

THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS AND THE ASSEMBLY AT GENEVA

By NEWTON W. ROWELL, K.C., M.P.

THE ideal embodied in the Covenant of the League of Nations is not new. What is new and significant is that the great majority of the nations of the world have signed a treaty—for the Covenant is a treaty—pledging their adherence to this ideal, and their co-operation in an effort to realize it.

What is the conception of international relations which finds expression in the League? In the past, with but few notable exceptions, the nations have looked upon each other as real or potential enemies, and have, therefore, felt compelled to erect military fortifications, to raise and train armies, to build navies and to provide themselves with all the equipment and paraphernalia for war, nominally for the purposes of defence, frequently for the purposes of offence. For the same reason they have formed alliances, more or less intimate, to protect themselves against similar alliances and so preserve what is known in diplomacy as 'the balance of power.'

The culmination of this conception of international relations and its most severe condemnation are to be found in the recent great war. The suffering and needs of humanity have compelled the recognition of a new and better conception of international relations. This new conception is that each nation should look upon every other, not as a real or potential enemy, but as a real or potential friend, and should substitute for competition in preparation for war, co-operation for the preservation of peace. The old conception was essentially pagan, the new is essentially Christian.

Is this new conception practicable? Is it possible to find a substitute for war as a means of settling international disputes? For more than a hundred years the people of Canada and of the United States have given expression to this new conception in their international relations. They have refused to look upon each other as real or potential enemies. They have resolved to look upon each other as friends. They have, therefore, refused to build fortifications along their common international boundaries; they have refused to place warships upon their common international waterways. The 'Unguarded Boundary' of 5400 miles between the United States and Canada is a standing testimony to the world that nations can live at peace one with the other and settle all their disputes by peaceable means. More than a hundred years of peace between the United States and the British Empire have not been made possible because there have been no disputes to be settled; there have been many such disputes, important, urgent, critical; but where diplomatic negotiations failed to effect an adjustment both nations have agreed that these disputes should be settled by arbitration. It is quite true that many citizens of each country have at times questioned some of these settlements, but all thoughtful men must agree that the worst settlement secured by peaceable means was better for both nations than the best settlement that could have been secured by either nation as a result of war. What has been possible between the United States and the British Empire for more than a hundred years should be possible for all civilized nations.

The Covenant of the League, like every other human document, may be imperfect; it perhaps should be amended in important respects. These amendments will come, if and when required, to enable the League to discharge properly its great functions.

The functions of the League may be divided into three classes:

(1) Its primary function is to preserve peace by providing a substitute for war as a means of settling international disputes.

(2) Its secondary function is to provide a means for international co-operation in many matters of common concern to the nations, co-operation which will remove causes of international friction and promote human welfare.

(3) The League is required to discharge certain duties under treaties of peace.

The Covenant contains provisions covering the following important matters, the observance of which should greatly contribute toward preserving peace.

(1) All the states, members of the League, agree that should a dispute arise between them which they are unable to settle by peaceable means, they will submit this dispute either to arbitration or judicial determination or to investigation and conciliation by the Council of the League, and in case the matter is referred to arbitration, they bind themselves to abide by the decision of the arbitrators, and in all cases they agree not to resort to war until three months after the decision has been rendered or the Council has made its report. This is the heart of the Covenant.

There is also the much discussed Article X.

(2) The members recognize that the 'maintenance of peace requires the reduction of national armaments to the lowest point consistent with national safety, and the enforcement by common action of international obligations.' They, therefore, agree to take steps towards the limitation of armaments.

(3) The members recognize that secret treaties are frequently one of the chief causes of international misunderstandings and strife, and they agree that henceforth every covenant or international engagement entered into 'by any member of the League shall be forthwith registered with the Secretariat, and shall as soon as possible be published by it, and that no such treaty or international engagement shall be binding until so registered.' Strict adherence to this obligation is imperative or the old policy of secret treaties will revive.

(4) The provision for international co-operation in many matters of common concern should bring the nations together in the performance of certain common tasks and thus increase their knowledge of one another, and tend to remove the danger of misunderstandings which so frequently lead to war.

(5) The meetings of the Council and the Assembly, the former composed of nine members, the latter of all the members of the League, make possible what has been described as 'diplomacy by conference,' the actual and frequent meeting of the heads of states, where matters of international concern can be discussed freely, international difficulties explained and international goodwill promoted.

If the members in good faith carry out these provisions of the Covenant, the hundred years of peace enjoyed by the British Empire and the United States should become the common possession of all mankind.

What is there in the provisions of the League that should make a special appeal to the Christian leaders of the world ?

First, the League recognizes the essential unity of the races of men ; that God 'hath made of one blood all nations for to dwell on all the face of the earth.' If not explicitly, it certainly does implicitly, affirm the principle that each nation's welfare is a matter of interest and concern to every other, and each attains its own highest welfare, not by the loss and suffering of the other, but by co-operation with the other in promoting their common welfare.

Second, it substitutes right for might and reason for the sword in the settlement of disputes between nations. In addition to the provision for arbitration or conciliation by the Council, the Assembly at Geneva made provision for the constitution of a Permanent Court of International Justice, before which nations may go and have their disputes determined according to the very right and justice

of the cause rather than according to the strength and power of the litigants. The establishment of this court will be a great and practical step towards the establishment of 'public right' and of the 'rule of law' among the nations and a very real contribution to the cause of world peace.

Third, the mandatory system is the recognition of an entirely new principle in international relations, a truly Christian and humane principle introduced for the benefit of subject races.

THE GENEVA ASSEMBLY

The first Assembly which met at Geneva on the 15th of November 1920 was composed of delegates of forty-six nations, from all the continents and principal islands of the seas, and representing more than three-fourths of the whole human family. It was the most truly representative international gathering ever held. The Assembly satisfied its friends and disappointed its enemies. Notwithstanding the initial difficulties of complete strangeness, difference in race, language, religion, past history and outlook on life, the Assembly in five weeks transacted more important business than any Parliament of any of the states there represented would have transacted in the same time. This was only made possible by the spirit of unity and co-operation which prevailed throughout the Assembly.

It is true there were differences of opinion among the delegates, but serious difficulties do not usually arise out of a frank interchange of opinions between men who are seeking to further a common object which they all have at heart. International difficulties have not usually arisen from the frank interchange of views between statesmen of the world; international difficulties have usually arisen because of matters which did not see the light of day, and because of things said and done in secret that would

not be said or done face to face. If the League of Nations accomplishes no other purpose than to provide an open forum in which great international questions can be frankly discussed by the statesmen of the world, it is an experiment well worth trying and most hopeful in its potentiality for good.

The greatest single achievement of the Assembly was the provision for the establishment of the new Permanent Court of International Justice, to which reference has already been made. When the statute passed by the Assembly is approved by the majority of the states, members of the League, which will probably be before the next meeting of the Assembly in September 1921, the Court will be established, and the Council and the Assembly will proceed to elect the judges.

ARMAMENTS. No question awakened greater interest at the Assembly than that of the limitation of armaments, and while some real progress was made, it was recognized that it was impossible to deal effectively and finally with the question without the co-operation of the great nations as yet outside the League, particularly the United States. The League, however, has taken certain important practical steps.

Disappointment has been expressed in many quarters that more radical action was not taken by the Assembly, but it must be recognized frankly that you cannot have a reduction in armaments on a large scale by the nations within the League while there are influential nations outside the League under no obligation to disarm and which may go on increasing their armaments. The question must be examined from a practical as well as a theoretical and sentimental standpoint. The co-operation of the United States is essential to any general scheme for the limitation of armaments.

Few questions are more important or urgent at the present time, and undoubtedly the United States, by reason of her strength and independent position as a

non-European state, has a great opportunity to lead in this movement so essential to the recovery of the world from the loss and wastage of the war and to the preservation of the world's peace. It is to be hoped that action may be taken at an early date which will lead to very large practical results, and the world will be spared the spectacle of the United States and Japan competing in an armament race which, as it appears to the outsider, can serve no useful purpose, and may lead to the same disastrous results as followed the competition of armaments in Europe.

MANDATES. Second only to the interest in the question of the limitation of armaments was that taken in the question of mandates. Article XXII of the Covenant provides :

To those colonies and territories which as a consequence of the late war have ceased to be under the sovereignty of the states which formerly governed them and which are inhabited by peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world, there should be applied the principle that the well-being and development of such peoples form a sacred trust of civilisation and that securities for the performance of this trust should be embodied in this Covenant.

The best method of giving practical effect to this principle is that the tutelage of such peoples should be entrusted to advanced nations who by reason of their resources, their experience or their geographical position can best undertake this responsibility, and who are willing to accept it, and that this tutelage should be exercised by them as Mandatories on behalf of the League.

Provision is made for the constitution of a permanent commission to receive and examine the annual reports of the mandatories, and to advise the Council on all matters relating to the observance of the mandates. This permanent commission will consist of nine members, the majority of whom shall be nationals of non-mandatory states.

At the Assembly a difference of opinion arose between the Council and the Assembly in reference to procedure. The Assembly Committee on Mandates felt that it could not deal effectively with the questions submitted to it without having before it the form of the proposed mandates.

On the other hand the Council contended that as the Council under the Covenant was the only body entrusted with the responsibility of settling the form of the mandates in case there was a difference of opinion, they could not delegate their authority to the Assembly and they should not submit the mandates to the Assembly Committee. The Council was acting within its rights in the course pursued, but it would be difficult to justify the Council's action on any sound grounds of public policy. The mandatories exercise their duties as mandatories 'on behalf of the League.' The form, therefore, of these mandates is of interest to all the members of the League, as they are indeed to the whole civilized world. There can be no valid objection to the form of the mandates being made public before final settlement, so that the Council in reaching a conclusion would have the benefit of the advice of the other members of the League and of the suggestions of all interested in the question. The fact that the principal members of the Council are mandatory states makes full publicity all the more important.

There are three classes of mandates, A, B and C. The A mandates relate to Palestine, Syria and Mesopotamia, the B mandates to Central Africa, and the C mandates to South-West Africa and the South Pacific Islands.

The C mandates were approved by the Council while the Assembly was in session. A and B mandates are still under consideration by the Council.

The Mandates Commission made the following recommendations, which after protracted discussion were finally adopted unanimously by the Assembly as recommendations to the Council.

(a) Recommendations regarding the Mandates Commission.

1. The Members of the Commission should not be dismissed without the assent of the majority of the Assembly.
2. The Commission should contain at least one woman.
3. The mandatories should be asked to present to the Commission a report on the recent administration of the territories now confided to their care.

(b) Recommendations as to Mandates A.

4. The mandatory should not be allowed to make use of its position to increase its military strength.

5. The mandatory should not be allowed to use its power under the mandates to exploit for itself or its friends the natural resources of the mandated territory.

6. An organic law should be passed in the mandated territory as soon as possible, and before coming into force should be submitted to the League for consideration.

(c) General Recommendation.

7. Future draft mandates should be published before they are decided on by the Council.

There will be no greater test of the sincerity of the principal allied and associated powers than the final form of these mandates, and the manner in which the trust created by the mandates is discharged.

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION. The Assembly took action on a number of important matters coming within the secondary functions of the League, but space will not permit of a review in detail of these matters.

Article XXIII of the Covenant provides as follows :

Subject to and in accordance with the provisions of international conventions existing or hereafter to be agreed upon, the Members of the League :

(a) will endeavour to secure and maintain fair and humane conditions of labour for men, women and children, both in their own countries and in all countries to which their commercial and industrial relations extend, and for that purpose will establish and maintain the necessary international organizations ;

(b) undertake to secure just treatment of the native inhabitants of territories under their control ;

(c) will entrust the League with the general supervision over the execution of agreements with regard to the traffic in women and children, and the traffic in opium and other dangerous drugs ;

(d) will entrust the League with the general supervision of the trade in arms and ammunition with the countries in which the control of this traffic is necessary in the common interest ;

(e) will make provision to secure and maintain freedom of communications and of transit and equitable treatment for the commerce of all Members of the League. In this connexion, the special necessities of the regions devastated during the war of 1914-1918 shall be borne in mind ;

(f) will endeavour to take steps in matters of international concern for the prevention and control of disease.

It should be noted that final action under any clause of this Article is conditional upon the existence or negotiation of an international convention covering the particular matter.

An international labour organization has already been established under the labour clauses of the treaties of peace to endeavour to secure and maintain fair and humane conditions of labour for men, women and children.

The important question of facilitating international communication and transit received very careful consideration at the hands of the Assembly, and the Assembly approved the constitution of a temporary advisory committee and the calling of an international conference to consider certain draft conventions and other questions relating to international communication and transit. This conference was held at Barcelona, Spain, in March 1921, and its results will be communicated to the members of the League and to the next Assembly.

The report of the Brussels Financial Conference was submitted to the Assembly and the recommendations of the conference received careful consideration. A temporary advisory committee on finance and economics was constituted and practical steps were taken towards assisting in the solution of the financial and economic difficulties which at present are paralyzing the activities of many European nations.

The question of health in its international aspects also received consideration; an international campaign against typhus in Central Europe was inaugurated, and an international health organization founded upon the present International Institute of Hygiene was sanctioned. The League took over the administration of the international conventions relating to traffic in opium and other narcotic drugs and the traffic in women and children, and the Assembly provided for calling an international conference to consider the latter matter and to report the results to the next Assembly. The mere enumeration

of these matters shows what a vital bearing this aspect of the work of the League may have upon the health and well-being of great masses of our humanity, and how deeply interested all who believe in the gospel of the Son of Man should be in the success of this great experiment in international co-operation for promoting human welfare.

ARMENIA. The question of Armenia has been engaging the attention of the Council and of the Assembly for many months. The responsibility for settling this problem does not properly rest with the League. It rests with the Supreme Council of the allied and associated powers. As, however, the Supreme Council invited the co-operation of the League, it has sought to render all possible assistance and it is to be hoped that as a result of the joint action of the Supreme Council and of the League, some practical solution will be found which will preserve the Armenian race and ensure to them a stable government in their ancestral home.

ADMISSION OF NEW STATES. The admission of new states was one of the most important questions which came before the Assembly. Every believer in the League is convinced that it should and must include all the principal powers and that the time will come when all the powers will realize their identity of interests. 'For the body'—of our humanity—'is not one member but many, and whether one member suffer; all members suffer with it; or if one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.'

Some seventeen new states applied for admission. The greatest interest—naturally centred in the applications of the ex-enemy states, Austria and Bulgaria. Their applications required a careful investigation into the question of whether they had given evidence of a sincere intention of observing their international obligations as required by Article I of the Covenant. The Assembly Committee reached the conclusion that they had satisfied the conditions for admission and they were admitted without any

dissenting vote—some abstentions, but no dissenting vote. The admission of Austria and Bulgaria to the League is an important step towards the reconciliation of Europe and the re-establishment of sane conditions following the war. The movement for reconciliation, however, must not stop with Austria and Bulgaria. It must include all the ex-enemy states when they apply and comply with the conditions for admission. The wounds of the war cannot be healed, the world cannot be bound together by the gospel of hate. This is only possible by the gospel of brotherhood and of justice.

THE ATTITUDE OF ASIA. A very interesting and significant feature of the Assembly was the attitude of the Asiatic delegates. Japan's position is assured and she, therefore, is not apprehensive of the future. The other Asiatic nations have not the same strength or stability.

The allied and associated powers during the war declared they were fighting for peace, for justice, for the sanctity of treaties, and for the protection of small and weak nations. The League is the medium through which these great ideals are to be realized and the Asiatic peoples are looking to the League, and to the action of the western powers in connexion with the League, with hope and yet with apprehension—with hope, because they feel that if the western powers live up to their declared principles, it will mean a new and better day for the peoples of Asia; with apprehension, lest in the reaction following the war, the western powers should forget or ignore the principles proclaimed during the war and go back to the old principles, the old policies and the exploitation of the weaker nations of the world. Millions in Asia and Africa will judge of the sincerity of the powers great and small by the fidelity with which they support the League and carry out in times of peace the principles they proclaimed during the war.

IS THE LEAGUE PRACTICABLE ? Everyone must admit

that the League is at present only an experiment, but an experiment of tremendous import to our humanity. If it fails, what is the alternative? Its chief enemies are not the common people, who must bear the principal burdens of war in every land, but those who live by the sword or who revel in the old methods of diplomacy and who prefer the might of great armies to the justice of impartial tribunals.

No one can view without grave apprehension the unfortunate and distressing conditions existing in many parts of the world, particularly in Europe, conditions in many cases more unfortunate and distressing than even existed during the war. If our present civilization is to be saved, another great world war must be averted. When one recognizes the awful loss of life and property through this war, the crimes and horrors that characterized it, the financial obligations which the nations were compelled to assume in carrying it on, and witnesses its after-effects in the present social, economic and industrial disorganization which is even now threatening our civilization in certain sections of the world, the man who says there is no substitute for war as a means of settling international disputes, that there is no better way for our humanity than the road along which it has travelled in the past, confesses to the utter bankruptcy of modern statesmanship and the failure of Christian civilization.

This is the time for faith and courage, not for scepticism and fear. Statesmanship is not bankrupt and Christian civilization has not failed. The Assembly at Geneva has demonstrated that the League is both a hopeful and practical experiment for providing a substitute for war as a means of settling international disputes. If all the great powers were to come into the League with the sincere intention to co-operate, that in itself should guarantee the success of the experiment, but even if other powers do not enter, and the League must continue its work in its present form with its present membership, it is still a

hopeful experiment, the most hopeful and practical yet tried, and is deserving of every encouragement and support. Every lover of peace and of international justice should seek to strengthen and improve the League rather than destroy it.

The future of the League will depend not so much on the attitude of soldiers and statesmen as upon the public opinion of the world. A great opportunity is presented to the Christian leaders in every land to aid in the creation of an intelligent and sound public opinion which will demand that in the future the Christian and not the pagan spirit shall govern in our international relations, and that the society of nations which our humanity has only secured after over two centuries of effort is not sacrificed to political or national jealousies, but is improved and strengthened so that it may accomplish its great and beneficent purposes for mankind.

The experience of more than one hundred and thirty years reinforces the urgent appeal of Bentham in his *Plan for a Universal and Perpetual Peace*.

The objection, and the only objection, to the plan of a peace that shall be universal and lasting is its apparent impracticability—that it is not only hopeless, but hopeless to such a degree that any proposal to this effect deserves to be called ‘visionary and ridiculous.’ It is said that the age is not ripe for such a proposal. Then ‘the more it wants of being ripe, the sooner we should begin to do what can be done to ripen it.’ Who that bears the name of Christian could refuse to assist with his prayers? What pulpit could refrain from seconding the author with its eloquence? ‘Catholics and Protestants, Church of England men and Dissenters, may all agree in this, if in nothing else. I call upon them all to aid me with their confidence and their support.’

NEWTON W. ROWELL