

Special Prize.

(a)

ROYAL EMPIRE SOCIETY ESSAY COMPETITION, 1957.

CLASS A

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Some Hemorrhoids
but well arranged
and covers a great deal

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The Commonwealth Is Not Breaking Up
But Growing Up

Today the different constituents of the British Empire are becoming looser and looser in legal relationship, but in actual co-operation they are becoming closer and closer. That the British Empire is not breaking up, but growing up is, therefore, nothing more than a well-justified statement. It is true that the old British Empire, the empire of the sword, is not only breaking up, but has already broken up. Yet instead of coming to nought, as the Roman Empire did in ancient days, it is taking another form - the Commonwealth of Nations as it has come to be called. It is in the "pupa stage". It is not dying, but changing from the ugly caterpillar into the gorgeous butterfly!

E.M. Richardson :
The Building of
The British Empire

Brock : Britain
And The Dominions

In order not to misunderstand this confirmation it is desirable to make some definitions. Since 1919 the term British Empire has for more and more nations come to mean "a group of autonomous states, organised on a basis of complete constitutional equality under a common Crown." This Empire, often called the Commonwealth, consists of junior partners, the present colonies, and the senior partners, the Dominions which were defined in the Westminster Statute as "autonomous communities within the British Empire in no way subordinate to one another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by a common allegiance to the Crown and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations".

The British Empire is not the only empire in history, but it is the only one organised by free co-operation based on mutual benefit, as may be seen in the word Commonwealth. It is the first to grant self-government to its colonies. Britain does not extract money from her colonies, as many people may think. In fact, the British people have contributed and are still contributing, substantial sums towards their development. This policy is the extreme contrast to that of the Mongolian Empire and the Spanish Empire which ruled by mere force and were interested only in deriving revenue from their possessions, neglecting their development. In the Commonwealth, Britain does not reveal herself as the ruling power but plays the part of a founder and a senior partner, always ready to co-operate with and give assistance to the others. Although not all the members of the British Empire are independent, all of them are inter-dependent, in one respect or another.

This uniqueness of the British Empire has largely been the result of the way by which it has grown up. It may be said to have grown up by accident. Unlike others the British flag went after trade. Many British territories originated as trading posts and settlements. In addition, the enthusiasm for new excitement and adventure, the wish for freedom from religious persecution and the pursuit for better economic conditions and political ideals were motives for emigration and settlement. The inextinguishable zeal for excitement and adventure of curious people, especially in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had been expressed in Sir Francis Drake's circumnavigation in 1577. Others went to settle in North America and later in Australia in the hope of discovering gold. The "Pilgrim Fathers" who arrived at Plymouth and became the most influential ancestors of modern American man were Puritans who wished to escape from the restrictions of the Catholic Church in England. Other emigrants left Britain during the nineteenth century famine. During the serious economic depression in 1845, thousands were sent to various places within the British Empire. Added to these were those who

Thailand

hated the corrupt political system. In short, the British Empire has been built up by means of discovery, conquest, cession, treaty, refuges from persecution, settlement and mandate.

Burham

The transformation from Empire to Commonwealth had more or less been stimulated by the loss of the North American Colonies, after which Britain assumed a more liberal policy towards her colonies, exemplified by the abolition of slavery. Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, the settlers of which are mainly of British or European stock, took the lead in demanding self-government. They had the idea of political freedom and equality in their blood. They had similar culture, similar traditions, sentiments, political and social institutions, to those in Britain. In 1840 Canada obtained self-government. In 1867 a Federation was founded and a Parliament was devised on the British model. In Australia responsible government consisting of a Parliament and a Cabinet with a Prime Minister was granted to each of the colonies except Western Australia. The first Federated Parliament was opened in May, 1901. New Zealand, after many difficulties, obtained responsible government in 1852. In the same year Cape Colony was granted representative government; and responsible government was given in 1872. The Act of the Union of South Africa was soon passed, joining the Cape of Good Hope; Natal, Transvaal, and Orange Free State Provinces into a Union responsible for internal affairs.

The World War I (1914 - 18) forms a watershed of the flow from Empire to Commonwealth. As may be expected, world war caused world changes. In 1914 Canada, Australia and New Zealand followed the example of Britain in declaring war on Germany. South Africa supported the Empire and helped to conquer German South West Africa. To Germany's disappointment India did not take this opportunity to defy the British Empire but remained loyal and was also anxious to help. An Indian leader said: "We are loyal because we are patriotic, because we believe that with the stability and permanence of British rule are bound up the best prospects of Indian advancement". Thus this War strengthened the co-operation of the Commonwealth as well as raising the status of the senior partners. In the War Cabinet the Prime Ministers of Britain and of the self-governing Dominions, the Secretary of State for India and other representatives of India discussed items concerning war and future Imperial relations. The Dominions were then virtually recognised as "autonomous nations of an Imperial Commonwealth, and India as an important portion of the same, with a right to an adequate voice in foreign policy and foreign relations." In 1919 they signed the Peace separately and were admitted as "Small Nations" into the League of Nations.

Brook : Britain
& the Dominions

F.M. Richardson :
The Building of
the British Empire

Though virtually independent the Dominions were still legally bound to follow the laws enacted by the Parliament of Great Britain, until 1931, when the Westminster Statute removed this limitation. The Statute made the Dominions legally independent and stated that any alteration in the succession to the throne or in the Royal title necessitated the assent of all Dominions and that Britain could not pass an Act affecting a Dominion unless requested or agreed to by that Dominion.

/The World War II ...

The World War II marked an even more advanced era in the transformation. In the War all the Commonwealth countries stood by Britain. Many pilots in the Royal Air Force came from various Commonwealth countries. The conquest of Abyssinia and Eritrea was largely accomplished by Indian and South African troops. Prime Ministers of the Dominions were consulted about Imperial war strategy. So great was the part played by them that important changes in the ideas of Colonial peoples resulted. Being conscious of their success in fighting and having seen the Europeans defeated so rapidly by an Asiatic race, the Japanese, at the beginning of the War, Asiatic peoples could no longer be convinced that they were inferior to anyone. Nationalism thereby took root in their hearts. Therefore Europeans cannot hope to dominate the Asiatic peoples in future, but only to co-operate with them on the basis of equality and mutual benefit. Also, the Africans who had returned from the War in which they had won great credit, were technically trained and educated and had enjoyed better living than before. They became dissatisfied with the poor, backward tribal life and started to work with tremendous energy and zeal to improve their countries. A bright future is awaiting them.

The immediate effect was that the meeting of the representatives from the Dominions in 1949 decided that India, Pakistan and Ceylon might remain in the Commonwealth as fully self-governing Dominions, in spite of the fact that India had not followed the British Constitution but had become a Republic. This meant that the Asiatic element in the Commonwealth had come to outnumber the European; moreover, Asiatic Dominions remained in the Commonwealth on account of very real advantages. The Commonwealth has thus become a free association which spans the continents and united the races."

There are real advantages for a country to be a member of the Commonwealth. First is the economic link. The industrial members such as Britain, Canada and New Zealand need the raw material produced by the comparatively backward members, and the latter (ones) need the manufactured goods of the former, particularly capital goods. In addition, there is the encouragement of Imperial Preference, a protective tariff, favouring Commonwealth - produced goods by demanding a lower duty on them than on foreign goods. The Exhibition in 1924 and 1925 at Wembley has also given an impetus to Imperial trade. Some Colonies have their own representatives in the Commonwealth Economic Conferences.

Secondly, there is the link of defence. As the Commonwealth is far-flung, defence depends very largely on the navy. At present the navies of Australia and New Zealand have taken over quite a position of the responsibility for the protection of the Commonwealth in the South Pacific and the British Navy is now concentrated mainly in the North Atlantic and the Mediterranean.

Thirdly, there is the feeling of belonging as equals. It has often been the habit of human beings to cling to something powerful; the Holy Roman Empire in its early days is a good example. Today is an age of physical might. It is completely different from Medieval Europe which was the time of the moral influence of the Pope and of Christianity, although force was by no means completely absent. Now the title of the Pope still exists, but not the moral influence. Many in the world are Christians in name, but not in spirit. The combining power of Christianity or any other religion has faded. The British Commonwealth is making an attempt to bind people by moral and other non-material forces in an age which despises them.

/Fourthly, ...

Fourthly, the Empire is a source of stability, both in politics and in economics. For example, India and Indonesia were formed as republics at about the same time; but now India, a member of the Empire, is among the most prosperous countries in the East while Indonesia is in danger of falling into pieces. Foreign investments, especially by the United States of America which possesses the greater part of the excess money in the world, have also been encouraged by such stability. Merchants are always keen on making profits. No wonder that they prefer investing their money in the stable Hong Kong to investing in the unstable Viet-Nam!

Newly grown up countries find it profitable for them to be members of the Commonwealth because Britain and the wealthier Dominions help them to solve their many problems. These countries all need money badly. Britain invests in the Colonies in the form of gifts or loans. About the time of World War I the Colonial Welfare and Development Fund was started to aid the poorer Colonies. Up to 1952 £140,000,000 had been voted by Parliament for this purpose.

The food problem is almost insoluble with the rapid increase of population after World War II. Thousands of British experts in irrigation, reafforestation, prevention of soil erosion and other fields of agriculture have been sent to improve conditions in the Colonies.

After World War II all countries have realized that industrialization is the key to prosperity and wealth. The need for capital and expert advice has been largely met by Britain. It should be noted that a renowned English scientist proposed ever more investment. Professor Blacket, the President of the British Association, said lately in Dublin that if the West had given the East modern science, the East had given the West its technology in ancient times besides its great religions! He said that Britain should take the job all by herself in case other Western countries refused to help, and give £150,000,000 more annually to Eastern undeveloped countries. But with the financial difficulties in Britain it is hard to say that she will be so generous and far-sighted.

The relatively backward countries often rely upon their primary products as the source of their wealth, e.g. rubber from Malaya, sugar in the West Indies and the cocoa of Ghana. They must find markets for these products and the Commonwealth itself is an enormous consumer. Besides, the prices of these are subject to fluctuation and the Colonies may arrange with Britain for a stable price over a period of time. This is great assistance.

Britain has also helped to solve the health problem in the Colonies by providing better medical services and advice on nutrition. Large campaigns have been initiated to combat pests like tsetse-flies, locusts and mosquitoes and diseases like malaria, yellow-fever and "sleeping sickness".

/Western style ...

Western style education, especially science, is a demand of backward communities. Many modern schools have been built, wholly or partly at the expense of Britain. The Achimota College has trained many of the politicians and important personnel of the newly independent Ghana. Among other well-known Colonial education institutions are University College at Nigeria, Makerere College in Uganda, Codrington College in Barbados, Raffles College and the Medical School in Singapore and the University of Hong Kong.

Many other countries remain in the Commonwealth for strategic purposes, for a small country can hardly stand alone in this world of power.

After World War I it has been the declared policy of Britain to prepare her Colonies for self-government. Sometimes this is not done deliberately, but rather unconsciously, because the governors and administrators who have been accustomed to the free government and tradition of Britain find it only too natural to instruct natives in the ideas of democracy and the methods of running their countries for themselves. Since World War II there has been a rapid increase in the number and responsibilities of native officials in administration and in other public services. This experiment had the most striking success in Malaya, which was able to attain complete self-government in July, 1957.

On the other hand, the children in different countries of the Commonwealth, which includes Britain of course, are being educated in the mutual knowledge of each other member and are taught that they are not only citizens of a particular country, but citizens of a world-wide Commonwealth.

However, to succeed in self-governing is not so easy as it seems to many Nationalists. It requires many conditions. To assure that every member who obtains self-government may be successful, Britain has worked out a ladder with Crown Colony at the bottom and Self-governing Dominion at the top. The intermediate bars are Crown Colony with Indirect rule, Colony with Representative Government and Colony with Responsible Government. To a foreigner this plan may reveal that a Self-governing Dominion is remote from a Crown Colony. But examples in the history of the Commonwealth show that the process of climbing may be quite fast by means of smooth development. Ceylon is an example of rapid development.

Although there is no written constitution for the Commonwealth, great efforts have been put forth to keep the members in closer touch. Imperial Conferences, meet in London at frequent though not fixed intervals to discuss topics of Imperial trade, economy, defence, foreign policy and others. Communication has been greatly improved so that continuous consultations and visits can be made. As all the partners of the Commonwealth look upon the Crown as the sign of unity, the royal tours to Australia, Nigeria and Canada and Princess Margaret's visits to the West Caribbean and other places have done a great deal in encouraging good-will and co-operation.

/In an ...

Report of the
Inter-Imperial
Relations, Com-
mittee of the
Conference in
1926

In an uncertain and rapidly changing world the Empire is changing very rapidly into the Commonwealth, but still no blue-print or plan has been worked out **in detail**, for the British believe in empirical development proceeding from fact to theory, not vice versa, as shown in the various forms of government which suit the corresponding countries best. The over-riding idea is of the mutual benefit which can flow from co-operation in many ways, under a common Crown and through discussions and dealings by "people who speak the same language" of frank and honourable conduct. "Free institutions are its life-blood, Free co-operation is its instrument. Peace, security and progress are among its objects" What is so outstanding in the Commonwealth is the ability not only to agree but to agree to differ, for instance, over the question of free trade in the Imperial Conference in 1930. The Empire at present includes roughly a quarter of the world's population and area. It is growing up in the sense that, as more and more of its members become independent, it is taking a new and much better form - the Commonwealth which is a free and voluntary association of equal partners. It has been seen that this change has recently been accelerated. Before long its united **strength** and example in a co-operative Commonwealth will be a valuable contribution to world peace.

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Reference Books :

Brock : Britain and the Dominions

Sinnet : Emergent Commonwealth

E.M. Richardson : The Building of the British Empire