

CURRENT MAGAZINES

THE COLLAPSE OF GENEVA

League and Anti-League—Editorial, in *The National Home Monthly*.
Conflict between the Generations—Mr. G. Hutton, in the *Atlantic*.
Totalitarian Japan—Mr. G. Stein, in *Foreign Affairs*.
The Rule of Fear—Mr. G. Ferrero, in the *Fortnightly*.

IN a New Year statement Mr. Neville Chamberlain referred, with an obvious touch of pride, to one effort the British Government had put forth in 1937. It had fought consistently, he said, against the proposal to divide democracies and dictatorships into hostile camps. No doubt there are battles in which it is to one's credit to have fought even though one has been beaten. It was the chief of the fallen angels in *Paradise Lost* who said:

That strife
Was not inglorious, though the event was dire.

But one can think of more reputable champions and worthier causes whose virtue has dignified a losing battle. Can we include, as an example, Mr. Chamberlain's case? That the development against which he says he fought, the division of democracies and dictatorships into hostile camps, has been achieved, is obvious. It is indeed the outstanding international phenomenon of 1937. That the effort to prevent it was, some time ago, commendable, is also beyond serious dispute, at least in countries with the habit of thought and the criterion of valuing held in respect by the League. But was it commendable to persist in this effort as late as 1937, when the charitable illusions about German and Italian and Japanese purpose could no longer be cherished by any intelligent observer?

I.

What the *National Home Monthly* calls, with terse suggestiveness, "The Anti-League" is no sudden apparition in the international firmament. Those who describe it as an outcome of the much abused Treaty of Versailles, like those who offer similar explanation for excesses of Nazi cruelty, are but continuing to charge to the same distant account each outstanding debt that is elsewhere repudiated. At the utmost, the responsibility of the

clear-cut document drafted at Versailles is for forcing to definite avowal and mutual acknowledgment those schemes of national lawlessness which it would be easier to pursue separately and under disguise. The exposure is wholesome.

From the founding of the League, it was obvious that some at least of the signatories to its Covenant had no belief in the project they had endorsed. They spoke quite freely of their assurance that no major Power would entrust to an international tribunal the determination of its territories, its rights, its "honour", making it clear that they wished to keep this margin of legitimate refusal as wide and indefinite as possible. To anyone with the least capacity for reading between the lines of a cautious despatch, or hearing between the sentences of a gracious speech, it was obvious that by certain Powers the Covenant was being accepted most unwillingly, in deference to the prestige and resources of the President of the United States, and that effort was being devoted to secure such vagueness in the terms of the document as might facilitate frustration in practice. Still more regrettable was the evidence, even in countries whose official signature was cordial and whose popular support was eager, that a powerful and ingenious minority was "biding its time". When, to the boundless joy of these early Anti-Leaguers, the United States refused to confirm Woodrow Wilson's pledge, the temper of initial disparagement was stimulated to bitter opposition.

Anti-League feeling in the period just after the Versailles Conference was, no doubt, in part disinterested and honest. It sprang from a conviction that human nature, working in national policies, was not ready for such a change in the world scheme, however valuable the change might be if it were practicable, and from alarm lest such premature reforming on a great scale might make things much worse rather than better. One knows the result of opening an abscess too soon! But it is impossible to account in such charitable terms for a great deal that was most persistent and most effective in the hostile propaganda. "Why should not this war be followed by the same sort of settlement as all previous wars?"—Such was the indignant demand from journalists and orators and especially leaders of industry. With the self-consciousness of victors, with thought of the spoil that had in the past enriched the victor's purse even more satisfactorily than the wreath had decorated his brow, and with tolerable confidence that in their own time at least no risk of a further world struggle need disturb the joys of exploiting present triumph, they wanted no bother about changing a system they had found so profitable. Woodrow Wilson,

they exclaimed angrily, was nothing but a pedantic old school-master, and his moralizing was a nuisance. For themselves, they were proud to be "realists", with genuine appreciation of human nature. So spoke and wrote countless critics. Particularly of the sort described by Mr. Harold Begbie when he had seen the first British House of Commons after the Armistice: "Hard-faced men who looked as if they had done very well out of the war!"

The same mood of competitive plunder has now taken possession of nations. Italy and Japan, cherishing resentment because their war spoils were inadequate, have set about repair of the defect by that old method which the League for a time effectively stopped. Needless to add, they agree on the urgency of getting the League out of the way. And, for the time at least, they have been successful. Now Germany intrudes, stimulated by a like prospect. And, however the Dictators may emphasize the strength of "the Axis", it is plain that here is a troublesome complication. The very vehemence of the emphasis attests it.

II

That the Geneva venture in "Collective Security" will have to be renewed in some form, sooner or later, when the horrors amid which we are now forced to live have become too gross for human endurance, is obvious to everyone who does not altogether despair for mankind. But in the interval of fantastic experimenting with the alternative, a period of return to that "war of all against all" which for nations as for individuals proves at length intolerable, it is instructive to consider the case against the League so eagerly propounded and so volubly endorsed.

It was the contention of such publicists as the late Frank H. Simmonds that "League of Nations", like its predecessors "Holy Alliance" and "Concert of Europe", was but an impressive name for a conspiracy on the part of a victorious group to retain its exclusive right of pillage. In his address to the Reichstag last month, Hitler arraigned it on this high moral ground: the Geneva institution, he said, would have meaning only if it brought its morals into consonance with those higher morals which rest upon equal justice.

When we search his speeches and writings to find out what, in detail, the Fuehrer holds "equal justice" to involve, the case becomes as plain as day. Equality would in his view require that the Powers victorious in the Great War revoke all the precautions and safeguards they imposed by disarming the enemy, cancel the

account for Reparations, and restore to their former control the German Colonies as before 1918, with all the opportunities not only for supply and settlement, but for submarine and air base on "the British Life-Line" which would thus be made available. Such requirement, in proof of League "sincerity", seems somewhat exacting, all the more when it comes from an orator who so extols the nobility of the ancient German spirit by contrast with Geneva corruption. One does not recall that the ancient German spirit used to conclude a victorious war in such considerate, and indeed apologetic, manner.

But, dismissing this complaint against the League as no less absurd than the familiar Communist plea that there can be no sincere goodwill in those not ready for an equal redistribution of the world's wealth, we encounter more persuasive argument. Lord Lothian contended years ago (in his monograph *A New League or No League*) that it must either go back or go forward, that the coercive clauses (providing Sanctions economic or military against an aggressor State) are incapable of effective fulfilment except by an organization with international armed forces. The French proposal for "pooling armaments" was thus represented as thoroughly intelligible, however otherwise unacceptable. Unless and until some such measure was adopted, Lord Lothian felt that League *enforcement* of peace was an idle dream, and that the Covenant should be revised so as to limit the project in express formula to that moral pressure which was plainly all it could mean in practice. Naturally the Abyssinian adventure has supplied illustrative material for those who now vehemently continue this argument.

The ineffectiveness of economic Sanctions in the Abyssinian affair is indeed no mystery, but one may question whether Lord Lothian's facile key is the one that opens it. More illuminating, I think, than his historic parallel from the failure of the first attempt at a "League of Nations" among the thirteen revolting American colonies, and their rapid abandonment of State Sovereignty for "Federalism", is an instance closer at hand. It is the case of the "International Non-Intervention Committee" which, coming so soon after the case of Abyssinia, made Spain a like theatre, equally grotesque and equally shameful, for competitive dishonesties. Mr. Chamberlain's avowal of disillusionment about the League, in which he says he once wholeheartedly believed, but whose ineffectiveness he has to acknowledge after trial, had a strange sequel in his persistent adherence to another project whose exposure has been at least as striking. To pour ridicule upon Geneva as the centre of sham and pretence, while one encourages faith

in the "Non-Intervention Committee" and rebukes misgiving about the value of a Fascist or a Nazi signature, is to strain the confidence of parliamentary followers far beyond breaking point. By this time, thanks to the leadership of such vigorous spirits as Mr. Churchill and Mr. Amery, the premier has come to appreciate it, and his tone has altered for the better.

That the economic Sanctions applied by fifty-two nations *in earnest* would have served to bring Italy or any other Power to submission, needs no proof. That the method did not succeed because certain Powers in the group professing to apply it were stealthily defeating its purpose, and because they were influential enough to exclude from its range certain vitally important commodities, does not require to be recalled. Quite probably, no matter what purely economic penalties had been imposed, the Italian arms could have forced a decision in Africa before these Sanctions had fatal effect. But certainly if they had been continued, it would before long have been found that the victory was so expensive as to deter any other Power from seeking to triumph at a like cost again. Nor, I suppose, did anyone ever believe that there was risk of one recalcitrant nation challenging all the other nations of the League to a world war. The simple truth is that the League Powers were not sufficiently in earnest with League method to take these steps. Sanctions were never imposed after the manner and in the degree vital to their success. As to the identity of the chief villain of the piece, there is no room for serious doubt. When M. Blum fulfils his threat to take the world into confidence regarding the Laval Government in France, we shall have documents worth perusal.

But to say all this, to trace the Geneva collapse not to any defects in machinery, but to deep-set antagonisms in human nature, is not to make prospects of League rehabilitation in the least more rosy. On the contrary: this is to present the whole apparatus of the Covenant as such that, human qualities being as they are, it was impossible, even under the strain of a recent fearful experience and the thrill of a new inspiration, to induce nations to cooperate earnestly in working it. They preferred the alternative. Already we have poignant appreciation of what that is. After nineteen years, we are back in the sphere of "Power Politics". That is why, even thousands of miles away from troubled Europe, we open our newspapers each morning in alarm and some mornings in terror. How much has happened, and how fast, all over Europe, since the helplessness of the League passed from a suspicion to a certainty, and the leaders who but two years back

in England had bidden all men pin their faith to it, made open acknowledgment that it was worthless!

III.

For this collapse, which is now so plain to see, and whose tragedy even the most cynical of a short time back are beginning to realize, no small share of blame must be laid on certain newspapers of Great Britain and France which so misrepresented the spirit of their respective countries.

In this respect, the peculiar attitude of the British people to the press, otherwise so wholesome and creditable, leads to profound misunderstanding abroad. A newspaper of immense circulation is naturally assumed to reflect the sentiments of a vast number of readers. What is not realized abroad is that only an insignificant proportion of British readers have the least interest in finding out what "views" the paper holds, and that the contents of the editorial page are by most of them dismissed unread. It is the *news*, in part of course (especially just now) of world politics, but still more the sporting news, the betting news, the financial news, the comic news of one sort and another that counts. And even among the select circle that will read a daily newspaper's editorial, very many in Great Britain prefer the piquancy of a paper on the opposite side in politics to the familiar commonplace of an organ of their own opinions. The monthlies and quarterlies are adequate for those interested in such public affairs. As to what the daily or weekly paper may say about these issues, well, it is not to find this out that the daily or weekly paper is read at all. Moreover, of those abroad who understand this peculiarity of the British temperament there are always publicists and leaders who know how to profit by exploiting the general ignorance.

Is it any wonder, then, that in the dictatorially-ruled nations of Europe certain London newspapers should now be circulated with the utmost diligence, and every word of admiration for the successful destroyers of Italian or German democracy which they contain should be made known throughout the land? A glance at the files of three or four British metropolitan dailies or weeklies will show how, at least since 1935, no opportunity was missed to suggest contempt of the League among all Englishmen of the keener intelligence and the wider grasp of world affairs; how League effort was depicted as mainly the enterprise of simpletons some of them well meaning, others hypocritical, and all alike representative of no serious national policy; how the fundamental sympathies

of the British people were set forth as accompanying the splendid "anti-Communist" "anti-Red" chieftains of Rome and Berlin, against whom "sentimentalists" might for the time pack a meeting in the Albert Hall, but for whose genius and courage "the best people" in England must be thankful.

Thus by degrees the Anti-League statesmen abroad were impressed with the idea that in Great Britain itself powerful influences might be counted as with them. Perhaps, indeed, a "flowing tide"! At all events, quite enough to disable effective resistance to a bold Fascist or Nazi stroke. Ambassadors and other agents charged with "feeling the pulse" of the British people had many an encouraging report to make to their dictatorial principals. But the outburst of rage at what has come to be called "The Cliveden Set" shows how dangerous it is to operate in this fashion even upon the temperamental slackness of John Bull. His anger with his own politicians and journalists who have deceived or misrepresented him is like his anger with foreign enemies. Slow to rise, but likely to continue till it has had its way. The uproar last month in the Cabinet showed that the limits of imposture had been passed.

Whether the damage indisputably done in the Dominions can be rectified by the reform which this uproar achieved, is more doubtful. From Australia, from New Zealand, from Canada comes many a sign that "Isolationism" was the one conspicuous gainer when British policy seemed to have been cut loose from its League moorings. So much of imperial patriotism had its source and spring of late for the Dominions in the acceptance of Great Britain as leader of the new League method! As for the fortunes of pre-League politics, the scramble for "balance of power" in Central Europe and other conflicts of sheer competitive selfishness—he would be a sanguine imperial organizer indeed who would now approach a Canadian community, for example, with an appeal for sacrifice in a cause such as that. It was an ironic turn of the wheel of fortune which made the son of Joseph Chamberlain inflict so grievous a blow upon imperial unity. But the British reaction, let us hope, has been quick enough to undo at least some part of the damage.

A like tale has to be told of the unscrupulous party politicians and party press in France. One knows not whether to marvel more just now at the orgy of strikes and outrages by insurgent French Labour, or at the Fascist and semi-Fascist Leagues of Paris, alike either in the utter ignorance or in the brutal unconcern they reveal regarding the foreign peril of the country. What is it that has happened to the "Sacred Union" spirit of twenty

years ago? Abundant evidence is forthcoming from the newspapers and speeches of the anti-republican faction that what democratic France sacrificed so much to preserve in the Great War her oligarchic ring would willingly abandon, if it could thus regain for itself even in a measure the privilege, the prestige, the dominance in which it revelled under the *ancien régime*. Its zeal for Franco in Spain, under pretence of "anti-Communism", is thus transparent. The wholesale corruption, which in French influential circles defeated the Sanctionist policy of the League, had a quite obvious local purpose. If those who contrived it are now terrified by some of its remoter consequences, if the threat "France is going Fascist" which they used for a selfish end at home is now proving a peril to much that they value abroad, they have themselves to thank. Once again as in England, press and speeches misrepresented the country on matters of the gravest international import, and the damage is of a sort far easier done than undone. It has been a fearful example of party scheming. Those fantastic tricks before High Heaven, which might well make angels weep, have left an impression abroad hard indeed to efface, because it suits the purpose of certain shrewd managers abroad to render it indelible. Article after article, harangue after harangue, meant only to deceive at home and to further some project of domestic intrigue, has been taken all too seriously outside, and policies launched on such inspiration are not dropped even when the inspirers make frantic effort to revoke their words. As an ancient scripture puts it, they find no place for repentance, though they seek it carefully with tears.

IV.

When things get bad enough, they have to get better: so runs an optimistic old saying, and although it is painful to have to find refuge in such general "faith in mankind's rationality" rather than in tokens of definite improvement, there has been many a period of the past when there was not much more upon which hope could be stayed, and yet it did not fail those who trusted it. Moreover, there is that invaluable reinforcing agency, time, which at length—since Mr. Churchill and a few others succeeded a year and a half ago in wakening a sluggish Government to its danger—has worked on the right side. It has worked on the right side in respect of the vital preparations even for France. It is working now in the United States. If the situation in respect of national unity is far from what one would desire to see it, in respect of rearmament at least a marvellous strengthening is already achieved, and the security improves every month.

But it is on what the Soviet publicists would call, in their unusual diction, the "psychological and ideological front" that much has yet to be done. Not a "Purge", in that violent sense familiar to Berlin and Rome and Tokio, but a definite demonstration to the world that those of pro-dictatorial sympathies in London and Paris and Washington are altogether unfit to speak for their country, and that only so long as the topic is of no more than "academic" interest can they be indulged in such propagandism at all. The national purpose must cease to be questionable as soon as there is national danger: an elementary maxim, one would have thought, but in over-charitable days readily forgotten.

It is part, too, of such psychological and ideological house-cleaning that the nations in earnest should come to recognise and reinforce their real friends, not hesitating to act on the difference between friends and enemies. The breach between democracies and dictatorships, which Mr. Chamberlain says he tried to prevent, has happened in spite of him: it is the part then, surely, of one who prides himself upon "realism", to accept this *fait accompli* and to adjust future policies in the light of it. This does not mean that with the new dictatorial Powers there should be a refusal of those friendly relations which were maintained by free countries with dictatorial Powers in the past,—with Tsarist Russia, for example, and the Turkish Sultanate. But it does mean that the acknowledged association and cooperation of certain nations in the so-called "Triangle" shall be met by nations of another way of thinking on human affairs not with helpless because isolated counter-contrivance, but with the strength which comes from unity. The phrase-making about exploration of avenues to a better relationship, and the whole apparatus of mere diplomatic disguise, which was no doubt worth trying until its futility was clear, may as well be at least suspended. It is the cementing of harmony among Powers with purposes the same, not the simulation of harmony among Powers with purposes altogether contradictory, that seems urgent. Obviously deep discontent and impatience until such "clarification"—to use Mr. Chamberlain's own word—is made, explains the present dangerous mood of British Labour. Why, it is very naturally demanded, was the proposal from M. Litvinoff for a Conference among Powers with such similar purpose refused as "inopportune"?

The same purpose may be expressed in very different ways; at least since Mr. H. L. Stimson's diplomatic effort at Tokio in 1932 and President Roosevelt's crusade to revitalize the Nine-Power Treaty in 1937, it has been clear that the Geneva spirit

is at work outside the Geneva formulae. It is among the more encouraging signs, of a time whose disappointments have been so many, that those with League rather than Anti-League disposition, by whatever names they are called, have begun to seek one another and to devise means to cooperate. An example, slight indeed by comparison with these great affairs, but noteworthy, may be given. Over thirty years ago, under the title "International Magna Carta Day Association", a movement was set on foot in the United States to secure a common official remembrance, each June 15, of the signature to the great Covenant from which 200,000,000 of English-speaking people still derive their constitutional inheritance. Back in 1907, few of us had the least thought of peril in which this inheritance might soon become involved; and, as usual, the enterprise of those who saw more clearly and further than others was supported in many quarters with no more than a languid acquiescence. "Magna Carta", said the late Calvin Coolidge, speaking for the American people, "is the background of all that we have." But that which we take for granted, we may by that very act in great measure suppress, and one should hail the effort now so widely advertised in the United States to make June 15, 1938, the Magna Carta Day of this year, one of peculiar emphasis on the ideals that unite the free countries of the world.

It will be a mere gesture, perhaps, a mere anniversary celebration? Not on that account is it unimportant. Of late we have witnessed, both for good and for evil, how vast is the practical consequence of mass education.

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