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Some Recent International Conferences, 1925.

"SOME RECENT INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES."

RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER.

THE TEMPLE, SUNDAY MORNING,

MARCH 15, 1925, CLEVELAND, O.



Geneva is today the capital of the world. All political roads lead there. And Geneva is today also the home of some of the dearest hopes of mankind. It is, as you know, the city of the League of Nations, that agency which the war occasioned and which some of the noblest minds of mankind evolved. Few as yet are its achievements; many are its inherent weaknesses, and numerous are the obstacles that the nations of the earth have placed and are placing in its way.

When all is said and done, quite apart from the question whether our country should adhere to it or not, the fact still remains, the indubitable fact, that the League of Nations is today the only international agency sanctioned by the governments of the earth, and representative of them, which is consistently and courageously wrestling with the task which is the greatest task of the twentieth century, namely, the finding of the formulae and the development of the method for the establishment of international peace and international security.

Nor is this agency, the League, limiting its activities to peace. Other great human problems touching the moral and the physical welfare of mankind have come within its scope,---The problem of raising the standards of the working-classes of the earth; the problem of suppressing the traffic in international vice, and the problem of stamping out the illicit, immoral traffic in drugs, narcotics.

✓ If one has ever entertained any illusions about the ease with which peace will be established and the swiftness with which international reconciliation will be effected, one need but spend a morning in Geneva and attend a session of the council and assembly of the League, or one of its subsidiary committees to be quickly disillusioned.

The disasters of the last war constrained the nations of the earth to consent to the formation of the League and to the drafting of its covenants. But the nations have not changed. It will, I suppose, be expecting the impossible to assume that the nations of the earth have, somehow, miraculously been spiritually transformed, chastened and purged of all their selfishness and of their rapacity. The nations of the earth in 1925 are the self-same nations which drove headlong and blindly into the war of 1914, and they are perhaps a little more enmeshed in international suspicions and animosities in 1925 than they were in 1914; and their spokesmen at Geneva are their spokesmen and not the spokesmen and the champions of some abstract ideal and humanitarian purposes.

✓ So that the council meetings at Geneva are not at best an elevating spectacle. Some of the nations of Europe today, signatories of the covenants of the League, are frankly hostile; they chafe under the restraint of the bans, however gentle, which the League imposes upon them; other nations are frankly cynical about the League; and still others are quite indifferent to it, content to let it play and function so long as it does not interfere with any of their particular

prerogatives. Once there is danger of the League touching them at a vital spot, immediately they warn the League to run along and tend to its own business. So that the League today is still a rather wistful and vain and timid thing.

During the last year a few events occurred of international importance which tended even more to undermine the prestige of the League of Nations, and to show its inherent deficiencies and weaknesses. First came the Egyptian scandal, of which I spoke some weeks ago. Immediately upon the rise to power of the Tory party in England, and under the cloak of a political assassination, England attacked Egypt, stripped it of its last vestige of political independence, annexed the Sudan--quite contrary to an international treaty, and forced upon the helpless nation humiliation terms at the point of the sword. The Egyptian parliament appealed to the League of nations, as to the conscience of mankind, but inasmuch as one of the high contracting parties of the League's covenants--in fact, one of the highest, if not the highest contracting party--England--was involved, the League thought it the act of prudence and wisdom to turn a deaf ear to the appeal of Egypt.

And then came the opium conference. I ought to dwell upon this a little longer because very little is known about the opium situation as touching the nations of the earth. In 1912, at the urgent suggestion of our own government--which, by the way, has a clear and noble and fine record in this matter of suppressing the curse of opium--at the urgent request of the American government an international conference was held

at the Hague in 1912, and the nations of the earth there assembled pledged themselves to a gradual but sure suppression of opium production and distribution except for medicinal purposes. But most of the nations who had financial interests involved in the opium traffic never had any intention of carrying out either the letter or the spirit of those conventions; and so the opium traffic during the past twelve years, instead of being diminished, has increased at a terrific pace.

When the League of Nations was called into existence in 1919, the agreements entered into at this convention in 1912 were handed over to the League by common consent, and the League was called upon to enforce the terms of those agreements. It was not very long before the League, at the behest of the nations who had vested interests in the opium traffic, namely, England, France, Holland, Portugal, and one or two other nations,--it was not very long before the League passed a pious resolution repeating mechanically the principles of the Hague conventions and declaring that the production of opium was legal not merely for medicinal purposes, but for what is known technically as legitimate purposes, namely, that the use of opium was legitimate in those countries where the popular consumption of opium is permitted by law.

In other words, the League merely indorsed and sanctioned a horrible condition which prevailed and continues to prevail. The United States government, being one of the signatories to the Hague convention, resented this violation

of an international agreement, and in conjunction with other nations demanded another conference. This conference was held last year, or rather beginning in 1923 and dragging over a period of more than a year. Months were spent in fruitless negotiation; two conferences were held; one broke down completely, after one of our delegates, Bishop Brent, left in despair and in disgust; the other ended in the drafting of certain resolutions quite similar to those previously drafted, which gave voice to pious sentiments but which did not adopt effective measures for the suppression of this vice; and the American delegation, headed by Congressman Porter, a brave and courageous man, refused to sign this agreement and left the conference, with the consent and the sanction of our government.

The American delegation brought in quite clear and sound proposals. Mankind was faced with a desperate situation; the consumption of opium must be checked; the only way to check it is to control it at its source, namely, in the lands where the poppy was being produced; that land, principally India, is under British control, a part of the British empire. The American delegation suggested that fifteen years be allowed the nations which are producing raw opium, gradually to suppress that trade and to enable the farmers of the poppy to turn their fields into other agricultural purposes; the fifteen year period to begin at once. The American delegation furthermore suggested that the use of opium for other than medical purposes be declared illegal and prohibited. In other words, to outlaw opium. And the

American delegation further suggested that an international board of control be instituted which will annually determine the amount of opium which each country requires for its medical purposes, regulate export and import, and in a general way control the situation. In other words, the American delegation presented a sound, logical plan for meeting this desperate situation. But the European nations, the Christian nations which punish those who use opium at home, but which have territorial possessions in the East, where opium produces as high as fifty per cent of their revenues,-- those European nations at first refused even to place the American proposals on the agenda--even to listen to those proposals, to permit them to go into the minutes of the conference; but after a long period of wrangling and insistence these proposals were permitted to be placed on the agenda of the conference.

But they were denounced; they were howled down; they were called radical and fantastic and visionary. The representative of India--who, by the way, was not an Indian but an Englishman--the English presumed to speak not only for the Indian but for two-thirds of mankind--the representative of India made a quite clear statement: that the use of opium in India was a very innocent pastime; that it was altogether not harmful, and even beneficial; that while India is content not to sell opium to nations that do not wish to buy, India, which has seven thousand emporiums for the sale of opium,--India, where opium dens are licensed by the government,

✓ --India has no intentions of prohibiting the natives from consuming the opium.

Thus spoke the representative of India, an Englishman. At the same time when he was making this dramatic announcement of the needs and the wishes of the Indian people, an all-Indian congress committee meeting in India declared "in the opinion of the all-Indian congress committee the opium policy of the government of India is altogether contrary to the moral welfare of the people of India and of other countries. The congress is further of the opinion that the people of India would welcome the total abolition of the opium traffic for purposes of revenue, and is also of the opinion that the production of opium is out of all proportion to the medical requirements of India."

The British--when I speak of England, please remember I am not now speaking of the English people but I am speaking now of the English government which happens at this moment to be in control; a quite reactionary government, an imperialistic government.--the British Government, which holds the key to the situation, inasmuch as it controls India, countered the American proposals by offering a proposal of its own, namely, that the production of opium be gradually suppressed during the period of fifteen years, just as the American proposal read, but that this period of fifteen years shall begin when the illicit production of opium is checked in China and when the fear of smuggling disappears. In other words, the period is to begin when the Messiah comes.

Lord Robert Cecil, that Englishman who a few months ago came to the United States to receive the Wilson peace medal--Lord Robert Cecil, the best foot which England always puts forward--Lord Robert Cecil was the spokesman and the champion of the opium deals at this conference; and he almost spoke like an evangelist, so great, I understand, were his emotional exaltations when he spoke about the need of opium for the people of India.

Such is the condition of civilization in Europe, and such is the condition of European statesmanship. England, which forced China to use opium; England, which waged a war upon China to compel China to use opium, so that English merchants may profit from the sale of that opium; China, which has made such desperate efforts in the last twenty or thirty years to eradicate this curse which is inflicting its people; China, which not so very long ago had two million poppy fields plowed up and hundreds of millions of dollars worth of opium burnt, destroyed,--China is again being victimized, and England is again, consciously or unconsciously, helping to spread the plague among the Chinese. In the meantime the League has come out of this affair even more bedraggled and a sorry thing, indeed.

And now comes the Geneva protocol which England has scrapped,---The Geneva protocol, which was the supreme effort of the last assembly of the League of Nations. What is this protocol of which you are now reading much in your newspaper? The protocol is very much like a subsidiary

covenant to the original covenant of the League of Nations-- supplementing it, giving it teeth, as it were. To quote the protocol itself: "The aim of the protocol is to facilitate the reduction and limitation of armaments provided for in Article 8 of the covenants of the League of Nations, by guaranteeing the security of states through the development of methods for the pacific settlement of all international disputes, and the effective condemnation of all aggressive war."

The object of the protocol is to facilitate the reduction of armaments by bringing about a condition of security in Europe so that nations will consent to disarmament, and by bringing about a condition where the aggressor nation will be punished by the united forces of the signatories to this protocol. This protocol goes a step further than the original covenant of the League of Nations. It definitely and clearly outlaws war; it definitely and clearly declares all war an international crime except such wars as are waged in self-defense or at the behest and in conjunction with the other nations of the League of Nations engaged in a punitive enterprise to coerce an offensive aggressor nation. And it goes a step further in clearly defining what an aggressor nation is. Very often in an international conflict it is very difficult to say which nation offended and started the war, and all nations are quite ready to put the blame on the other nation. The protocol sets up a test for determining the aggressor nation, and the test is simply this: any nation which refuses to submit its difficulties to arbitration, or

refuses to abide by the decision of an arbitrator is ipso facto the aggressor nation. That is a logical, that is a simple way of determining aggression.

Furthermore, all the nations signatories to this protocol agree to pool all their forces, economic if necessary, military if necessary,--all their naval and air and land forces, to a degree to be determined by each individual nation, to punish an aggressor nation. This protocol is to be inaugurated after an international conference for the limitation of armaments convenes--the conference which was to be held in the month of June of this year. Now, this is the first honest, earnest, serious effort on the part of the European nations to face the problem of disarmament and peace.

It is quite clear to any thinking man that the nations of Europe will not disarm, cannot disarm, should not disarm unless and until such a forceful, authentic agency is established in Europe which will guarantee them collectively and to each of them separately absolute security. No nation is justified, in deference to its own self, to destroy its tools of self-defense, unless there is an international agency having force back of it, and power and authority which will protect it and defend it if it is being unlawfully and unjustly attacked or menaced.

The European nations are seeking a real solidarity, and the continental European peoples are all eager for this protocol--even France, because France realizes that the only other alternative to the protocol is the old fashioned

military alliances and the balance of power, which inevitably bring on war and disaster. But England, the present English government, has scrapped the protocol, and the protocol today is a dead issue. I suppose there were reasons for it; I suppose some of the terms of the protocol are as yet too vague; I suppose England feared that it might be called upon to punish a nation not a signatory to this protocol--like the United States, should the League declare the United States at any future time an aggressor nation, and England would not wish to be used on such a punitive mission; I suppose the degree to which a nation may be called upon to contribute of its military forces in a given situation is not well provided for; I suppose no adequate provisions are made in this protocol for correcting territorial injustices which now exist in Europe. But England curtly denounced this protocol without offering a substitute, without suggesting amendments, thereby postponing, perhaps for a long period of time, the sound idea back of the protocol, namely, effective security for the sake of effective disarmament and peace in Europe.

I say, the League again has suffered in prestige, has suffered a serious defeat. But I assume that all such defeats are evidences of ultimate triumph; these are heroic defeats; these are the inevitable checks and obstacles which a great ideal must inevitably encounter before it reaches the point of consummation and realization. It is absolutely certain that if the European peoples are ever to see the new day of international peace and good will and

cooperation and well-being, they will have to evolve some such protocol, some such agreement for mutual security and defense.

It is absolutely sure and certain to any thinking man that in that direction and in that direction only lies the path of civilization; and the League, if it remains loyal to the spirit which informed it from the beginning, and continues to speak freely and courageously, refusing to be intimidated, refusing to be coerced, refusing to be threatened by the great powers of Europe; if it insists upon hitting away year after year and year after year at these few simple Gibraltar-like truths, ultimately, ultimately it will win out. Mankind may yet have to pass through many a sea of blood before it reaches the promised land; mankind in its blindness and foolishness may yet have to see many an empire crumble into dust and many millions of God's beautiful children cut down in the prime of life--mutilated. But if a few will remain steadfast and true, if a few will tend the sacred fires on the altars, if a few will speak out of season and in season, tactfully or untactfully, of these simple, elemental, indispensable truths, then it may be hoped that our dreams will yet come to be.

Nations must consent to sacrifice their chauvinism, their national imperialistic ambitions, their lust for power, their pseudo-prides, for the sake of cooperation and comity and good will. Nations must learn to realize that the interests of all are the interests of one, and the interests of one are the interests of all; that European life today

is so completely intertwined and interlaced that no nation can suffer without making other nations suffer; and no nation can prosper without extending the benefits of its prosperity to other nations. The European nations will have to learn the lesson which individual human beings have learned: that law is greater than force, and justice is stronger than brute power. And perhaps it will yet be the sacred privilege of the American people again to lead in that direction.

The day following the break-down of the protocol in Geneva, our own President announced his intention of convoking another international conference for the limitation of naval armaments. That is a blessed advance in the right direction. It will not reach down to the root of the problem; it will not make for land disarmament in Europe; but any conference which brings nations together and tends to discourage competition in armament, tends to make them understand one another a little better, and tends to create finer terms of friendship and cooperation, is a desirable thing and a highly helpful thing.

The way of truth is hard. Peace, if it ever comes, as I said over and over again, will not come like a radiant beam, bringing gifts; peace, if it ever comes, will come like a man of sorrows, mocked and spat upon. It is a hard road which the human race will traverse; but it is the only road. It is the only road.

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