

ORDER OR CHAOS?

LORD DAVIES, indomitable apostle of international order, turns the Abyssinian fiasco to good account¹ to reinforce his familiar plea for the creation of a tribunal of equity and an international police force. The latter remedy, it is true, has lost some of its pristine simplicity. Instead of an international air force coming fully fledged to life, it is conceived as the end of a process, "the organization of sanctions culminating in the establishment of an I.P.F." The writer's main conception of what is required to maintain peace in the future can be judged from the moral which he draws from the failure of the League to mobilize effective sanctions against Italy. "In order to rally world public opinion in support of the maximum penalties provided for in Article 16, both the moral and the material factors should have been brought into play, the former represented by an impartial tribunal charged with the task of recommending an equitable settlement to the Assembly, the latter by a Standing Board of Commissioners entrusted with the duty of co-ordinating sanctions in order to exert the most effective pressure upon the aggressor. Both these institutions were indispensable if it was intended to assert the rule of law." Lord Davies sees that such a system—a supranational tribunal judging *ex aequo et bono* supported by adequate force—is impossible in the present condition of the League of Nations, which is little more than an association of Sovereign States. He therefore concludes that "the problem of the League is the problem of federalism," and he urges that the League, beginning with the Federation of Europe, should develop into a Confederation, similar to the United States of America, having a Supreme Court and an executive authority "entrusted with a superiority of centralized force." He admits however that such a development is not so easy for the Europe of 1936 as it was for those who framed the American Constitution of 1789, and that progress must necessarily be slow.

¹ *Nearing the Abyss*, by Lord Davies (Constable; 3/6).

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This interesting thesis confronts us with a singular paradox. On the one hand it is closer to the main trend of Catholic sociology than the conception of the present League of Nations; on the other hand it would seem to be even more unattainable, in the existing political condition of Europe. Incidentally those functions of the international society which it particularly seeks to strengthen—obligatory arbitration and sanctions—are precisely those which so many Catholics, the willing or unwilling henchmen of fascism and nationalism, are recklessly attacking to-day. Their neurotic clamour might come from Moslem preachers of a *Jehad*, for all the resemblance it bears to the basis of peace proposed by Benedict XV, the closely reasoned doctrine of Taparelli d'Azeglio which inspired it, or the pacific statesmanship of Leo XIII. It is a nuisance: but it will pass.

Let us consider Lord Davies' thesis on its merits by the criterion common to those three great Churchmen and to us. Leo XIII, when consulted by the Tsar upon the programme of the First Hague Conference, replied through his Secretary of State that what was most needed to establish the rule of law in the world, and what corresponded completely to the desires of the Apostolic See, was the establishment of a system of obligatory arbitration. Benedict XV proposed to the belligerents in 1917, after outlining his territorial suggestions, a threefold foundation for the structure of international order: the reciprocal diminution of armaments, the establishment of arbitration in the place of rival armies, and "sanctions to be determined against any State which should refuse to submit its international disputes to arbitration or to accept the arbitral award." In the Encyclical *Pacem Dei Munus* of 1920 the Pope supplemented this practical teaching by urging all nations without exception (that is to say Christian or non-Christian) to enter without misgiving a society or family for the purpose, among other things, of protecting the independence of each and of reducing the burden of armaments. This was no personal invention of Benedict XV: the sixth book of Taparelli d'Azeglio's *Essai Théorique de Droit Naturel* is devoted to an elaborate ex-cogitation from first principles of the necessity for, and

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essential characteristics of, a society of States (*ethnarchy* he called it), required by nature itself and involving therefore a duty on the part of sovereigns to enter into it, so soon as international commerce and communications brought into being constant relations between their several States. This society, he taught, must have a superior authority, as must all society, consisting of persons chosen out by the constituent States as equals, but deriving its mandate from the Divine Legislator. And its functions include, among others, arbitration—necessitated by the very fact of an apparent conflict of equal rights, and forcible protection of the independence and other rights of member States as against violent infringement of them, which would enable each member State to reduce its armaments. This appeared in 1848: and like Lord Davies, Taparelli appealed to the precedents of successful Confederations, already known to history—such as the United States of America—as examples on a larger sphere. The obligations of the State to the “ethnarchic” authority he reduces to the following four headings:

1. In the repression of internal disorders, a State must carry out the advice and the decision of the judges of the ethnarchy.
2. It must do likewise in any quarrels which it may have with the other member States.
3. It must also join in giving assistance, which the members owe to one another in order to guarantee their rights mutually against their internal and external enemies.
4. So too must it co-operate in all the undertakings whose purpose it is to fulfil a duty of universal good will.

Taparelli admits that in an “imperfect ethnarchy” war will still be possible; but when the world society which he envisages has been properly organized, the only war to be contemplated would be one between a recalcitrant member wrongly attacking another and all the others leagued together to resist it. The ethnarchic authority, he says in another place when summarizing its powers, will be able to fulfil its purpose when it possesses two essential characteristics of civil society at its best—an independent and impartial judicature and adequate executive force.

Judged by this criterion it is not too much to say that Lord Davies’ main thesis—which Mr. Winston Churchill has now

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made his own—is in line with the Christian social tradition in its most constructive form; by which I mean international ethics evolved from Augustinian principles by the Neo-Scholastics in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, applied by a great theologian of the nineteenth to the new condition of political life in Europe and endorsed since then by two great statesmen-Popes.

Can it then be wrong to direct one's energies to the ideal which the devoted founder of the *New Commonwealth* puts before us and to advocate the reform and development of the League of Nations in this sense? We cannot believe it. Certainly the difficulties are stupendous. Lord Davies at the beginning of this little book analyzes with brutal candour the motives of national self-interest, suspicion and timidity which caused States members of the League to evade even their existing obligations under the Covenant when confronted with Signor Mussolini's resolute defiance. Would they be any more likely to renounce their sovereign rights in favour of a superior, non-political tribunal? Or to agree to a pre-arranged system of automatic military action against an aggressor, near or far? Apart from the weakness of the League system resulting from the strong attachment of almost all governments to the notion of national sovereignty—which is the most obvious impediment to the organization of the natural society of nations in *any* positive form—there is another, which Lord Davies does not mention. It is the disintegrating effect of the new Russian foreign policy—membership of the League and the Franco-Soviet pact combined with the activities of the Comintern. This has greatly diminished confidence in the Council and Assembly of the League, in which the Soviet are represented, among immense numbers of people in many countries who on religious or political grounds are utterly opposed to Communism. This fact was ably exploited (during the Abyssinian war) by the Italian Government and their agents and sympathizers abroad in order to undermine—most of all among Catholics—respect for the League's authority, and to provide excuses for disregarding the principle *pacta sunt servanda*, upon which the whole collective action of the League is necessarily

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based. Unless this particular complication is to paralyze all attempts to restore the League's authority—let alone to supply it with a judicature and executive power in the sense which Lord Davies desires—several things will have to be done. One of them—and the first—is to get the leaders of British opinion who are concerned, and rightly concerned, to stop the drift to international anarchy, to take seriously (as so few do yet) the Communist nuisance and the almost fanatical reactions which it everywhere produces. Here is a formidable obstacle to what is called the “organization of peace,” at least as formidable as the conflict of national interests which is commonly regarded in this country as the sole cause of war. But those whose religion is universal, designed for the salvation of all peoples, and grounded in truth divinely revealed and divinely safeguarded, cannot, if they are true to their principles, be indifferent to the urgent necessity of saving the world from war, and of saving it by means which respond to the postulates of Right Reason and Christian Charity. Certainly it is a duty to be wide awake and realistic in regard to immediate political difficulties and dangers. But we should do wrong to allow them to becloud our vision of a better future and to make us forget our duty as Christians, as citizens, and as the custodians of a great tradition, to take our part in every positive and constructive endeavour to attain it.

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