Report.

The Prince of Wales, as President, attended a recent meeting of the Imperial War Graves Commission, at which the following members were present:

Viscount Milner (Secretary of State for War), Chairman;
Mr. Walter H. Long (Secretary of State for the Colonies);
Lord Islington, (Under-Secretary of State for India);
Sir Alfred Mond (First Commissioner of Works);
The Hon. Sir George Perley (High Commissioner for Canada);
Mr. E. A. Box (representing the High Commissioner for Australia);
The Hon. Sir Thomas Mackenzie (High Commissioner for New Zealand);
Mr. W. P. Schreiner (High Commissioner for the Union of South Africa);
Dr. E. F. S. Green (Newfoundland);
Sir William Garstin;
Mr. Harry Gosling;
Mr. Rudyard Kipling;
General Sir C. F. N. Macready;
Admiral Sir Edmund S. Poë, and
Major-General Fabian Ware, Vice-Chairman.

Among other matters which were discussed the Commission had before them two important questions: first, the bringing into the cemeteries of bodies buried in isolated graves on the battlefields; and, secondly, the exhumation of bodies, whether in isolated graves or in cemeteries, in order to transfer them to their native countries. The Commission recognised the existence of a sentiment in favour of leaving the bodies of the dead where they fell, but in view of the actual conditions regarded it as impracticable. Over 150,000 such scattered graves are known in France and Belgium. In certain districts, notably those of Ypres and the Somme battlefields, they are thickly strewed over areas measuring several miles in length and breadth. These areas will shortly be restored to cultivation, or possibly afforested, and the bodies cannot remain undisturbed. They must therefore be removed to cemeteries where they can be reverently cared for. The Commission felt that any other course would be excessively painful to relatives and discreditable to the country, and would place the cultivators of the land throughout an enormous extent of territory in a most unfair position. They accordingly resolved to apply to the French Government for permission to gather these bodies into cemeteries as close as may be to the places where they lie. It was announced that the Army was arranging for this work to be done by volunteers from among the comrades of the fallen, and that the reburials would be conducted by the Chaplains with the Forces, while the Graves Registration Officers would ensure accuracy of identification.

With regard to the removal of bodies to their native countries, the Commission were aware of a strong desire in a small number of...
cases that such exhumation should be permitted; but the reasons to the contrary appeared to them overwhelming. To allow removal by a few individuals (of necessity only those who could afford the cost) would be contrary to the principle of equality of treatment; to empty some 400,000 identified graves would be a colossal work, and would be opposed to the spirit in which the Empire had gratefully accepted the offers made by the Governments of France, Belgium, Italy, and Greece to provide land in perpetuity for our cemeteries, and to "adopt" our dead. The Commission felt that a higher ideal than that of private burial at home is embodied in these war cemeteries in foreign lands, where those who fought and fell together, officers and men, lie together in their last resting place, facing the line they gave their lives to maintain. They felt sure (and the evidence available to them confirmed the feeling) that the dead themselves, in whom the sense of comradeship was so strong, would have preferred to lie with their comrades. These British cemeteries in foreign lands would be the symbol for future generations of the common purpose, the common devotion, the common sacrifice of all ranks in an united Empire. This view has already been expressed in some of the Overseas Dominions, and the Commission were strongly of opinion that it would commend itself to the large majority of the British people, as the higher and nobler course.

Imperial War Graves Commission,
Winchester House,
December, 1918.