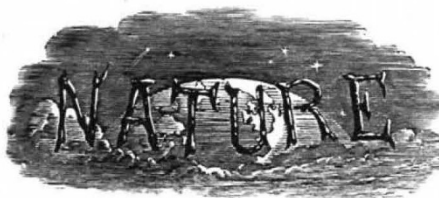


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The British Association and Imperial Unity

THERE are plans for ensuing peace which may seem on a hasty or superficial view to have little or nothing in common. A closer analysis, however, shows that, in many instances, points of contact are exhibited such that men of good will, seeking to save our civilization from the dangers that beset it, may find in the structure of very divergent plans some greatest common measure which will make possible effective united action.

The policy of the British nation, as it is expressed by the National Government, is one of firm support of those principles of collective security set forth in the Covenant of the League of Nations. To that end is the national scheme of rearmament directed; to that policy—a policy which recognizes that the older method of denying to one's opponent the justice which one claims for one's self is neither right in morals nor effective in action—we are committed over and over again, if words have any binding significance. It is the plain duty of every citizen who supports that policy to use to the utmost such powers as he possesses to bring the ideals of the Covenant of the League of Nations into the realm of fact. The need is urgent, and opportunities, once lost, are not likely to recur.

What part can the man of science play in this world-drama? His responsibilities are great and, while he cannot, in common fairness, be asked to shoulder all the blame for the misuse of the great gifts which the genius of his predecessors and contemporaries has showered upon mankind, it is in some measure his responsibility in that he has placed dangerous weapons in the hands of those whose minds are not mature enough to use them wisely and well.

Mayhap the man of science himself, considered as a social animal, is still in that stage. This is possible, but unlikely, for the scientific worker to-day is showing himself increasingly alive to the importance of the impact of the advance of knowledge on society, whether the society be that of the nation or the world at large, and the toast "Here's to science—may it never be of any use to anyone at any time" is drunk with less and less enthusiasm as the century grows older.

Nowhere is that increasing awareness more clearly shown than in the programmes of the British Association. Some years ago, the Council considered carefully how the Association, within the framework of its constitution, could most profitably assist towards a better adjustment between the advancement of science and social progress. Effect has been given to these considerations by specially distinguishing papers, addresses and discourses which have a direct bearing on the relations between science and the interests of the community, and by arranging that, at each annual meeting, a proportion of the work of the meeting shall be devoted to the elucidation of such problems.

The efforts made in this direction have been widely recognized and appreciated, but are they a sufficient contribution to the general problem? Such work, though it makes contact with imperial and international matters in so far as it concerns itself with social questions of wide interest, yet barely touches the fringe of those problems which, unwisely and irrationally attacked, may lead the world down the ringing grooves of change to a goal which shall see the shattering of all those ideals for which a sane civilization stands.

The problem is as much emotional as rational. Even if the Association directly concerns itself—as we earnestly hope it will—with finding scientific solutions for some of the social and economic problems which deface and weaken the structure of our international relations, such rational solutions will be but one step towards that freedom from national animosities and clashing interests which is the greatest guarantee of international peace.

For the British nation, the first guarantee of peace, internal or external, is a united Empire, united, not by the bonds of self-interest, enlightened or not, but by a sympathetic understanding of each other's difficulties and problems; and that is equally true of the relations between nation and nation. It is the creation of a friendly spirit of good will that matters most, and it is a favourable omen for the future that the Association, in the most recent of its activities, is directing its energies towards a task which will assuredly increase the spirit of good will and understanding between the constituents of our Empire. The sending of a delegation nearly a hundred strong to the silver jubilee celebrations of the Indian Science Congress Association is an event unprecedented in the history of the British Association. Over-seas meetings are an old-established feature of the Association's work, but the sending abroad of an independent delegation during the year of an ordinary meeting at home is quite another story. Lord Rutherford, with his accustomed wisdom, quickly perceived the importance of this step, and his considered opinion, expressed with that lucidity and emphasis which were part of his being, was that the Association could undertake no more important work than that of sending delegations to outlying parts of the Commonwealth, and that the success of the British Association in days to come would in no small measure depend on the development of its activities in these important directions.

Lord Rutherford, in more regions of thought than that of physical science, had an uncanny gift for seeing the answer to the sum without going through the dull mechanick process of working out the algebra, and in this matter, as in many others, it is more than likely that he spoke with a wise prevision. The British West Indies, Kenya Colony, Malaya . . . each has its problems, social, educational and scientific, and a visit by a delegation from the Association to one of these Dependencies, or to those greater

Dominions which already know something at first hand of the Association's activities, would be welcomed as giving to the region visited some direct knowledge of the most recent advances in science, affording an opportunity for the discussion of special problems, and, more than all, of cultivating that spirit of mutual aid which is at the root of all healthy social life. Is it too much to hope that, within the next few years, we shall see a delegation formed which shall carry a message of good will to the British West Indies?

The work of such delegations by no means exhausts the possibilities. The Association carries on much of its work quietly during the intervals of its meetings by means of research committees, appointed at the annual meeting. The researches of these committees have done much to systematize and clarify our knowledge, and in many instances have resulted in important additions thereto. It is sufficient here to instance the work of the great committee on Electrical Standards and of the committees on Seismological Investigations and on the Calculation of Mathematical Tables. There are many Imperial economic and other problems which might profitably be attacked by research committees acting under the aegis of the Association. It would be very desirable, also, to extend hospitality more frequently to students from the outlying posts of the Empire who desire to take part in the ordinary meetings of the Association. More than this, there are possibilities, so far imperfectly explored, of sending delegations to the meetings of sister Associations in other countries, thereby doing something to promote that atmosphere of mutual understanding which is such a powerful dissipator of jarrings and jealousies.

Each of these activities, considered as a contribution to the causes of Imperial unity and of international peace, may be in itself a little thing; but a little thing well done is a very great thing, and, indeed, the sum total of these matters is far from being small. The prosecution of these tasks will involve the Association in grave financial responsibilities, responsibilities which for these great causes are well worth incurring, and the Association could raise no more enduring monument to the memory of the great physicist who has so recently left us, than by the institution of a series of delegations to be known for all time as the Rutherford delegations, and to be charged with the duty of fostering the unity of the Empire by carrying the lamp of science and learning to her uttermost dependencies.