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1923
Class "A"

2nd Prize:-

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The Possible Effects of the League of Nations
on the British Empire.

"Yet I doubt not, thro' the ages
One increasing purpose runs"

It is idle to pretend that even at the present time, the idea of a League of Free Nations has secure possession of every British mind. Regarding it from the Imperial point of view, many are led to scepticism; many are led to believe that we are best with our Empire, and that we require no League of Nations. But these men are wrong; they do not realise that the League of Nations is a final consummation of the Idea of Empire, - that the British Empire is willing to, and should give way to a world union.

What then are the probable effects of the League of Nations on the Empire that scepticism is well-grounded and yet fundamentally wrong?

Let us consider first the constitution of the League with regard to the Empire.

The Assembly "will consist of the official representatives of all the members of the League including the British Dominions and India. One delegate for Great Britain, four for the Dominions and one for India." The practical effect is to give the Dominions and India an effective voice, and at need, the decisive power of a veto for the representation and protection of their particular interests and views.

Here the advantage is great; but serious disadvantages arise as a result of the mandatory system of the League. The principle is this; - "in the colonies which have ceased to be under the sovereignty of the states which formerly governed them, the tutelage of the people should be given to advanced nations who will act as mandatories for the League." This will raise grave

administrative difficulties. Australia governs Papua, - its laws are there. German laws are in force in Kaiser Wilhelm land. The practical inconvenience of two systems of law existing permanently in contiguous territories administered by one authority, is obvious. Again, Papua has always been to the Commonwealth a costly experiment, which so far has not been justified either by the numbers of white settlers or by the export of raw products. The Commonwealth has grumbled but has paid. What will happen when the question is asked why Australia should pay all the cost of administering south-east Papua while other members of the League share the advantage but not the cost? Sanguine theorists may ridicule the question of ways and means as unworthy of the great ideal of the League of Nations, but to Australia it is no laughing matter. Moreover similar conditions are likely to prevail in South Africa and New Zealand, for they too come under the mandatory system.

The constitutional question is raised by the demand that the "degree of authority, control or administration to be exercised by the mandatory state" - the context makes it quite plain that this is intended for the British dominions - "shall, if not previously agreed upon by the high contracting parties, in each case be explicitly defined by the Executive Council in a special act or charter." Who is the high contracting party with which the League will make an agreement? The vagueness is in itself a danger, and there

is no reason to believe that the intimate relationship between the Dominions and the Empire as a whole, has been even considered. As an historian points out, in a sense the constitutional question raised is a legal one. It may be held that mandates to the Dominions as separate national entities are subject to the inherent rights of the Crown, and must be interpreted by these rights. But it is dangerous to overlook the fact that, loyal as the Dominions are to the Crown, their allegiance cannot be forced by a legal process. It is based upon good will. Moreover, as a writer says, the admission of a wrong constitutional policy is more dangerous to the future of the Empire than is direct propaganda of disunion.

Another great effect of the League of Nations on the Empire is connected with the foreign policy of the dominions. To take first the non self-governing dominions. These claim a part in the foreign policy of the Empire. It is one thing for the British dominions to ask for a share in the Empire's foreign policy through the channel of the Foreign Office; but it is quite another thing for that dominion to accept partial direction and partial control from an authority outside the Empire. By a confusion of thought or of terminology the mandatory idea appears to have created an "imperium in imperio" with dangerous possibilities.

The foreign policy of the self governing Dominions and of India is clearly defined. By Article X of the Covenant, each Dominion as well as the United Kingdom, is to "undertake to respect and

preserve the territorial integrity and existing political independence of all members of the League". This is of extreme importance in its effect on the Empire. The movement of hostile forces across any frontier in Europe will commit the Dominions to war. The whole state of Europe becomes their daily and hourly concern. Canada, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand are in fact bound by stronger written obligations to Poland and to Czechoslovakia than to the British Isles. So much for the latter. If England were invaded, the other British democracies would arm to defend her; but although they have a written obligation to Poland which they have never dreamed of giving to England, they would not, in practice, mobilise a single man for Poland.

But the time has passed forever when Canadians may think of the foreign affairs of Canada as relating only to her frontier with the United States. Australians must now realise that foreign affairs mean more than questions affecting New Guinea or Japan.

The economic policy of the League will have an important effect on the British Empire. By the institution of the Supreme Economic Council of the League, a new system of free economic intercourse will be established. The economic life and needs of each of the various nations will be passed in review and compared by their representatives in the council. From this system the British Dominions overseas would probably gain as much as any consuming nation. They would gain by continued, definite, expert suggestion as to the ways and means by which their natural resources could be increased for

the need and use of the peoples who are importers of food and raw materials.

As far as the actual letter of the economic policy of the League goes, there are disadvantages for the colonies. For instance, the declaration that "there can be no special, selfish economic combinations within the League", if carried out, would be disadvantageous. A self-governing Dominion like Australia must certainly retain the right of giving a preference to the Mother Country if only to attract more British emigrants. Canada in the future, might decide to be governed by another principle. Her closer economic connection with the United States on one side as well as with the Mother Country on the other, is always possible.

Again, the British Commonwealth must maintain its right to negotiate as a whole on trade relations. For it is the Commonwealth which has control of the great sources of food and of raw material. The Mother Country and the Dominions must act together in concert with the League of Nations.

The question of tariffs will also affect parts of the Empire. America and Canada insist on keeping an open door in China. But if America and Canada are not to be excluded from China, why should Japan be excluded from America and Canada? This might possibly be a source of severe disadvantage to Canada.

In Article IV of the Covenant, the British Empire is entitled to one representative with one vote on the Council. The representative will, to the best of his ability, listen to and voice public opinions in the Dominions, as expressed through

their Governments. But no British citizen in the Dominions can cast a vote which operates to dismiss him, and the spokesman whom voters cannot dismiss by their votes, they do not control. It is of great importance to the Dominions. The representative of the British Empire in the Council of the Nations must be made answerable to British citizens in the United Kingdom, or the nations he does not represent will disavow him. The peoples of the Empire are approaching a fateful issue in which they will decide for themselves, whether, as British citizens of a world-wide Commonwealth, they will assume obligations for ordering the peace of the world, for moulding the future of mankind; or whether, renouncing that status, they will content themselves with such a place as, by the logic of facts, minor states alone can find. The gift which the League of Nations offers them is trouble; the high privilege of bearing the troubles of mankind. A more fateful issue was never presented to deliberate choice.

In this connection India stands forth as a new great power with a glorious future open to it through the League of Nations. The appearance of India as a co-equal partner with the Dominions is of historical importance and significance.

Hitherto India has been under the control of Britain, under a wise and judicious rule certainly, but India has had little self-government.

With its entry into the League of Nations however, it assumes a new character; it appears as a power detached from the Mother Country, and capable of taking its part in the affairs of the world. It is

the first manifestation of the inevitable break-up of our Empire. We shall lose control of India although we shall not lose its allegiance. Whether India is qualified to take her place among the nations, to dispense with the guiding hand of the Mother Country, is a matter for speculation. Its admission as a separate power into the League of Nations gives it that opportunity. India will probably cease to be one of our possessions, and will become a national entity.

Indeed the inevitable result of a League of Nations is that the British Empire will gradually disappear, will be absorbed in a great world union, and it is on this fact that sceptics base their arguments. Why, they ask, should the British Empire, built up so slowly and as a result of much bitter experience, be dissolved into a League of Nations. Well may they be sceptical. The British Empire stands for the same principle as the League of Nations, which is nothing less than making the world into a peaceful home for a united human family. — The main difference between the two is that one is a theoretical adventure, while the other has a right to claim experimental value. The League of Nations is a glorious dream; the British Empire is a solid reality. The British Empire is the product of gradual development and of three hundred years of practical experience. It is by far the largest and most extensive part of the edifice of human society. And no greater world-disaster could be conceived than that the fabric of the Empire should be undermined in order to make room for an

ambitions, but imperfectly thought-out scheme for a Palace of Peace.

With the League of Nations, the idea of Imperialism vanishes. There is a complete antiposition between imperialism and internationalism. The two cannot exist together. But it does not necessarily follow from that, that the great British Commonwealth, the English-speaking brotherhood, will be destroyed. At present it is held together chiefly by sentiment, and it would rather more than a league of Nations be destroying that sentiment. It is a feeling of loyalty; a passionate devotion to the crown, - that is the connecting link which binds together the British Empire. However there is the great danger that, as a result of the League of Nations, the connecting link will disappear. For in the league of Nations, what is the future of monarchy? The Times has styled the Crown "the golden link" of the Empire. The British crown does stand as a symbol of unity over diversity such as no other crown can be said to do. And the British Crown is not like other crowns; it may conceivably take a line of its own and emerge - as H. G. Wells has it - possibly a little more like a hat and a little less like a crown - from trials that may destroy every other monarchical system in the world. But even if the monarchy survives, and the Empire is still bound together by sentimental ties, the monarchy will have no power. Britain will no longer stand forth supreme, as the nation with the greatest powers and possessions, as ruler of the seas and as controller of food supplies and raw materials. Our Empire will so, as it were, be disbanded.

At present our argument is that in India, Egypt, Africa and elsewhere, we stand for order and civilization; we are the Trustees of freedom, the agents of knowledge and efficiency. The creation of a council of the League of Nations is like the creation of a Public Trustee for the world. The creation of a League of Nations is necessarily the creation of an authority that may legitimately call existing empires to give an account of their stewardship. This will not

particularly affect the African part of our Empire. England can claim the best record for humanity and intelligent liberalism in dealing with African natives.

Freedom of access to, and exploitation of the natural resources of such places as Africa is now generally recognised as a common right of mankind. Under proper control, intercourse with Europeans and the development of natural resources by civilised enterprise are of recognised advantage to the natives.

England exerted that proper control - she had found out the secret of dealing with the natives. May the new controlling authorities of the League of Nations show an equal understanding, and may the people of this part of the British Empire not suffer through the coming of the League.

The British Empire is in a sense, a forerunner of the League of Nations. It is not a net about the world in which the progress of mankind is entangled, but a self-conscious political system, working side by side with the other democracies of the earth, preparing the way for, and prepared at last to sacrifice and merge itself in a

world confederation of free and equal peoples.

Regarding the matter from a more practical point of view, it is almost inevitable that some changes take place in the British Empire, and the League of Nations is the method by which the most advantageous changes can be effected.

Old securities and old arrangements must be upset by the greater range of modern things. To the Englishman who scorns the League and is content with Empire, several questions might be put. The question of aviation for instance. Before the great possibilities of aviation can be realised there must be a pooling of air control. Let us take also the question of Gibraltar which is regarded as a sort of sacred possession of the British Empire. It is surrounded by Spain, it is in easy range of any modern gun. In other words the Spaniards are in a position to blow Gibraltar to bits. Also there are long sweeps of coast, north, south and west of the Rock from which torpedoes could be discharged at any ship that approached. Again there is no place on the Rock where an aeroplane might land. What then is the value of Gibraltar?

All empires are becoming vulnerable at every point. Australia, New Zealand, directly they are involved in the future, in a war against any efficient naval power, will be isolated owing to the immense power of submarine blockade.

But the League of Nations will prevent all these possibilities. The British Empire will probably be destroyed by the League, but, in the contrary, it will receive its consummation for there will be born a co-operative commonwealth of the whole

world. Well might the sceptic say that it is a sacrifice of the British empire which may be made in vain, and that the league of Nations should be a concrete fact which is yet far away. So it is far away - so far that the gradual absorption of the British Empire into a world commonwealth would not be felt. The transformation will not be abrupt - there will be no sudden disruption of the British empire. There will be instead, the gradual passing of what is already a great league of Nations into a greater league - a world league which comprises all mankind.

It is a great ideal towards which our Empire is striving, and for which it is making sacrifices, but it is right and sceptics are wrong when they condemn it for, —

"l'esprit des temps rejoint ce que la mer sépare
le titre de famille est écrit en tout lieu
l'homme n'est plus Français, Anglais, Romain, Barbare
Il est citoyen de l'Empire de Dieu.

Réjoignons - nous donc dans le jour qu'il nous

prête,
C'est nous qui conduisons aux conquêtes du Père
les colonnes du genre humain".