SEVENTH PLENARY MEETING
Friday, September 10th, 1926, at 10.30 a.m.

CONTENTS

Report of the Committee on Credentials.

22. Welcome to the German Delegation.

President: M. NINTCHITCH.


The President:

Translation: The Chairman of the Committee on Credentials will read the report and submit the decisions of the Committee on the credentials of the German delegation.

M. de Agüero y Bethancourt (Cuba), Chairman and Rapporteur of the Committee on Credentials:

Translation: Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen — The Committee instructed by the Assembly to examine the credentials of delegates met to-day at 10 o'clock in the Salle de la Réformation to examine the credentials of the German delegates to the Assembly.

The Committee has examined the credentials of the delegates of Germany signed by the President of the Reich and the Minister for Foreign Affairs. This document having been found in good and true form, the Committee considers that the delegates of the German Government to this Assembly have been duly accredited.
The President:

Translation: If nobody has any remarks to make, I will declare the conclusions of the report of the Committee on Credentials adopted.

The conclusions of the report were adopted.

The President:

Translation: The conclusions of the report being adopted, I invite the German delegates to take their seats. (The German delegates took their seats in the Assembly.)

22. WELCOME TO THE GERMAN DELEGATION

The President:

Translation: Ladies and gentlemen—My rôle as President to-day is an easy one, since I have but to voice the unanimous sentiments of the Assembly in extending a warm welcome to the German delegates who have just taken their place amongst us.

This event is, for the League of Nations, both happy and memorable in a twofold sense.

In the first place, it marks a new step towards that universality to which the League is inevitably progressing, despite difficulties which we hope are only temporary.

Secondly, the essential object of the League is the maintenance of peace, and the admission of a great European Power is a happy omen for the peaceful future of the continent which has suffered most from war.

We have therefore the double good fortune to see the accomplishment of an act for which the League has never ceased to hope, and to see in it the prelude of new successes in its mission of peace.

The preparations for this happy event were made last year, and this year, too, both within and without this hall, but its achievement was made possible by the will of this Assembly when it expressed its opinion, the day before yesterday, with a unanimity, the symbolic importance of which will be plain to all.

I am glad to see Germany take her rightful place amongst us as a great nation desirous of supporting our work for international security and understanding.

In extending a cordial invitation to the distinguished representatives of Germany to take part in our work, I welcome their presence as a new pledge for the success of international collaboration in the cause of peace.

Dr. Stresemann, first delegate of Germany, will address the Assembly.

Dr. Stresemann (Germany), speaking in German:

Translation: Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen—The President of this High Assembly and the President of the Council of the League of Nations have been good enough to accord Germany a joyful welcome on her entry into the League. In addressing you from this platform, I feel my first duty to express Germany's thanks to these two gentlemen and to the Assembly. Allow me at the same time to express our gratitude to the Swiss Government, which is now extending its traditional and generous hospitality to Germany as a Member of the League of Nations.

More than six years have passed since the League was founded. A long period of development was thus necessary before the general political situation rendered it possible for Germany to enter the League, and even in the present year great difficulties have had to be overcome before Germany's decision could be supplemented by the unanimous decision of the League. Far be it from me to dwell on matters which belong to the past. It is rather the task of the present generation to look to the present and to the future. I would only say this, that, although an event such as Germany's entry into the League is the outcome of a long preliminary process of development, yet the very fact constitutes perhaps a surer guarantee of its permanence and of its fruitful results.

To-day Germany enters a circle of States to some of which she has for decades been attached by unbroken ties of friendship, whereas others were allied against her during the Great War. It is surely an event of historical importance in the annals of Germany and these latter States are now brought together within the League of Nations in permanent and peaceful combination. It is a fact which indicates more clearly than any mere words or programmes that the League of Nations may in very truth be destined to give a new direction to the political development of mankind. Civilisation would be exposed to grave dangers indeed at the present time if the nations could obtain no assurance that they would be able to perform in peaceful and untroubled co-operation the tasks which their destiny has assigned to them.

The catastrophic events of a terrible war have recalled the conscience of mankind to a consideration of the tasks which confront the different peoples. In many countries we have witnessed the ruin of the lower classes of the population, who are not only valuable, but intellectually and economically indispensable to the life of the nation. We are beholding the birth of new forms of economic life, and the disappearance of older ones. We see how economic life is overlapping the old national boundaries and creating new forms of international operation. The old economic situation of the world has disappeared; no programmes, to guide its co-operation. This co-operation was based on the unwritten law of the traditional exchange of goods between the different continents. It must be our task to restore this exchange. If we really desire the economic development of the world to proceed undisturbed, we shall not obtain that end by erecting barriers between the countries, but rather by bridging over the gulfs which hitherto have separated the different national economic systems.

But there is something which far transcends in importance all material considerations, namely, the souls of the nations themselves. There is just now a mighty stirring of ideas among the nations of the world. We see some nations that adhere to the principle of self-contained national unity and reject international understanding, because they do not wish to see all that has been developed on the basis of nationality superseded by a more general conception of humanity. Now I hold no country which belongs to the League of Nations that is sufficiently aware of any of its national individuality. The Divine Architect of the world has not created mankind as a homogeneous whole. He has made the nations of different races; He has given them their mother-tongue as the sanctuary of their soul; He has given them countries with different characteristics as their homes. But it cannot be the purpose of the Divine world-order that men should direct their supreme national
energies against one another, thus ever thrusting back the general progress of civilisation. He will serve humanity best who, firmly rooted in the faith of his own people, develops his moral and intellectual gifts to the utmost, thus overstepping his own national boundaries, and serving the whole world, as has been done by those great men of all nations whose names are writ large in the history of mankind.

Thus the ideals of nationality and of humanity may unite on the intellectual plane, and they may similarly unite in pursuit of political ideals, provided that there is the will to make common progress in this field.

The political outcome of these ideals is a moral obligation on the part of the different countries to devote their efforts to peaceful co-operation. This moral obligation also applies to the great moral problems of humanity. No other law should be applied to their solution than that of justice.

The co-operation of the peoples in the League of Nations must and will lead to just solutions for the moral questions which arise in the conscience of the peoples. The most durable foundation of peace is a policy inspired by mutual understanding and mutual respect between nation and nation.

Even before her entry into the League, Germany endeavoured to promote this friendly co-operation. The action which she took and which led to the Pact of Locarno is a proof of this, and as further evidence there are the arbitration treaties which she has concluded with almost all her neighbours. The German Government is resolved to persevere unwaveringly in this line of policy, and is glad to see that these ideas, which at first met with lively opposition in Germany, are becoming more and more rooted in the conscience of the German people. Thus the German Government may well speak for the great majority of the German race when it declares that it will wholeheartedly devote itself to the duties devolving upon the League of Nations.

During the past six years the League has already taken in hand a substantial portion of these tasks, and has done most valuable work. The German delegation does not possess the experience which the members here assembled have acquired. We believe, however, that, as regards the new work which lies before us, the subjects dealt with first should be those in which the individual nations can do most by combining in joint institutions. Among other institutions which the League has created, we have in mind the World Court, which is the outcome of efforts made to establish an international legal order.

Furthermore, the efforts made towards disarmament are of particular importance for the consolidation of organised international peace. The complete disarmament of Germany was stipulated by the Treaty of Versailles as a preliminary to general disarmament. It is to be hoped that practical steps will be taken to further this general disarmament, and thereby furnish evidence that the lofty ideals of the League of Nations already contain within them the seeds of a great positive force.

Germany’s relations to the League are not, however, confined exclusively to the possibilities of co-operation in general aims and issues. In many respects the League is the heir and executor of the Treaties of 1919. Out of these Treaties there have arisen in the past, I may say frankly, many differences between the League and Germany. I hope that our co-operation within the League will make it easier in future to discuss these questions. In this respect mutual confidence will, from a political point of view, be found a greater creative force than anything else. It would, indeed, be incompatible with the ideals of the League to group its Members according to whether they are viewed with sympathy or with antipathy by other Members.

In this connection I reject most emphatically the idea that the attitude hitherto adopted by Germany in matters concerning the League of Nations has been dictated by such sympathies or antipathies. Germany desires to co-operate on the basis of mutual confidence with all nations represented in the League or upon the Council.

The League has not yet attained its ideal, which is to include all the Powers of the world. Germany’s entry into the League does, it is true, constitute an important step towards its universality. But we desire at the same time to express our deep regret that Brazil has manifested her intention to withdraw from it. We regret this more particularly because we believe that if the League is to be world-wide, one continent alone should not have a predominant influence within it. Furthermore, we share with the other Members of the League the firm hope that we may retain the valuable co-operation of Spain. We are convinced that the appeal which has been addressed to Spain by all the Powers will reveal to that great country and its people how detrimental it would be to the high ideals of which Spain has been a leading champion if she were long absent from Geneva at this time.

Universality alone can protect the League against the danger of using its political forces for other purposes than in the service of peace. Only on the basis of a community of all nations, without distinction and on a footing of perfect equality, can mutual assistance and justice become the true guiding stars of the destiny of mankind. Upon this foundation alone can that principle of freedom be set for which nations and individuals alike are constantly striving. Germany is firmly resolved to found her policy upon these lofty ideals. To all the nations assembled here we can apply the words of that great thinker who said that we belong to a generation which strives from darkness towards the light. It is our fervent hope that the tasks of the League may be fulfilled on the basis of the noble conceptions of peace, freedom and unity. So shall we draw nearer the ideals to which we aspire, and it is the firm resolve of Germany to assist wholeheartedly in that task.

The President:

Translation: M. Briand, first delegate of France, will address the Assembly.

M. Briand:

Translation: Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen—

I sincerely thank my colleagues on the General Committee of the Assembly for having allowed the delegate of France to follow the distinguished representative of Germany on this platform, to welcome the German delegation on its entry into this Assembly and to assure you that we are resolved to collaborate with that delegation, cordially and sincerely, in the work of international pacification. My colleagues on the General Committee were right in reminding the Assembly that the presence of the delegate of France on this platform at this moment, after the eloquent and lofty words
which you have just heard, would perhaps do something to emphasise the character of this occasion and make clear its significance, its consequences and all the hopes which the peoples of the world rightly centre in it.

Those who indulge in irony and derision at the expense of the League of Nations, who daily cast doubt upon its soundness and time after time proclaim that it is doomed to perish, what will they think if they are present at this meeting? It is a moving spectacle, and a specially moving and comforting one, when we think that only a few years after the most frightful war which has ever devastated the world, when the battlefields have hardly ceased to reel with blood, the peoples, the same peoples who were hurled in combat against each other in the second Great War, have come together and are expressing to each other their common will to collaborate in the work of world peace?

What a renewal of hope for the nations! From this day on how many mothers will look at their children without feeling their hearts contract with fear.

Peace for Germany and for France. That means that we have done with the long series of terrible and sanguinary conflicts which have stained the pages of history with blood. It means the black veil of mourning for sufferings that can never be appeased, done with war, done with brutal and sanguinary methods of settling our disputes. True, differences between us still exist, but henceforth it will be for the judge to declare the law. Just as individual citizens take their difficulties to be settled by a magistrate, so shall we bring ours to be settled by peaceful procedure. Away with rifles, machine-guns, cannon! Clear the way for conciliation, arbitration, peace!

Countries do not go down to history as great solely through the heroism of their sons on the battlefield or the victories that they gain there. It is a far greater tribute to their greatness if, faced with difficulties, in the midst of circumstances in which anger all but crowns the voice of reason, they can stand firm, be patient and appeal to right to safeguard their just interests.

Gentlemen of the German delegation, our nations need give no further proof of their strength or of their heroism. Both nations have shown their prowess on the battlefield, and both have reaped an ample harvest of military glory. Henceforth they may seek laurels in other fields.

For many months now Dr. Stresemann and myself have been working together at the same task. He had every confidence; I had no regret that confidence; I trust that he also will have no occasion to regret it. With the help of a man whose noble and generous spirit and sincerity are known to you all — I refer to my colleague and friend the first delegate of the British Empire, Sir Austen Chamberlain — we have worked together. We needed all our courage in our endeavours to reach a goal which was then so distant. As the crow flies, Locarno and Geneva are not far distant, but the road between them is by no means easy. It has to pass round many obstacles, and since we all admire faith when it moves mountains, we should certainly feel pride in the faith that has brought the Lake of Locarno so near to the Lake of Geneva.

If at the outset we had allowed ourselves to lose heart; if, influenced by the expressions of doubt, hesitation and mistrust uttered by some in our countries, we had gone no further, all would have been at an end. Far from taking a further step towards peace, the seeds of renewed mistrust would have been sown between countries already divided.

I have perhaps the right, speaking from this platform, to feel a special pride in having taken part in to-day's manifestation, for I have the great satisfaction of seeing in it the outcome of a personal effort — although that, of course, is a small matter — and above all I foresee that there will henceforth be no possibility of a repetition of the terrible events which we have witnessed in recent years.

Before we could arrive at the stage we have reached to-day, certain difficult problems had to be settled by means of private negotiations. In point of fact, these negotiations were recommended by previous Assemblies, which displayed remarkable political insight and realised that, unless certain rapprochements were made outside the League of Nations, unless certain concessions could be obtained from both sides, unless certain conversations could be held in preparation of solutions to be submitted to you, the task we were jointly pursuing would never be accomplished.

At the last Assembly, we came very close to the danger-spot. I am glad now that at the time I had no doubt of the final result and that it was I who caused the special Assembly to adopt the proposal and not the other. As it happened, the two representatives were able to leave Geneva in the certainty that morally Germany's application had been unanimously accepted by the Assembly.

In the interval we discussed matters, and we prepared for negotiations by conciliation. This kind of work, I hasten to add, does not partake of the true spirit of the League of Nations. In the League everything must be done in public and in collaboration with all the nations belonging to it. I can now proclaim, in the certainty that I shall not be contradicted by my friends, that in future it will no longer be necessary to resort to proceedings of this nature.

All the Members of the League of Nations, great and small, without distinction, must collaborate with a view to attaining the objects laid down in the Covenant.

If, during these difficult times through which we have passed, some of you have felt perhaps that it was our intention not to admit you to a share in the decision; that the German representatives have been mistaken; no one is more firmly resolved than the delegates of France that, in future, the work of the League shall be done in the light of day and with the collaboration of all its Members.

I have no fault to find with the remarks made by the representative of Germany concerning his conception of collaboration with us on the League. As far as the delegate of France is concerned, I may say that the German delegation can be sure of finding in him a loyal collaborator.

The fact that we are both present in this Assembly and that, on the plane of the ideal, we can hold communion with one another does not destroy existing obstacles. Such obstacles still exist, as you, Sir, so tactfully indicated. Of this fact I am fully aware. Dr. Stresemann and I, each in our respective countries, are in a position which enables us to perceive those obstacles, and the mere fact that he has left the Wilhelmstrasse and I the Quai d'Orsay, to meet here in the fair city of Geneva, does not mean that these difficulties have disappeared through the goodwill manifested in our words.

It is sufficient, however, if both of us, voicing the deep-rooted feeling in our hearts, can assure you that it is the feeling of my country — have the will to meet these various difficulties,
firmly resolved to settle them by conciliatory means. That is enough to prevent any dispute between us from becoming an armed conflict.

It is especially those peoples who have not always been in agreement who have most need of the League of Nations; for, if it is true that there may be some divine plan whereby the nations are prevented from making war on one another, I believe we should readily agree that, during the long years of the Peace, this plan has been singularly disregarded. I should like to see it applied from to-day onwards, and you may be sure that I will do nothing to prevent it. I simply wish to say this: If you are here as a German and only as a German, and if I am here as a Frenchman and only as a Frenchman, this agreement will not be easy. But if we come here, not forgetting our respective countries, yet as citizens sharing in the universal work of the League, all will be well, and we shall attain spiritual communion with our colleagues in the atmosphere peculiar to Geneva.

You said, Sir, that you were inexperienced. That will not be for long. You prove it in this, the statesman’s supreme quality — this your speech has clearly proved — and you have the sensitive perception which enables you to realise the spirit of the League.

I have often arrived at Geneva, or in some other town where the Council of the League was sitting, with the helpless feeling of being at grips with problems impossible of solution, confronted with the comments of the Press and of politicians who at times serve to render them still more obscure. On such occasions, I have often said to myself that we were certain to separate without coming to an agreement or finding a solution. But a solution has always been found, because, directly we were sent on our mission, the League, that is to say, Covenant, infected by the spirit of the place, ennobled in one another’s eyes by our great purpose, realising the moral responsibility which weighed upon us not only toward our individual nations but the whole world, we readjusted our minds, we made a supreme effort, and at the most critical moment, just when a solution appeared to be escaping us for ever, we were able, by a kind of miracle which I will not attempt to explain, to reach an agreement, to the amazement of all and particularly of those who perhaps had not desired the success of our endeavours.

But such a result could only be attained upon one condition: I am not going to put before you it is a condition which applies to no hesitations to me, but to you all, for, I, like any other statesman, am not strong enough to resist committing the kind of error which I have in mind. I have in the past been guilty of many such errors, and I know that what I am going to say will be received not as advice from myself, nor as an appeal to you, but in the spirit in which it is said — not as an appeal to me, but in the spirit in which it is said — but as an appeal to you as citizens sharing in the universal work of the League.

There are two spirits in which delegates may come to Geneva: the objective spirit and the fighting spirit. If the League takes on the semblance of a kind of tourney; if, under the stimulus of polemical debates or actuated by an overheated sense of national pride, we come here and there to spin against each other, with the desire to gain the perilous upper hand, it is certain that our victory will be a hollow victory. Victories of prestige bring no result in appearance. Think of the havoc they have wrought in the past! Prestige stimulates the imagination, aggravates selfish interests, urges States to feverish demonstrations of national pride and incites them to declare war on delegates, who, on losing the guiding rein of reason and the spirit of compromise, are nothing but statesmen. It is impossible for statesmen, under such conditions to work in a spirit of conciliation.

They face one another like wrestlers in the ring, with their peoples eagerly looking on and asking which is going to throw the other. That is the spirit of war; it is a spirit which must not exist — least of all in the League.

For my part I promise to do my best to avoid bringing this spirit here, and I count on the intelligence, the pacific intentions and the lofty sentiments of the German delegates to do the same.

If we are egged on against each other, if we are urged in interviews and speeches to oppose each other, we shall put aside all such temptations; let us thrust them far from us! That is the road of blood, the road of the past, covered with the dead, the road of mourning of destruction and disaster. It is not our road.

Henceforth our road is to be one of peace and progress. We shall win real greatness for our countries if we induce them to lay aside their pride, if we persuade them to sacrifice certain of their own desires in the service of world peace. This sacrifice will not diminish, it will increase their prestige.

When Europe has regained its economic and moral equilibrium, when the peoples realise their security, they will then be able to cast away the heavy burdens imposed by the dreary or war, they will be able to work together to improve their respective positions. There will arise at last a European spirit which will not be born of war, and will for that reason be nobler, loftier and more worthy of admiration.

It is for us to make this effort. It is easy to blame the peoples, but it is generally their leaders who are to blame. We must see that they who will have to take upon themselves, who should have a proper understanding of events and should always interpret them in a spirit favourable to efforts of conciliation.

Arbitration! That word is now at the height of its prestige and its power. Arbitration treaties are increasing; nations after nation is promising to abjure war and to accept intermediaries. All these undertakings are building the path of peace; all are permeated with the spirit of the League; and for that reason all nations should devote themselves heart and soul to the League’s defence. It should be sheltered from all attacks and placed above all other considerations.

With the League goes Peace! Without it, the more or the less will be the result of which the peoples have suffered too long.

This day should be commemorated with a white stone. The words of collaboration which Germany and France have just exchanged in a like spirit of sincerity should be marked with a white stone — and I for one will never change the colour of that stone.

And now, apologising for having prevented upon your patience so long, may I say to the League that to-day, by the entry of Germany, made another step towards its object — universality! Although this is a cause for rejoicing, our joy is dimmed by the fact that two great nations of the League are no longer with us.

I endorse your remarks both as regards Brazil and Spain. These two great countries were deeply imbued with the spirit which animates us all. They had rendered many services to the League in difficult circumstances. It is therefore not surprising that even our joy at to-day’s event should be tinged with regret at their absence. But we do not give up hope, and I am deeply convinced that soon we shall see the representatives of Spain and Brazil among us once again.

The League is not going back; its future will be one of constant expansion. To-day it has taken
one step forward; to-morrow it will take another. Our presence, both yours and ours, is of deep significance.

I am glad to have been able to take part in this event. It will, I am sure, take a great place in history. It is for us to ensure that no rash move on the part of any of us will endanger the hopes of the peoples of the world.

The President:

Translation: Ladies and gentlemen — Sharing as I do the deep emotion with which you have listened to the last two speakers, I am convinced that the Assembly will wish me to convey our thanks to Dr. Stresemann and M. Briand and to assure them that their sincere and touching words have reached our inmost hearts.

It was indeed a moving spectacle to see the delegates of Germany and France mount the same platform, animated by the same desire to proclaim their deep faith and unshakable conviction in the future of the League!

Their words, I am convinced, will prove a determining factor not only in the work to be accomplished here, but also in the whole future of this great international association.

Sir Austen Chamberlain (British Empire):

I beg to move that the speeches which you, Mr. President, have addressed to us from the Presidential chair and the speeches of the honourable representatives of Germany and France be printed verbatim in the Assembly Journal.

The President:

Translation: I take your applause to mean that the Assembly has adopted the proposal of the first delegate of the British Empire.

I think that, in view of the deep emotion we have all experienced, it would be inopportune to continue the discussion of the agenda at this morning’s meeting. I propose, therefore, to adjourn until this afternoon. (Assent.)

The Assembly rose at 12.15 p.m.