goal of freedom for all men beneath the Union Jack.

The rate of this development in some places is rapid, whereas elsewhere it is slow because of the primitive state of the inhabitants. Nevertheless, it is an irresistible onward march. In order to understand this political progress more fully, it is necessary to divide the Empire into its four main groups. First, there is the Colonial Empire; then, there are semi-autonomous countries such as Northern Rhodesia and Ceylon which have complete control of their internal affairs; next, there is India, an Empire within an Empire; last, there is the British Commonwealth of Nations composed of the Dominions and the Mother Country - those nations which have reached the goal.

First, let us notice the Colonial Empire. There are some fifty colonies, protectorates and mandated territories included in it. Many of these are just beginning to emerge from the primitive stage but even they are taking a part in their own government. As time goes on, this share will be gradually increased. Naturally, their progress is slow and it would be a great error to try to force them to run before they can walk.

Despite this, the prime aim of British Imperial policy is to help these peoples to help themselves both politically and socially. The British Government has been constantly training the natives of these colonies as teachers, doctors and civil servants. In increasing numbers native administrators are taking over colonial departments. In many colonies there are very excellent native judges, administrative officers and leaders of thought. We are deliberately training these people so that they will be able to take over the administration of their own affairs in ever increasing numbers. It is truly significant that in most of the colonies there is some form of local representative council with varying powers depending on their place on the ladder of civilization.

Here, we turn to the semi-autonomous states. In Ceylon, for example, there is a legislative council of more than one hundred members, elected by a wide popular franchise and led by a Singhalese Prime Minister and Committee of Singhalese Ministers, who head almost every department. This council has complete control of law-making in the internal affairs of the island.

Another significant example of the semi-autonomous state is Northern Rhodesia. She is considered to have advanced so far along the road to complete political autonomy that her Prime Minister, Sir Godfrey Huggins, was invited to attend, and take part in the recent Commonwealth Conference in London, along with the Prime Ministers of the Dominions and the Old Land.

This is surely proof that Northern Rhodesia will soon leave the status of colony and join the ranks of the Dominions.

The ultimate aim of the British Government is government of the colonial people, for the colonial people and by the colonial people. They realize how fortunate they are, living under the British system of justice as witness the huge flood of spontaneous messages of support, from every corner of the Empire, on the declaration of war.

Why did these messages come? They came because these peoples knew that Britain was the best guarantee of their future freedom and present security. If Britain were destroyed they would be too, and all that is best in their culture with them. They recognized the fact that under British rule they would be free to develop their abilities and cultures to the fullest extent.

One case in proof of this is Malta. In 1939, she was granted a new constitution giving her self-government to a large degree. There is no doubt that their heroic defence of that island bastion of freedom was encouraged and sustained, in the days of strife during which she remained battered but defiant, by it. Theirs was a true tribute to the colonial policy of Great Britain.

Let us pass to the eastern Empire of India, in all its splendor and squalor. India is the nearest to the goal of Dominion status of all the colonies. A definite date has been set for her debut. It is sometimes said by critics that a tyrannical British government stands in the

way of Indian freedom. Nothing is farther from the truth. Before the British came to India, there was continual internal strife and destruction. For years since their coming, they have been anxious to press reforms which would lead to India becoming an independent sovereign state. Certain difficulties are hindering this. The princely states are one, but the greatest difficulty is that the two great religious groups - the Hindus and Moslems - have been unable to compromise their views to form a constitution dividing authority equitably and protecting the rights of minorities.

The solution lies with the Indian people themselves. The proposals of Sir Stafford Cripps still stand. India is offered political freedom either as a dominion or an independent state outside the Empire. Could any offer be fairer or more generous? This is another proof that the British Empire is not like other empires of the past. India is whole-heartedly behind the war. Her factories are pouring forth equipment; her young men are fighting valiantly beside our own. We all look forward to the day when India will be as free as she is brave.

The proof of Britain's sincerity is the group of young nations gathered round the Motherland. They have graduated from colonial status as free and equal nations. They are the Dominions - Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Eire. They co-operate like brothers, but also, like brothers, they jealously guard their own freedoms.

In the Empire's hour of dire crisis, four of the five immediately stepped forward into the breach beside the Old Country. They did this of their own free will because they would rather die free than live on as slaves. On the fate of Britain rested the fate of the world.

One, Eire, remained neutral. This neutrality has been a source of danger to us and as a result certain precautions for self-protection have needs been taken. But no attempt has been made to force Eire into the war. Did I say Empire? Ah! yes, but I put the word British before it. That is where the difference lies.

Thus we see that the term British Empire does not express fully the fact that there are the self-governing Dominions, whereas the term British Commonwealth leaves out all the colonies. This is one of the cardinal points in favor of choosing the British Commonwealth and Empire which is all inclusive. This is the most obvious reason because it is the physical and political one.

But let us turn to other aspects in the choice. In choosing a fitting name, we must have one that will remind us of the glorious past, the courageous present and the hopeful future. It must be one that will remind our peoples of their great heritage, of all for which they have to be thankful and of the vast opportunities that lie ahead.

The words British Empire are the key to our past. I include the word British to distinguish it from all empires of the past. It is not like them, one of oppression but rather one of freedom. Of our past, we must ever be mindful because of all it means to you and to me. It reminds us of the struggle to establish the supremacy of parliament, of Magna Carta, the Bill of Rights and the Statute of Westminster. The mysterious onward moving of the British race to the freedom of government it now enjoys is a magnificent tribute to it.

We remember the great Empire builders - Wolfe, Clive, Rhodes - men who devoted their lives to the furthering of the Empire. These men looked into the future and beheld the Empire as the great power for peace and freedom it is to-day. Theirs was a glorious cause.

Then there are the pioneers who built their homes in the wilderness and settled in the widespread parts of the Empire. They could have led peaceful lives at home but they saw their duty clearly. They, too, had faith in themselves and in the future. The vast lands were the outposts of freedom in which lay limitless possibilities.

We are reminded of our statesmen - Pitt, Disraeli, Gladstone, Lloyd George, Churchill - to mention only a few. These are the men who held the Empire together, set it on a foundation of rock, and gave it the impetus which carried it to its present greatness. In Canada, MacDonald, Cartier, and Brown founded the first commonwealth of nations by forming

the provinces into one nation. Laurier, Borden, Meighen, Bennett and King carried on their work till here, in Canada, we have a free nation loyal to its past but looking resolutely to its expanding future.

We remember in all humility our gallant dead - people like you and me. They died to preserve our way of life and future. We must carry on; we are able to carry on because of their sacrifice. We have our duty to them and to ourselves.

All these people, with a host of others, have made our past what it is and made possible the greatness of the present.

The title, British Commonwealth and Empire, tells us of our present. To-day, we are fighting for all for which it stands. These words speak of the Four Freedoms, of you and me, and of the future. Most of all they stand for something that is far greater than human comprehension. It is something that words cannot explain. Perhaps it is best typified by the soldier who was asked by an enemy soldier whom he had just captured, what we were fighting for. His reply was, "We are fighting for you." This simple statement means more than a whole paragraph of words. The sacrifice of our men must not be in vain. Their deaths have ended their chance of a future but have given us ours. We must remember the present and build for the future.

The future - the possibilities of the good to come!
The Commonwealth is our future. A Commonwealth of Nations,
free unto ourselves but mindful of our duty to others. We
shall go forward to the appointed end. Our goal - the
establishment of God's Kingdom on earth. The way may be
difficult and full of sorrow but we will struggle higher and
higher, through the storm into the bright morning sunshine.
The Prime Minister has expressed it thus: "But yonder, look,
the sky is bright!"

We are set on a firm foundation, our heritage of
the past. The British Commonwealth and Empire - what a
glorious prospect for the future!

References:

"Blood, Sweat and Tears"- by Winston Churchill.

Speeches by Mr. Malcolm MacDonald.

General reading and knowledge.