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ABOUT two months ago, Mr. Anthony Eden startled the Council at Geneva by a speech suggesting that Great Britain might withdraw from the League. As if to emphasize in advance the gravity of this intimation, Mr. Baldwin had spoken three days earlier to his own Worcestershire constituents in language obviously meant less for them than for the Chancelleries of Rome and Berlin. He had warned all men to realize that the British Foreign Secretary when he sets forth Great Britain's policies is never to have his words discounted as a mere personal opinion, but has the whole strength of his Government behind him. It sounded like a superfluous assurance: in British countries such Cabinet solidarity is taken for granted. But what is axiomatic in British countries is often strange news abroad. The efforts of German and Italian newspapers, so aptly described as "the kept press", had not by any means failed to make their readers think Mr. Eden a rash, eccentric, self-opinionated young diplomatist, who might at any moment be repudiated at home. Quotations from London newspapers, which had not been ashamed for party purposes to lend colour to this legend, were of course used in Berlin and in Rome to stimulate resistance as often as Great Britain made a new demand. So the Prime Minister, knowing what his Foreign Secretary would say at Geneva, disarmed foreign critics before they had time to use their accustomed weapon.

To France especially this threat that she might be left to safeguard herself was an opportune shock. It used to be said that in Geneva there had been opened a new branch of the French Foreign Office, and as a guarantor of the Versailles settlement the League has indeed been invaluable to the diplomats of the Quai d'Orsay. But what virtue would be left in that organization if Great Britain were now to withdraw? The point of Mr. Eden's warning was that this great international apparatus is worth preserving only if it is genuinely international in its activities, that as the mere tool of a single

Power or group of Powers it must dispense at least with British support, that the stage has almost been reached at which British patience with the selfishness of continental associates will be exhausted, and that such Powers as have invoked collective security in their own interest but declined to cooperate in providing it for others may shortly find themselves alone.

Within a few weeks from the delivery of that speech the circumstances by which it was provoked had undergone a profound change. On April 26 and May 3 the French electorate dealt very summarily with its own Government. Many considerations, no doubt, cooperated to determine the triumph of *The Popular Front*; but from the international point of view the significant thing was the appeal by its leaders to the French people for wholehearted cooperation with the League. This was indeed the issue in foreign affairs: *Collective Security, or Rival Alliances. League or anti-League.* From the *National Front* came fierce and almost hysterical demand for escape from "the fetters and ideology of Geneva". France, it was urged, must set herself free to deal with Germany after a fashion incompatible with League membership, and to organize help, in ways the League would not approve, for countries which Germany is threatening. This doctrine, proclaimed everywhere by speakers and journalists of "The Right", had the impressive imprimatur of the high priest of French Nationalism. M. A. Tardieu had withdrawn from the strife of parties, declaring the constitutional forms of his country incapable of being mended and—as they stand—unworthy of his participation. But from his secluded library he sent forth, at what seemed the opportune moment, a blast against the League. It proved of no avail. A majority of more than 140 in the new French Chamber is pledged to genuine cooperation in League policies. It is pledged, by inference, to disavowal of the Laval, the Sarraut, the Flandin manoeuvring which brought about the crisis in Anglo-French relationship, culminating in Mr. Baldwin's speech and Mr. Eden's threat.

So a month ago, when M. Blum entered upon office, the friends of the League ventured to cherish a new hope for its future. They felt that at least the peril of its immediate dissolution had been averted. But although the professions of *The Popular Front* sounded well, there was an undercurrent of misgiving. Election programmes and pledges have sometimes faded fast into an unpleasant memory. Within a few weeks M. Blum was talking about "Regional Pacts" which, under colour of merely reforming the League, might destroy what had hitherto been vital to it. At this moment, when the project initiated seventeen years ago amid the high hopes of man-

kind seems all too likely to pass into the record of vast disappointments, it is suggestive to reconsider—with numerous publicists in the great magazines—how the situation has been brought to this.

I

Most plausible of arguments for giving up the League is that over a considerable period of years it has failed as a guarantee of peace. The attack by Japan on China, the war between Bolivia and Paraguay, the annexation of Ethiopia by Italy, constitute a sombre series. What reason is there to suppose that collective intervention in future cases will have any better result?

The force of this reasoning is unquestionable, and no intelligent advocate of the League will deny that his confidence in it has lately suffered a succession of shocks. Belief in the Geneva Covenant, like belief in the moral values or in the Christian religion, has to be maintained—if it is maintained at all—against intellectual difficulty leading to periodic storms of doubt. Pursuing the analogies I have suggested, one might urge that the doubt in all three cases is best dispelled by a clear contemplation of the alternative. But the sceptic in League matters, like the sceptic in religion or morality, must not be allowed to state his case with such confusions and duplications as give it an illusory strength. Its strength is disturbing enough when stated with scrupulous exactness. But those who delight to see it exaggerated in almost every issue of their favourite anti-League newspaper must be put in mind of certain distinctions that are fatal to their case.

The League is an instrument for preserving world peace. As in the case of any other instrument, its efficiency for its purpose is one question, while the likelihood of its being used is another. That economic Sanctions, for example, if persistently applied by fifty nations against Italy, would in time produce such hardships for the Italian people as to force its Government to accept League direction about Abyssinia, does not admit of dispute. But it might very well be disputed whether "human nature" in its commercial aspect would consent to such cooperative pressure long enough to achieve the result.

The so-called failure of Sanctions in the Italo-Ethiopian case is thus no reflection upon the economic insight of those by whom this method of collective pressure was recommended. One may perhaps wonder that Mr. Eden and Mr. Baldwin did not know better the leaders of the armament industry in England or the anti-republican manipulators of the money power in France, so

as to realise what these forces both could and would do to make Sanctions fail. Where success depended not on a mere majority effort, but on an effort approximately unanimous, such opposition might well be decisive. Still, it was at least a noble venture, based on a too sanguine estimate of the degree in which the lesson of comparative values had been learned in the Great War. There are defeats much more creditable than a victory.

II

The campaign against "Geneva" had cooperation from quarters which it is instructive to distinguish. There was no surprise in the attitude of the party known to French politics as "The Right". It resolved from the first to stand by its natural ally. Haters of a republican government, both in France and in Spain, have long watched the Italian "Black Shirts" with mingled envy and admiration. Like the British reactionaries who whisper to one another "We need a Mussolini", they enjoy the thought of despotism successful elsewhere though impracticable for themselves, and of vicarious vengeance which Il Duce has executed on the hated "democracy". The chief service they could render to their foreign hero was by obstructing, delaying or nullifying the pressure of "Sanctions", and such service they tirelessly performed. In the peculiar but expressive diction that Mussolini himself affects, one may say that the French party of the Right has been from the first a "subversive" force within the League, "sabotaging" every League effort as often as it showed signs of being successful. On the morals of such procedure it is needless to comment: whether even as a piece of tactics it was well judged, only time can reveal. M. Sarraut said during the last French election that his country had to choose between two precious friendships—the British and the Italian. It is now acknowledged that the policy she pursued went far to forfeit the former. Whether it intensified the latter, we shall discover by degrees. Having so faithfully done Mussolini's work, the French Right may be supposed to hold his bond. But Mussolini's bond is of the sort that requires, in banking parlance, an adequate endorser.

Less easy by far to explain is the attitude of a large and powerful section of the London press. Volubly and persistently it has helped the Dictator. Not in the sense that it definitely justified what he had done, explicitly defending his breach of covenant after covenant, or applauding his declaration that war is intrinsically a splendid thing and on no account to be abolished. Shrewd

journalists like Mr. J. L. Garvin of *The Observer* know the British public much too well to risk such wholesale endorsement of editorials in the *Giornale d'Italia*. On the contrary, the press organs I have in mind were careful to record from time to time their own love of peace, their concern for international good faith, and even their regret that Signor Mussolini had adopted such-and-such an "indefensible" method. To write thus was, from the Fascist point of view, innocuous, provided time and circumstances were carefully chosen. Moreover, it was indispensable, if British readers were not to be driven away in disgust. Such decorous passages must be kept available for quotation if the paper should be arraigned. But at every critical moment when there was a chance for the press to influence the course of events, the purpose of these organs was unmistakably shown, and as one put the stages of their policy together in series, the spectacle was psychologically as interesting as it was nationally humiliating. Of journalists more perhaps than even of politicians it may be said that their acts cannot continue long to be done in a corner, and that for them there is nothing covered which shall not be revealed nor hid that shall not be known.

A keen French publicist, writing in *Foreign Affairs*, warns the English and American reader that nothing could be less to the mind of the party of the French Right than a secure establishment of world peace, and this for a very simple reason. Not because the Right desires war, but because it profits so much by keeping ever alive the *fear of war*. Only by invoking patriotic or quasi-patriotic alarms and enthusiasms can it distract attention from social reform, and win such concessions of dictatorial or oligarchic power as it may use for its own advantage. A France which ceased to be apprehensive of foreign attack would soon "think dangerous thoughts"—as the Japanese would say—at home. No British observer of affairs will suppose that this analysis applies to the French alone. Reactionaries bear everywhere something of a family likeness, and it can hardly be an accident that the pro-Mussolini press in Great Britain is controlled and edited by men who all through last generation fought a desperate battle against the forces of social progress. Their hopes seem to have been at length rekindled, as their strange hero would say, from "the fateful hills of Rome".

III

Among the most extraordinary proposals for "League reform" is one which urges such modification of the Covenant as would keep Fascist Italy still an active member!

No serious critic pretends that the attack on Ethiopia was other than a violation, in letter and in spirit, of pledge after pledge by which Mussolini's Government had bound itself. But there have not been wanting foreign apologists to construct a plea by which that guilt may at least be mitigated, speakers and writers who dwell upon some remarkable provocation—in lack of raw materials, in congested territory, in unfair apportionment of spoils after the Great War, or in the evil example of other Powers—which may be put forward as an excuse. It is fitting then to ask whether the literature of Fascism provides any authoritative statement of general policy and principles such as to justify one in saying that the Ethiopian venture was thus an isolated occurrence, a lapse from the standard of good faith and fair dealing to which Italy like other civilized Powers is pledged, but from which others like her have from time to time so fallen that none can afford to be censorious. Unfortunately for her champions, we have conclusive proof that this is the very inverse of the truth. Mussolini's own article entitled "Fascism", in the *Enciclopedia Italiana*, presents the relation of his movement to the League with an explicitness that clears away all sheltering ambiguities. The passage deserves reproduction in full. Mussolini writes:

And above all, Fascism, the more it considers and observes the future and the development of humanity, quite apart from political considerations of the moment, believes neither in the possibility nor in the utility of perpetual peace. It thus repudiates the doctrine of Pacifism—born of a renunciation of the struggle, and an act of cowardice in the face of sacrifice. War alone brings up to its highest tension all human energy, and puts the stamp of nobility upon the peoples who have the courage to meet it. All other trials are substitutes, which never really put men into the position where they have to make the great decision—the alternative of life or death. Thus a doctrine which is founded upon this harmful postulate of peace is hostile to Fascism. And thus hostile to the spirit of Fascism, though accepted for what use they can be in dealing with particular political situations, are all the international leagues and societies which, as history will show, can be scattered to the winds when once strong national feeling is aroused by any motive—sentimental, ideal, or practical.

In view of this explicit statement, to which countless later rhetorical outbursts on platform, by microphone or through the press, are related as merely illustrative, it is an insult to intelligence to discuss the pleas advanced on Mussolini's behalf by his French and British admirers. People say of M. Tardieu that he is showing the natural resentment of an ex-premier fallen into such disrespect with the

public he so lately led, and they say of Mr. J. L. Garvin that "after all, he is growing old". But these excuses are surely less than fair to old age, and to the average morale of politicians wincing under defeat. Other considerations help one to understand how, at this parting of the ways, such singular preferences have been exhibited.

IV

If collective security has indeed broken down, if faith in Covenants and Pacts has now (as the *Spectator* mournfully observes) no basis more reliable than "an Italian signature", what is the alternative to which the nations are driven?

Clearly the alternative is being faced. Never until now had the fair promise of the Covenant of the League been definitely abandoned, however cynically it might be depreciated; but the definite abandonment is now, in country after country, very real indeed. What happened five years ago in the case of Japan and Manchuria had shaken confidence, but we had been reassured by the reflection that, after all, those were Oriental countries, and that Western civilization was "different". The Italo-Ethiopian experience has disillusioned us, so that the western nations are now ready for anything. A recent despatch from Geneva tells what the Swiss have in mind, those peaceful Swiss whose Constitution has always prohibited a standing army, but who are now at work day and night in munition factories to raise an army of 400,000—nearly ten per cent of the total population—equipped and armed with every desperate weapon of modern warfare. "All Switzerland", says the despatch, "is shaken by fear that there is a secret treaty between France and Italy to make a surprise attack on Germany by striking across the Swiss border." That is the reason why the border is being everywhere fortified, and a loan of 235,000,000 francs has just been voted. What else can one expect the Swiss to do? Can we ask them to depend on the guarantees of international law, or the intervention of the League, or the sanctity of an Italian signature?

Of like suggestiveness is the story in the London *Sphere* about the feverish haste with which preparations are being pushed forward in Great Britain to defend British cities against bombardment with "poison gas". This peril too is "covered"—as the Insurance Companies would say—by a Pact; the civilized Powers have plighted their word to one another that none of them will make use of that latest device, in which the horrors of the old Red Indian warfare are enriched and intensified by modern laboratory discoveries

and technique. But with courteous acknowledgment of such a memorandum, the British authorities—for the sake of greater security—are supplementing it, we read, with an order for the manufacture of 30,000,000 gas masks, which, says the *Sphere* correspondent, will be kept in store at convenient centres “until the situation looks muddy”. We are told, too, of a volume entitled *The Householder's Handbook*, which the British Government will distribute free, in enormous quantities, within the next few months. If its contents have been accurately described by the critic of the *Sphere* who has seen advance sheets, it is a manual fit to disturb even the most somnolent optimist. It sets forth what should be done, and how it should be done, in the event of gas bombs being rained from the air. Every householder is to prepare immediately what is called a “refuge room”. This is described as an act of simple insurance, made needful by the new menace to which mankind is exposed. Instruction is given regarding the part of house or flat best suited for a refuge, and some twenty requirements of defence are specified. Householders are told of the fittings to be laid up beforehand—even such details as the rolls of brown paper and paste for sealing windows and plugging keyholes, the first-aid box, the supplies of tinned food, the radio sets to receive warning notices. A film, it seems, will be prepared to show in every theatre the exact method of sealing apertures to render them gas-proof. What is called “decontamination” work will be taught to applicants as a new and a highly technical art. Applications are already coming in thousands, and it is expected that at least half-a-million of such technicians will have been trained by the end of the present year.

To dwell upon such matters may incur the reproach of alarmist sensationalism, and the British Secretary of State for War has been bitterly attacked for urging that even at such a risk the public should be aroused to the facts. Mr. Duff Cooper lately expressed the opinion that it is now a patriotic duty to “frighten people out of their wits”. So long as certain widely read newspapers and certain armament interests continue to represent that the alternative to League Security is a most invigorating and exhilarating programme of national preparedness, it is surely an obligation to exhibit in gruesome detail what these preparedness plans will actually mean. That conscription for various services, especially air service, is coming in England, seems to become plainer every day. That the British fleet may before long be denied a passage in the Mediterranean beyond an Italian barrier of mines and submarines extending from Sicily to Tripoli seems likewise probable,

and already—apparently in expectation of it—plans are being considered to reestablish the old route to the East round the Cape of Good Hope. The threat not only to close the Suez Canal against British and French ships, but likewise to extend “the Italian Empire” over Egypt, the Soudan and Palestine is among the most familiar topics of newspaper discussion. Such a radio message as the following, sent out from an Italian station for Arab and Indian listeners, is unmistakable in its purpose:

All the world knows that Islam is suffering under British rule. We will open the eyes of all Moslems the world over to the false, egotistical, cowardly and imperialistic British policy which holds over three-fourths of the Moslem World in submission.

So far as one can gather definite policy from the hints and suggestions of a great part of the London press, what is advised is that Mussolini should be bought off, at least temporarily, by “conciliation”! Is it any wonder that Mr. Lloyd George speaks of the spectacle which he watched with shame, of “a White Feather being embroidered across the Union Jack”? Mr. Lloyd George is indeed a rhetorician, and I do not suggest that the abandonment of Sanctions called for descriptive imagery such as this. Perhaps, owing to the negligence of certain persons who had the national defences in charge, the strangely evasive and acquiescent method of recent British diplomacy was the least of evils. But the country will demand ere long an accounting, to show why such humiliations had become inevitable. Nor will the patience and the pride of Englishmen tolerate so futile a surrender as the renewed payment of *Danegelt*.

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