

THE IDEA OF A LEAGUE OF NATIONS

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The idea of a League of Nations by Various

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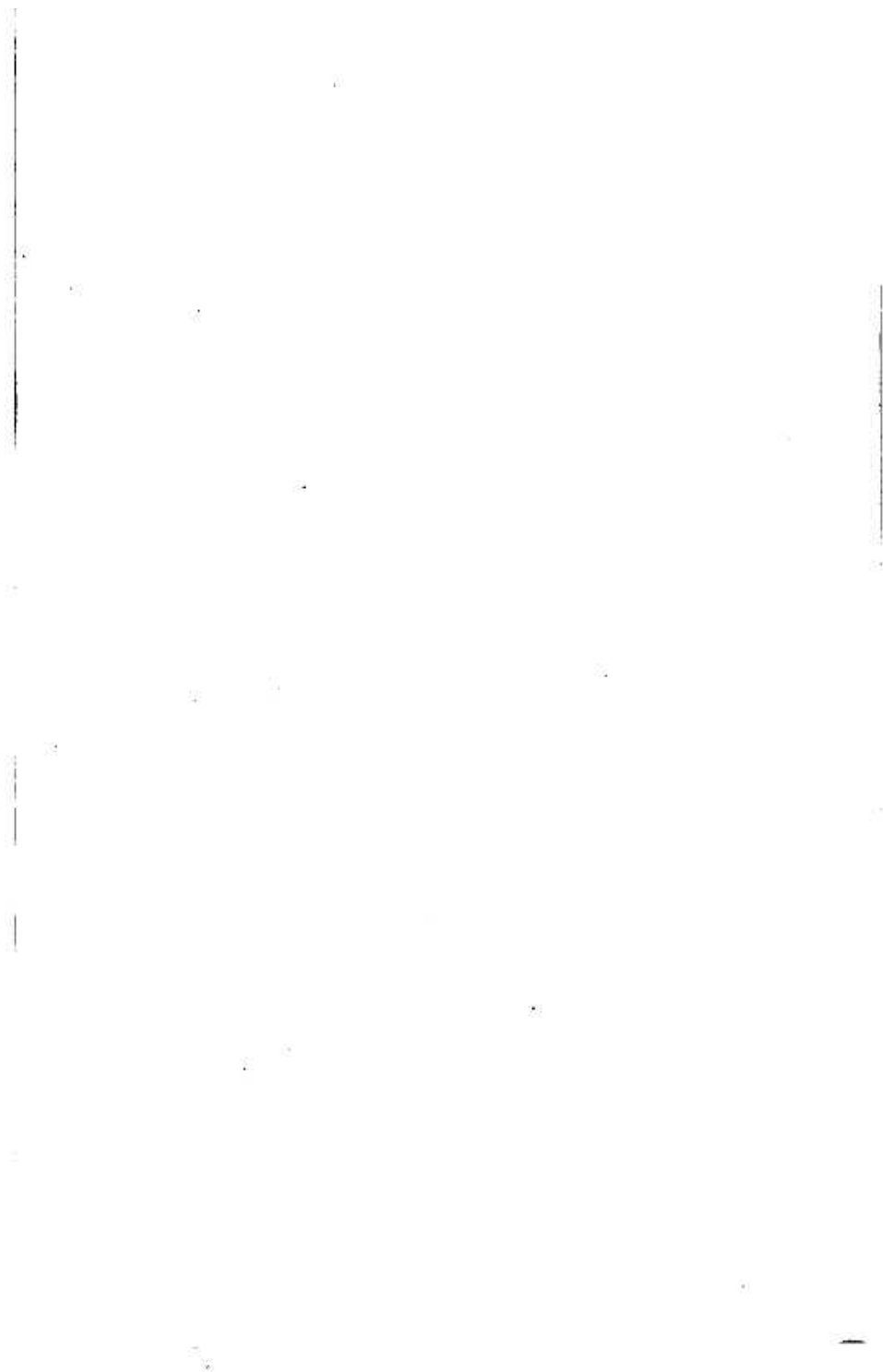
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VARIOUS

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LEAGUE
OF NATIONS**



The small group of British publicists who have collaborated in presenting "The Idea of the League of Nations" have long been working towards universal peace from an angle of their own. Under the chairmanship of Mr. H. G. Wells, they have formed The League of Free Nations Association, and have divided among themselves the principal problems connected with the formation of such a league, subject for extended study, appraisal, and suggestions for solution. The remarkable qualifications of this group assure to their treatise a high place in the literature of World Peace.

THE IDEA
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LEAGUE OF NATIONS

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THE IDEA OF A LEAGUE OF NATIONS

I

UNIFICATION of human affairs, to the extent at least of a cessation of war and a world-wide rule of international law, is no new idea; it can be traced through many centuries of history. It is found as an acceptable commonplace in a fragment, *De Republica*, of Cicero. It has, indeed, appeared in, and passed out of, the foreground of thought, and reappeared there, again and again.

Hitherto, however, if only on account of the limitations of geographical knowledge, the project has rarely been truly world-wide, though in some instances it has comprehended practically all the known world. Almost always there has been an excluded fringe of barbarians and races esteemed as less than men.

The Roman Empire realized the idea in a limited sphere and in a mechanical, despotic fashion. It was inherent in the propaganda of Islam—excluding the unbeliever. It was the dream of the mediæval Church—a dream which, partly in harmony, partly in rivalry, with the mediæval Empire, it was constantly trying to realize, however ineffectually. (But here again the line was drawn against the infidel.) It may be said that the political unity of Christendom, overriding states and nations, was the orthodox and typical doctrine of the Middle Ages. The individual states were regarded as being, in the nature of things, members of one great body politic, presided over by the Pope or the Emperor or both. It was the idea of the world-supremacy of the Empire which inspired Dante's *De Monarchia*; but, as Lord Bryce has remarked, 'Dante's book was an epilogue instead of a prophecy.' The Council of Constance (1414-1418) brought together the Christian princes of all countries, the higher dignitaries of the

Church, the ambassadors of many cities, and the most celebrated scholars of the age, with the Pope and the Emperor at their head; it was, however, the last assemblage of the whole of Western Christendom.

It cannot be claimed that history shows any continuously progressive movement of human affairs from a dispersed to a unified condition. Rather, it tells a story of the oscillating action of separatist and unifying forces. And the process of civilization itself, if we use the word in its narrower and older sense of the elaboration of citizenship in a political and social organization, and exclude mechanical and scientific progress from it, has, on the whole, been rather on the side of fragmentation. It was, for example, much easier for loosely organized tribes and village communities scattered over wide areas to coalesce into vague and often very extensive 'nations,' like the Scythians and Thracians, or to cooperate in 'amphictyonies,' or federations, like the small peoples of central Greece, than for highly developed city-states or fully organized monarchies, possessing a distinctive culture and religion, and definite frontiers, to sink these things in any larger union. For such higher forms of political organization, enlargement occurred mainly through conquest, which created unstable empire-systems of subject and subordinate peoples, under the sway — which might, of course, be the assimilative sway — of a dominant nation, rather than real unifications.

The Renaissance presents a phase in history in which a large vague unification (Christendom) is seen to be breaking up, simultaneously with the appearance of a higher grade of national organization. Machiavelli, says Ter Meulen, may be conveniently taken as the typical exponent of the new mental forces which ultimately turned Europe toward the conception of more or less absolute princes, with highly organized standing armies (see his *Art of War*), national religions, and educational autonomy. Machiavelli, with his aspiration toward a united Italy, involving a disintegration of the Empire, opened that phase of

the national state in Europe, which reached its fullest development in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. Before the Renaissance, Europe was far more of a unity than it was at the close of the reign of Queen Victoria, when it consisted mainly of a group of nations, with their national edges sharpened and hardened almost to a maximum, each aspiring to empire, and each acutely suspicious of and hostile to its neighbors. The idea of international organization for peace seemed far more utopian to the normal European intelligence in 1900 than it would have done eight hundred years before.

But while these political and social developments which constitute civilization in the narrower sense of the word were tending to make human societies, as they became more elaborately organized, more heterogeneous and mutually unsympathetic, there were also coming into play throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, for the first time, upon a quite unprecedented scale, another series of forces diametrically opposed to human separations. They worked, however, mutely, because the world of thought was unprepared for them. Unprecedented advances in technical and scientific knowledge were occurring, and human cooperation and the reaction of man upon man, not only in material, but also in mental things, was being made enormously more effective than it had ever been before. But the phrases of international relationship were not altering to correspond. Phrases usually follow after rather than anticipate reality; and so it was that, at the outbreak of the Great War in August, 1914, Europe and the world awoke out of a dream of intensified nationality to a new system of realities entirely antagonistic to the continuance of national separations.

It is necessary to state very plainly the nature of these new forces. Upon them rests the whole case for the League of Nations as it is here presented. It is a new case. It is argued here that these forces give us powers novel in history, and bring mankind face to face with dangers such as it has never confronted before.

It is maintained that, on the one hand, they render possible such a reasoned coördination of human affairs as has never hitherto been conceivable, and that, on the other, they so enlarge and intensify the scope and evil of war and of international hostility as to give what was formerly a generous aspiration more and more of the aspect of an imperative necessity. Under the lurid illumination of the world-war, the idea of world-unification has passed rapidly from the sphere of the literary idealist into that of the methodical, practical man; and the task of an examination of its problems and possibilities, upon the scale which the near probability of an actual experiment demands, is thrust upon the world.

All political and social institutions, all matters of human relationship, are dependent upon the means by which mind may react upon mind and life upon life—that is to say, upon the intensity, rapidity, and reach of mental and physical communication. In the history of mankind, the great phases seem all to be marked by the appearance of some new invention, which facilitates trade or intercourse and may be regarded as the operating cause of the new phase. The inventions of writing, of the wheel and the road, of the ship, of money, of printing, of letters of exchange, of joint-stock undertakings and limited liability, mark distinct steps in the enlargement of human intercourse and coöperation from its original limitation within the verbal and traditional range of the family or tribe.

A large part of the expansion of the Roman Empire, apart from its over-seas development, may be considered, for example, as a process of road-making and bridge-building. Even its trans-Mediterranean development was a matter of road-making combined with ship-building. The Roman Empire, like the Chinese, expanded on land to an extremity determined by the new method of road-communication, and sought to wall itself in at last at the limits of its range from its centres of strength. The new chapter of the human story, again, which began with the entry of America