

CONSOLIDATION OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE

Dr. J. M. Harper's Plan for Parliamentary Assimilation After the War

There are some critics who have cheap sneers for those whom they accuse of attempting to "re-fashion the British Empire." These critics delight in pointing to the empires past and present that have been duly organized and yet have failed to achieve the higher purposes for which organization should be planned. They repeat the fact that even organization sometimes fails to bring the right sort of success, until they make themselves believe that organization inevitably and always spells failure and loss for a nation.

Usually these critics are very insistent on pressing the "autonomy" of the part of the Empire in which they reside. They are wont to argue that Canada, for instance, should not be expected to share in the burdens and responsibilities of the Empire, because Canada has no representation in the framing of the world policy of the Empire. Yet when any plan is suggested for giving Canada representation in the councils of the Empire, these critics may be depended upon to oppose the proposition whatever it may be and wherever it may originate. They still appear to fear for their precious "autonomy", which in actual practice in the past has simply amounted to this: that the Dominion has shared in all the benefits of the Empire and borne no due part of the cost.

Few thoughtful people question the need for proper organization or the advantages to be derived therefrom. If there is such a thing as over-organization there is also such a thing as under-organization. It is beside the point to laughingly quote the old wit's saying that the British Empire just fell together in "a fit of absence of mind," or the modern noodle's opinion that it is this very

"absentmindedness" that now holds it in the bonds of a workable union. Of course, the truth is that it holds together DESPITE the lack of organization,—and the lack of organization is a menace not a strength. There are a few people who can bring themselves to believe that even the necessities in the present war grow in some mysterious way from Britain's lack of preparedness. The fact is that there would have been more victories and fewer defeats, if Great Britain had not been forced to turn aside TO ORGANIZE her forces and resources while the Huns thundered at the very gates. In war the policy of "muddling through" has cost the Empire many precious lives. In peace shall Justice and Commonsense still wait because some illogical critics pretend to believe that everything will always turn out all right somehow?

The question of the proper co-ordination of the different parts of the world-wide Empire surely must be faced, and thoughtful men here and overseas are turning renewed intelligence to the great problem. Dr. J. M. Harper, the noted historian, poet and author, of Quebec, has made a noteworthy contribution to the discussion of the subject. In a recent issue The Quebec Chronicle devoted a full page to a thoughtful and logical article by Dr. Harper. In this essay the whole situation is reviewed and a plan outlined for betterment.

Dr. Harper prefaces his article with a paragraph from a recent address by the British Prime Minister, Mr. David Lloyd George. "Things can never be the same after the war as before it," said the Prime Minister. "Five democracies, all parts of one Empire, cannot shed their blood and treasure with a heroism and disregard of cost which have been beyond all praise, without leaving memories of comradeship and great accomplishment which will never die. Of this I am certain. The peoples of the Empire will have found a unity in war such as never existed before,—a unity not only in history but of purpose. What prac-

tical change in Imperial organization that will mean I do not venture to predict. That it will involve some change is certain."

Dr. Harper makes it clear that Mr. Bonar Law and many other prominent British statesmen hold similar views on the question. To quote Dr. Harper's own words:—"More than one prominent statesman claims that the anomaly of a tribute being paid in lives and treasure, with no administrative voice in the Empire's councils of the Motherland, cannot be allowed to continue."

"Individualism has to find its habitat in a collectivism that has the interests of the whole Empire at heart, outside of all provincial or municipal exploitations of rule," says Dr. Harper. He suggests a form of federation of the various provinces or parts of the Empire on a plan somewhat similar to the confederation of our own provinces of Canada. "Is it a going beyond the line of logic to say that if Canada and Australia have been endowed with an oversight of a co-ordinating provincial rule within a federal rule, so ought every Overseas Dominion be given a provincial rule within a federal rule, if it ordains to have such, just as Ireland and Scotland and Wales may be given provincial or home rule, if they desire to have it." That is Dr. Harper's way of stating the case.

Dr. Harper does not ignore the difficulties in the way of any and every plan for the consolidation of the Empire. Instead, he faces the obstacles squarely and seeks for means to surmount them. He believes it would be almost impossible to arrange for direct parliamentary control of these realms in and through the direct casting of the ballots of the various peoples scattered throughout the length and breadth of this world-flung community of

members, the creeds, the races, the distances, seem to make direct representation impractical. "What then?" he asks. And his own reply is: "There is then nothing for it but a representation selected by a representation,—a representation chosen a stage or so remote from the ballot box, such as might be secured in a re-arranged House of Lords, if that chamber is ever likely to be reconstructed in line with the demands of the several democracies within the Empire." The pith of his suggestion along this line may be summed up in his own words:—"A re-arranging of the House of Lords into an Imperial Chamber of Senate House under the proviso that any member of it can only hold a place in it for a given term,—say, as long as the Ministry recommending appointments to it remains in power,—and such would certainly be the prelude to a federated Empire throbbing with true British fervor in full touch with the whole Empire under the supervision of a people's parliament in both its chambers with direct representation from the people in the one chamber and indirect in the other, as the case would be."

The other outstanding difficulty of providing representation in the Empire's councils for the smaller and outlying parts of the Empire is also dealt with by Dr. Harper. "The problem," he says, "should it happily be solved, will provide for a Provincial Rule, a Federal Rule, and an Imperial Rule, within each of the component parts of the Empire, including the Motherland as well. The outlying smaller colonies would in such a case have to seek attachment to what to them would be the most conveniently situated Dominion. For instance, the detached British possessions in the Americas, from Newfoundland and Bermuda to the Falk-

IN THE MAIL BAG

From the Front and Elsewhere

France, Feb. 20th, 1917

Dear Old Len:—I know you will be somewhat surprised to have a letter from me, but I was reading The Advance the other day; Charley Hall from the "McEnaney" sends it to me regularly. I saw where you made a spiel advising the town to increase the Hospital accommodation and I thought it was a real bright idea, because I'm beginning to think

and Islands, would have to link themselves on to the federalized Dominion of Canada, if they would share in Imperial Federation."

"The setting of the Empire's house in order," says Dr. Harper, "in my opinion, has to be preluded by the Motherland setting her own immediate household in order. The status of Ireland has to be agreed upon; and that involves the fixing of a relative provincial status for Ulster and Wales and Scotland. And the re-forming of the House of Lords has to be brought about by the Motherland herself, as a preliminary to a possible Imperial Federation."

Only a very brief and imperfect outline of Dr. Harper's argument has been given, yet it is hoped that even this will incite thought and study of the question. It should be remembered that the matter is of vital interest and importance to every Canadian, for the Canadian in Timmins, for instance, is just as truly and as fully a British subject as if he were living within the sound of Bow Bells, for example. It is our Empire! What will we do with it? Will we simply—to use a slang expression—"let her slide!"

that some of us will try it out for a week or two if we ever get back. Well, there are quite a few of the boys "pushing up daisies" here in France, but not so many from Timmins. I am Sergt-Major now of the Company which left Timmins. Must say that I am feeling pretty good, but don't get many good square meals these days, therefore I'm about as slim as ever. The biggest part of me now is my elbows. Just the same Len, there are few men who have stuck it better than I have. I have yet to miss my first day's duty since I came to France, which is a year ago. We are pretty near like Infantry at present. We are in dug-outs now up in the trenches. Fritz has not much to say these days. Sometimes he gets spiteful and opens up, but our guns are pounding him all the time when there is any kind of observation. The outfit has been on some pretty hard scraps; Len, so we are used to it now. The great drawback at present is the water and mud. It has been very cold, but it has started in to thaw, and the trenches are caving in, so it makes it tough for us. But we swear a little bit, and get a snort of rum, and carry on as usual. It is hard to write a good letter when the shells are screaming over your dugout, so I must close for now, wishing all the old-timers the best of luck, I am,

Yours truly,
"Slim" Halliwell.

Address:
C. S. M. Halliwell,
2nd Canadian Pioneers,
Canadian Contingent, France

David, in Psalm cii, 6, in comparing his pitiable condition to the pelican, which was not uncommon in Palestine, probably had reference to its general aspect as it sits in apparent melancholy with its bill resting on its breast.

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