

THE OVERSEAS CLUB MOVEMENT.

JOHN EVELYN WRENCH, C. M. G.

Founder of the Overseas Club

WHAT exactly is the Overseas Club, or—to give it its full title,—the “Overseas Club and Patriotic League”? This is a question which is frequently asked, and which the present article will endeavour to answer. At the outset it may be well to admit that considerable ignorance still exists as to the Club’s aims and objects.

Very briefly, the Overseas movement is a non-party, non-sectarian, democratic society of men and women in all parts of the British Commonwealth of Nations, who believe in the free institutions, the just laws and the good government which have been responsible for the progress of the British Empire during the past sixty years—let us say since the passing of the British North America Act and the federation of the Dominion of Canada—and who pledge themselves to work for the common weal by every means in their power. The service of others and good citizenship are the two corner-stones on which the world-wide membership of the Overseas League rests. As the writer once described the movement to Sir Robert Baden-Powell, the Overseas Club is “a kind of grown-up Boy Scouts.”

In recent years, and especially since the termination of the Great War, there has been a growing suspicion in many quarters of “Imperialism” and everything which savours of “jingoism”; “spread-eaglesm” it is termed in the United States, the kind of *Deutschland uber alles* nationalism which was Germany’s undoing. Let it be stated at the outset that the Overseas League has never stood for blatant Imperialism or flag-waving; rather since its inception has it sought to emphasize the tremendous responsibilities incurred by citizenship of the British Commonwealth.

The objects of the Overseas League are the following.—

- (1) To draw together in the bond of comradeship British citizens the world over.
- (2) To render individual service to the British Commonwealth of Nations.

- (3) To maintain the power of the British Commonwealth of Nations and to hold to its best traditions.
- (4) To help one another.

Its "creed" is:—

"Believing the British Empire to stand for justice, freedom, order and good government, we pledge ourselves, as citizens of the British Commonwealth of Nations, to maintain the heritage handed down to us by our fathers."

We have always sought to interpret the "power of the British Commonwealth" as its *power for good* in the world, and by "maintaining the heritage handed down to us by our fathers" we have sought to imply those great traditions of freedom handed down to us ever since King John reluctantly affixed his seal to the Magna Charta on the meadowland of Runnymede seven centuries ago. Where the Overseas League has perhaps struck a new note in imperial and patriotic movements is in the continuous emphasis it has laid on the British Commonwealth's rôle as the *server* of mankind, with no thoughts of self aggrandizement, rather than on the types of patriotism so prevalent in the closing years of last century and expressing themselves in *Britannia rules the Waves* or *We don't want to fight but by jingo if we do*. The Overseas League therefore stands to-day above all things for the "new Imperialism" which keeps its eye for ever fixed on the sacredness of the task which has been entrusted to the present generation of citizens of the sister nations of the Britannic Alliance,— to use Richard Jebb's apt designation of the British Empire. A task which implies, not merely the holding high of the torch of progress throughout the British Dominions around the seven seas, but also the sponsorship of the small nations and backward peoples throughout the globe! This sponsorship has no tinge of national self-seeking, but means an overwhelming desire to give a helping hand along the path of freedom and independence to those less fortunately placed than ourselves.

The cynic may smile, and shake his head, and question whether a movement with such a mission is likely to achieve much success in this wicked old world of ours, the iniquities of which all our present day prophets down to H. G. Wells in his *Salvaging of Civilization* are for ever dinning into our ears. The striking success achieved by the Overseas Club and Patriotic League since its inception in 1910 refutes the critics. To-day the society is the strongest of all the "Imperial" movements, with a subscribing membership of 26,000, with a chain of some six hundred honorary corresponding secretaries around the globe, with annual income of nearly £30,000,

with its magazine *Overseas* that has a paid circulation of 24,000 copies a month, with tens of thousands of "associates" in all parts of the British Commonwealth, with its own freehold headquarters in the heart of Clubland at Vernon House, Park Place, St. James's—one of London's historic homes which the society has just bought from Lady Hillingdon for £45,000 as its War Memorial to the men from overseas who gave their lives in the great war.

To Canadians the Overseas movement should make an especial appeal, for it was while the writer was staying at Rideau Hall, Ottawa, with the late Lord Grey during his Governor-Generalship in 1906 that he first conceived the idea of starting a great "brotherhood of service" which aimed at making the peoples of the British Commonwealth better known to one another. The scheme was committed to writing as he travelled to Winnipeg by the "Imperial Limited," and for four years after the writer's return to London it was kept in his office drawer. It was not till August 1910, that, thanks to Lord Northcliffe's interest in the idea, the formation of the Overseas Club was announced in an article in an Overseas edition of the *Daily Mail*. Since that date Lord Northcliffe has been a most generous financial supporter, and has given the society much free publicity in the columns of the weekly edition both of the *Daily Mail* and of the *Times*.

The first public meeting of members of the Overseas Club was held the week following the Coronation of King George in London on Tuesday, June 27th, 1911, at the Memorial Hall, Farringdon Street, when some three hundred members from all parts of the world were present, and a number of matters affecting the welfare of the society were discussed. These included the instituting of a regular annual subscription and the possible opening of London premises the following year—a consummation which, as matters turned out, did not take place till Empire Day (May 24) 1914. The chair was taken by the writer, and among those present were Lord Northcliffe, Mr. L. S. Amery, M. P., Hon., A. L. Sifton (then Premier of Alberta), Hon., J. M. Gibson (then Lieut.-Governor of Ontario), Mr. C. A. Magrath of Ottawa and a number of other Canadian men and women. *Inter alia* the chairman on that occasion said:—

"I hope that ten years hence, when the Overseas Club has become a really powerful influence in the councils of the Empire, we shall be able to point to the realization of some of the aims which we are about to discuss to-day. The present occasion would seem to be unique. For the first time you have assembled in London, a gathering of citizens from every

section of His Majesty's Dominions--no mere conference of statesmen, but a meeting of the people themselves.

Has it ever occurred to you how largely the future of the world's progress lies in the hands of the Anglo-Saxon race? Only by the interchange of dream and idea between the sundered units of the vast Empire can the finest and widest conception be built up. The Overseas Club must serve as the medium for that communication."

The interest in the Overseas movement steadily increased, and the correspondence grew to such an extent that the writer soon realized he would have to give up his journalistic work on Lord Northcliffe's staff and devote himself entirely to furthering the interests of the society. This he afterwards did. In the meantime he surrendered his contract with the Amalgamated Press, and, accompanied by his sister, he set out in May 1912 on a world-tour of the British Dominions, covering some 64,000 miles. Crossing to New York on the *Lusitania* he commenced his Canadian tour at Ottawa where Sir George E. Foster and he were the guests at an Empire Day banquet. During the next three months he gave addresses on the Overseas movement at Montreal, Three Rivers, P. Q., Toronto, Fort William, Winnipeg, Battleford, Lloydminster, Saskatoon, Borden, Edmonton, Calgary, Lethbridge, Nelson, Kelowna, Vancouver, New Westminster, Victoria, ending up at Prince Rupert. Subsequently he visited the leading Overseas Club centres in New Zealand, South Sea Islands, Australia, Tasmania, Union of South Africa and Rhodesia. The lessons learned on this world-tour were of the utmost value; above all, personal contact was established with the Canadian, Australian, South African and New Zealand members, for it may be well here to emphasize the fact that the Overseas Club movement is not a society for those who were born in the Old Country, as is so often erroneously stated.

On returning to London the work of forming a properly constituted governing body, with His Majesty the King as Patron, was undertaken and the complicated task of drawing up rules and regulations, of dealing with matters of finance and deciding on a future programme was successfully carried out. The first chairman was Mr. Richard Jebb, the author of *Studies in Colonialism* and many other important works. During those early years the task of collecting sufficient funds to enable the work of the society to go on was no easy one, and without the substantial donations of Lord Northcliffe and Mr. Alexander Smith Cochran of New York, an American admirer of the British Commonwealth who gave us

£3,000 just at the critical time, the success of the movement would not have been possible.

On Empire Day 1914 central premises at General Buildings, Aldwych, London, consisting of the modest number of four rooms, were opened by the Lord Mayor of London, Sir Thomas Bowater, in the presence of a large and distinguished gathering, and there and then the Overseas Club really began to function. At the outbreak of the war the society had but 850 subscribing members, but it possessed the nucleus of a world-wide organization with local representatives in many of the most important centres throughout the Empire. From the first day of the war the Central Committee and the far-flung members of the League threw their whole energies into helping the Empire in the hour of its need. Membership increased rapidly and active centres were started in many new districts. Vast sums of money were contributed by members to local patriotic funds, and about £1,000,000 was forwarded to the London headquarters for war purposes, including the gift to the British Government of 350 aeroplanes and sea-planes. The war activities of the Overseas brotherhood were far too numerous to be recorded here, but they included the upkeep at a cost of £30,000 a year of a hospital for flying officers outside London, the forwarding of vast quantities of tobacco, hampers and other comforts to the men in the Imperial Forces, and the upkeep of over a hundred beds in various Red Cross hospitals.

In June 1915 the writer was invited by Lord Selborne and by the committee of the Patriotic League of Britons Overseas (a society which had been formed at the outbreak of the war to collect a fund for war purposes from British subjects *living in foreign countries*) to take over the administration of its affairs and to become Joint Honorary Secretary. This society differed from all other "Empire" movements in that it confined its activities to foreign countries, its chief field of work lying among the large and powerful British communities in such countries as the United States, Argentine, Brazil, Mexico, China, Chile, and elsewhere. On March 31st, 1918, the Overseas Club and the Patriotic League of Britons Overseas became merged into one great society under its present name.

The most important event in the eleven years' history of the society was the founding of its own official monthly organ entitled *Overseas* in December 1915. In six years the magazine has obtained a subscription circulation of 24,000 and penetrates to places where no other monthly is ever seen. *Overseas* has won for itself a unique place in the periodical literature of the British Commonwealth, and

is eagerly looked forward to by thousands of farmers and homesteaders throughout the great spaces of the Canadian West, the Australian and New Zealand "back-blocks," the South African Veldt, and in countless lonely homes under the four winds of heaven where British subjects are to be found earning their daily bread. The magazine is a vital link in the Overseas organization, because except by its perusal members can have no proper conception of the world-wide activities of the society.

Here are some of the ways the Overseas League tries to carry out its ideals of service and good citizenship. Through an information bureau information of every kind is furnished concerning the Empire and the local conditions in each of its parts. For instance, a fruit farmer in Nova Scotia may care to exchange experiences with a fellow fruit-grower in Tasmania or New Zealand; through his membership in the Overseas League he is enabled to do so. Or again, a homesteader in his lonely shack in Saskatchewan may desire to enliven his long winter evenings by entering into correspondence with his fellows elsewhere; this he can do through his association with the society. Many thousands of lasting friendships as a result have been formed through the Overseas Club during the past ten years.

Perhaps you are interested in social reform, in town-planning, in infant-welfare; if so, through the Overseas Club you are at once put into touch with those social workers elsewhere interested in the same attempts at social advancement. Forthwith the collective experience of the British Commonwealth is, so to speak, at your disposal. The vista of usefulness opened by this linking up of the idealists in Canada with those in the Old Country or Australia or elsewhere needs no elaboration. The Overseas movement has always made a special effort to enroll school teachers in its ranks, and as a result many hundreds of those to whom the task of educating the Empire's youth is entrusted have been linked up with their colleagues across the seas.

In no direction has more useful work been performed by the Overseas movement than in the matter of providing accurate information by those on the spot concerning local conditions and prospects of employment. Too often, alas, emigrants are attracted to new scenes of work by altogether too rosy accounts disseminated by steamship agents and other interested parties. Much needless suffering is saved by the utilization of the accurate information obtainable through the representatives of the Overseas Club *on the spot* concerning all parts of the British Commonwealth, from the Falkland Islands to Fredericton, from the Okanagan Valley to the Orange Free State. To promote trade among the different parts of

the British Commonwealth is the object for which the Overseas Trade Bureau in connection with the Overseas Club was started. Its sole aim is to provide accurate trade information to both importer and exporter. No enquiry is too small, and no charge is made for these services.

Most citizens of the Dominions hope to visit London some time in their lives. By associating themselves with the Overseas Club at the extremely moderate cost of \$5.00 for two years or \$35.00 for Life-Membership (\$50.00 on and after January 1, 1923) they are assured of a home of their own in London where a warm welcome awaits them, in addition to all other privileges of belonging to the society, including the receipt of the monthly magazine. It was the late W. T. Stead who some twenty-five years ago wrote a remarkable article in the *Review of Reviews*, then at the height of its influence, calling the metropolis "inhospitable London" and urging the need of some great central organization to extend the hand of welcome to the visitor from across the seas and to make him feel at home in the capital of the Empire. This is exactly what the Overseas League endeavours to do by means of its committees and social gatherings. Hardly a day passes but some wanderer from across the seas visits the London headquarters of the organization in search of some kind of information or assistance.

But it is not only in London that the Overseas brotherhood attempts to live up to its object of "helping one another." In every city of the world where an Overseas Club representative or centre exists the stranger is assured of a welcome on showing his club badge which is now so familiar an emblem, and never again need he feel lonely. Let me give two recent examples of the helping hand given to the stranger, and thousands of similar instances can be recorded. A little South African girl aged 14 was brought by her mother to London to obtain two artificial legs as owing to a severe illness hers had been amputated at home. Her mother, a stranger to London, knew no one and for several days spent an extremely lonely time in her London hotel without a friendly word to cheer her or her daughter, strangers in a strange land. A few days after their arrival a letter reached the Overseas Club headquarters from one of the League's representatives in South Africa telling of the strangers' departure from their home and commending them to the society's care. Within a couple of hours of the receipt of the letter little Lizzie and her mother were welcomed by fellow-members, and from that moment they never again wanted friends.

A few months since a lonely Briton had to go to a New York hospital suffering, though he did not then know it, from an incur-

able malady. He knew no one, as he had resided in another part of the United States, but he bethought himself of a member of the Overseas Club with whom he had crossed the Atlantic, and wrote to him telling of his lonely plight. His friend at once wrote to the New York Branch of the society. From that day and during his seven months illness kind friends were always at hand who brought him fruit, papers, flowers, and finally when the end came his body was claimed and he was given a proper burial in the presence of his Overseas friends.

The vision of the Overseas Club and Patriotic League which we hold before ourselves is that of a centre in every town in the world where British subjects are to be found, a kind of freemasonry open to both sexes with nothing secret about it. In Canada, where so far the progress of the movement has not been quite as rapid as elsewhere, it is hoped to possess a chain of active centres right across the continent. These will serve not only as a rallying point for furnishing information to the new-comer but as centres from which Canadians will be enabled to keep in touch with their fellow-citizens in the other British lands. Nor is there in enthusiastic membership in the Overseas Club anything incompatible with thorough Canadian Nationalism.

The British Empire as envisaged by the Imperialists of the nineties, when Joseph Chamberlain was making his appeal to the British masses to "think Imperially," an Empire consisting of a motherland surrounded by devoted daughter-states and dependencies, has gone, never to return. There are few practical statesmen to-day who believe in the possibilities of Imperial Federation as preached even so recently as the outbreak of the great war. Its place has been taken by something surely far more splendid, a real British Commonwealth of free nations, with complete local autonomy but co-operating together for the good of mankind. There is nothing inconsistent in entire devotion to the British Commonwealth and the fullest adhesion to a real League or association of *all* nations. Indeed it is no exaggeration to say that without the willing co-operation of the British Commonwealth no lasting League of Nations or Concert of Powers is possible. The promoters of the Overseas Club movement stand strongly for the greatest possible friendship and the closest and most intimate co-operation between the United States and the British Commonwealth in the interests of civilization and world peace, but at the same time they may especially desire that the bonds uniting the far-flung sections of the British Commonwealth should be rendered indissoluble.

There would appear to be four directions in which the good citizenship of the individual Canadian (or Australian or Englishman as the case may be) can find an outlet:—

- (1) His allegiance to Canada or to that section of the British Commonwealth in which he resides.
- (2) His allegiance to the British Commonwealth as a whole, the greatest political instrument of freedom since the world began.
- (3) His allegiance to the institutions and ideals to be found throughout the English-speaking world. That is to say, the British Commonwealth and the United States. The fact that he may happen to be a French-Canadian or a Dutch South African need not affect his belief in the destiny of the English-speaking races to lead the world in all that implies human progress.
- (4) His allegiance to the League of all Nations, by whatever name it may be termed, which we may all hope will emerge from the Washington Conference, and his desire to be a real citizen of the world, never for a moment removing his eyes from the vision of the Brotherhood of Man.

It is to the carrying out of the first and second of these allegiances that the Overseas Club particularly addresses itself. It aims at this by inculcating ideals of good citizenship and by making the Canadian feel in touch with his brother and sister in the Old Country, in Australia, South Africa, New Zealand and elsewhere. The patriotism preached by the Overseas Club is that of service and of such pre-occupation with setting aright our own shortcomings that we have no time to think of the mote in our brother's eye.

The following creed was written to express the kind of things which we like to feel that the Overseas brotherhood stands for.

“I believe in our glorious Empire of Free Peoples,
 In the sacredness of our mission,
 In the unselfishness of our aims,
 In the ultimate triumph of our cause.
 I believe in our great past,
 And in a greater future,
 In the *emptiness of riches*,
 And the dignity of labour,
 I believe in right thinking and pure living,
 And in the inspirational power of woman,
 I believe in national re-birth,

In a new Empire and a new world.
I believe in the need of humbleness,
In the vision of the mountain tops,
I believe in God's guidance in the days ahead.
I believe.

All who desire to associate themselves with the Overseas brotherhood of service are asked to write for particulars of membership to the writer at Vernon House, Park Place, London, S. W. I., England, who will forward the name of the nearest Canadian representative.

ANDREA, ONCE MORE

ROYALL SNOW

Some say: great heart meets great in Raphael
While only soulless eyes find nothing there
Conceived sublime enough to make him heir
In adoration to great Gabriel;
And that, for all Andrea's perfect swell
Of modulated line and colour-flare,
His hand worked only—his heart was unaware
Those things eternal which the seraphs tell.

But yet there never lacked to perfect heart
A cunning hand to make its glory known,
Nor yet no perfect hand has ever shown
An ultimate perfection in high art
But there has beat within its subtle veins
Blood from a heart refined in infinite pains.