The Economic Committee of 1927 uttered a warning of the danger; its action immediately led to a movement for the removal or lowering of Customs barriers, and a first attempt was made to effect something practical in this direction. Four interconnected Conventions were concluded for the suppression of import and export prohibitions, and high hopes were entertained when a large number of countries immediately signed the Conventions.

Disappointment was soon to come, however, when it was found how few countries ratified the Conventions they had signed. Without ratification these Conventions must remain inoperative, which would mean, as far as collective action is concerned, a setback that could not fail to have a most discouraging effect. That is why I now make an urgent appeal from this platform to the signatory Governments to appen the necessary ratifications to these Conventions.

But the work to be done certainly covers a much wider field than this. We must work resolutely for the lowering of tariffs. The World Economic Conference of 1927 drafted categorical recommendations on the subject in earnest, nay solemn, terms. I propose to quote them, for they are quite short:

The Conference recommended that “the time has come to put an end to the increase in tariffs and to move in the opposite direction”, and it recommended the nations to take immediate action to remove or lower the barriers to international exchange set up by excessive Customs tariffs.

In the meantime protectionism is still rife, and even shows signs of increase in various quarters. Is it not a suitable time to remind ourselves of the warning uttered by the Economic Conference? That warning is not a threat of a contractual one! The States acceding to it would undertake not to increase their Customs tariffs. That would be a minimum commitment, a conservatory measure; but it would be a stage on the road towards the wider and bolder reform of lowering tariffs, which we must perhaps be allowed to call “economic disarmament”.

In pursuance of this aim, the 1927 Conference recommended the conclusion of collective international conventions. It is true that that system is liable to create difficulties. We can conceive such difficulties. They arise out of the disparity between the economic conditions obtaining in the various States, some of which are already highly industrialised whilst others have remained primarily agricultural. It would not, however, be necessary immediately and indiscriminately to include all countries in this convention. It might be confined to countries with similar economic conditions which were willing to embark on the policy indicated by the Economic Conference.

But here an extremely delicate question arises. It is this: Could a State not acceding to a collective commercial convention be allowed to reap the benefits of the convention through a most-favour-nation clause incorporated in a bilateral treaty concluded by it with one of the acceding States? I do not know if I have made myself clear: the idea is quite definite, though it is difficult to explain. Could such a State be allowed to reap the benefits of the convention to which it had not acceded, while refusing to share in the costs and responsibilities attached thereto? This would certainly appear illogical and unjust. It would be putting a premium upon abstention and would probably mean the failure of the system of collective action.

The Economic Committee of the League foresaw this danger and endeavoured to obviate it. It indicated one method of doing so by proposing the insertion in bilateral treaties containing the most-favoured-nation clause of a provision to the effect that that clause would give no right to any benefits under a collective commercial convention open to all countries and calculated to improve the commercial relations of the peoples of the world. That seems to me a perfectly legitimate reservation, and any Government has the right heretofore to adopt the principle in any commercial negotiations upon which it may embark in future. I am convinced that this principle will gradually become general.

The policy I have outlined might naturally lead groups of States which have reached approximately similar stages of economic development, and which, because of natural ties and a geographical unit, to free their trade from all hindrances. That may, perhaps—I say perhaps—be one of the forms which the bold and inspiring suggestion that M. Briand has made to Europe will one day take. We are all anxious to hear more about this suggestion. I shall not detain you any longer. I merely wanted to touch upon certain specific points. I cannot, however, leave this platform, where I have stood over this imposing gathering, including so many eminent statesmen, without recalling the first session of the Assembly held ten years ago. At that time we were without chart or guidance. We have since embarked on an enterprise full of anxiety, an enterprise that was met with hostility, derision, scepticism. Some said we were launching a great experiment; they were the optimists. Others, again, said we were embarking upon an adventure. Well, we have had our adventure, and we are now on firm ground. Our experiment has succeeded. We have succeeded in turning an enterprise, which was at first full of anxiety, into an enterprise full of success, which is now full of expectations.

The President:

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

M. Briand (France):

Translation: Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen—It is now ten years since the League of Nations came into existence. That is a long time for anyone of my age, but it is a very short period in the history of a great institution like the League. No one can say that those ten years have been wasted; the fullest possible use has been made of them. The League has faced its responsibilities, and its work has extended to every field of endeavour. Much that has been done has failed to attract attention, or at least to the general public; much that has been done has not been as successful as it might have been, despite attacks upon the way. It has vanquished what constituted the most redoubtable foes for an institution of this kind; it has risen triumphant over scepticism and derision.

Doubt is non-existent nowadays where the League is concerned. A close interest is taken in its work, which forms the subject, in the large majority of countries, of sympathetic and very
real enthusiasm. It enjoys universal confidence and has built up a moral capital which is without parallel in the history of the world. But at this point a serious problem arises. What use is the League going to make of this trust which the nations have placed in it? What use is it going to make of the moral capital represented by that trust?

I fully appreciate that an association built up of such a nature and so devoted to such a purpose should be approached with caution. If the League is to arrive at unanimity—and that condition is obviously difficult to fulfill in dealing with certain problems—it may appear quite natural to attempt, I will not say to shelve those questions, but to adjourn them, to agree to some delay before approaching them. Certain however, have only been raised before the League are so urgent that the League could not attempt to disclaim responsibility without serious damage to its own prestige.

The League has waged more than one campaign against war which has been productive of very marked results. Last year, speaking from this platform, I said that there must be no falling off on the part of the activities of an institution such as this. I was the first to pay tribute to what the League had done, to note the progress it had made in the cause of peace.

Anything that has been accomplished during the last few years has been due, in part, to the inspiration of the League; certain things, rightly held up to admiration and imitation, have not had the League, by virtue of its acts and the confidence it inspires, created a favourable atmosphere throughout the world. Locarno, to which we owe the present, was born of the League, and the Paris Peace Conference has been more formalised here, although it might seem to have been conceived outside the League, was also brought into being by its inspiration.

Here, since first had the honour to represent my country at Geneva, I learned to seek a means of exercising war and, still under the influence of this idea, I found the formula from which the Paris Pact arises. No one in the world has the privilege to deposit with the Secretariat of the League of Nations. It is here now, in our midst, part and parcel of the League and of its patrimony.

Yet, despite the progress made in the cause of peace as a result of the Paris Pact, despite the part played by Conventions—for example, by the Locarno Pact—against war, there remains one serious omission in our work, and, though I may feel some hesitation in approaching this problem, I have to tell myself that, as a member of the League, it is my duty not to shirk it.

Yes, despite the League's efforts in the cause of peace, one serious omission exists which sooner or later will inevitably come to light.

We have agreed to place a ban on war; war henceforward will be deemed a crime, whereas a few years ago, though executed by all of us, it was perhaps not legal, but unquestionably was lawful. Now, at last, we have our enemy by the throat; now we have him fast in the pillory. That is to say, we have fixed the moral barrier precluding all recourse to war. But who would venture to say that that is enough?

Who would venture to say that, when an institution like the League has pronounced sentence, its duty is done?

No, gentlemen, not until the League, having condemned the crime, has taken such precautions as lie within its power to prevent that crime from being committed, or to punish it when committed—not till then will it have completed its duty.

Let us make no mistake; every nation is obsessed with the same idea. Wherever our activities are discussed, wherever they are approved, and held to offer real guarantees of peace—and they do offer such guarantees—the question arises; supposing, all the same, that among all the nations there were one, only one perhaps, which did not keep faith; supposing, all the same, that under some pretence the nature of which we refuse to conceive, but which still might occur, war were to break out, what would happen? What would be done by that great association of nations which has condemned war? What action would it take in such an event? How could it do otherwise than use the power which lies ready within its grasp? In other words, there never was and never will be a representative of my country in this Assembly, a great effort was made to fill that gap; for a whole month the Assembly toiled to raise up a solid barrier against war, to fix penalties, if by any evil chance war should be unchained.

That particular effort, which is an honour to the League, was never followed up, to our deep regret. Does that mean that we are henceforth to renounce our endeavours and again begin in some other form, that we are to put systematically on one side all ideas of penalties?

Gentlemen, no society worthy of the name which took precautions against crimes and penalties will renounce the right to inflict punishment, or will resign the right to defend its interests.

It is inadmissible that the League should not at some time of its own accord and without outside interference, that certain men, now—perhaps I am too long in waiting—should not be able to turn to the nations and say: "You put your confidence in me; henceforward I feel that I am fully deserving of it, for now the League will no longer be content with a convention, with a mere putting a ban upon it; the League has become the secular arm to punish anyone so rash as to employ that weapon". To this end we must work continually, with a firm resolve to succeed. Certain obstacles will gradually disappear; certain difficulties will be removed. We need only attack the problem as a whole and not in a piecemeal fashion, and I personally do not despair of an early solution.

I said that the League spirit had made possible all those manifestations of peace which you so rightly applauded. Quite recently, at The Hague, a new and striking contribution was offered to the cause of peace. Reference has already been made to the Conference held there. I myself was one of those who participated in that Conference, and I brought with it a feeling of perfect well-being. Like my friend Mr. Henderson, whom I see before me, I passed through a few anxious moments. It even seemed, at times, as if disaster were impending; but still we persevered. Why, do you ask? Because, upheld by the idea of peace, we realised that to separate in such circumstances, without achieving our purpose, would mean a shattering blow to all the League's work towards this same end. I held before me constantly this meeting of the Assembly. I asked myself what would happen when the Government delegates at The Hague, if they failed to reach agreement on the programme laid down at Geneva a year ago, appeared among the forty members of the League. Did I myself what would be the atmosphere of this Assembly should such a disaster come to pass. The mere thought of that contingency gave me fresh strength and courage. I told myself: "Our discussions now must surely yield some gleam of light. We must, of course, fight stubbornly for our interests; but, above all, the League, which there remains to be carried out the work of political reconciliation. We are not going to jeopardise
that work for the sake of arguing about a few millions." As the delegate of France, I realised that the only way to do this was to my own country having made no sacrifices, content to pride myself on negative results, I should not be very cordially received.

We overcame the obstacles at The Hague, and to make the last remaining difficulties outstanding between Germany and France will also have vanished: closer collaboration will now be possible, certain controversial points will cease to exist — all to the greater advantage of the cause of peace. This, I repeat, would never have been possible but for the League, but for the way in which it has drawn men together, but for the strength it has given them to tackle certain vital problems and to solve those problems.

There are other problems that it has to face. One question recurs periodically in all the speeches, and I shall not attempt to exclude it from mine. Reference has already been made to the duty of honouring the undertakings embodied in Article 8 of the Covenant and taking steps to effect the reduction of armaments. That, as I have said before from this platform — and I do not hesitate to repeat it now — is a solemn obligation entered into by all the signatories to the Covenant, an obligation to which I must not turn a deaf ear. It, however, a difficult problem, as everyone realises. It depends — I hesitate to pronounce a word which has given rise to so much misunderstanding, a word so often regarded as an obstacle and hence the subject of impatient comment, and yet it must be said — the problem depends, I say, on security.

Security is a difficult factor to assess. In estimating our own security, we find powerful arguments in its favour and eloquent phrases whereby to persuade other nations of certain very natural anxieties. When we speak of the security of others, we take a more broadminded view of the matter.

But somehow we must manage to establish a common measure, and only by a joint effort of goodwill, by trying to understand one another's point of view, shall we ever reach a solution of this problem. I am convinced that we shall have to wait years before we succeed in solving it. I do not think so. I think that the Preparatory Disarmament Commission, which, at the time of the last session of the Assembly, appeared to be confronted with insuperable difficulties, has made real progress towards a solution.

When the agreement about which my friend and colleague Mr. MacDonald spoke in such eloquent and hopeful terms — and we share his hopes — when that naval agreement between Great Britain, the United States and the other countries concerned becomes an accomplished fact, the Preparatory Commission will be able to complete its work, so that within a comparatively short time the Council may fix the date for the meeting of the Conference which is to give effect to the promises embodied in Article 8 of the League Covenant.

I need hardly assure my British colleague that I am following his conversations with very special interest. Chance has placed me at the head of a department which has its traditions — I was going to say its habits, but that would be inadequate — a department which has followed the practice of diplomacy and likes its safe rules. I have often been told that I am rather too fond of conversations.

After drafting dispatches and reading dispatches from other people. I came to feel that this method is out of harmony with the modern love of speed. It seemed to me that many difficulties might be solved by a personal conversation — you understand one another, or at least you try to understand one another. You make an effort to find a solution, and in the end you do find a solution, for a situation which had appeared to be out of tune now. Accordingly, I have followed, and I am continuing to follow, the conversations of my friend and colleague, and I trust that they will lead to a satisfactory issue.

Progress has been made in that particular question during the past year.

I, too, once tried to hold conversations on these vital problems; yes, I was once bold enough to attempt it, but I was soon shown that I had strayed from the path of prudence and reminded that I must not indulge in such conversations. Personally, I was not entirely convinced of the error of my ways. The nations have progressed in the past year, and now approve these conversations. I am delighted, and feel sure that, if persevered in, they will yield good results.

I am therefore confident that agreement between the countries concerned will quickly be reached, and that it will then be possible for the Commission to resume its work, in preparation for the convening of the Conference to which we have pinned our hopes.

My friend and colleague, M. Hymans, dealt in the course of his remarkable speech with another delicate problem which the League has taken up and about which it has collected very valuable and interesting data. I refer to the problem of economic disarmament, for we have to secure not only political but also economic peace between the nations.

M. Hymans suggested certain solutions which I personally am prepared to consider sympathetically. But here again, I would venture to say, the League must make up its mind to act with resolution. It must not approach these questions timidly awed by the difficulties inherent in the task.

I do not think a problem such as this can be solved — really solved from the standpoint of economic peace — on purely technical lines. We must, of course, have technical advice; we must consult experts and respect their views, and realise that our work has to be based on sound and solid data. But to leave the solution of these problems to technical experts alone would mean resigning ourselves to coming back to the Assembly, year after year, only to deliver eloquent speeches and to record many bitter disillusionments.

Only if they deal with it themselves and consider it from the political standpoint will Governments succeed in solving this problem. If it is allowed to remain on the technical plane, private interests will step in to combine or compete with one another, and no general solution will ever be found.

Now, with some slight misgiving, I might say with a feeling of anxiety, productive of a certain fear which you will forgive in me, I have to approach another problem. I have been associated with recent events of active propaganda in favour of an idea that is politely described as magnanimous — perhaps in order to avoid terming it rash. This idea, which was first conceived many years ago, which has haunted the imagination of philosophers and poets and has won for them a certain succès d’estime — this idea has now forged ahead in virtue of its own intrinsic worth and has been seen at last to supply the answer to a real need. Propa-
gandists have united to spread it abroad, to establish it more firmly in the minds of the nations, and among those propagandists I stand confessing.

At the same time, I have never closed my eyes to the difficulties of such an undertaking, nor failed to realise the doubtful expediency, for a statesman, of plunging into what might readily be termed such foolhardy acts, as I think, contain some element of madness or temerity. So I absolved myself in advance and went on; but I proceeded cautiously. I realise to the full the dangers of hasty action, and I do not deny that the problem is perhaps rather outside the scope of the League's work — at least in relation to most programme, however, for ever since the Covenant was framed the League has called for international reconciliation and urged the formation of regional associations, even on most comprehensive lines.

I think that among peoples constituting geographical groups, like the peoples of Europe, there should be some kind of federal bond; it should be possible for them to get into touch at any time, to consider their interests, to agree on joint resolutions and to establish among themselves a bond of solidarity which will enable them, if need be, to meet any grave emergency that may arise. That is the link I want to forge.

Obviously, this association will be primarily economic, for that is the most urgent aspect of the question, and I think we may look for success in that direction. Still, I am convinced that, politically and socially also, this federal link will, without affecting the sovereignty of any of the nations belonging to such an association, do useful work; and I propose, during this session, to ask those of my colleagues here who represent European nations to be good enough to consider this suggestion unofficially and submit it to their Governments for examination, so that those possibilities which I see in the suggestion may be translated into realities later — perhaps at the next session of the Assembly.

There is another question upon which I should like to touch, at the risk of wearying you with an over-long speech — that of the peaceful settlement of disputes. The British Prime Minister stated from this platform, to the accompaniment of your applause, that his country would sign the Optional Clause of Article 36 of the Statute of the Permanent Court of Peace. That is a great event, upon which we cannot sufficiently congratulate ourselves. France signed that clause in 1924, but on condition that another Protocol should come into force at the same time. The Protocol was not carried into effect, and our accession may therefore be regarded as having in a sense lapsed; but I wish to tell you that this session will not end without our having renewed our signature.

But this clause is not all. Even more important perhaps is the question of the organisation of compulsory arbitration by means of the General Act submitted for your approval. My Government has stated its intention of acceding to the General Act, and, with this object I have introduced a Bill in the Chamber of Deputies. I undertake to get it dealt with, here in my power, as soon as our Parliament meets, to secure the ratification of that Act.

No effective condemnation of war or precautions or sanctions against war are conceivable unless we are in a position to propose to the nations legal methods of settling their disputes.

As Minister for Foreign Affairs during the last two years, I am proud to have signed twelve arbitration treaties. And that is not all. When disputes have arisen in which my country was implicated, I have acted in such a way that they were submitted to arbitration.

Two years ago a dispute arose between France and a country which is not a Member of the League. We took the matter before the Court of Arbitration, and I lost my case; but when we take a case before the courts we must be prepared for disappointments.

Since then, the Court has had to deal with another dispute between my country and a friendly country — the one whose generous hospitality we are now enjoying. When I was at The Hague, the Court asked us to devote several months to endeavouring to reach an agreement. The country to which I have just referred may be certain that, for my part, will do all I can to arrive at a friendly solution.

Countries which submit their disputes to arbitration do not lose any prestige. I did not feel in the least humiliated when I was told that we had lost the first case I mentioned. Indeed, since the Treaty between the two countries has been more cordial, and there has grown up between them a feeling of mutual confidence which has enabled them to solve many other problems.

We must resolutely pursue this course, and we must make up our minds not to fear arbitration. Men have appointed judges whose duty it is to prevent them from fighting over questions of interest, and nations may well do the same in order to avoid the slaughter of the battlefield. If they sincerely desire peace, they must decide to seek and find peaceful legal solutions of their disputes.

May we be spared talk of prestige! What harm such talk may do in international affairs! It is no disgrace for a country which considers itself in the right to propose submitting a difference to judges, who will say where truth and justice lie. If the award is not favourable to itself, a country should not, after its first very natural feelings of annoyance, consider itself humiliated because it has to bow to the judgment delivered and carry it out. Every time a country thus saves a war, it may be said to have won a victory, even if it loses its case.

In his admirable speech the day before yesterday, Mr. MacDonald told us that peace was a moral question. Peace, I agree, is very largely a moral question, and I recognise that this idea has already made a great deal of progress. Conflicts which have all but broken out have been prevented by the League, and others which have actually broken out have been stopped by the League. I defy anyone to find that a moral idea has been deprived of the results of the activity of the League.

In the old days, when the first shot had been fired and the first blood had been drawn, it was almost impossible to stop war. We have found on two different occasions that, as a result of action taken by the League, the belligerents have responded to the appeals made to them to keep the peace. That is a very great achievement, and it has only been possible through the spirit that, by the praiseworthy perseverance of Assembly after Assembly for ten years, you have succeeded in creating.

When I see at the present time military movements afar off (and what military movements, however distant, can fail to cause apprehension among the nations?) when I see troops advancing with hesitation; when I see armies apparently held back by some moral force of which they themselves are, perhaps, scarcely conscious, while the
Governments try to re-establish contact with one another, I say that this is something we have never seen before.

This is your doing, and it ought to encourage you to persevere and give you cause for self-congratulation.

Let me add that, if the idea of peace is to reign supreme among the nations, we must not shut our eyes to the fact that there are certain poisonous influences persistently at work. Not all men are enamoured of peace. There are in every country those who are secretly and disloyally working against peace. These movements must be watched. You who are interested in social work and are tracking down the traffic in opium and morphine must also turn your attention to certain machinations which are actually aimed at poisoning the minds of children by sowing in them the seeds of war and urging them to some revanche in order that the future generations may become generations of hatred and blood! Those who, by their words, writings and teaching, are promoting this nefarious work can only be described as odious criminals who should be relentlessly hunted down and rendered incapable of harm.

This is work which is worthy of your efforts: and here it is particularly to the women that I appeal, for it is they who will have to protect their homes against these poisonous influences. If fresh wars were to break out, they would be the first victims, and would water the new battlefields with their tears. It is their duty, therefore, remembering past wars, to prevent this poison from penetrating into their countries and to follow to their source all attempts to instil such poison and render them innocuous. This is the primary condition of peace. When children are taught to love peace, to respect other nations and to look for what men have in common rather than for their points of difference, we shall no longer need to apportion guarantees or to apply Article 8 of the Covenant. Peace will already be enthroned among the nations.

The Assembly rose at 1.10 p.m.