RECONSTRUCTION AND NATIONAL LIFE

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BY
CECIL FAIRFIELD LAVELL, PH.D.
(COLUMBIA)
Associate Professor of History, Grinnell College

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FOREWORD

Reconstruction is not, to an American, a word of the happiest associations. To even a superficial student of American history it means one episode and one only, an episode to which no southerner can yet refer without heightened color, no northerner without discomfort. But we do not recall such a memory to promote pessimism — only to remind ourselves that it was reconstruction of the South *by the North* that failed and that proved more destructive than the war itself. The reconstruction that succeeded was undertaken by the South and was carried through in spite of all handicaps. And the reminder may help us to estimate the permanent and the passing, the fundamental and the external in the Europe of 1919. For it may be that some of us watch too exclusively the labors of the Congress at Paris and ignore the pathetic and powerful struggles of the people of Europe for security, freedom and self-realization.

The problem of reconstruction may be approached from two angles. One phase of it is necessarily somewhat formal and external. Wounds have to be healed,

deformities have to be removed, frontiers have to be redrawn along national lines, rival claims have to be considered where nationality is mixed or doubtful, new states that were formerly parts of the German, Austro-Hungarian or Russian Empires have to be delimited and recognized, and form must be given to the League of Nations. The other phase is even more complex and fundamental. It involves the renewal of normal lines of life and progress by all the nations involved in the war, the picking up of strained and broken threads, the reconsideration by each people of its own problems after the tremendous crisis that is now past.

The formal, diplomatic phase is the one that primarily concerns the Peace Congress at Versailles. Its difficulties are in theory not particularly formidable, for the most part, for the settlement must proceed on principles universally admitted. The practical difficulties, on the other hand, are enormous, and can be removed only by a minute knowledge of the facts and by infinite tact. But however carefully we may endeavor to follow and understand this external side of reconstruction we are in the main powerless to aid or hinder. All we can do is to clarify the issues in our minds and try to grasp the most essential facts.

The more subtle and far-reaching phase of recon-

struction is that implied in self-determination, the problem imposed on each people of facing its own issues, reconsidering its own aims and lines of advance. In this we cannot always give mutual aid in a direct and material way, but we can aid in sympathy and understanding. And if this kind of aid, intangible, spiritual, immensely powerful, is to be rendered intelligently we must above all things try to know the character and the problems of the peoples with whom we are to be associated in our League of Nations. For whatever form the League may take and however that League may be modified in the years to come it will stand or fall not mainly through formal merits or formal weaknesses but through the degree to which it succeeds in "organizing the friendship of the world."

It is this latter phase of reconstruction that I have had chiefly in mind in the chapters that follow. They rest on the conviction that important as the formal work of the Peace Congress may be there is a more fundamental and permanent work of reconstruction that must fall on each nation, not a reconstruction that will be built on the deceptively tangible foundation of maps and treaties but a reconstruction built on the hopes, the convictions, the struggles, the dreams of the peoples. The basis of such reconstruction is not to be found in documents or institutions, for it is a living

and dynamic basis, and the structure will not be one that may be completed in a year; its foundations have been shaping for centuries, and none of us will live to see the work receive its final touch. But in the meantime we may aid in the building by knowledge, sympathy and good-will. And our first step must be the study of the foundations on which the anxious and wearied peoples of Europe are to build, the solid and yet ever changing foundations of human life in its struggle toward a social ideal.

Of the need for such a study we are earnestly convinced. For the isolation of the United States is broken, and apparently broken forever. The Atlantic has been bridged, or rather it has become to America what the Channel has been to England for a thousand years. It still separates us from Europe, but we no longer have the illusion that the troubles of Europe are the troubles of another planet. It was always an illusion. There was never a time when the affairs of peoples so closely akin to us in blood, in traditions and in thought did not matter to us. Not only has the stream of immigration never stopped, not only have all of us friends or relatives who were born in Britain, Germany, France, Italy, Russia and the remotest corners of the older world, but our reading and thinking of every day brings us into touch with the lands and

peoples across the sea. We were all really aware of this before the war. But the old condescension of Europe toward America had been replaced by a more arrogant condescension of America toward Europe, and we assumed an attitude of lofty remoteness, an attitude born of conviction both of security and of superiority. That attitude, we may hope, is gone forever. And now it is necessary to turn with frank inquiry and with sympathy to the effort to understand our overseas kindred whose tragedies we have in some measure made our own. It is not enough to have American representatives in the Peace Congress or to send Commissions. Each of us must try to clear away the fog of ignorance and prejudice that blinds our eyes, and to understand the problems that Europe has been facing in past years and is facing still. For we at last see that those problems are our own, and that in the burden of their solution we must bear our share.

To this effort toward the understanding of the living basis of Europe's problem of reconstruction I have contributed only an introductory survey, hardly more indeed than the statement and illustration of a point of view. To this end the scope of the book has been limited, except for the first chapter, to the study of four peoples, the French, the German, the Russian, and the British. A bibliography has seemed hardly