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A British Organisation founded to promote the formation of a World League of Free Peoples for the securing of International Justice, Mutual Defence, and Permanent Peace.

British Nationalism and the League of Nations,

By H. G. WELLS.

THE common-sense of the world is altogether in favour of a League of Nations, as the chief end of the coming Peace Conference, a League that will establish an enduring world peace and a commonweal of mankind. That is the declared aim of the United States of America, and the implicit aim of ourselves and all our Allies. It is a vast task, a complicated task, and a necessary task. In the measure in which our generation fails to accomplish it, the prospect before mankind darkens. Failure means a world unsettled and insecure as well as a world impoverished. It means a world therefore, unable to recover from

its strain and impoverishment. It means a world staggering along through many generations to come, between phases of social disorder and phases of partial discipline. Such states and regions as contrive for a time to escape social collapse, will remain in an atmosphere of mutual distrust ; they will be forced to expend their energies they might otherwise devote to recuperation upon war preparation until they too stagger in their turn.

So plain is this prospect, so manifest is the choice that now confronts humanity, that it needs some effort to understand the motives of those who oppose the League of Nations movement. One might reasonably expect from every human being with any conscience, any touch of imagination, any spirit of generosity, an ungrudging willingness to help, to learn, to make sacrifices in a need so urgent and for a cause so great.

And there can be no doubt that the will to bring about this change in the ordering of human affairs, this new phase that will substitute for the secret and blood-stained rivalries of Great Powers, the open organisation of the whole world for the common welfare of mankind, spreads now like the glow of burning tinder in a breeze. It seizes upon more minds and more. The astonishing thing is that it does not seize upon all. The astonishing thing is to discover that there is a real opposition to the League of Nations idea. It is

not simply an obstruction due to a failure of understanding or courage, it is a deliberate opposition. Distrust one can understand, and want of faith ; but not this open and declared hostility.

THE ANTI-LEAGUERS.

The creation of a League of Nations with its intricate tangle of problems, with its manifest necessity for loyal co-operation and complicated new organisations, is not to be brought about, it is clear, in a frankly gracious atmosphere. Those who grow rich through war and the preparations for war, those who would echo the happy cry of that cattle-dealer the other day who did not care how long " the good old war " lasted, those who trade upon human disputes and hatred, those who occupy positions of advantage and importance that seem to be threatened by the prospect of a re-united mankind, are rallying in defence of the old disorder. And there have been some amazing displays of personal meanness. It was inevitable that some public men should give themselves openly to this world task before others, but it is pitiful that the spirit of rivalry should drive others into open antagonism to our common cause. Yet politicians who once seemed touched with greatness have set themselves to shout down the League of Nations.

The way to a League of Nations is beset with difficulties, but against it there is very little reasoned argument. And most of the opposition

takes the form of violent appeals to the patriotic susceptibilities of mankind. In every country the ordinary citizen is being assured that the League of Nations means that he is to be ruled by "foreigners"; the Pan-Germans in Germany, the Tory-reactionaries here, the rowdy antagonists of President Wilson in America, are all hammering hard upon that one suggestion, the only suggestion against the League that seems to them in the least likely to appeal to the ordinary man. The League of Nations, they declare, is against nationality, it is unpatriotic. The clamour they are making is so considerable that it has to be dealt with, flimsy though the arguments are behind the noise.

The desire of these opponents of the League of Nations to represent that great project as an offence against the patriotic instincts of mankind is so strong, that they stick at no trick of controversy or misstatement to make out that patriotism is incompatible with the organisation of a world peace. In a recent controversy this was brought home to the present writer, in a very striking way. He happens to be an almost offensively patriotic Englishman; he took care to express that patriotism emphatically and to quote old and recent utterances of his own to enforce the fact. But it was necessary to the conduct of his argument that he should point out that the British Empire is not a nation but a League of Nations, that British nationality is a mere legal fiction, that

the Welsh and Scotch and English are three very distinct nations, and that the sort of political movement which may be called the "British Nationalist" movement is a pretty bare-faced attempt to exploit the natural and noble feelings of nationality for base ends. "I loathe Nationalism," he wrote. Surely it is plain that one may loathe "Nationalism" and have the keenest sense of and pride in one's nationality. One loathes Nationalism because one loves one's country, and hates to have that love caricatured. In "Stalky and Co." Mr. Kipling expresses just that same loathing for nationalism in his biting sketch of an oily political humbug waving the Union Jack in front of Stalky and his schoolfellows. Patriotism is a deep and natural instinct in man, it is therefore very easy to trade upon; it is a deep fount of emotion, deeper often than reason and criticism, and that is why, as Dr. Johnson, who was himself no mean patriot, said it is the last refuge of a scoundrel. When every other device has failed there is always a chance for the patriotic appeal.

But the notable thing about that recent controversy is this; that neither the writer's antagonist nor the press upon that side would allow that the writer had not declared a loathing for his own Nationality. They jumped upon that sentence, "I loathe Nationalism." They tore it from its context. It has gone the round of the noisier Tory press in Britain, usually with the

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substitution of " Nationality " for " Nationalism." It will go ronud the world, in paragraphs and comments. It has produced a crop of letters of remonstrance from that inexhaustible army of letter-writers who will not read what one has written but will insist upon writing about it. That last is, however, merely a personal inconvenience ; the value of the incident is in the light it throws upon the spirit and quality of the " Nationalist " opposition to the League of Nations. These people will not stick at any misinterpretation to get national feeling on their side. Because it is generous and indiscriminating and easily aped and tricked.

IS THE LEAGUE UNPATRIOTIC ?

Now is there a shadow of justification for this asesrtion that the League of Nations will trench on Nationality ? Is it not rather the case that the League will preserve and secure all that is precious in nationality ?—that it is, as its name implies, a guarantee of nationality against Empires and Powers which are inspired not by patriotism but by Imperialist pride and cupidity ?

The fallacy of all this violent " Nationalism " is the belief that to be a patriot one must hate. Such was the patriotism of the German in 1914. It was a training in falsehood about foreigners ; it was an organised cant that robbed the German people of all respect for the rights and lives and dignity of men outside Germany. With such consequences as we have seen Such, too, is this loud thing that now echoes up and down the British press against the League of Nations,

against the leadership of President Wilson, against our Allies. But for men and women not altogether base, patriotism is love ; and to be a good patriot does not prevent us from honouring and loving other countries and peoples. Within the circle of one's patriotism is love of family, love of one's circle of friends, love of one's district or county ; outside of it in a clean and intelligent human soul is love and care and respect for all mankind. For British people, at any rate, before we come to that outer circle, there should be, beyond the range of our own flag and rule, our pride and affection for those of the English speech and tradition who live beneath the stripes and stars. None of these circles of loyalty and duty are incompatible one with the other. The man who does his duty by his family is thereby a better patriot, and a good patriot is still incomplete until he has squared his patriotism with the human commonweal.

A man who pays his police rate does not thereby betray his family and personal friends. Yet by recognising the law and the police he does bring in an outside authority over his little circle. In return other families and circles come under that same authority. He makes a reasonable barter of his freedom to be violent for security against violence. In Corsica, until recently, and in some parts of Kentucky, family loyalty resented such intervention and the blood feud prevailed, but common-sense undermines family dignity even in these remote and picturesque regions. Only in the Khyber Pass and a few such regions now, does loyalty to one's village involve a standing blood

feud with the next. We English have long since learnt to co-operate with the Lowlanders and Highlanders of Scotland and with the Welsh, in spite of profound and enduring differences of language, religion, and character. It is ridiculous to pretend that either the Welshman or the Highlander has abated his nationalism at all, because he belongs to the British unity. Welshmen are probably more Welsh now than they were two hundred years ago. Their distinctive music, their literature and language hold their own. They do not simply preserve, they develop their national tradition. It is very right and proper that every family should manage its own affairs, every village and every country; and there is nothing in the League of Nations proposal to alter that. The League of Nations is no project to interfere in any nation's or people's own affairs. But it is a project to establish and organise common interests. Just as I and my neighbour have a common interest which neither he nor I can manage alone, called "keeping the peace," which we have to manage therefore by a combination of neighbours and through the convenient agency of policemen, so the nations and states of the world have a supreme common interest, which is the peace and the general order and prosperity of humanity. That peace of the world, mankind is beginning to realise, cannot be kept by one nation or by a conspiracy among the nations any more than one man or several men can set up to police a village without the general consent of the community. The peace of the world must be a collective arrangement, just as the support of the

local police and the national law are collective arrangements.

That collective arrangement means co-operation with foreigners, it means indeed federation with foreigners, and that is where the excuse for all this outcry comes in. "Are we to have our affairs managed by foreigners?" they shout. "Perish the thought!" But to have a partner is not to become the slave of a partner. There must be some trust in human affairs, and even savages will put aside their weapons after eating bread and salt. If mankind does not disarm, mankind will be starved while holding its weapons; and there is no other way to secure a world disarmament except by setting up a world power that can challenge any country that arms. These "Nationalists" would persuade the public that the League of Nations is some sort of scheme for disarming the British Empire, while leaving all the rest of the world free to prepare for war. But they will persuade the public to think any nonsense they can, because, to be plain about it, their opposition to the League of Nations is no more honest than their controversial methods. Behind their campaign lies a scheme of economic exploitation; it is their substitute for a soul, their romance and their dream. They prate of patriotism, but they think of piracy. These "British Nationalists" of ours care as much for English nationality as they care for the horse in a cab in which they want to get to a bargain sale. Behind their patriotic pretence is a Tariff, and that Tariff, **as they conceive it,** is a scheme of war and plunder. Like war it will injure both the country

that it "protects" and the country it assails. Like war it will waste the resources of mankind to gratify the ambitions and serve the interests of a few individuals.

Now let us be clear upon one little point here. The writer has put four words in the previous paragraph into heavier type. If this article is quoted in a hostile paper those four words will almost certainly be omitted. A Tariff need not be an aggression between two nations. It is an arguable thing, and so far as the writer's opinion is worth anything, it is his opinion, that a Tariff can be a quite legitimate economic expedient in certain cases. He has never been a fanatical Free Trader. To ensure a world peace there will no doubt need to be a certain control of inter-national trade on the part of the League of Nations to restrain economic policies of a provocative or destructive type; but that will not preclude reasonable restrictions upon injurious competition and reasonable reflections of trade by Tariff methods. But what these so called "British Nationalists" contemplate is not human welfare, but large-scale aggression and exploitation, they want Tariff warfare in order to enjoy the profiteering that arises out of such conflicts, and they know that against such proceedings an efficient League of Nations is bound to set its face. The chief movers of this "British Nationalist" party, from which this clamour against the League of Nations proceeds, are uninitiative and unteachable men. Before the war they were dazzled by the florid successes of Germany, and by the economic brutalities on which they appeared to be based, and during the war they have learnt nothing. Their Imperialism is a plagiarism of German Imperialisms; their appeal to British "National" spirit are an abject imitation of that example. The national spirit in Germany was systematically perverted into a gross Nationalist Imperialism, centring upon a system of economic offensives and military and naval preparations that led naturally and inevitably to world disaster. They are organising a similar perversion here. Undeterred by the spectacle of Germany exhausted, socially demoralised and disorganised, and tottering to her fall, they can imagine nothing better for the English but to thrust the British Empire along the same path and towards the same end.

How much these "British Nationalists" respect true Nationalism, how much they care for and sympathise with the honest pride in and passion for one's own land, is shown directly they are brought into contact with an Irishman who loves Ireland or an Indian who loves India. And it is quite in the vein of this bastard "Nationalism" that among its chief exponents should be those Ulster leaders, neither good English nor good Irish, who keep open the Irish sore. What is the patriotism of such a lawyer as Sir Edward Carson? What land does he serve, who bought German guns for the killing of Irishmen, and plotted bloodshed and civil war on the soil of his own province?

Such is the quality of this "British Nationalism" which is setting its face against the League

of Nations; it is a debasement of all that is noble and sweet in national feeling and an outrage and aggression upon every nationality on the earth except our own. It has as much resemblance to that dear love of country that burns in the hearts of men as the mercenary leer of a painted harlot on the pavement has to the love of a mother for her child.

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