



The Spiritual Sanctions

of a

League of Nations

BY THE

BISHOP OF WINCHESTER

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THE proposal of a League of Nations, now upon every one's lips, is evidently beset with difficulties of very serious kinds. Some of them are due to the mere complexity of the subject-matter; and these can only be lessened and overcome by the patient work of experts, supported and impelled by a deepening intelligence in the peoples as to what is at stake, and a strengthening determination that the way should be found. But other difficulties are of a different kind. They have to do with the sources and amount of motive which can bring about so great a change; and which can not only supply the steam to work a very complex machine, but also compel its construction.

The present enthusiasm for the idea is much more than merely sentimental or rhetorical: it is serious and moves serious men; and this in itself is hopeful. But it does not make the prospect easy; and those who see most what is at stake will be most desirous to convince themselves that there is, indeed, behind the movement the strength of those moral motives which ultimately prevail.

It should not be very difficult to do this, and to do it satisfyingly, if we put the case for the League of

Nations sufficiently high, and detect the real principles which underlie it. It will not be enough, though it will be very well in its way, to invoke the motive of humanity, and (with the evils of war present as they are to the minds of all) to claim acceptance for the League of Nations as giving at the worst a chance, and at the best a bright prospect, of preserving peace where otherwise war will recur, perhaps in annihilating forms. For so great a gain the League would be well worth trying as a mere diplomatic experiment, and it might be rather confidently expected to rally an increasing amount of prepossession, and even of enthusiasm, to assist its successful working.

But in its essence this would still be more a mechanical than a moral improvement. The forces, remaining what they were, would be adjusted to run with less risk of friction and more skilful compensations.

What we want is more than this. We want a moral change, with a political development which will both answer to that change, and by exercise stimulate and strengthen it.

Take the latter first. The curious course of human history which seems to have promiscuously engendered with no chronological order states of the most various sizes and values, such as unchanging nomad or pastoral tribes, vast empires, little highly organized independent cities, may perhaps disguise from us a real trend in the affairs of men, from the particular to the

more universal, from simpler to more complex and larger systems. The ancient history of the West gave striking evidence of this trend. The Roman Empire with its 'peace' was perhaps the best result of it; great in actual effect, and great in its permanent imaginative influence. Its ultimate failure was due to its want of real citizenship, and of the virility and defensive force which this creates.

But through it men's minds gained an intuition of a true all-embracing state.

After the crash of the barbarian invasions, the same trend working its way out of the early mediaeval chaos produced the nation as we know it in the kingdoms of the West. Internally these states have become, in different forms, fine unities of human life, with much internal harmony and subordination. But their mutual relations have been frankly elementary. The name of international law stands for something of whose extent and reality the 'layman' can hardly judge; but the associations of the name are largely ironical.

Remembrance of the Empire and Christian aspiration made men feel for some more inclusive ideal, but vaguely and without effect.

This is the stage which we have reached. But it must be a very stubborn believer in the dull creed that what has never been will never be, who thinks that there we must stop. The older among us remember the sound constantly in our ears of the 'Concert of Europe'. Clumsy, halting, and ineffective, it was not

wholly powerless, and it was significant of the current's trend. Along with it went attempts such as the Berlin Convention to bring the Native Races within the shelter of European corporate guarantees. In other words, to acknowledge a common European responsibility for world welfare.

But since then at what a pace things have moved! Colonies or Settlements building up, as in Australia, Africa, and Canada, into Dominions or Commonwealths; the British Empire yielding more and more of its prerogatives, but only to find itself 'enlarged' in a more complex unity better named a Commonwealth or else a thing which waits for a name. And then the War, with its extraordinary co-operative results — its unprecedented unities of command and the like in economic matters, in finance, in matters of supply and transport, and the whole habit of intimately interwoven actions with independent states.

'Out of the eater has come forth meat.'

The War, in accustoming four great Powers and some twenty smaller ones to act together for a common cause, has been training its own antidote. And the increasing perception that such combinations must be used in the interests not only of the partners but of the world, gives to the combination double measure both of dignity and of *raison d'être*.

Thus we are brought, by tracing political developments which have all of them constructive promise,

to the patent need for a moral change which can supply binding power, and can quickly but steadily tune into a higher key of unity the current common-places, and the accepted conventions, and the accredited sentiments which have such power in human affairs.

Will any supply meet the demand? The answer, I submit, is to be found in the influence of the War upon human morale; its *creative* moral power. For profoundly uncertain and speculative as forecasts of the moral effects of this convulsion may be—and we may seem to be laying a path of progress as upon mists—it is at least clear that the War has brought out new capacities in character and new standards of value, in a way which we are all occupied in trying to understand. Among such changes, matters of commonest observation are increased sense of service to a cause, and increased satisfaction in the comradeship both of men and of nations.

But above all these is the revealed contrast, colossal and lurid, between two alternative Spirits or Ways. Against the Way which Germany (or the men who speak for her) has been persuaded to make her own, the way of selfishness growing ever more brutal and ruthless, the other Way, the way of unselfishness, of common service and sacrifice, stands out in all the dignity and effectiveness of a true ideal.

Now the principle thus recognized cannot be less than cosmopolitan in its reach and strength; the welfare of humanity comes out more and more distinctly

and inevitably as the one adequate object towards which the human conscience drives. The manner in which Germany has stiffened itself in conscious antagonism to milder ideals has been the testimony of a true instinct as to the real enemy which her ideals of force had to face. The final issue, Christ or Anti-christ, has been more distinctly seen, and the enthusiasm with which the victory has been greeted has sprung in its depths from the sense of what the real issue has been. That sense, burnt into us during the years of war, became articulate and undeniable when the great neutral Republic came in for the right under the guidance of its President.

It has been wonderfully dramatic that the man who had the handling of the machine should also have had the insight to see clearly and steadily what the action of his nation meant and must mean, and to discern that behind the supremely important crisis of national policy there was the even more important crisis of opportunity for a world-change. It is no disrespect to Mr. Roosevelt to illustrate this by contrast with what he could have done. He could have brought America in with a fine chivalry, an indomitable energy, a righteous rage. And no doubt he would have used its success kindly and well. But he would not have discerned, as his successor has, how the action of himself and of his people has done more than decide a situation, however prodigious; how it has inaugurated an epoch of which *the characteristic is*

that its horizons are ultimate. The world may never fill them out; there may be follies and weaknesses among those who mean to do well, and there will be abundance of treacheries and persistent sinister combinations of interests, intent on serving themselves at humanity's expense. But the ideal has been declared once for all.

It is perhaps to say the same thing in another way if we claim as a moral support of the League of Nations a quickened belief among us that there is behind the world a real meaning—a Purpose with power.

Without referring again to the German contrast, we may do well to remind ourselves that the international sphere has been, especially in our later knowledge of it, the region in which it was hardest to see more than the tangle of forces, the pulls and counter-pulls of a thousand powers, national, fiscal, commercial, of revenges and resentments and antipathies.

Across all this the crisis of the great War and the great Victory has cut like a flash of blinding revelation. It did matter, then, what the standards of diplomacy were! A condition in which states were assumed to act like the economic men of the old Political Economy, by the one motive of self-interest or self-protection, proved a rotten condition! You arrived that way at a terrific crisis which every one feared but no one could avert. The whole system shared responsibility for the result which its most

unscrupulous and violent member precipitated. On a vast scale the ancient Righteousness has been vindicated; and the lineaments and trend of an age-long purpose of love for humankind are seen, and men of goodwill answer to its challenge.

They will have no illusions of a sudden international Utopia. They will know how long and treacherous the path to be trodden is. They will be aware that the effort of humanity to follow it may, unless God avert, stagger down into failure.

But the opportunity is in a most true sense new. For never before have the issues been at once so simple and clear and yet so grandiose; never have antagonistic opportunist ideals been so discredited; never before has the way been so clearly revealed down which humanity might drive, delayed only by its own blind follies and grievous faults, towards the goal of a human brotherhood, existing to give fullest expression to the life in humanity, and to bring the variety of its gifts and products into the wealth and beauty which Unity secures. That is the League of Nations, of which such League as we may know will only be the green and crude shoot, yet that from which alone the summer's flower can spring to its perfection.

It will be plain to my readers that for myself the issues of the future (and implicitly of the League of Nations) depend on the consent of mankind to travel *Christo duce et auspice Christo*. Nor have I any doubt

that the security for this will be in the number of those who definitely follow His acknowledged Captaincy in sacrifice and service. But it is the Christian faith that in Christ all that is true in human wisdom, and effective in moral and spiritual capacity, comes to self-recognition. In the realm of principles and of the forces, economical, social, ethical, by which human affairs are leavened and moulded, Christ has also a secret sway, and leads, whether or no they are conscious of His leading, all men of goodwill.

EDW. WINTON.





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