

CURRENT MAGAZINES

“NEUTRALITY”

America Intervenes:—Mr. G. Glasgow, in the *Contemporary*.

In an Era of Unreason:—Mr. N. Peffer, in *Harper's*.

A Policy of Neutrality for Canada:—Prof. F. R. Scott, in *Foreign Affairs*.

A MEMORABLE passage in Dante's *Inferno* describes those angels who preserved cautious detachment during the initial period of Lucifer's insurrection. They were unwilling to commit themselves until they saw clear sign of the upshot, feeling that if the Prince of Darkness should prevail, it would be of some advantage to be able to say to the victor "At least we never took a side against you". Thus early did the problem of recognizing a new Government suggest itself, and the diplomatic dexterities we now call "realist" were celebrated in the great Italian epic. While Milton's fallen angels reasoned like Calvinists and Arminians on free will, Dante's neutral angels might well have anticipated a modern House of Commons debate on the difference between *de facto* and *de iure* recognition.

It is part of the shame of our own time that while certain Powers are perpetrating deeds darker than any we had ever thought to witness again on earth, the highest statesmanship of other Powers has been expended on "keeping out of it". The maxims and slogans of an Age have often done it more than justice, making it appear nobler in spirit than it was. But ingenuity would be taxed to devise at an hour such as this a motto lower than "Non-Intervention" or "Neutrality".

I

The architects of our present international ruin began by pouring contempt on the League of Nations. Having worked systematically to make it fail, they pointed with a pretence of regret to its failure as a reason for going back to the "power politics" which the League was meant to supersede.

It was the very essence of that Geneva enterprize that, in a quarrel between Powers, other Powers—disinterested in respect of the merits of the dispute—should not remain neutral, but should collectively intervene. Critics often say that the League was a doctrinaire project—the common cynical reproach against

every project which aims at human improvement. But at least it was launched with very great care. When the Covenant was drawn up, regard was paid to the objection that on some matters the interference of any outsider to a dispute, whether alone or in concert with other outsiders, would not be tolerated, and such matters were discreetly left out. There remained a very wide range of quarrels such as experience had shown fruitful of war, and upon which no nation seriously desirous to avoid war would refuse the aid of such machinery of accommodation as the League made available. Why did it fail? Not because of external opposition, but because—in all too familiar language—it was “sabotaged” from within. American abstention was regrettable, extremely regrettable, but honest, and not in itself fatal to the League’s success. It was not any Power which remained outside, it was certain Powers within, utilizing the opportunity of inner betrayal, so much more effective than outer attack, that brought the League enterprise to ruin. Fascist Italy, whose leader never misses a chance of declaring that permanent world peace would be calamitous, belonged for many years to the League, with purpose all too easy to conjecture. About the France led by M. Pierre Laval, likewise a League member, it is sufficient to observe that for her performances at Geneva in 1935 and 1936 the France of to-day, growing ever more desperate for allies, and finding national memories inconveniently long, is paying the price. A different France, but burdened with “arrears” that take long to pay off!

II

One thing the League experiment showed—that there is a clear-cut division in Europe between ideological groups, and the recent tone of the press of the United States shows fast increasing impatience with the legal fetters which hinder the Government at Washington from supporting the side in which nearly all Americans believe. A mood angrier and angrier is developing, as Americans realise how their *Neutrality Act*—if they carried it into effect—would often not only prevent them from helping the cause they approve, but would actually compel them to help the cause they hate.

To be “neutral” when a conflict such as this has split the European nations into groups may mean no more than refusal to interfere. It cannot, surely, mean for any intelligent and informed people a continuous state of indecision as to which

side has its approval. In the early days of the Great War, the leaders of a nervous set of American isolationists dwelt on the need for a threefold neutrality: neutrality (1) in act, (2) in word, (3) in thought. Looking back after April, 1917, on the strange manoeuvres attempted by patriotism to fulfil this triple requirement, American speakers for the Draft Law used to point out that neutrality in act had been easy, neutrality in word had been harder, and neutrality in thought had been from the first not only impossible but ridiculous. The same might be said, with much greater emphasis, now. Will anyone suggest that, from the point of view of an American of whatever party, who has not abandoned all that the American ideal means, it is possible to hesitate about the side to be approved in this ideological conflict among European States? In the summer of 1914 the issue was at least arguable. In certain quarters it is hotly argued still. For example, among candidates for a Ph.D. degree in History or Political Science, for whom it is always imperative to "do what has not been done before", showing subtle acumen in argument for a novelty, it is still a favorite thesis that the German side can be vindicated by some evidence in State papers previously overlooked, whose significance the lynx eye of the Ph.D. candidate has been the first to discern. But in the wider world, British, French, American, uninterested in the originality of a post-graduate thesis, the fundamental judgment of justice and injustice in the war aims of 1914-1918 still stands. And if it had been otherwise in any danger of reversal, the development of the last five years in Germany would have served as its illustrative confirmation. Even the atrocity stories of the autumn of 1914, long suspected (no doubt many of them rightly) as the exaggerations of prejudice, seem credible again. The initial presumption against them has been swept away, because the spirit of *Schrecklichkeit*, which they express, has been reaffirmed so often by Nazi leaders whose boast it is that they are preserving the imperial tradition.

Except, then, for persons of such hospitable mind as the character in *Hyppatia*, who said "God forbid that I should fetter my impartiality by cherishing an opinion", the shreds of doubt—if they existed—about German purpose and method in the years 1914 to 1918 have been cleared away by the revelations of the Hitler régime. Here is indeed a plain tale to anyone who has studied the story of the Reichstag Fire, or the record of the concentration camps and the Brown Houses; to anyone

who has listened to Hitler or Goering giving an account to an audience with mechanized *claqueurs* of what was done in the Blood Purge of June 30, 1934, and of what will yet be done to clear Germany of the Jewish peril; to anyone who has before him the facts about the raid on Austria or the raid on Czechoslovakia—each within a few weeks of yet another “solemn” pledge to preserve the sovereign independence of the State thus victimized. There may, of course, be many a misstatement on points of detail, but they don’t matter. We are confronted by a certain type of State, of which it may be erroneous but it cannot be slanderous to say that it perpetrated twenty-five years ago the sort of outrage it undoubtedly perpetrates now.

In a conflict between that sort of State and its “ideological” opponent there can be no neutrality for any informed and decent mind.

III

But it is quite possible, and we have all moods in which we think it quite reasonable, to contend that it is best for the nations fortunately placed on this continent to leave deteriorating Europe severely alone. “No matter what we feel about it, there is nothing we can do to help, and our wisdom lies in taking care not to burn our fingers with it in vain as we did last time”: so speaks many a representative of United States opinion. But there are a great many things that the United States can do “other than waging war”, as Mr. Roosevelt would put it, by which the balance will be tipped very effectively indeed between the contestants, on one side or on the other. Indeed it would be somewhat difficult to show how American action can be so directed as to avoid such reinforcement and hindrance, unconsciously, but not on that account less effectively, provided. What may, however, very well happen, what has happened more than once through inadvertence during these last years, is that America by her action should help her natural enemies and thwart her natural friends. Legislation designed to keep her “neutral” has had this astonishing result. Moreover, she can never really escape consequence, for good or for ill, of what happens in Europe.

The *Neutrality Act* provides that a certain attitude shall be taken by the United States when the President finds that any two other Powers are at war. Great significance here belongs to those four words “when the President finds”. It is not sufficient to bring the *Neutrality Act* into operation

that two countries should actually *be* at war. Not unless and until they are so *found*, and so officially reported at Washington, do limitations and prohibitions of that famous measure come into force. The most conspicuous proof of the difference which this makes is to be seen in the case of the conflict between China and Japan. To official Washington this still remains not only an undeclared but an unrecognized war. Mr. Roosevelt's celebrated description of it was in the words "a fearful mess", and there is nothing in the legislation of Congress to require any particular procedure or abstinence on the part of Americans when there is a fearful mess abroad. It is a term which seems—sad to say—continuously applicable to Europe in its mood of a good many years duration.

If, and when, events have strained even so elastic a formula to breaking point, what happens next? Suppose the President of the United States feels constrained, from whatever cause, to "find" that a war is going on, what measures are required? In the first place, it is forbidden to American factories to sell munitions to either combatant: and lest there should be trouble with the affectation of doubt as to the sorts of goods included under that name, a list of what shall count as "munitions" is appended. It is further provided that the President may, by proclamation, add to the list. So not only are the commodities there named under embargo, not to be shipped under any circumstances to either of the Powers officially "found" to be at war, but it is within the President's discretion to indicate other commodities to which, for the purposes of the *Neutrality Act*, the same name shall be applied. For other kinds of goods, the "Cash and Carry" clause was inserted. Either combatant, even while war is raging, may purchase from an American vendor goods other than munitions, provided they are paid for on the spot, and are taken away in the buyer's own ships. It is forbidden to send American ships for their transport, and also to sell in such circumstances on credit, for obviously the extension of credit to a belligerent would be an act of interference on that side in a war.

Suppose, says a prominent American publicist, that the *Neutrality Act* had been put into operation in respect to the war (for everyone knows it *is* a war, and a vast one) raging now between Japan and China. Its consequence would have been to benefit Japan very largely indeed. For, in preventing the sale of munitions to either of the combatants, it would have tremendously handicapped the side which needs to buy these

in great quantities abroad, while its damage would have been relatively insignificant to the side which can supply otherwise its own need. In the event, then, of a European war, what would be the consequence of application of the Act? Suppose that in the years 1914-1917 munitions had not been available for purchase from American firms. Obviously this would have made little difference to the Central Powers, which—without control of the seas—could not have sent for them in any case. But it would have made an enormous difference to the Entente Powers, which had not only the “cash” to pay for them but facilities to “carry” them home in safety.

Granted, then, that the measure a country enacted, in all good faith, for a certain desired purpose, proves not to be the serving but the defeating of that purpose, is not the remedy obvious?

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The *New York Times* has been urging for at least a year, indeed ever since the seizure of Austria put the character of Nazi policies beyond any further reasonable doubt, that the *Neutrality Act*, which disables the United States from helping the cause with which American sympathy is intense, should be either repealed or amended. It has dwelt again and again on the tragic absurdity of a measure which undertook to prescribe, in advance of a fast changing European situation, what the United States should do and should not do. It has pointed out how ignoble is the resort to devices of evasion as an alternative to honest, straightforward reversal of a policy which should never have been begun. Senator Pitman's bold campaign, even at this late hour, for alteration of the Act, and Mr. H. L. Stimson's tireless advocacy of a definite procedure to reinforce the European democracies (especially, for example, by accepting responsibility for control of Japan in the Pacific if hostilities should break out in Europe) furnish a pattern which one hopes will be increasingly followed by those who form American opinion.

Meanwhile the fulfilment—even while the *Neutrality Act* is in nominal operation—of schemes far from neutral must be observed with great joy by those concerned for freedom and justice. Whether Mr. Roosevelt said or did not say to a military Committee of the United States Senate that America's frontier is the Rhine, matters very little. It sounds very unlike what he would say, though quite like what he would mean, and the German newspapers (or rather the German newspaper, for to all intents and purposes there is now only one) which said “He

acts on that assumption, whether he put it into words or not", was this time very close to the truth. Undoubtedly American factories are being not only permitted but encouraged to build planes without limit to British and French order, and thousands of such American-built planes have already been bought by the European democracies. To the enquiry whether he would sanction such trade in aircraft between American manufacturers and German or Italian buyers, the President refused to make any answer: he would not deal, he said, with a "hypothetical question"; and the press representatives present drew their own conclusions. Plainly it is not to stimulate the business of American factories that he is concerned. No wonder there is rage in Berlin and in Rome: no wonder the directed press is directed to collect sedulously every word of unfavorable comment on Mr. Roosevelt's Administration at home, and to dangle before readers the hope that his own people will repudiate him next time at the polls. Of course it is an unneutral policy he has decided to pursue, and for that he deserves the admiration of all the freedom-loving peoples at this hour.

How far can such manipulation—which no one can call deceitful, because it is quite open—be made effective? Its range is indeed ample, as German and Italian critics very well know. Mr. Roosevelt speaks of what may be done by American exertion "short of war". *The New York Times* a year ago threw out a hint: "We shall be fully prepared", said its editorial, "if war on a large scale envelopes Europe, to choose the side of the democracies. . . . A deliberate policy of favoring our friends in the interpretation of laws which control our relations with other countries, and of traditions which govern our policies on the high seas". There is immense possibility there. The last twelve months, laden as they have been with disaster, begin to show in their ultimate upshot a sign of improvement. On the United States every eye is turned. And great as is the service which that nation can render even under the handicap of one of its own laws which it must evade, it will render more when it shakes the handicap completely off. It is too tiresome to have to expend on transparent law evasion an ingenuity needed for greater and worthier tasks.

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What is the prospect of success in overcoming the United States tradition of aloofness, the habit for which Washington's advice against "entangling alliances" is always quoted as the

authority? There is much to show that in these very exceptional days an exceptional temper is reasserting itself among our neighbors on that issue too.

We have had a sequence of suggestive events. There was the Pan-American Conference, which culminated in the document called *Declaration of Lima*. It apprized the whole world that the republics of this continent feel themselves to be in danger from the totalitarian states, and that they are organizing a common defence. No enemy was named, and there was no hint of any action beyond self-defence in case of attack, but nobody could mistake the reference. Everybody knew who was meant when Mr. Cordell Hull said they were now pledged to stand together against any outside effort to undermine their democratic institutions, or outside interference of any kind which might threaten them. Recent upheavals in Peru and Brazil came, of course, to everyone's recollection. The immediate outburst of anger in the Nazi press, arguing that the Pan-American Conference had failed, was enough to show that in Germany at least there was no doubt of what the United States had in mind.

Following hard upon the *Declaration of Lima* came the speech by Mr. Ickes, in terms of such scathing rebuke to German policies and methods that an explanation, an apology, a withdrawal was at once demanded by the German ambassador. This elicited from the State Department a reply which was meant to emphasize rather than to remove the conflict of purpose. Mr. Ickes, the German representative was told, had but expressed the deliberate judgment of the vast majority of the American people. It will be remembered that the matter was then dropped, as the German press explained "in deference to the Christmas season", which was no time for quarrelling!

Third in the series of significant events since Christmas was Mr. Roosevelt's Message to Congress, calling for immediate and enormous additional appropriation for armament. Again the significance was indicated by German and Italian comment: no doubt whatever was entertained in Rome or Berlin of the purpose with which this vast apparatus was being collected.

Last of all came certain definite acts. American factories, with the approval and even at the prompting of the Executive Government, are so engaged that from Rome and Berlin comes prompt acceptance of the United States as now on the European democratic side. Mr. Roosevelt's speeches constantly cor-

roborate that view. It is to be noted that an ex-Premier of Poland has begun to talk of the Franco-British-American Triangle. Still more striking is what Mr. Hoover has said, that if a European war should break out and bombs were being dropped on cities to kill women and children, the United States might easily enter as a combatant. Everyone realises that just such bombing of cities would be the first method of German attack. So Mr. Hoover might as well have said "If there is a European war, we may well be combatants in it."

How much chance, in such an atmosphere as this, has the *Neutrality Act* to survive, except in name, if in that? And of what use is *vox et praeterea nihil*? It is here worse than useless; it is humiliating.

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