

**THE COVENANT OF
PEACE; AN ESSAY ON
THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS**

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The covenant of peace; an essay on the league of nations by H. N. Brailsford

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H. N. BRAILSFORD

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AN ESSAY ON
THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

By H. N. BRAILSFORD

with an introduction
by HERBERT CROLY



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TO THE
ASSOCIATION

INTRODUCTION

EARLY in 1918 the *English Review* offered a prize of £100 for the best short study of the idea of a League of Nations. The jury, consisting of the Master of Baliol, Lord Parmoor, General Sir Ian Hamilton, Professor Bury, Mr. H. G. Wells and Mr. John Galsworthy, awarded the prize to the following essay, written by Mr. H. N. Brailsford. This competition of the *English Review* was more fortunate in its results than the majority of similar competitions. It actually succeeded in eliciting by far the best short account which has yet been published of what a League of Nations should be and why it is needed.

Mr. H. N. Brailsford's success in winning this competition is not surprising. More than any other English or American political writer he has persistently and persuasively contended for an organized society of nations which would deprive war of any legal sanction. As a journalist and one of the editors of the *London Nation* he has long opposed the politics of the Balance of Power with the politics of a concert of nations. His book, *The War of Steel and Gold*, was the most drastic exposure, published previous to 1914, of the competitive imperialism which dictated the colonial policies of all the European Powers and of the reaction of this imperialism upon their domestic politics and upon their relations one to another in Europe. A later edition of this book contained his first sketch of a League of Nations—

one which differed from analogous and contemporary American plans chiefly because he emphasized the necessary foundation of any organized international society in economic coöperation. Finally, in 1916 he developed this sketch in a larger work, entitled *The League of Nations*, which, though it is in part out of date, remains a more candid, luminous and exhaustive exploration of the idea than has elsewhere appeared in English or any other language.

The following essay was written and published in the summer of 1918. It assumes, consequently, a state of facts with respect to the European Alliances, which the victory of the Allies and its consequences have falsified. He speaks on page 10 of Middle Europe as if it were "on the point of realization," whereas it collapsed with the military defeat of Germany and with the release of the minor nationalities of Central Europe from Hungarian and German domination. But the disintegration of Middle Europe alters the application rather than diminishes the force of that part of his argument. It is more true than it was when he wrote last summer that we shall have to "make either one supernational League or two." For the moment the alliance of the five largest victors in the war is and looks as if it would continue to be irresistible. Yet if there is any certainty in politics, it is certain that a partial alliance among these nations whose eyes like those of other partial alliances would be fixed

on preponderance of power and which would, consequently, connive at injustices committed by its own members, would provoke in the comparatively near future the formation of an effective counter-alliance. It is a choice not between independent nationalism and a League of Nations but between two mutually exclusive conceptions of an international league.

The conception for which Mr. Brailsford contends is one which asks all the nations to pledge themselves to a common covenant of peace, to accept a common provision of international immunities, privileges and obligations. It begins by outlawing war, but it is not satisfied merely to outlaw war. To reprobate and to try to outlaw war without proposing to create some alternative method of avoiding international stagnation and bringing about needed readjustments, as the majority of English and American pacifists did before 1914, is sheer futility. In all his discussions of a League of Nations Mr. Brailsford has insisted upon the necessity of associating an effective mechanism of international security with an equally effective mechanism of international adaptability. If a League of Nations is to survive and work, it must possess genuine power of legislation. That is why the Peace Conference offers an unique opportunity of bringing it into existence. The victors in the great war possess at this moment a power of international legislation such as only exists dur-

ing a period, like the present, of extraordinary political flexibility and such as could only be born of a great military victory. If they use this power unjustly they will bring into existence a partial alliance whose chief object will be the increase of its own power and which is bound to instigate a counter-alliance. But if they use it justly and wisely and at the same time start "processes" in motion which will keep alive this existing power of legislations it will bring into existence a League of Nations which may well survive and work. The test of its survival will be its ability subsequently to promote active and positive international coöperation. Instead of being merely a treaty of arbitration, "an external tie between exclusive peoples," it will organize and inform the common economic and political interests and activities of the nations. }

HERBERT CROLY.

New York, January 31, 1919.

THE COVENANT OF PEACE

TO inquire amid universal war whether a League of Nations be possible, may be to challenge experience and tilt against fact. At a first glance it may seem that we must begin our ascent to an international ideal on the lowest rung of the ladder of hope. If the inhabitants of Sirius and Saturn, who looked at our planet in Voltaire's *Micromégas*, were again to take up their microscopes, they would discover little novelty in our occupations. They would still see "a hundred thousand madmen of our species" engaged in massacring another hundred thousand, and learn that certain "sedentary barbarians" gave orders for these exercises, in the interval between digesting their dinner and praising God. They need revise this summary view of our "ant-heap" only by substituting millions for thousands. It would be their trite conclusion that man is still a wolf to man. We who are in the "ant-heap" can discern, however, another truth about this process. War is an operation of the social instinct. If tragedy is the conflict of two rights, war is the shock of two social organisms. It is the ultimate expression of the solidarity which knits a social unit. Of the social units which we call national States it is broadly true that war is possible between them, but not within them. That elementary fact must be our clue in any investigation of the problem of a durable peace. If, by the creation of a League of Nations, we