

ARCHITECTURE OF PEACE

HAROLD S. BIDMEAD

THE ancient art of architecture owes much to Science. A building must be designed on scientific principles, if it is not to collapse under the first strain and bury beneath its ruins those whom it was intended to shelter.

The progress of civilization owes much to Man's ability to learn from experience, profit from past mistakes and formulate for his future guidance sundry collections of rules-of-thumb that have ultimately converted his every activity into some semblance of a science, this one relying on certainties, that on modest probabilities, others on empirical formulæ. Admittedly in some fields logic has been carried so far that it may seem to have reached a phase comparable with second childhood. Aldous Huxley, writing sometime between the War-to-End-All-War and the War-to-End-All-Peace, averred that "the physicists are at present involved in such difficulties that some pessimists have suggested that the universe is fundamentally irrational." True, the social sciences may never reach the maturity attained by mathematics; economics and psychology may never become respectable in the eyes of the Exact Scientists. Nevertheless, this world would be an even more ignorant, squalid, hungry, fearsome place than it is already, were it not for the Royal Society. Prudent men *plan* their buildings, their commercial ventures, their agriculture, their campaigns against pestilence, their wars. But they abandon the dictates of good sense when they go in for lotteries, and take elaborate precautions to ensure that the art of politics remains uncontaminated by scientific principles except when absolutely unavoidable. The apparent failure of political experiments has too often been taken as "proof" of the futility of making political experiments at all. (Consider, for instance, the ill-fated attempts to sow English parliamentary government in untilled ground. Their failure has been widely attributed to some alien quality in the soil!) Apart from the singular success that attended the transfusion of the American system of inter-State government into the Swiss, Canadian, Australian and Russian Constitutions, there are few notable instances in history of Man having drawn the correct inferences from the lessons of history. Even the American constitutional experiment cannot be regarded as having passed the laboratory stage, since it has always been confined within the boundaries of the respective

national States and has not so far been applied to any attempt at inter-national governments.

In the international sphere, in those fond realms of cloud-cuckoo make-believe, the statesmen live in the Stone Age, in the era of the big club, where the Scientific Epoch appears to them as but an anxious dream. And so, led from the rear by politicians who are led by the nose by the diplomats, the caravan of humanity divides its ranks into those who shout "My country, right or wrong!" and those who cannot even conceive of the possibility of their country ever ceasing to be always right.

The practice of politics appears, indeed, to engender in its votaries a romantic attitude towards Truth; the facts accommodate themselves to theories in a manner indebted more to Art than to Science. How often one is regaled with a stream of generalizations based on irrelevant particulars, in support of a favourite "ism" or a pre-conceived and prejudiced conclusion, when the actual facts of the case are shrouded in obscurity! Seldom do we see a politician pursuing the slender thread of truth to the bitter end, and acting on his conclusions no matter what the cost to himself. Disillusionment, jettison of false beliefs, is often a painful but necessary alternative to a sojourn in a fool's paradise.

Harold Nicolson, whom *The Listener* styles a skilled observer of many conferences, writing in that paper (29 August, 1946) on the Paris Conference, declared that "All of us who have watched this Conference would agree that as an experiment in open diplomacy, it has already failed . . . They have reduced the Conference to the level of a charade . . . They do not believe in what they are doing." He called for "a voice which will recall the pledges . . . the pledges in the *Atlantic Charter* . . . pledges . . ."

But can an experiment be said to have failed if it has illustrated a fact? If the fact passes unnoticed, does not the failure rather lie in the eye of the "observer"? One might feel justified in regarding the Paris Conference as a valuable and successful experiment in that it tends to *disprove* something the diplomatists and the skilled observers hoped it would prove. Paris has revealed the futility of pledges, the bankruptcy of diplomacy, open or shut, folded or flat, as a means for attaining peace with justice. In the words of Senor de Madariaga: "The atomic bomb has made three imposing ruins: Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and the San Francisco Charter."

It is easy to dismiss such a verdict as the irresponsible cynicism of a subversive spectator. But even Trygve Lie, Secretary-General of the "United Nations" organization, has admitted its intrinsic impotence, in his summary of its operations to date, published in August, 1946. "The United Nations is no stronger than the collective will of the nations that support it. Of itself it can do nothing."

It should be obvious to any skilled observer of inter-national affairs, provided he is not permanently blinded with the dust that he or his colleagues helped to throw into the eyes of the public concerning the previous League, that Mr. Lie's apology errs heavily on the side of optimistic understatement. The most cursory study of the United Nations Charter reveals that it formally confers upon the new League the same debilities as have been revealed in practice. The General Assembly has not even the right, let alone the power, to do anything else than to "discuss" matters and "make recommendations," either to the States Members or to the so-called "Security" Council. The Security Council cannot even arrive at a decision, let alone take action on any matter affecting international law and order, unless the Big Five are agreed, and two of their puppets vote with them, in which case of course there would be no need for an organization to prevent war, anyway. If they disagree, the "collective will" of the nations is revealed as the myth that it most frequently is.

It should not be necessary to underline the conclusions reached by skilled observation from three such different points of view. A more laudable undertaking would be to enquire into the possibility of improving the United Nations Charter or, if this be impracticable, of supplanting it with a construction better designed to stand the stresses and strains of world politics. The enquiry would lead us back through English history to the first principle of effective and permanent government discovered by Edward I. The members of a legislature must be empowered by their electors to make laws that *do not have to be referred back* to the constituencies for ratification. We should have to re-discover the principles of inter-State government that have proved their own validity whenever and wherever they have been applied:

(a) Representatives to the supra-State body must be elected not by the State governments but by the citizens, thus minimizing the disintegrating effect of national bloc voting:

(b) International law must act directly upon the individual citizen, not through the intermediary of the constituent governments. (The only way to enforce "laws" upon States as such is by war, or threat of war. We cannot keep the peace by waging war.)

(c) The supra-national government must have full government power in its own sphere, but this sphere can be restricted to a limited number of specified fields, e.g. defence and foreign affairs.

The United Nations Charter completely perverts every one of these vital *desiderata*. As a result, the nations are *disunited* and—what is worse—an ever-widening gulf has been flung between the citizens of every nation and those of every other.

It would have been too much to expect the Charter to apply these principles on a global scale, in the present state of the world's political development; this will have to wait for world-wide self-government at national levels. But the statesmen should at least have attempted to set up a working model—no matter how limited in extent—of the future world commonwealth of nations.

The idealists had set their revived hopes upon a universal friendly society in which bitter rivals would lick each other's wounds. It would have been more realistic to recognize that the formidable imperfections of the new World League render it nothing better than temporary accommodation. We must lay elsewhere the foundations of the permanent structure that will one day shelter the Earth.

THE AUCTION SALE

MARY EDNA RITCHIE

AN auction sale is announced to country people through bills placed in the village stores. Everyone reads these bills. The farmer may find the very implement he needs on the list. A binder has been known to sell at an auction for as little as ten dollars and after cutting several crops to sell again at fifty dollars. The gardener may need a wheelbarrow or a rake, and his wife's longing for built-in cupboards may be assuaged by a kitchen cabinet.

Strangers, stopping for gas, also read the sale bills, especially those specifying household goods. For the city people the auction holds the possibility of picking up a spool bed, a fine old mahogany bureau or a cherry table.

There is much to be done in the way of getting ready. Cupboards are emptied and trunks are opened. The old clock that has told the time rather indifferently for years is brought out from its scene of banishment and dusted. Someone with a hankering for antiques may buy it. If that happens, the ancient timepiece will probably have electrical mechanism installed behind its flower-embossed glass doors. Never again will the thud of weights against the top be heard as the clock endures a nightly winding. There will be no more need of winding.

On the great day the family is up early. The furniture is marshalled on the front porch and in the yard. The beds are set up. A clothesline is strung between two trees. Over it quilts, hooked rugs and linens are hung. Strangers will marvel at the log-cabin quilt and wonder how it is made. They will exclaim at the "crazy" patch-work quilt, each piece a silk one and outlined with herringbone or feather stitching.

The younger generation scorns the old crafts. "Piecing" a quilt has little or no meaning. And a pillow sham is a complete enigma. In these days enveloping bedspreads of satin or candlewick take care of the pillows' appearance. On one pillowsham is embroidered in red thread "I slept and dreamed that life was beauty" and on its mate "I woke and found that life was duty." But the other pair of shams sounds a more frivolous note with stiff-limbed figures, reminiscent of an ancient Egyptian frieze, responding to "Girls and boys, come out to play" on one, and "The moon doth shine as bright as day" on the other.

Along the edge of the porch someone sets the chairs. The four with the rounded backs were bought over sixty years ago and were paid for with two bags of potatoes.

Leaning against the house are the framed pictures. The "Roman Chariot Race" was a premium given with a yearly subscription to a weekly magazine paper half a century ago. In its cardboard mailing tube it spent years in a trunk until money for a frame could be diverted from more urgent uses.

The neighbors, beaming with importance or reflected glory, begin to arrive. They move around the yard, commenting on the various things. The lilac bush was set out the year Johnny was born. The "crazy" quilt was pieced the time Mary Ann was laid up with a sore knee. It is easy to see that the woodbox misses Grandpa. He always kept it filled with shavings and finely-split sticks. Morning wood he said.

There is a sprinkling of strangers. One woman is enthusiastic over Grandpa's woodbox. It seems it is really a fine old pine chest in disguise.

As the time draws near for the sale to begin, the gathering assumes a slight resemblance to a funeral. There is something of finality as well as drama—the end of one life and the beginning of another. There is the same tense waiting for the auctioneer as for the undertaker, the same waiting for his patter to begin as for the service. A deep quiet falls on the gathering. The auctioneer clears his throat.

He begins with the little stuff, saving the more important things for the last. Queer assortments are offered—a box of odds and ends such as hinges, door-knobs and mouse-traps; a box of dishes. The city woman who penetrated the woodbox's disguise, bids on this and gets it for fifty cents. There is a look of triumph on her face. She has no use for the moustache-cup, and does not need an odd salt shaker, but who knows but a piece of willow ware or dresden might be in the lot.

A dealer drives up with his truck. The Sale is well on its way, but he knows the small stuff is always sold first. What is he after? Perhaps he has heard about the big round mahogany table used in the cellar for holding baskets of eggs, crocks of butter, pies and cakes. The table top is leaning against the side of the house. But where are the legs? Ah, there is a real relic. The table's support is a square-set base that forms four low-backed seats. Years ago, when the room was being cleared for a dance, it was a simple matter for two husky men to lift

off this top and lean it against the wall. The base, pushed to one side, provided seats for four.

A woman has discovered a red glass pitcher. "Ruby glass!" she exclaims. "And such a large piece, too!" You'll never know, stranger, how much better the buttermilk or lemonade tasted when poured out of that pitcher. Your cocktails are a poor second.

There goes the white china hen from the top shelf of the high glass cupboard. Her nest a dish, she patiently sat through the years on some strangely-assorted "eggs"—tax receipts, bills, a tiny gold ring, a recipe for cough medicine and for a while a set of dentures. Grandpa just couldn't seem to get used to his teeth.

The chairs are gone. The big mahogany table from the cellar is being loaded into the dealer's truck. Its possession represents a hard-won battle entailing some spirited bidding against the lady of the woodbox rescue.

The Sale is over. People are hurrying off with their loot. For some of the objects the new life may be a step down in the social scale and for others a step up. No more will the crocks hold butter or pickles or "fried-down" meat. The city people will likely put flowers in them. The "Roman Chariot Race" has gone in a big car. The pictured amphitheatre, with its spectators watching excitedly as Ben Hur urges his steeds past those of the lordly Messala, may have aroused nostalgic memories of a European tour. The new owner probably imagined just such a scene while viewing the ruins of the Coliseum.