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IN THE FOURTH YEAR

THE LEAGUE OF FREE NATIONS

I

THE WAY TO CONCRETE REALIZATION

More and more frequently does one hear this phrase, The League of Nations, used to express the outline idea of the new world that will come out of the war. There can be no doubt that the phrase has taken hold of the imaginations of great multitudes of people: it is one of those creative phrases that may alter the whole destiny of mankind. But as yet it is still a very vague phrase, a cloudy promise of peace. I make no apology therefore, for casting my discussion of it in the most general terms. The idea is the idea of united human effort to put an end to wars; the first practical question, that must precede all others, is how far can we hope to get to a concrete realization of that?

But first let me note the fourth word in the second title of this book. The common talk is of a "League of Nations" merely. I follow the man who

is, more than any other man, the leader of English political thought throughout the world to-day, President Wilson, in inserting that significant adjective "Free." We western allies know to-day what is involved in making bargains with governments that do not stand for their peoples; we have had all our Russian deal, for example, repudiated and thrust back upon our hands; and it is clearly in his mind, as it must be in the minds of all reasonable men, that no mere "scrap of paper," with just a monarch's or a chancellor's endorsement, is a good enough earnest of fellowship in the league. It cannot be a diplomatist's league. The League of Nations, if it is to have any such effect as people seem to hope from it, must be, in the first place, "understanded of the people." It must be supported by sustained, deliberate explanation, and by teaching in school and church and press of the whole mass of all the peoples concerned. I underline the adjective "Free" here to set aside, once for all, any possible misconception that this modern idea of a League of Nations has any affinity to that Holy Alliance of the diplomatists, which set out to keep the peace of Europe so disastrously a century ago.

Later I will discuss the powers of the League. But before I come to that I would like to say a little about the more general question of its nature and authority. What sort of gathering will embody it? The suggestions made range from a mere advisory body, rather like the Hague convention, which will merely pronounce on the rights and wrongs of any international conflict, to the idea of a sort of Super-State, a Parliament of Mankind, a "Super National" Authority, practically taking over the sovereignty of the existing states and empires of the world.

Most people's ideas of the League fall between these extremes. They want the League to be something more than an ethical court, they want a League that will act, but on the other hand they shrink from any loss of "our independence." There seems to be a conflict here. There is a real need for many people to tidy up their ideas at this point. We cannot have our cake and eat it. If association is worth while, there must be some sacrifice of freedom to association. As a very distinguished colonial representative said to me the other day: "Here we are talking of the freedom of small nations and the 'self-determination' of peoples, and at the same time of the Council of the League of Nations and all sorts of international controls. Which do we want?"

The answer, I think, is "Both." It is a matter of more or less, of getting the best thing at the cost of the second-best. We may want to relax an old association in order to make a newer and wider one. It is quite understandable that peoples aware of a distinctive national character and involved in some big existing political complex, should wish to disentangle themselves from one group of associations in order to enter more effectively into another, a greater, and more satisfactory one. The Finn or the Pole, who has hitherto been a rather reluctant member of the synthesis of the Russian empire, may well wish to end that attachment in order to become a free member of a worldwide brotherhood. The desire for free arrangement is not a desire for chaos. There is such a thing as untying your parcels in order to pack them better, and I do not see myself how we can possibly contemplate a great league of freedom and reason in the world without a considerable amount of such preliminary dissolution.

It happens, very fortunately for the world, that a century and a quarter ago thirteen various and very jealous states worked out the problem of a Union, and became--after an enormous, exhausting wrangle--the United States of America. Now the way they solved their riddle was by delegating and giving over jealously specified sovereign powers and doing all that was possible to retain the residuum. They remained essentially sovereign states. New York, Virginia, Massachusetts, for example, remained legally independent. The practical fusion of these peoples into one people outran the legal bargain. It was only after long years of discussion that the point was conceded; it was indeed only after the Civil War that the implications were fully established, that there resided a sovereignty in the American people as a whole, as distinguished from the peoples of the several states. This is a precedent that every one who talks about the League of Nations should bear in mind. These states set up a congress and president in Washington with strictly delegated powers. That congress and president they delegated to look after certain common interests, to deal with interstate trade, to deal with foreign powers, to maintain a supreme court of law. Everything else--education, militia, powers of life and death--the states retained for themselves. To this day, for instance, the federal courts and the federal officials have no power to interfere to protect the lives or property of aliens in any part of the union outside the district of Columbia. The state governments still see to that. The federal government has the legal right perhaps to intervene, but it is still chary of such intervention. And these states of the American Union were at the outset so independent-spirited that they

would not even adopt a common name. To this day they have no common name. We have to call them Americans, which is a ridiculous name when we consider that Canada, Mexico, Peru, Brazil are all of them also in America. Or else we have to call them Virginians, Californians, New Englanders, and so forth. Their legal and nominal separateness weighs nothing against the real fusion that their great league has now made possible.

Now, that clearly is a precedent of the utmost value in our schemes for this council of the League of Nations. We must begin by delegating, as the States began by delegating. It is a far cry to the time when we shall talk and think of the Sovereign People of the Earth. That council of the League of Nations will be a tie as strong, we hope, but certainly not so close and multiplex as the early tie of the States at Washington. It will begin by having certain delegated powers and no others. It will be an "ad hoc" body. Later its powers may grow as mankind becomes accustomed to it. But at first it will have, directly or mediately, all the powers that seem necessary to restrain the world from war--and unless I know nothing of patriotic jealousies it will have not a scrap of power more. The danger is much more that its powers will be insufficient than that they will be excessive. Of that later. What I want to discuss here now is the constitution of this delegated body. I want to discuss that first in order to set aside out of the discussion certain fantastic notions that will otherwise get very seriously in our way. Fantastic as they are, they have played a large part in reducing the Hague Tribunal to an ineffective squeak amidst the thunders of this war.

A number of gentlemen scheming out world unity in studies have begun their proposals with the simple suggestion that each sovereign power should send one member to the projected parliament of mankind. This has a pleasant democratic air; one sovereign state, one vote. Now let us run over a list of sovereign states and see to what this leads us. We find our list includes the British Empire, with a population of four hundred millions, of which probably half can read and write some language or other; Bogota with a population of a million, mostly poets; Hayti with a population of a million and a third, almost entirely illiterate and liable at any time to further political disruption; Andorra with a population of four or five thousand souls. The mere suggestion of equal representation between such "powers" is enough to make the British Empire burst into a thousand (voting) fragments. A certain concession to population, one must admit, was made by the theorists; a state of over three millions got, if I remember rightly, two delegates, and if over twenty, three, and some of the small states were given a kind of intermittent appearance, they only came every other time or something of that sort; but at The Hague things still remained in such a posture that three or four minute and backward states could outvote the British Empire or the United States. Therein lies the clue to the insignificance of The Hague. Such projects as these are idle projects and we must put them out of our heads; they are against nature; the great nations will not suffer them for a moment.

But when we dismiss this idea of representation by states, we are left with the problem of the proportion of representation and of relative

weight in the Council of the League on our hands. It is the sort of problem that appeals terribly to the ingenious. We cannot solve it by making population a basis, because that will give a monstrous importance to the illiterate millions of India and China. Ingenious statistical schemes have been framed in which the number of university graduates and the steel output come in as multipliers, but for my own part I am not greatly impressed by statistical schemes. At the risk of seeming something of a Prussian, I would like to insist upon certain brute facts. The business of the League of Nations is to keep the peace of the world and nothing else. No power will ever dare to break the peace of the world if the powers that are capable of making war under modern conditions say "No." And there are only four powers certainly capable at the present time of producing the men and materials needed for a modern war in sufficient abundance to go on fighting: Britain, France, Germany, and the United States. There are three others which are very doubtfully capable: Italy, Japan, and Austria. Russia I will mark--it is all that one can do with Russia just now--with a note of interrogation. Some day China may be war capable--I hope never, but it is a possibility. Personally I don't think that any other power on earth would have a ghost of a chance to resist the will--if it could be an honestly united will--of the first-named four. All the rest fight by the sanction of and by association with these leaders. They can only fight because of the split will of the war-complete powers. Some are forced to fight by that very division.

No one can vie with me in my appreciation of the civilization of Switzerland, Sweden, or Holland, but the plain fact of the case is that

such powers are absolutely incapable of uttering an effective protest against war. Far less so are your Haytis and Liberias. The preservation of the world-peace rests with the great powers and with the great powers alone. If they have the will for peace, it is peace. If they have not, it is conflict. The four powers I have named can now, if they see fit, dictate the peace of the world for ever.

Let us keep our grip on that. Peace is the business of the great powers primarily. Steel output, university graduates, and so forth may be convenient secondary criteria, may be useful ways of measuring war efficiency, but the meat and substance of the Council of the League of Nations must embody the wills of those leading peoples. They can give an enduring peace to the little nations and the whole of mankind. It can arrive in no other way. So I take it that the Council of an ideal League of Nations must consist chiefly of the representatives of the great belligerent powers, and that the representatives of the minor allies and of the neutrals--essential though their presence will be--must not be allowed to swamp the voices of these larger masses of mankind.

And this state of affairs may come about more easily than logical, statistical-minded people may be disposed to think. Our first impulse, when we discuss the League of Nations idea, is to think of some very elaborate and definite scheme of members on the model of existing legislative bodies, called together one hardly knows how, and sitting in a specially built League of Nations Congress House. All schemes are more methodical than reality. We think of somebody, learned and "expert," in spectacles, with a thin clear voice, reading over the

"Projected Constitution of a League of Nations" to an attentive and respectful Peace Congress. But there is a more natural way to a league than that. Instead of being made like a machine, the League of Nations may come about like a marriage. The Peace Congress that must sooner or later meet may itself become, after a time, the Council of a League of Nations. The League of Nations may come upon us by degrees, almost imperceptibly. I am strongly obsessed by the idea that that Peace Congress will necessarily become--and that it is highly desirable that it should become--a most prolonged and persistent gathering. Why should it not become at length a permanent gathering, inviting representatives to aid its deliberations from the neutral states, and gradually adjusting itself to conditions of permanency?

I can conceive no such Peace Congress as those that have settled up after other wars, settling up after this war. Not only has the war been enormously bigger than any other war, but it has struck deeper at the foundations of social and economic life. I doubt if we begin to realize how much of the old system is dead to-day, how much has to be remade. Since the beginnings of history there has been a credible promise of gold payments underneath our financial arrangements. It is now an incredible promise. The value of a pound note waves about while you look at it. What will happen to it when peace comes no man can tell. Nor what will happen to the mark. The rouble has gone into the Abyss. Our giddy money specialists clutch their handfuls of paper and watch it flying down the steep. Much as we may hate the Germans, some of us will have to sit down with some of the enemy to arrange a common scheme for the preservation of credit in money. And I presume that it is not proposed

to end this war in a wild scramble of buyers for such food as remains in the world. There is a shortage now, a greater shortage ahead of the world, and there will be shortages of supply at the source and transport in food and all raw materials for some years to come. The Peace Congress will have to sit and organize a share-out and distribution and reorganization of these shattered supplies. It will have to Rhondda the nations. Probably, too, we shall have to deal collectively with a pestilence before we are out of the mess. Then there are such little jobs as the reconstruction of Belgium and Serbia. There are considerable rectifications of boundaries to be made. There are fresh states to be created, in Poland and Armenia for example. About all these smaller states, new and old, that the peace must call into being, there must be a system of guarantees of the most difficult and complicated sort.

I do not see the Press Congress getting through such matters as these in a session of weeks or months. The idea the Germans betrayed at Brest, that things were going to be done in the Versailles fashion by great moustached heroes frowning and drawing lines with a large black soldierly thumbnail across maps, is--old-fashioned. They have made their eastern treaties, it is true, in this mode, but they are still looking for some really responsible government to keep them now that they are made. From first to last clearly the main peace negotiations are going to follow unprecedented courses. This preliminary discussion of war aims by means of great public speeches, that has been getting more and more explicit now for many months, is quite unprecedented. Apparently all the broad preliminaries are to be stated and accepted in the sight of all mankind before even an armistice occurs on the main, the western front.

The German diplomatists hate this process. So do a lot of ours. So do some of the diplomatic Frenchmen. The German junkers are dodging and lying, they are fighting desperately to keep back everything they possibly can for the bargaining and bullying and table-banging of the council chamber, but that way there is no peace. And when at last Germany says snip sufficiently to the Allies' snap, and the Peace Congress begins, it will almost certainly be as unprecedented as its prelude. Before it meets, the broad lines of the settlement will have been drawn plainly with the approval of the mass of mankind.