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THE NAVY LEAGUE IN CANADA.

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Prize Essay

Subject :

“ Shall Canada have a
Navy of Her Own ? ”

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MRS. W. HEWES OLIPHANT
 TORONTO.

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The Navy League is in no sense a partisan organization. It works for the welfare of the Empire, the preservation of peace, and the prosperity of the British Community.

Here in Canada its objects are :—

1. To bring home to Canadians a sense of their dependence on and interest in the Naval strength of the Empire.
2. To press upon public attention the need for a Canadian Naval Defence Force.
3. To show how Canada can best help the Royal Navy—locally—in time of war.
4. "As knowledge is power" so want of knowledge is weakness. This League seeks to remedy the prevailing lack of information on Naval matters by distributing literature on the subject to its members and the public press, and by promoting the teaching of Naval history in schools.

NAVY LEAGUE in CANADA

Shall Canada have a Navy of Her Own ?

The Prize Essay.

:: BY ::

Mrs. W. HEWES OLIPHANT.

Reprinted from "The Standard of Empire."

The following contribution has been awarded the \$400 prize offered by the Navy League of Canada for the best essay on the question: "Shall Canada have a Navy of Her Own?" The author is Mrs. W. Hewes Oliphant, 210, Simcoe Street, Toronto, Ontario.

No student of the present day, in view of the examples which crowd the history of the past, will attempt to deny to the ships which traverse the world's great highways, an influential, even a commanding share in moulding national destinies. No State has ever attained greatness without asserting and maintaining its title to the free and common use of the sea. No land-locked country has ever achieved any considerable sovereignty.

It is impossible to read Captain Mahan's admirable book, "The Influence of Sea Power upon History," to follow his engrossing story of the development of the great world Powers, to trace in his pages the growth, the perils, the conflicts, the triumphs of the nations of the past, in all of which the ships of history took their magnificent part; to mark, with him, the progress of Britain through the centuries which have developed and crowned her supremacy, without yielding a willing assent to his deduction that power on the high seas means, in the case of any nation, respect and an influential voice abroad, peace, progress, and development at home.

The subject of this paper presents, to every Canadian who professes an intelligent interest in his country, problems of paramount importance. And it is quite possible that our past consideration of these problems has, for reasons of one or another kind, not been really either independent or adequate. In the first place, we have a sort of national sensitiveness, almost amounting to self-consciousness, which has made many Canadians whose devotion to their country is beyond question impatient of suggestion or advice originating, or supposed to originate, in Great Britain. This restiveness of attitude is not confined to official hint, remonstrance, or what not, but to any governmental theory or conclusion which is not directly and primarily drawn by ourselves, from our own experience, in our own interests. We are impatient of anything which seems to savour of dictation or even advice from any standpoint but our own. The friendly Briton, official, semi-official, or unofficial, who tours among us, addresses our Canadian clubs, suggests, with greater or less modesty, according to his temperament, in what respects our public systems or ideals or ethics are faulty, or where we have failed in our duty, whether as dependents upon Great Britain or as members of a world-wide Imperial family, or even how we may best work out our own destiny as an independent nation, has done much, by his mere remonstrant presence, to divert or prevent fair-minded investigation from the purely Canadian point of view. That some Canadians held similar opinions before the Briton voiced them is not to the point. The result of his intervention in the supersensitive Canadian mind, is to make the controversy no longer Canadian only in its purpose and scope. The view is that the controversy ought to be settled by and among Canadians, and in the interests, primarily, at all events, of Canada. The Imperial purposes involved in the controversy become secondary in significance and importance. When the Canadian mind is made up from the Canadian standpoint, Canada will be prepared to discuss such imperial questions as this with the other members of the family. Meantime, Canada's conclusions and attitude are to be the result of Canadian inquiry and discussion. Another circumstance has hitherto stood in the way of a fair and just consideration of these problems by Canadians. We have been so busily engaged in growing up to national stature, and our growth has been so absorbing in its rapidity and consequent demands upon our young vitality, that we have had literally neither time nor strength to make full plans for the protection of the national

structure in the building of which we have so freely expended every present resource, and have with such high confidence pledged the resources of the future.

But it is no longer possible for any Canadian to deny to his country the status and dignity of a nation. British ideals and practice assure to us the continuance and growth of the powers of self-government with which we have been so long entrusted. Our connection with the British Crown, though informed by the deepest and most strenuous loyalty, is a connection which involves no economic fetters, and which is rapidly tending in all foreign relations towards freedom of contract and full powers of management, in respect of Canadian affairs. We make our own laws. No attempt is made at Imperial control of our trade tariffs with the world, including Britain. It seems no longer possible to withhold from us the right to make our own treaties, even in cases which may indirectly affect Imperial interests. British garrisons have been withdrawn, and Canada manages, without review or appeal, her military affairs. The great fortified harbours of Canada, which Britain deemed an essential part of that great maritime system by which she maintained her naval supremacy and effectively policed the world, have been assumed by Canada. In her outlook towards Britain, Canada, while loyal, is independent. She faces the rest of the world, in every essential sense, a free, autonomous, and Imperial Power.

The time has, therefore, come when this, and every other problem which nationhood presents, press for solution upon an adult country, whose leading strings are essentially severed. And the solution, to be acceptable and permanent, must be reached by applying Canadian minds to questions which are primarily of Canadian moment. Of these none is of greater interest or presents greater complexity than that of a Canadian Navy. It is not difficult to understand and appreciate the historical reasons for the interest we have always taken in the improvement of the Canadian Militia, while comparative indifference has marked our treatment of Canadian naval questions. Our geographical position and vicinage have hitherto accounted for the one and served in some degree to excuse the other. While we have had long frontiers, we have had little property at risk upon the seas. Our possessions have not attracted attention, or been likely to excite cupidity elsewhere than among our very good neighbours to the south. Such of our seaports as seemed vulnerable have been fortified

by Great Britain, and woven into her Imperial naval fabric. We have rested content in the comfortable knowledge that an Imperial North Atlantic or North Pacific Squadron always, either actually or potentially, hovered about our eastern and western sea coasts, sheltering them and our commerce under the historic prestige of which it was the symbol.

But the seaborne commerce proper to Canada has now assumed very considerable proportions, both eastward and westward, and it would seem that, if we are to learn and apply the lessons of history, and unless we are to repudiate the burdens incident to that independent commercial sovereignty which we have boldly claimed and fairly won, we must establish and demand, to secure the continuity and growth of our great and increasing seagoing trade, a thoroughly well grounded belief in the minds and consciences of other nations that we are ourselves able to give it an adequate and continuous protection. It is true that we already have the nucleus of a Navy; that is to say, we have ships which are exercising true naval functions.

Since 1885 we have protected our fisheries, both on the Atlantic seaboard and on the great lakes, by means of armed vessels, and our ships have done valuable hydrographic survey work, fitting work for a navy.

But in the wide, independent sense in which our sovereignty is conceived, the burden has never yet been acknowledged, much less lifted to our young shoulders.

In these days of "practical politics" it seems certain that the shouldering of any great financial obligation must be preceded by an intelligent realisation, first, of a duty with regard to it, and, second, of its significance and extent. Unless Canadians are persuaded (they will not be dragooned) into a belief in the existence of such a duty, it is unlikely that they will volunteer. Once convinced, they will not be deterred from undertaking and performing it by faint-hearted or penny-wise considerations. The Canadian attitude towards recognised obligations is, above all, essentially honest.

The first question, then, is whether there exists now a Canadian duty in the matter of a naval establishment. Or, it may be stated in another way, to emphasise the two elements which enter into the question: Do we, as Canadians, owe such a duty to Canada; that is, to ourselves? And, if we do, is it a duty which calls for performance under existing Canadian conditions?

The question, in its double aspect, must appeal to Canadians, if at all, as arising out of, and referable to, the independent commercial sovereignty already spoken of. It may be taken for granted that a Canadian navy, established for, and serving Canadian aims and objects, and managed by Canada from the Canadian standpoint and in Canadian interests, will, like her troops, be freely tendered for Imperial service on any occasion of Imperial stress. This, being granted once for all, disappears from the problem, and the Canadian view may be put and argued without reference to it.

Any existing Canadian duty ought to be referred primarily to the undisputed present national status of Canada. She is a country with sea-going traffic upon two oceans, and, therefore, a navy is an essential part of a well balanced national equipment. That Canada should have soldiers is, in this view, accepted both in theory and practice. That she should have sailors also is only another way of stating the original proposition that Canada has attained national stature. She cannot hope, limping into the arena of the world, to become a commercial factor in its progress. She must march in bearing those convincing insignia of her maturity and strength which a reasonably perfect equipment affords. She must hold up her head among the nations whose peer she proclaims herself to be, pointing to those twin guarantees of her efficiency—an army and a navy.

This first consideration, viz., the vital necessity of a navy to the national equipment of Canada, really covers much more of the ground usually debated than is plain in a casual glance. Clear ideas with regard to the proper functions of a navy must underlie the discussion. It will involve an examination of Canadian geographical and trade factors, because naval equipment becomes desirable or imperative in proportion to the extent to which the country's geographical position and its trade call for this branch of equipment. It will be concerned with the country's foreign relations, actual and possible, because Canadians will not blindly accept the burdens imposed by a naval equipment for the sake of protection against a mere bugbear or series of bugbears. It will call for careful inquiry into all questions of method and cost, because the nature and expense of equipment must bear true relations to the very purposes which the equipment is to serve. And all these questions must be examined and answered in the Canadian sense as distinguished from the Imperial.

There appear to be two principal modern theories with regard to the true functions of a navy as part of the national equipment. They are clearly stated, and strikingly discussed by Admiral P. H. Colomb. One theory assigns as its function the local defence of the country itself, the other the preservation of the great lines of trade communication. Both theories are, it will be observed, based upon the fundamental idea of defence. Aggression is no part, though it may become an incident in the working out of either theory. And each theory has been formulated as part of a policy applicable to Imperial conditions. In their application to those conditions, they have almost become rival theories, though they have never lost their purely defensive character. The extreme adherents of the first have, in theory, girded the navy about the British islands to repel attacks upon their coasts. The adherents of the second have advocated the distribution of the navy along the great established ocean highways of trade, viewing the ocean commerce of Britain as the true point of attack, to be guarded at all costs, by "keeping open the great sea routes from the heart to the extremities of the Empire." As Admiral Colomb says, the great trade routes bear "the income of the nation, scattered broadcast over the ocean." The key of the position, in the application of both theories, is the channel and other waters adjacent to Britain. But in the application of the home defence theory, it is the key because those waters are the avenues of hostile approach to the land itself. In the application of the other it is the key, because in those waters converge the trade routes which bear the nations' wealth, and the theory assumes that if the communications are preserved intact, no successful land attack can be made. The weight of the best naval opinion seems in favour of this view.

The statement of these two modern theories goes far to assist in defining the functions which a Canadian Navy should be designed, under present Canadian conditions, to perform. Our conditions are not essentially similar to those which, in Imperial discussions, make the theories rival rather than complementary. Our ocean commerce for the most part at least, is borne over the same great lines of communication which bear the commerce designed to be protected by the Imperial navy, and, indeed, forms part of that commerce. To assist in the protection of those highways may, and doubtless will be, in time of war, an appropriate use to which to put a Canadian navy. But it cannot be its primary or normal purpose, under existing conditions, even in case of war. Halifax,

St. John, Quebec, Montreal, indeed the whole of the lower St. Lawrence River ; Victoria, Vancouver, and, in the near future, Prince Rupert, all peculiarly ours, are possible points of attack, and must be made invulnerable, if at all, not by fortification merely, but by fleets of our own, flying our flag and patrolling the waters by which these points may be approached. The prime necessity, and therefore the paramount function, of our navy, must be the protection of our trade. Our commerce must safely get into and out of our ports, and, to that end, our seaboard must be effectively protected by our navy.

The commerce to be protected includes, of course, at all times, our fisheries and our Customs.

Our geographical position is unique. Our immediate neighbour is the United States, and the border line stretches from ocean to ocean. "E. B. O.," in the "National Review," Vol. XLVIII., goes so far as to say that it would not be possible for us to defend our border against an attack from that quarter. And he advises an acceleration of our population in the great West as a practical assurance of ultimate security. But the existence of any insecurity which the tremendous length of our frontier may involve does not directly bear upon the present discussion. Until the abrogation of present treaty obligations, neither country can maintain warships upon the great lakes forming so large a part of the frontier. In the most unlikely event of a conflict with our neighbour, our possession of sea-going war vessels will certainly not be a source of weakness. Nobody suggests either the length of our frontier or the improbability of such a conflict as a ground for reducing our Army, and neither circumstance ought to affect the present question.

Then we have two seaboards, perhaps three, for who shall say that Canada is not soon to have an Arctic outlet, by Arctic ports, for her commerce ? With commercial ports upon, and with products traversing, three oceans, it seems inevitable that our equipment must include a navy, or our ports and their trade, which is our wealth, must be at the mercy of the first strong hand to strike at them. The blow, if it come, will not fall upon our merchant ships when they have reached the area of that protection which Britain gives the great lines of communication, but in and about our home ports and our home waters.

And what of the volume of trade demanding protection, its great growth, its absorbing and magnificent prospects ?

Canadian merchant fleets ply from her Atlantic ports to all the markets of Europe, Africa, the Atlantic States, the West Indies, and South America, and from her Pacific ports to Australia, New Zealand, China and Japan, all bearing cargoes whose production and carriage are vital to our national growth. With the opening for agriculture of the great territory traversed by the new transcontinental railway, whose gradients are to make possible the shipment of our harvests to Europe by the Suez Canal, with the construction of railways to the Hudson Bay, and the establishment of the new carrying facilities from new seaports there to the food markets of Europe, with the remarkable and encouraging advance in ships and exports and imports using the established Atlantic routes, with the impetus which the All-Red Line must give to our shipping in every direction, we cannot longer hesitate to admit the existence of a national duty to insure the permanence of conditions so vital to the growth of the country. Whatever equipment may be necessary to their maintenance Canadians will cheerfully furnish and honestly keep up.

Our relations, actual and possible, with other countries call for some examination. Do they involve risk to the Canadian interests which have been imperfectly described, and is a protective equipment necessary for any reason arising out of them?

The time has not yet arrived when peaceful arbitrament shall supersede national strength and national readiness for conflict. The peace proposals with which altruists so much concern themselves do not, as yet, possess any reliable significance. Side by side with the more or less candid adherence by European nations to the theoretically beautiful doctrine of universal peace, they are diligently preparing themselves not for war, perhaps, but for geographical alterations—modifications of the world's map, which may not be compassed without physical contest. Their preparation is largely and intelligently directed towards naval armament. Not only in the settlement of European boundaries, but in all questions affecting her colonial and commercial interests that may arise, in Asia or Africa, Britain must have a voice. Imperial considerations must range her upon one side or the other of practically every controversy that may take place in the civilised world. This is an incident of her greatness. We would not have it otherwise. Our destinies are bound up in her. That in the course of these controversies she may find herself at any time bound to defend Imperial policy and Imperial interest

against another Power or a combination of other Powers, and that without any aggression on her part, requires no argument to make it plain. When that occasion comes, a vigilant and prepared foe may reasonably be expected to strike at a vulnerable part of the Imperial body. What point more vulnerable than our navyless Atlantic and St. Lawrence seaports ?

But Europe and its political complications are not the whole of Canada's possible embarrassment, perhaps not even the principal part. Our Western possessions realise acutely, even now, the great Asiatic immigration problems which the recent history of China and Japan may force upon us. Leaving out of the question the treaty between Great Britain and Japan, and the possible difficulties in our scheme of self-government which it may introduce, we must recognise the peculiar peril in which we stand if Japan, the most recent addition to important world-powers, should insist upon full recognition by us of her new status. Japan's attitude is that she has fought her way into the realm of national recognition. She is sensitive to a degree, and may shortly be found claiming, as an Eastern nation, rights of re-immigration and intercourse upon a Western basis. Suppose that Japan desires to foster the emigration of her subjects. We are conversely inviting immigration. But we will not have it from Asia. One need not be an alarmist in any sense to feel and realise that the situation may easily become critical. It must not be forgotten that further complications arise out of the existing treaty, and while the present Canadian arrangement has, at all events partially, composed Japanese irritation for the time, there is manifested by the Japanese people a disposition to evade the arrangement, and there is a clear feeling of dissatisfaction with it among our own people, accompanied by an unrest and agitation which are at least disturbing. Again, we look for the vulnerable spot, and find it in our navyless Pacific seaboard. Do we not need a protective equipment there ?

Upon the whole, it seems impossible to reject the conclusion that Canada should, for Canadian reasons, have a navy ; having regard to the functions of a naval equipment, our geographical and trade conditions and our relations, actual and possible, to the outside world.

The questions of method and cost remain to be considered, and may be conveniently treated together. On the one hand, we do not want a mere toy ; on the other, the conditions do not call for a fleet composed of Dreadnoughts and of Imperial dimensions.

In time of war we must as yet leave to Britain the task of confining the enemy within his own home ports and cutting off his outside sources of supply, directing our efforts towards the efficient protection of our sea gates and the peaceful traffic coming into and going out of them. In time of peace we must direct our efforts towards the building and preparation of ships and the training of men, with a view to a moderate but always efficient and continuous present strength, and to a capacity for such prompt additional mobilisation as will, without friction or strain, bring our navy at any time to such a war footing as becomes our needs.

Without attempting technical details, an outline plan may be presented which draws upon past experience and suggestion, in an endeavour to combine and adjust. The details must be left to trained hands.

Ships to a number and of type and armament bearing a fair peace proportion to a total war strength suitable to and reasonably sufficient for Canadian defence in the sense already mentioned, should be built, armed, manned, and put into commission, at reasonable intervals. For this purpose a moderate programme, providing for, say, two or three such ships a year for five years, or every other year for ten years, might be adopted without unduly taxing the resources of the country.

Meantime, moderate subsidies should be offered to the great Canadian companies which handle our merchant shipping, so as to induce them to build, for the merchant service, ships of a type capable of being quickly armed, and of so taking their places in a defensive naval scheme should occasion arise. The subsidies should be conditional upon satisfactory compliance with carefully designed types, and should secure immediate Governmental control and possession when required.

The whole plan should be carefully prepared and worked out with attention to technical detail as regards efficiency of construction and armament, and should be aimed at securing continuity of preparation.

The manning of a Canadian navy should not present much greater difficulty than the maintenance of a Canadian army. A naval volunteer force, with a provision for suitably equipped training stations, and for voluntary term service, would be as likely to appeal to the ever ready loyalty of young Canadians as a volunteer militia force, with term service and the liability to serve. Views somewhat like these were put forward by Lord Brassey in a speech before the Royal Colonial Institute

in 1878, but as part of a scheme for augmenting the Navy from the Imperial standpoint. He spoke of a "Colonial Naval Volunteer Force or Reserve," and pointed to the Canadian fishermen of our maritime provinces as admirable material for such a force. His idea was not to draw them away from the labour market altogether, but to take advantage of their winter leisure to make them into available naval material. If the objective point is made an active naval Canadian establishment instead of an Imperial reserve, there is no reason to suppose that training for such an establishment or enlisting for term service will be less popular or produce less satisfactory results than the equivalent provisions in our militia scheme. Out of our trained volunteer militia we have evolved a small regular enlisted army. Why should we not, out of a trained volunteer naval force, evolve a regular enrolled navy? The periods of training must be longer and more continuous, and, according to naval traditions, should commence at a somewhat earlier age. The enlisting or enrolling, during or after the completion of the training, would probably keep pace with the building and commissioning of the ships. Behind the manned ships and behind the subsidised merchant cruisers, ready to help to man the latter in time of war and liable to be called on for service, we should in time have an ample trained reserve, capable of efficient service in a Canadian navy as their brothers are in the Canadian army.

The command of our ships and the training of the men requires officers, and they also must be trained. For some time, no doubt, we should require Imperial assistance in this respect. So we did for our army in its early days. But as time and training have given us Canadians capable of commanding armies, so time and training will give us Canadians fit to command ships. With this in view, we should, no doubt, establish a Naval College as we have established a Military College. The necessary expansion of educational facilities would naturally and appropriately follow our first decisive move navywards.

In establishing training stations, it seems desirable to bring them to the people—to localise them. We may, therefore, perhaps, besides establishing such stations in or near some of our Atlantic and Pacific ports, follow the lead of our neighbours, who do not look upon training naval stations in ports of the Great Lakes as contrary to existing treaty provisions.

The cost of gradually building up a moderate naval establishment on the lines suggested is not beyond our means or disproportionate to the need for the expenditure. It is a sort

of insurance premium upon our national commerce. So is the expenditure upon our militia establishment. But even if the expenditure were larger, and the wealth insured by it smaller and incapable of that magnificent expansion for which we confidently look, we still owe to ourselves and to the world the duty of that measure of national equipment which is the burden of this paper, a duty which we cannot afford longer to remain unperformed.

Australia and New Zealand are both moving towards naval establishment. The writer (Hordern) of a remarkable article on Australian Naval Defence in the "United Service Magazine," Vol. XXXIV., takes strong ground against Australian contributions towards the Imperial Navy, in the administration of which Australia has no voice. He says that Australia's need for a navy is not so much the protection of her coast trade as "the maintenance of her freedom and the protection of her ideals against foreign interference." He is referring to Japanese immigration as a menace which only awaits the expiry of the Anglo-Japanese treaty to become an active peril; and counsels Australia to be ready, when the treaty expires, to offer herself to Britain as an ally, instead of Japan, and with a fleet. Recent advices from Australia indicate that her subsidy to the Imperial Navy will be withdrawn, and that she will build a navy of her own. Premier Deakin had already foreshadowed this in his naval scheme, "Navy League Annual," 1908-9, p. 160.

The proceedings of the Colonial Conference in 1907 disclose a considerable and very satisfactory advance towards soundness of view when compared with the report of the Naval Reserves Commission of 1902. In that report Colonial reserves were treated as mere nurseries for the Imperial Navy. The attitude of the Conference of 1907 towards the whole question was, however, much broader and more liberal. The Imperial representatives practically conceded the independent right of each colony to deal with her own naval problems from her own standpoint. This brings Canadians face to face with the Canadian question. Of its ultimate triumphant answer by Canada there can be no doubt. In her present solid achievement and her future splendid promise, and in the hostages she has given to fortune, it is already answered.

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