

Poetry Competition

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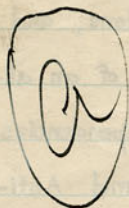
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"Empire" or "Commonwealth", how have these two terms come to be applied to the King's Realms, and what is their significance and difference?

C The British Empire of today is different from all others; "it bears no real resemblance to any other political organisation which now exists or has ever been tried for free institutions are its life-blood; free co-operation its instrument." — It is not an empire in the 'old' sense at all. Truly had the Prime Minister, Mr. Baldwin said: "Empires of old were created by military conquest, and sustained by military domination. Our Empire is so different from these that we must give the word 'Empire' a new name, or use, instead of it, the title 'Commonwealth'." — We are accustomed to referring to it as "the Empire on which the sun never sets" and as "the greatest Empire the world has ever seen," without realising fully what these statements actually mean. The British Commonwealth of Nations is divided into :- (a) The Self-governing Dominions (b) The Crown Colonies which are of many kinds, and (c) India, which is in a class by itself. — Modern democracy appreciates the reality of a symbol and the symbolism of a reality. Kingship makes for unity.

The words 'Empire' and 'Imperialism' have been so loosely and so incorrectly used that they have acquired with many people a bad connotation. The word 'Empire' may be regarded as applying to the whole of the King's Realms, while 'Commonwealth' is restricted to an association within the

Empire, comprising the United Kingdom, the self-governing Dominions, and sometimes, India. Less often, "Empire" is taken to denote a part of an all-inclusive Commonwealth, which comprises the United Kingdom, and its dependencies.

There are two main types of Imperialism: Prussian and Anti-Prussian. The former is based on racial pride. It is indifferent to the sufferings of others so long as they serve its own ends. Modern Germany not only manifests Imperialism of this kind, but is the product of it. Anti-Prussian Imperialism lays stress not only on the duties of man, but on his rights also, and believes that society will be most happy and prosperous if there is the least interference with what it describes as its natural laws.

No one can speak successfully on the word 'Empire' without quoting once more the much-quoted words of the Greek autocrat, "I have remarked again and again, that a democracy cannot manage an Empire." The one great Empire of old was the Roman Empire, and in making their Empire, the Romans substituted for democracy a military despotism. And yet, there was much more in the Roman Empire than mere military despotism. In the sphere of local self-government, and in admission to citizenship, Roman policy was liberal to a degree.

In what sense is the British Empire a new Empire? The loss of the old North American Colonies closed a chapter in the history of the British Empire, and with the beginning of Queen Victoria's reign and Lord Durham's mission to Canada, a new chapter was opened, in which self-government for those colonies which are now styled Dominions became a leading feature in British colonial policy, a wholly new type of Empire being thereby created.

It is customary to say that the British Empire grew up in a haphazard way, extending here and expanding there according as opportunities offered in warfare or bargaining with other nations,

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in exploitation and in colonisation. The British Empire is the most variegated Empire that has been seen or heard of throughout the history of mankind. "You may find in it," says Sir. Charles Lucas, "every sample of climate, product, race, colour, law, language, religion, constitution. If you want uniformity, go to Germany: it is made there. If you want diversity, go to the British Empire, it grows there by itself." I am of opinion that a uniform system cannot be produced without much breaking and uprooting in the process, and without violent changes. We must bear in mind that the American War of Independence was the outcome of a disastrous attempt to apply uniform treatment to diverse conditions, and to treat as dependencies colonies which were not dependencies.

Some parts of the British Empire were acquired in the name of the Crown, by people who went out from the British Empire, and took possession of territories which were either uninhabited, or appeared to be worth the effort of conquest. Some were acquired by cession from other European Powers. Sometimes large territories, such as the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast, were seized, as it was found out that their pacification was essential to the safety of the British settlers. Other territories, such as Sierra Leone on the West Coast of Africa, came under the protection of the Crown, at the request of the inhabitants. Still, other territories were acquired because of their strategic value, for example: Gibraltar.

The form of government in each part of the Empire

depends upon a considerable number of factors, such as the size of the territory, its strategic importance, the concentration of European or other civilised peoples, and the accidents of history. The forms of government range from autocratic rule of a Governor, as experienced in some parts of Africa, to complete autonomy under a system of fully responsible government as in the Dominions and the United Kingdom. Between these extremes are institutions of government in which the people are represented by nominated members. Here, in the Gold Coast, the Governor is assisted by a Council composed entirely of officials, both natives and Europeans. But in other countries, such as India, Ceylon, and Southern Rhodesia, there are varying degrees of responsible government.

It has been often said that in time of peace, German competition and pressure from the Dominions combine to extend the British Empire, by compelling many of the reluctant British Governments to move forward. The present war is only the terrible climax of this competition; and, unless Germany secures a decisive victory, which, by the way, is very doubtful, not to say impossible, the British Empire is likely to grow again; in fact, it is growing already!

The maintenance of freedom, as 'freedom' can be understood by the human beings who inhabit each particular niche in the British Empire, is characteristic of the whole Empire. "This is the new Empire," says Sir Lucas, "unprecedented in kind, and newly aggrandized. It is like a gigantic jig-saw puzzle, in which new pieces are being constantly inserted. The pieces are of different sizes, shapes, and colours, but they all fit in somehow, and make an intelligible whole — one large map of LIBERTY."

Some people who love liberty dislike the word 'Empire'. To me, it seems too military and despotic to suit the

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relation of a mother-country to colonies. And the British Empire, as it stands today, is such a complex organization that a suitable name must be given to it. I say this, because 'Empire' has been given an inappropriate meaning by the tyranny of some of the military powers on the continent of Europe. Turkish congeries of nations let us compare it to the United States of America, and those who fail to see that it has been wrongly ~~erected~~, ~~as~~ classified, conclude that the British Empire is at fault. Again, by contrasting the British Empire with those of former days, when empire meant "conquest by force, unwilling subject nations, and the exploitation of the conquered by the conquerors," we may make a mistake as to the meaning of "empire." When I say a more suitable name must be given to the British Empire, I do not forget, however, that "in British practice, 'Empire' is an honourable name which we must not be ashamed to use." 'Commonwealth of Nations' is a newer, and in some ways, a better name; but the British Empire and the British Commonwealth are one and the same thing.

The actual choice of words in some cases, will be determined simply by a regard for literary felicity. Astor makes it clear in "The British Empire", published by the Council of the Royal Institute of International Affairs that "'Empire' is used when the idea to be called up is that of the group of countries, as a whole, without reference to the political articulations within it, and 'Commonwealth' is used, when attention is to be drawn to

the relation of 'free association' that subsists between the self-governing countries, with their respective dependencies, of which the group is composed."

The British Commonwealth, as it exists today, is the product, in the first place, of a century of peaceful growth after the downfall of Napoleon, and secondly, of a tremendous blaze of public spirit and patriotism during the Great War. In 1815, Napoleon was overthrown in the decisive battle of Waterloo. A long-enduring peace ensued until 1914. This century of peace from 1815 to 1914 witnessed the growth of the British Empire, and the beginning of its transformation into the Commonwealth of Nations.

The growth of the Commonwealth has meant one of the following changes: ① the abolition of the Slave Trade and the waste of life it ~~or~~ caused, as experienced in West Africa, ② the encouraging of backward peoples to take an interest in their own government, and, ③ the peopling of empty lands by industrious colonists.

The one difficult problem of the Commonwealth was that of Foreign Affairs. Some rules, therefore, have been laid down which are meant to combine 'freedom' of the separate nations. None of the nations of the Commonwealth can take any steps which might involve ~~all~~ the others in any obligations without their willingness. The desire to keep the Commonwealth united makes it certain that no member nation will go to war unless its cause is so just that the other nations of the Commonwealth will join it.

It is not easy to define wherein a Commonwealth consists. A Commonwealth cannot exist among a people whose government depends upon unquestioning obedience to authority,

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whether it is secured by terrorism inspired by armed force, "or by the sedulous inculcation into the subjects that disobedience is impious and wicked." Nor can it exist among people organised on the principles of limited liability, on the bases that society is merely a makeshift for controlling people. A Commonwealth bases its communal life on the principle that every citizen has an unlimited duty of helping every other citizen, that it exists to maintain or promote self-government among its peoples, and that the society it fosters will be happy if its members are governed by the law of love.

The methods of the Empire Commonwealth are those of caution and common sense, the ideals of freedom and humanity — different, indeed, from those promised to the world by Hitler's Reich. The purpose of the British Commonwealth is to promote the development of its members. "It is the standing denial of the twin doctrines which have caused the devastation of Europe," says Kerr. If the British Commonwealth were to break up, History would repeat itself, as it would be the greatest calamity which could befall mankind. Under the protection of its laws, we all live in peace. It guarantees to every individual of whatever race or colour, an equal liberty before the law. Its whole purpose is to ensure that every citizen may lead the freest life. It promises not only good government, to all, but eventual self-government.

In a Commonwealth so diverse in its natural regions and products, and so full of opportunities and resources of all kinds, it is no wonder that some people look forward to the day when the Empire will be self-supporting, as indeed it might be, if it were so organised. On the other hand, there are those who remind us that while it is right for the Empire nations to hold intercourse and trade as much as possible with each other, we must not forget that in these modern days we are citizens of the world as well as citizens of the Empire.

We ought to be proud when we refer to the British Empire as "the far-flung Commonwealth," because if its ~~were~~ not purpose were not to promote the development of its members, it might not have possessed "lands in every climatic zone."

Every society must have a head to call upon its members to do their work, and to represent them all in the person of one man on great occasions. In the British Empire, this 'representative' is the King, called to this position by royal birth. It is difficult to imagine how the British Empire could have an elected president, even if it wished. If South Africa admired some public man he might be unknown in India or disliked in Canada. Some people may ask, "Why do we have a King at all? Why should we not have a republican form of government?" The words 'Monarchy' and 'Republic' stand for forms of government and not for government itself. As our poet Pope wisely remarked —

"For forms of government let fools contest
That which is best administered is best."

The King cannot be present in all the Dominions at the

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same time - and no one can - and so is represented by Governors. He himself takes an active interest in every aspect of national life, in charitable work, in research and education, in the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force, in exhibitions of industrial arts and crafts, and in all kinds of sports. And so his subjects feel a personal loyalty to him. It is this which has inspired government officials of the colonies to pass on their sentiment of loyalty to those under them with whose welfare they are entrusted.

And the King, by visits, by messages, by the justice which he symbolises, and the help and encouragement he is always anxious to give, has appealed directly to the imagination of his subjects throughout the Empire, and has thus deepened their loyalty to him. As Sir Philip Gibbs ~~we~~ rightly puts it, "Just as the great dynamic of the Christian religion is devotion to a Central Figure, so is the most effectual driving power and unifying influence in an Empire found to consist in unswerving allegiance to a Central Personality," and this Central Personality is the King.

The Empire, then, is an association of peoples as well as of countries. There may be much to divide these peoples. Race, language, law, religion, literature, geographical position, climate, and economic interests may tend to separate them. But other aspects of these factors will serve to draw the peoples of the Empire together, and establish among them a community of ideals and aims. Theodore Roosevelt, a famous President of the United States

of America, once said: "I have the keenest sympathy with the spread of the British Empire, and I have that sympathy because and so long as the spread of that rule means benefit to the people over whom it goes."

If the Empire is to exist continue as a political organization it ought to be based on sentiment and the perservation of democracy and liberty. The most important of these is mutual and material advantage, for it is unlikely that a member of the Commonwealth would, in the long run, sacrifice its vital economic and political interests out of regard for the ideal of unity.

The words of Sir Philip Gibbs may suitably end this essay: "The Imperialism of the future must be more universal in its outlook than the Imperialism of the past has been. It must proceed along the lines that will mean the breaking down of all narrow barriers and distinctions. It will be based upon co-operation. Its emblems will be the trading-vessel and all those instruments and agencies which tend to make the whole world one. Its prime motive and inspiration will be the basic reality of humankind's essential oneness."

List of books consulted.

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2. A Short History of the British Commonwealth by Muir.
3. The Empire and the Future. (A series of Imperial Studies Lectures delivered in the University of London)
4. The Growth of the Empire Commonwealth by J. R. Williamson
5. The Expansion of England by J. R. Peckey.