

Esperanto and the Language Question at the League of Nations

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Dr. Nitobe submitted this report to the Secretary-General of the League of Nations on August 31st, 1921, following his visit to the 13th World Esperanto Congress in Prague. Only the third section, slightly edited, was communicated to the national delegations and published in the Official Bulletin of the League. Because of the intrinsic historical interest of Dr. Nitobe's report, and its relevance for the issues debated at the Symposium, we are pleased to publish the text in full for the first time.

According to the character of its contents the present Report is divided into three parts.

I. The first part deals with an account of the Congress and the impressions it made upon the writer. It will naturally be descriptive and the impressions personal. The discussions and resolutions of the Congress will be omitted as the printed copy of the proceedings will be attached as soon as published.

II. In the second part a few elementary facts will be given to show the growth and the present state of the Esperanto movement. It is intended for the information of those who, like myself, have taken no particular interest in it; but as the Secretariat is constantly receiving communications on Esperanto and other linguistic schemes, a general knowledge of them may be of use.

III. The third part will be devoted to the consideration of the larger aspects of the language question as it particularly affects the League of Nations.

PART I. – CONGRESS AND ITS IMPRESSIONS.

(1) *Delegates of the League of Nations in the Congress.* The Universal Esperanto Association (U.E.A.) sent an invitation to the League of Nations to appoint a delegate to the 13th International Congress of Esperanto, to be held in Prague, July 31 – August 6. The Secretary General thought it best to dispatch some one who is acquainted with the language. Mr. Fujisawa of the Information Section was forthwith decided upon, as being about the only Esperantist in the Secretariat.

As my Section had to deal, however, with the numerous documents which have from time to time been addressed to the League by various international organisations, I was also asked by the Secretary General to attend the meeting. After finishing my engagement to speak in the League of Nations Union Summer School at Oxford, I went to Prague, taking Miss Stafford with me.

The Congress was formally opened in the morning of July 31st, in the large impressive building of the "Representacnidum", where nearly 3000 people were gathered. Several public men of Czecho-Slovakia took part in the opening ceremony. I was not present at this opening meeting, having only arrived in Prague in the course of the afternoon. The meeting was resumed after lunch and when I reached the hall I was told that the announcement, made in the forenoon, that the League of Nations was sending a delegate, was received with much enthusiasm, and that it was therefore only right that my arrival should be made known. When the Chairman announced that the League delegate had arrived there was such a hearty welcome that a response on my part became imperative. As I went with no idea of speaking, it was extremely embarrassing. I spoke in English, which was translated into Esperanto by Mr. Privat, the Vice-President of the Congress. In a few improvised sentences I tried to make three points – (1) that the League of Nations is interested in international movements of all kinds; (2) that a medium of

expression common to all the nations of the world is needed, but that it will likely take a long time for the League to find and adopt one; and (3) that one must be warned against division which is prone to arise in any great and successful movement. In this connection I believe I owe it to myself to correct a mis-statement which I understand was made in some newspapers. I did *not* say that the League of Nations would soon adopt Esperanto as an official language.

(2) *Programme of the Congress.*

	<i>Morning</i>	<i>Afternoon</i>	<i>Evening</i>
July 31	Permanent Congress Committee. Language Committee. Election of National Delegates.	Opening Session of the 13th Congress.	
Aug. 1	Session of U.E.A.	Business meeting of Congress.	Concert by Czech artistes.
Aug. 2	Sectional meetings.	Visit to Old Town & Castle. Continuation of Sectional meetings.	International Fancy Dress Ball.
Aug. 3	Business meeting of Congress.	Session of U.E.A.	Theatrical performance in Esperanto.
Aug. 4	Excursion.		
Aug. 5	Session of U.E.A.	Business meeting of Congress.	Concert by blind Esperantists.
Aug. 6	Closing Session of Congress.		

(3) *Official Personnel of the Congress, elected at the first meeting.*

President: Professor Kamary[t], Prague.
 Vice-Presidents: Mr. Warden, Edinburgh, and Dr. Arnhold, Dresden.
 Secretaries: Mme. Cense, Paris; Mlle. Schupichowa, Prague, and M. Pitlik, Commissioner of Trade Ministry, Prague.

Permanent Officials of the U.E.A.:

President: E. Stettler, Berne.
 Vice-President: Dr. Privat, Geneva.
 Secretary: H. Jakob, Geneva.

President of the Academy: Professor Cart, Paris.

Official delegates from Governments who spoke at the opening meeting were as follows: –
 Czecho-Slovakia H.E. the Minister of Education, Dr. Schusta.

Holland	Mr. Stevenhausen, representing the Minister of Education.
Spain	Major Mangada, representing the Minister of War.
Italy	Commandor Alessio, representing the Minister of Navy.
Finland	Mr. Setälä, representing the Minister of Education.
Lithuania	M. Modem, representing the Minister of Finance.
Saxony	Dr. Wicke, representing the Minister of Education.
Ukraine	M. Rotchkowsky, representing the Government.
Uruguay	M. H. Legrand, representing the Government.

Other official delegates:

Bureau International du Travail	M. Blumel.
International Red Cross Committee	Mr. Horner.

(4) *The attendance* was very large. This may be attributed to (a) low exchange of Czech kronen; (b) accessibility of Prague from other countries (such as Germany, Austria, Poland, Hungary, etc.) where Esperanto is well spread; (c) the great interest taken by the Czechs themselves; and (d) the cessation of meetings during the War.

(5) *The number of nationalities.* Thirty-six countries were represented by a number of delegates from national Esperanto organisations, as follows: –

Algiers	1
Argentine	4
Australia	3
Austria	83
Belgium	19
Bessarabia	1
Brazil	1
Britain	78
Bulgaria	32
Czecho-Slovakia	1702
Denmark	75
Danzig	5
Esthonia	2
Finland	15
France	91
Germany	289
Hungary	45
Italy	45
Jugoslavia	27
Japan	5
Canada	3
Lithuania	3
Cuba	2
Netherlands	73
Norway	12
Poland	72
Rumania	10
Russia	2
Spain	27
South Africa	1
Sweden	111
Switzerland	35

Turkey	2
United States	5
Ukraine	5
Uruguay	<u>1</u>
	<u>2557</u>

(6) *The social classes represented.* An appreciable portion of those present – nearly 40% – consisted of women. As to different professions, I obtained the impression that a large number were teachers. The following statistics were compiled not on the basis of actual presence, but from the number of those who expressed their intention to attend the Conference.

Teachers	201
Skilled workmen	189
Merchants	126
Students	103
Professors	36
Engineers	30
Advocates	22
Physicians	19
Journalists	14
Artists	12
Clergymen	10
Various professions	103

(7) *The high tone in discussion.* Without knowing any Esperanto I could understand from one-fourth to one-half of the speeches delivered, according to the clearness of the speaker. But always some one kindly seated himself by me and translated almost every sentence, and I was struck with the high note, the superior mental and moral calibre of the speakers. Some of them rose to flights of oratory. There were indeed some moving verses read as well as funny stories told. Anyway it was quite obvious that, not only can Esperanto be a medium for all sorts of mental operations and of temperamental moods, but that those present at the Congress were persons of more than average intelligence.

If there is no doubt about their intelligence, there may still remain some doubt as to the mental equipoise of the advocates of Esperanto. A very common remark is that they are hobbyists, cranks, unbalanced zealots, etc. – criticism cast on all pioneers of new enterprises. It was told me that among the Esperantists one often finds persons with peculiar scruples, or what we may call queer notions, e.g. strong teetotalers, vegetarians, religious fanatics, etc. I felt I could verify this statement – not, however, to their discredit, but rather in their favour. It is only to be expected that idealism and independence of mind should manifest themselves in ways divergent from the beaten tracks of the every-day world.

(8) It was told me more than once that the Esperantists are usually “poor”, and it is even stated by a good authority that the cause of Esperanto was taken up by the “proletariat”. The Congress gave me the impression that it was typical of the seriously minded intelligent middle class, whatever the occupation. Perhaps the labouring classes could ill afford to make the trip to Prague or even to bear the expenses of representation. But it is true that this linguistic scheme has enlisted the sympathy of labour. I shall have to treat of this later.

(9) *Harmony and Zeal.* It is very much to the credit of the Esperantists that they make up by their zeal for financial deficiencies, and I think it is in this zeal that the future of the language largely lies. There seems to exist a deeper bond than that of a common tongue which makes them the united body they are. This bond is, I believe, their common reverence for the founder, Dr.

Zamenhof, whom they usually call “the Master”. Certainly Dr. Zamenhof was a very remarkable personage both as regards ability and character – a great linguist and original thinker as well as an amiable, reverent gentleman. Another common tie is evidently what they call the “interna ideo” – the internal idea. To this I shall have occasion to refer later on. Whether it is due to this idea or not, one could but be impressed with the spirit of harmony which prevailed in the Congress, despite a good deal of divergence of opinion. Of this last point – divergence of opinion – I had had some intimation, and it was that which I had in mind when I warned against division by citing the words “United we stand. Divided we fall.”

(10) *The League of Nations and the Congress.* Those Esperantists who are acquainted with the objects of the League feel at once that these coincide with their “interna ideo”. For this reason they seem to be especially gratified to see the League taking interest in their work. Besides, there is another and more material reason why they greet the attention of the League. They have done an enormous amount of propaganda work and, considering the small financial support they have, it is astonishing to see how much they have accomplished. The propaganda is still going on. But they are well aware that they have no open recognition from any officially instituted body of high order or of great influence.

Victims of derision and of indifference from principalities and powers, they are, I believe, in search of an authority to endorse their cause, and feeling a common bond of union in the ultimate aim, they look to the League as their most probable patron and protagonist. Hence the cordiality with which the League delegation was received. At the same time one can easily conjecture that among the 3000 present, a large number were either totally ignorant of the existence of the League or positively inimical to it. It must be remembered that large delegations came from countries not members of the League – e.g. Hungary sent 45, Germany 289. There were besides representatives from Lithuania, Esthonia, Turkey, Bessarabia, Ukrainia, etc. If there were any among them who were not favourably disposed to the League, no evidence of this was given. On the contrary, the few individuals of these nations with whom we came in direct contact, were exceedingly friendly. I sincerely hope nothing was done to wound their sensibilities by the presence of League delegates.

To those – I dare say not a few – who were innocent of such an organisation as the League of Nations, no proof was more convincing of its existence than that it should have sent a delegation. It was repeatedly stated by different people that the Congress rendered great propaganda service for the League.

How much the Esperantists trust to the League for sympathy and for the realisation of their idea, can be gathered from the unanimous resolution they passed: –

“Thirteenth Universal Esperanto Congress 2500 Delegates 40 nations respectfully asks the League to recommend gradual introduction of Esperanto teaching in the schools of her Members in order to help popular education league’s ideal.”

Universal Esperanto Association.

(11) *Invitation from Ido Congress.* At the latter end of the Esperanto Congress I was asked by Major Tanner of Berne, who is interested in both Esperanto and Ido, to attend the Ido Congress which was to take place in Vienna the following week, August 8th. He desired me to study and compare the two artificial universal languages before expressing my opinion on either. The Secretariat has received a number of pamphlets and letters from the Idists as it has from the Esperantists. That there is keen rivalry, not to say bitter feeling between the two, is well known. The League of Nations does not, of course, take sides with either, nor will it exert itself in mediating between them as the war of tongues lies outside the pale of its aims to avert! In fact, between these two so-called “neutral” but in reality quite belligerent tongues, the League maintains strict neutrality. I make this statement so that the Idist may understand exactly where the League stands. For myself, I know as little of Ido as of Esperanto and my mind is a perfect *tabula rasa* on the moot question which of the two pasilalies – to me a well-nigh obsolete term

for the sake of brevity – is more practical or scientific.

I was told that the Ido congress in Vienna requested the Secretary General by telegram to send me thither. When I was advised of this I wired myself to the Secretary General inquiring whether I should attend the Congress. He was of opinion that in view of the imminence of the Assembly, I should return to Geneva as soon as possible. I regret that I had no time to meet the Idists, but I am sure they understand why. Under circumstances so plain, it was impossible to do so. I learned afterwards that this first International Ido Congress was attended by 70-80 people.

PART II. – OBSERVATIONS ON THE ESPERANTO MOVEMENT.

It is a mere platitude to assert that there is no barrier between nations harder to overcome than language. It is a barrier that does not stop at the tongue, as it strikes its root in the manner of expressing thought and often in the very spring of thought itself. The difference in language was identified with that of race and was regarded as a just reason for enmity, as is hinted in such terms as Babel, barbarian, balbus, etc. This linguistic barrier is now increasing with the rise of new nationalities.⁴ In Europe alone forty-nine languages are in actual use. Suppose each desires to be heard! Hence the urgent need of a common language is more than ever felt.

But which shall it be? The so-called dead languages can hardly be resuscitated. Among the living languages, much as English⁵ is spread beyond Anglo-Saxon lands and precise as French is, to propose either as an international medium would be to arouse antagonism, for fear of undue political and commercial preponderance of their native speakers. The only existing tongue that was seriously advanced for candidature of world-language was Norwegian, because of its comparative simplicity and its immunity from national jealousy. It is doubtful how seriously M. Paul Chappelier's proposal of concluding a linguistic treaty whereby England and the United States shall make the teaching of French compulsory in English and American schools, and that of English in French schools, will be taken up in these countries. Moreover, as one of the greatest linguists (H. Sweet) has said, all national languages are equally difficult. It is a very true remark of M. M. Breal that a national language would have more to lose than to gain from being internationalised, as it would be travestied and lose its own character and originality.

A neutral language claiming no nationality most certainly stands the best chance of general adoption. A very common objection that an artificial language has no life cannot carry much weight. Automobiles have no life but they are doing the work of horses very much better without, however, blotting them out of existence. In the last 250 years, ever since Descartes advanced the idea of a "philosophical language" there were proposed about one hundred different lingual systems artificially created. Some of them were no better than the intellectual pastime of linguists. Most of them were biased in favour of one or another natural language, though it is a significant fact that the inventors are never partial to their native speech. It cannot be too strongly emphasised, as there is a wide-spread misconception on this point, that in the later attempts at artificial languages a universal philosophical language is not sought after, but rather an auxiliary international language – a linguistic scheme designed for use side by side with a native speech. The purpose of such a scheme is not to supplant but to supplement the mother-tongue of various countries. It aspires to do for different peoples what "musical notation does for musicians, flag-signalling at sea for sailors and signs for mathematicians." It will not hurt any national language any more than stenography will calligraphy.

Of these different later attempts at a pasilaly only Volapük (invented by Bishop Schleyer of Baden in 1879) attained any degree of success – this being due chiefly to the fact that its vocabulary was made up largely of English words, though so badly mutilated that identification was difficult. But before it made much headway, it had to encounter a new rival in the form of Esperanto, and partly by the sheer law of the survival of the fittest, and partly because of the dissensions between the inventor and the Academy which was founded, Volapük has practically died out. Attempts to revive it were made by a Russian (Rosentberger) and an American (Holmes) with improvements, under the name of Idiom Neutral; but this did not go much further

than a mere project though in a modified form it is continued by Professor Peano of Turin. In these later phases of the Volapük development, the influence of Esperanto can be clearly traced.

Esperanto is an international auxiliary language invented by Dr. Zamenhof, an oculist in Warsaw, who published in 1887 an essay on "An International Language by Dr. Esperanto" (i.e. one who hopes). Since then it has spread with great rapidity throughout the world by reason of the many advantages it possesses over natural and national languages. These advantages are more obvious when it is used by Europeans, since (1) nearly the whole of the vocabulary consists of root-words borrowed from modern Romance and Germanic languages; (2) the grammar is exceedingly simple, consisting of sixteen rules, without any exception; (3) its phonetic character, too is another attraction; (4) in the formation of new words there seems to be great flexibility and latitude allowed. All these advantages are claimed with perhaps equally good reason by the Idists; but this report is concerned with Esperanto.

Of the ease with which it can be mastered, compared with natural languages, there is no doubt, as has been testified by experience and experiments. With those who are specially endowed with the gift of tongues, it is no exaggeration to say that it is a matter of a few hours to be able to read Esperanto. Clark, the author of "International Language", estimates that the ease of learning Esperanto is three to five times as great as mastering the "unnecessary" difficulties of a natural language. The late Sir William Ramsay was of opinion that "an English child can learn Esperanto in at most six months, so as to be able to read, speak and write it." As to the vocabulary, which is based on two or three thousand root-words, whoever knows any modern European language will easily recognise many familiar words. It is said that the labour of learning the words of a language is five times greater than learning the grammar. Esperantists calculate that 75 per cent. of their vocabulary is of French derivation, 65 per cent. English and 50 per cent. German.⁶

Without doubt it was above all else the advantage of easy acquisition that made Esperanto so popular; but to do full justice to it, we must not omit to mention the underlying motive which prompted the inventor in his work.

Born in Bielostock, Poland, where he was constant witness of bitter race hatred between Russians, Poles, Germans and Jews, Zamenhof, when only in his 'teens, determined to find some means of reconciling and uniting them. Later he declared that it was not practical utility which was his main inspiration but the "idea of brotherhood and justice among all peoples". This idea, which his followers still cherish under the name of "interna ideo", was stated by Zamenhof himself as the Esperantists' aim "to establish a neutral foundation, on which the various races of mankind may hold peaceful, brotherly intercourse, without obtruding on each other their racial differences." (Presidential address at the Third Esperanto Congress at Cambridge, 1907). From the standpoint of a purely philological interest, this sentimental aspect of Esperanto, known as Homaranism, may strike the uninitiated as superfluous and even harmful. It has been ridiculed by its opponents (Beaufront) as a sort of religious dilettantism. To dilate on this highly interesting theme of "interna ideo" would easily lead one away from the question of language, and I shall refrain from doing so in this report.

The practical manifestation of this high moral sense, which proved to be an effective factor in spreading Esperanto, is shown in the self-effacement of Dr. Zamenhof. He invented the general system but left further perfection to others – a course in direct opposition to Schleyer, who claimed, to his cost, the absolute ownership of Volapük.

To return to the narration. Within a dozen years of its first publication, Esperanto could boast of 26 societies for its propagation in different countries, and the number increased steadily, amounting to nearly 3000 before the war. The societies dotted the whole globe, including many places out of the usual line of world's communication in South America, Africa, India, China, East Indies, etc.

By 1905, the movement had so far advanced that a World Congress was called where only Esperanto should be spoken. So in Boulogne some six hundred Esperantists of various

nationalities met under the presidency of Zamenhof, to the entire satisfaction of all present and to the amazement of the sceptical and the scoffing. Having scored this triumph, the Esperantists have held since then a World Congress every year in Geneva, Cambridge, Dresden, Barcelona, Washington, Antwerp, Cracow. The Tenth Congress was convoked in Paris on the 2nd of August 1914; it met for one day and adjourned. During the War a Congress was held but once, in San Francisco. After that no active work was possible until last year, when a comparatively small Congress was held at The Hague. The usual attendance at these meetings numbered from 600 to 1700, the smallest being 400 at The Hague in 1920. As to the number of Esperanto students, it is variously estimated by various authorities. One frequently sees 1,000,000 given, and the most modest statement gives a total of 300,000.

The Esperantists have organised, according to different purposes: –

(1) *The Language Committee*, consisting of 120 members from all over the world, for the purpose of watching over the development of the language. It meets once a year. The work of the Committee is, however, usually done by a much smaller committee called

(2) *The Academy*, composed of fourteen most competent authorities among the members.

(3) *The Congress Organising Committee*, whose name clearly indicates its duties.

(4) *The Central Office*, which is in Paris, where archives are kept and where is lodged the Secretariat of the above three Committees.

(5) A very important and useful body is the *Universal Esperanto Association* (U.E.A.), with its seat in Geneva, which aims at the spread of Esperanto by putting it into practical use, thus proving its immediate utility. This Association renders aid to its members by furnishing information on any subject, and, in their travels in foreign countries, making members acquainted with each other. It publishes every year a Year Book giving addresses of all delegates in pretty nearly every town of any size in the world.

Besides these organisations each nation has an association of its own consisting of local groups. There are also so-called specialist societies organised by doctors, teachers, postal officials, photographers, students, pacifists, scientists, vegetarians, labourers, etc. Thus an Esperantist may be a member of his local group, then of his national association, of a special society, of the U.E.A., besides being a member of the Academy. One can see how an esprit de corps is encouraged in this linguistic venture. “Even so the tongue is a little member and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!”

These various national or specialist bodies have usually organs of their own, so that at the time of the War there were over 100 periodicals issued in Esperanto in different parts of the world. During the War the number dwindled to about one-third and now it is again fast picking up lost ground. France, Germany and Holland have each a journal in Esperanto exclusively devoted to labour interests. Worthy of special mention is the periodical for the blind, which is said to outnumber in subscriptions any other magazine published in the Braille system. For one blind man to come into contact with another from a foreign country, through Esperanto, is equivalent “to the lifting of a veil between him and the outer world, coming next to recovering his sight!”

Besides the regular periodicals and pamphlets for propaganda, the literature in Esperanto includes a number of original works of fiction and verse as well as of translations from classical and popular writers, among other the New Testament, several books of the Old Testament, some plays of Shakespeare, etc. One prominent feature of Esperanto literature, easy to explain, is the prominence of writers of small languages, Finnish, Flemish, Serbian and Polish. Naturally the compilation of dictionaries in all the main languages was given first attention. Technical dictionaries of different sciences are being edited by specialists, such as those on Medicine, on Botany, Chemistry, Mathematics, etc.

But the course of the development of Esperanto was by no means smooth. Worse than the indifference and suspicion with which it was received by the public, the schism within the camp wrought havoc to its cause, particularly when the dissenters formed a group and advanced a new

system entitled Ido. To make this point clear we must go back a few years to 1900, when, on the occasion of the Paris Exhibition there was organised, as a result of congresses of learned societies, the Delegation for the Choice of an International Auxiliary Language. In the declaration issued by this Delegation, the International Association of Academies was given the first right to choose such a language, but in the event of the Association failing to act, the Delegation should appoint a Committee for the purpose, and this Committee should create a society for the propaganda of the language chosen. It was not until seven years later that the subject was brought up officially in the Association, only to be decided that it did not fall within its competence. Thereupon, the Committee of Delegation consisting of twelve members, was formed and in its meeting a few months after (Oct. 1907) it decided to adopt Esperanto in principle, subject to some modification in accordance with the Ido project.⁷ It made advances to the Esperanto Language Committee for co-operation, but owing to a dispute as to the ultimate authority of different bodies and to some personal acrimony, there resulted a complete separation between the Esperantists and the Idists. Henceforth each party pursued its way quite independent of the other; and all efforts made to reconcile them have thus far failed. The Delegation, having accomplished the duties assigned to it, was dissolved in July 1910, and the work of propaganda was taken up by the "Union for the International Language" which has its seat in Zurich. Some of the most prominent Esperantists espoused the new system, others proposed another system utilising the superior points of both – Dr. de Saussure's "Esperantida" – as its name indicates.

This schism strikes an outsider as exceedingly unfortunate; but as its cause lies – aside from some personal bickering – in the claim of innate superiority, it seems to me possible that it had a wholesome effect in improving them both and in whetting the zeal of their respective adherents. It is not for me to pass any judgment as to their respective merits. Only, to a superficial observer, it looks as though Esperanto is easier to learn, is hence more practical and popular and more widely spread, whereas Ido is more elaborate, academic and perhaps more logical. Though without a thorough and unbiased investigation it is impossible to determine which intrinsically is superior, one may ask: – "Must an artificial language be perfect before it can be accepted, or should convenience and utility determine its adoption? Should an artificial language have for its object facilities of international communication or superiority to existing tongues in accuracy, exactitude and euphony?" The answer to these questions does not lie within the scope of the present Report or the mental equipment of its writer. But while the linguists may be disputing, the need of a world language is growing daily more pressing.

The urgency of the question finds expression in the Association for the Creation of a Universal Language Bureau, which was founded in 1911 with its seat in Berne. Its object is to prepare and promote diplomatic action with a view to establishing a Universal Language Union between the various nations and creating a Universal Language Bureau whose duty it shall be, acting for the Union, to introduce, develop and apply an officially recognised international auxiliary language. The Association, officially "maintains the strictest neutrality in regard to existing systems of international auxiliary language or any which may subsequently come into existence"; but its impartiality has been somewhat suspected on account of the predominance of Idists in the official staff. From my knowledge of this particular Association it must be said that it has been greatly impaired in its activity by the War and seems to be still suffering from its effects. In its present quiescent state, this Association, which aspires to be an arbiter and mediator in the strife of tongues, watches on the one hand its mantle falling upon another new, vigorous, scientific body (the International Research Council), which will carry on investigations into the whole subject; and on the other hand the great strides in propaganda taken by the Esperantists. If the legal fiction that "possession is nine points of the law" be applied, it must be owned that Esperanto does to all appearance have every advantage at present.

PART III. – THE LANGUAGE QUESTION & THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS.

When in a short speech in the recent Esperanto Congress I stated that the League of Nations is interested in international movements of all kinds, there was an implication that the Secretary-General sent a delegate to the Congress *not* because it was Esperantist but because it was

international. Officially this attitude is sufficient; but I hope I am not going too far if I dare suggest to the Secretary-General the importance of calling sooner or later the attention of the Council and of the Assembly to the question of an international language. M. Hanotaux remarked in the first Assembly that “the question of languages, the solution of which presents many difficulties, is not yet ripe for discussion”. I shall not dispute the assertion of this eminent Academician, especially as I believe he meant the question is still immature for discussion in the Assembly; but I presume he will admit that the question has now reached the stage where it is not merely academic, but where, for practical reasons, it can no longer be ignored. I believe there are particular reasons why the League of Nations should take up this subject. I even believe that the League is committed to the task of its solution.

(1) When in the first Assembly the question of recognising Spanish as an official language of the League, at least in the discussion of the Assembly, came up, M. Tittoni immediately reminded the Assembly that the Italian delegation had a similar proposal to make with regard to the use of the Italian language and added that one must not forget that other delegations have also a national language. The subject being referred to a Committee, it was discussed materially from the point of view of the practical working of the League on the one hand and of economy on the other – other and more delicate and fundamental points being carefully avoided. The result was the adoption of English and French in practice, without officially excluding any other tongue. This decision was come to only by what the Committee lauded as “a spirit of self-sacrifice and devotion to the common welfare” on the part of the Spanish-speaking representatives who “agreed not to insist on their proposal at this session, although making reservation with respect to the future” – a reservation that may cease at any moment. Mr. Balfour, Chairman of that Committee, spoke of the above arrangement as “the best under present circumstances” and at the same time admitted that it did not pretend to have solved entirely this difficult problem. Thus the question is still pending and may be brought up at any time in the League, whose States Members speak 28 languages exclusive of some important dialects! The fact that the treaties of which the Covenant forms a part are in French and English, is in itself a pretty substantial reason for limiting speech to these two languages.

Apart from the general argument which makes the international aspect of the language problem devolve upon the League, we must remember that the bi-lingual arrangement of the League places a heavy handicap on some nations and thus evokes a question of justice.

(2) *Need of an auxiliary language in the League of Nations for adequate representation.* It is not quite fair for French and English speaking Powers, already great in other respects, to make their own languages practically the only media of expression and thus deny other nations equal linguistic opportunity. Attention is called to this obvious question not because of its ethical implication, but because of its grave practical consequences. In many countries the choice of delegates to the Council or the Assembly is limited to a very narrow circle of those who can command English or French with at least tolerable ease, and usually, as this circle consists of diplomats, professional linguists, school teachers and traders, many of those best fitted for the work of the League of Nations are passed over. When speeches are delivered at meetings in a tongue not understood by all, some members are inclined to leave the room or to get restless. Moreover, the most unselfish person will hesitate to expose himself and his nation, as long as he is a national delegate, to the chance of indignity and ridicule by presenting his case, however excellent, in broken French or English!

This grave handicap cannot be radically overcome by the mere adoption of an auxiliary language, which would probably be based on Western (European) linguistic systems without any reference to those of the Orient. I do not believe, however, that the Orient will raise any objection on this score.

Apparently there is no immediate remedy for the linguistic partiality in the League. It is not to suggest a remedy that this paragraph is written, but to point out that this fact must always be kept in view.

(3) *Need of an authority to endorse an artificial language.* For some years past competent authorities who have studied the feasibility of a common language looked for a properly authorised international body to pass verdict on its use and usefulness.

In a report of the Commission appointed by the Prime Minister to enquire into the position of modern languages in the educational system of Great Britain (April 1918), the opinion is expressed that “it might be worth the while of the Government, in concert with our Allies, to appoint a Committee to enquire into the potentialities of artificial languages such as Esperanto and its rivals. A universal language needs stability and this cannot be attained unless by some extensive international agreement.”

Professor H. Sweet, in suggesting a provisional adoption in the near future of an adapted language, expresses his conviction that it can be imposed only by a competent tribunal of scientific linguists (see his article on Universal Language in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*).

Numerous documents which are worthy of consideration have from time to time reached the Secretariat from important bodies in different countries, urging the League of Nations to consider the question of an international language. I dare say that among politicians and so-called practical people there prevails a notion that an international language is a hobby of cranks, and this feeling distracts from it the attention which its intrinsic gravity deserves. Indeed, the solution of questions of such far-reaching cultural importance as an international language is certainly one of the constructive means by which the ideals of the Covenant will be realised.

(4) *Need as a check to increasing natural languages.* While, on the one hand, the world is shrinking and the peoples are coming closer, there is every evidence that national languages are growing in number. The Irish delight in reviving Gaelic. The Czechs are again bringing into prominent use their once great language. Apart from the establishment of a Flemish University, the Languages Bill was a subject of heated and protracted debate in the recent Session of the Belgian Chamber. The Towers of Babel are multiplying, making worse than ever intercommunication and inter-communion among the nations of the earth. It seems to me that it is just to those numerically smaller nations which insist upon their own languages to admit that an auxiliary tongue will prove of greatest value. Moreover, when English and French were practically made the only official languages – and in my private view very properly – for reasons of economy, as the Committee Report says, this decision meant an apparent, near-view economy in the saving of time and money in translation. A large world-wide view of economy will render a different judgment. As Professor Pfaundler (Graz) said, if there are ten districts in a city to be connected by a pneumatic post with each other, each district must provide itself with nine tubes and the whole city will require $(10 \times 9)/2 = 45$ tubes; but that if one common central bureau were established, ten tubes would suffice. From the view-point of world economy no linguistic device is more reasonable and cheaper than the adoption of a common tongue.

It is, of course, needless to add that the smaller nationalities, eager as they are to develop their national tongue, feel more than larger countries the need for an auxiliary language. Hence, in the education laws of Czecho-Slovakia, as I understand, Esperanto is made an optional study in schools. The Parliament of Finland, after a long debate, voted in March of this year 25,000 marks to subsidise the Esperanto cause. The wide interest taken by the Swiss in Esperanto is too well known to repeat. The Bulgarian Government is similarly encouraging Esperanto instruction in its State schools, as is likewise the Free State of Hesse.

(5) *Need for an international language in commerce.* It is a truism that for the purposes of trade a common language is indispensable, and the larger foreign trade grows the greater is the need of a common language. This need is made clear by the fact that a number of Chambers of Commerce recommend the use and the teaching of an artificial language. A notable case took place in February of the present year (1921), when the Chamber of Commerce of Paris, after careful comparison of Esperanto with French (to see if the former can convey the precision of the latter), decided to introduce optional instruction in Esperanto in all its commercial schools and to recommend to the Chambers of Commerce of all countries that they should afford facilities for

commercial transactions by a rapid propagation of an auxiliary language.

The London Chamber of Commerce passed a similar resolution about two years ago, and in the schools under its management Esperanto is made an optional study for which diplomas may be granted.

I understand that in the international meeting of the Chambers of Commerce in London in June 1921, two Committees, one on Transit and the other on Standardisation, took up for study the question of an international language. It was also for its commercial utility that Esperanto was introduced into schools in Breslau, Chemnitz, Geneva, Milan and many other towns. It is said that of late a great many international fairs have advertised in Esperanto, as, for instance, in Paris, Lyons, Ghent, Frankfort, Breslau, Leipzig, Padua, Helsingfors.

(6) *Need for a common language in science.* Science, essentially international in character, must be provided with a rich, accurate and exact means of intercommunication, such as Latin once was. Since the beginning of the 17th century, by which time the use of Latin had diminished as a scientific language, this need has been keenly felt. When, in 1900, international congresses of learned societies, which were convened on the occasion of the Paris Exhibition, appointed a "Delegation for the Choice of an International Auxiliary Language," it was largely in the interest of scientific intercommunication. Or, to take a newer development, an appeal has quite recently been signed by twenty-one members of the French Academy of Science, urging the adoption of Esperanto in scientific literature and the introduction of the same into schools. When French savants advocate a neutral medium, it is easy to understand why the learned bodies of small languages, such as the Czech and Hungarian Academies of Science, have made official use of it.

As interchange of ideas and information becomes more extensive in the domain of science, a common language becomes an absolute necessity and its urgency is best shown by the following Resolutions adopted at the meeting of the International Research Council in Brussels in July 1919:

"(a) That the International Research Council appoint a Committee to investigate and report to it the present status and possible outlook of the general problem of an international auxiliary language.

"(b) That the Committee be authorised to co-operate in its studies with other organisations engaged in the same work. *Provided* that nothing in these Resolutions shall be interpreted as giving the Committee any authority to commit the Council to approval of any particular project, either in whole or in part."

As a result of the appointment of this Committee, similar co-operating Committees have since been appointed by the following bodies:

British Association for the Advancement of Science (B.A.A.S.).
Classical Association of Great Britain (B.C.A.).
American Association for the Advancement of Science (A.A.A.S.).
American Council on Education.
American Classical League.
American Philological Association.
American Council of Learned Societies.

At the annual meeting of the British Association at Cardiff in August 1920, their Committee submitted an interim report covering its preliminary work, and will present a complete report this year at the Edinburgh meeting, September 9th.8_

The purpose of these various Committees is to ensure that the approach to the problem is taken in an adequately broad and conservative manner and that no important aspect of the question involved shall be over-looked.

The B.A.A.S. had, in its meeting of 1919, appointed, from its Section on Educational Science, a Committee to study the practicality of an international language. The B.C.A. did likewise. The

four American Associations – all important bodies – have already either authorised or appointed Committees on the subject.

(7) *Need felt for an international language in the labour world.* Much as I personally dislike to speak of the labouring population as a separate class, as they form such an important body with distinct demands of their own, and as their class consciousness overleaps national bounds, it should be noted that their need for a common language is becoming very pronounced. Labour has joined enthusiastically in the Esperanto movement. When the question of an international language was brought up in the Swedish Parliament – as was repeatedly done in 1911, 1912, 1915, 1917 and 1919 – it was always expected that the Social Democrats would vote in its favour. We may also remember that, some years before the war, German and English Trade Unionists exchanged visits in Esperanto. In the recent Esperanto Congress in Prague about two hundred manual workers were present as delegates. While the rich and the cultured enjoy *belles lettres* and scientific treatises in the original, the poor and the humble make of Esperanto a *lingua franca* for their exchange of views. Esperanto is thus becoming an engine of international democracy and of strong combination. This interest of the masses must be taken account of in a rational and sympathetic spirit when making a study of this question of a common language. The International Labour Bureau is even contemplating the publication of some of its documents in Esperanto.

(8) In the preceding paragraphs I have advanced no new arguments, having simply presented some facts under different headings to prove that many powerful organisations, with very different objects and covering very wide fields of human activity, are seeking for the practical solution of the universal language. That the world's progress is impeded by linguistic barriers is a statement no longer to be despised as a platitude. It embodies a serious menace to the cause of peace.

The League should profit by the voice of those individuals or organisations which have had long experience in dealing with international meetings.

In September 1920, at the World Congress of the Union of International Associations at Brussels, a resolution was passed unanimously (with the exception of one vote for the French language) recommending to all interested in the progress of the world-language problem that these should join the Esperanto movement, and should postpone all theoretical discussion about linguistic details until the language be officially adopted by inter-governmental decision. If frequent references are made to Esperanto in this report, where I am treating of an international language in general, it is not because I espouse its cause (for I do not – at least, not yet), but because it supplies the best examples.

In the 10th meeting of the International Co-operative Alliance held recently (August 1921) in Basle, Sir William Maxwell, in his presidential address, referred to Esperanto, and added how much the work of the Alliance would be facilitated by the adoption of one channel for the purpose of carrying one's ideas and thoughts at a meeting like this. Sir William knows what it means to preside at conferences where every word spoken in English must be translated into German and French, and *vice versa*! I have had occasion to mention that no less than 28 languages are in use in the countries represented in the League. A number of them (Gaelic, Romance, Basque, etc.) will scarcely claim to be heard in the Assembly. Suppose, therefore, there are 22 languages officially employed in the forty-eight States Members. Apply the formula $(22 \times 21)/2$ and we have 231 as the number of translations to be made if each Delegation were to speak but once in the Assembly! The absurdity of such a figure is an argument for the necessity of considering the question of an international language. If the time is still too soon for the Assembly to adopt it, as I believe it is, it certainly is late enough for an authoritative body entrusted by the League to make enquiries concerning it, with a view of meeting the demands of science and commerce, and the still higher need for an instrument for international understanding and co-operation which are the preliminary conditions of lasting peace. The League may well ask, without committing itself too deeply, "Is an international auxiliary language possible? If possible, how far is it practicable? If sufficiently practicable, is it advisable to encourage it? If so,

what should the League do?"

4 A. Meillet: "Les Langues dans l'Europe nouvelle", 1918.

5 English is the native language of nearly 200,000,000 people and the administrative language for 500,000,000, one third of the world's population.

6 Ido contains 91 per cent. of French roots and 79 per cent. of English.

7 The system which the Committee proposed was officially called the International Language of the Delegation. For brevity's sake the name ILO, from the initial letters of International Language was suggested; but IDO was finally adopted, which was the pseudonym under which Marquis L. de Beaufront presented his scheme to the Delegation. IDO is formed from an Esperanto suffix meaning "descendant, offspring of".

– See *Beaufront*, IDO, 1917, p.12.

8 The Report of the Committee on an International Auxiliary Language of the British Association for the Advancement of Science has been made public and its conclusions are as follows:

(1) Latin is too difficult to serve as an International Auxiliary Language.

(2) The adoption of any modern national language would confer undue advantages and excite jealousy.

(3) Therefore an invented language is best. Esperanto and Ido are suitable; but the Committee is not prepared to decide between them.