

THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

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WITHOUT question there is a general desire for some kind of international agreement or union or league which will tend to prevent the recurrence, or at least to minimize the scope and the horrors of such a hideous disaster to humanity as the world war. In common with most of my friends I strongly share this feeling; indeed, the scheme which still seems to me most likely to prove feasible and beneficial in action is that which I gave in outline four years ago in the little volume called "America and the World War." In discussing this scheme I emphasized the vital need that there should be good faith among those entering into the scheme and honorable conduct in living up to the obligations incurred; for heedless readiness to make promises which are unlikely to be fulfilled is a public sin but one degree lower than callous readiness to break promises that can be kept.

In living up to the promises after once the league has been formed, the chief need will be insistence upon keeping faith when keeping faith is unpleasant or irksome. But in forming the league the chief danger will come from the enthusiastic persons who in their desire to realize the millennium at once, right off, play into the hands of the slippery politicians who are equally ready to make any promise when the time for keeping it is far distant, and to evade keeping it when the time at last arrives.

Nothing is easier than to be the kind of sham idealist whose idealism consists in uttering on all occasions the loftiest sentiments, while never hesitating to act in direct contravention of them when self-interest is dictator; and verily this man has his reward, for he is repaid by the homage of all the foolish people who care for nothing but words, and by the service of all the unscrupulous people whose deeds do not square with any words which can be publicly uttered, and who seek profit by cloaking such action behind over-zealous adherence to lofty phrases.

But the idealist who tries to realize his ideals is sure to be opposed alike by the foolish people who demand the impossible good and by the wicked people who under cover of adherence to the impossible good oppose the good which is possible.

If the League of Nations is built on a document as high-sounding and as meaningless as the speech in which Mr. Wilson laid down his fourteen points, it will simply add one more scrap to the diplomatic waste paper basket. Most of these fourteen points, like those referring to the freedom of the seas, to tariff arrangements, to the reduction of armaments, to a police force for each nation, and to the treatment of colonies, could be interpreted (and some of them, by President Wilson and his advisers, actually were interpreted) to mean anything or nothing. They were absolutely true to the traditions of the bad old diplomacy, for any nation could agree to them and yet reserve the right to interpret them in diametrically opposite manner to the interpretation that others put upon them.

Therefore in forming the league let us face

the facts, whether pleasant or unpleasant, and let us show good faith with ourselves and with every one else. The first fact is that nations do not stand on any real equality, and that at this moment we are not so treating them. A couple of years ago Hayti and San Domingo were two little independent republics. According to the principles Mr. Wilson has publicly laid down they were as much entitled to the right of self-determination as the United States or France, and all our dealing with them should have been frank and above-board. But in practice Mr. Wilson conquered them, killed large numbers of their people, deprived them of self-determination, and kept the action and the reason for the action absolutely secret. During the same period, in dealing with the affairs of China, a huge but pacifist power, unarmed and helpless, Mr. Wilson made his most important agreement about this peaceful republic's future not with China at all but with the Empire of Japan.

As Mr. Wilson practices only secret diplomacy we cannot tell what his justification for these various actions may be. But it is of course obvious that it would be absurd to include in a league of nations countries like China, Mexico, Hayti and San Domingo, on a make-believe equality with the United States and Japan. And there are dozens of other countries which stand in the same category. Moreover, there are some very big nations whose recent action would make reliance on any of their promises proof of a feeble intellect on our part. Most certainly Germany and Turkey ought to sit on the mourners' bench a good many years before we admit them to fellowship—and if any foolish person says that

the German people and the German Government were not the same thing, it is enough to point out that the German people throughout supported the German Government as long as its wrongdoing seemed likely to be successful, and abandoned the government only when the Allied armies obtained a military decision over those of Germany and her vassals. Russia's action during the last year would make any international guarantee of action on her part worth precisely nothing as a warrant for promise or action on our part.

Therefore, let us begin by including in the league only the present allies, and admit other nations only as their conduct persevered in through a term of years warrants it. Let us explicitly reserve certain rights—to our territorial possessions, to our control of immigration and citizenship, to our fiscal policy, and to our handling of our domestic problems generally—as not to be questioned and not to be brought before any international tribunal. As regards impotent or disorderly nations and people outside the league, let us be very cautious about guaranteeing to interfere with or on behalf of them where they lie wholly outside our sphere of interest; and let us announce that our own sphere of special concern, in America (perhaps limited to north of somewhere near the equator), is not to be infringed on by European or Asiatic powers.

Moreover, let us absolutely decline any disarmament proposition that would leave us helpless to defend ourselves. Let us absolutely refuse to abolish nationalism; on the contrary, let us base a wise and practical internationalism on a sound and intense nationalism. There is not and never has been the slightest danger of this

country being militaristic or a menace to other nations. The danger is the exact reverse. Keep our navy as second to that of Great Britain. Introduce universal military training; say nine months with the colors for every young man somewhere between the ages of nineteen and twenty-three, with extra intensive training for the officers and non-commissioned officers, and preliminary work, including especially technical, industrial and agricultural training, of the most practical kind, in the schools for the boys of sixteen to eighteen. We would thereby secure an army which would never be desirous of an offensive war; and its mere existence would be the best possible guarantee that we would never have to wage an offensive war. Prepare in advance the material necessary for the use of our first line when called out; don't forget that we were able to fight in this war only because our allies gave us at the battle front the necessary cannon, tanks, gas machines, airplanes and machine guns — for until almost the end of the war we had practically none of our own on the fighting line.

Then, when all this has been done, let us with deep seriousness ponder every promise we make, *so as to be sure that our people will fulfill it.* It will be worse than idle for us to enter any league if, when the test comes in the future, this country acts as badly as it did in refusing to make any protest when Germany violated the Hague Conventions, in refusing to go to war when the *Lusitania* was sunk, and in refusing to go to war with Bulgaria or Turkey at all. As for Germany, unless her cynical violation of the Hague treaties is punished we put a premium on any violation of any similar treaty hereafter.

Remember that the essential principle of the league, if it is to be successful, must be the willingness of each nation to fight for the right in some quarrel in which at the moment it seems we have no material concern. The will-power, the intelligent farsightedness, and the stern devotion to duty implied in such action stand infinitely above the loose willingness to promise anything characteristic of so many of the most vociferous advocates of such a league.

Let us go into such a league. But let us weigh well what we promise; and then train ourselves in body and soul to keep our promises. Let us treat the formation of the league as an addition to but in no sense as a substitute for preparing our own strength for our own defense. And let us build a genuine internationalism, that is, a genuine and generous regard for the rights of others, on the only healthy basis: — a sound and intense development of the broadest spirit of American nationalism. Our steady aim must be to do justice to others, and to secure our own nation against injustice; and we can achieve this twofold aim only if we make our deeds square with our words.