

## WHAT REMAINS OF THE GREAT ADVENTURE?

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*Viscount Cecil of Chelwood, United Kingdom.*

“ We may well ask: ‘ What, then, is left of the great adventure on which we then embarked?’ It is common nowadays to speak of the failure of the League. Is it true that all our efforts for those twenty years have been thrown away? I had a letter from our present Foreign Minister, Mr. Bevin, the other day in which he said he could not accept that view, and I am sure he is right. Some of the reasons for that opinion are well set out in the introduction to the Report and I need not repeat them. The work of the League is unmistakably printed on the social, economic and humanitarian life of the world. But above all that, a great advance was made in the international organisation of peace . . . By the Covenant, a definite scheme was set up. It was not, indeed, a full-fledged federation of the world—far from it—but it was more than the pious aspiration for peace embodied in the partial alliances which had closed many great struggles. For the first time an organisation was constructed, in essence universal, not to protect the national interests of this or that country—do let us remember that—but to abolish war. We saw a new world centre, imperfect materially, but enshrining great hopes. An Assembly representing some fifty peace-loving nations, a Council, an international civil service, a world Court of International Justice, so often

before planned but never created, an International Labour Office to promote better conditions for the workers. And very soon there followed that great apparatus of committees and conferences, striving for an improved civilisation, better international co-operation, a larger redress of grievances and the protection of the helpless and oppressed.

“ Truly this was a splendid programme, the very conception of which was worth all the efforts which it cost. For ten years the League advanced, and I remember very well a French representative, M. Hanotaux, saying to me that in his opinion the League was *bien enracinée*, but, as we know, it failed in the essential condition of its existence—namely, the preservation of peace. And so, rightly or wrongly, it has been decided to bury it and start afresh. That does not mean that the work of twenty years goes for nothing; far from it. All the main ideas I have briefly sketched, and which are so well summarised in the report before us, remain. True, there is a new organisation founded on a Charter and not on a Covenant. The Charter in one respect is certainly an improvement. It recognises more clearly than did the Covenant that in the last resort peace must be enforced. That was no doubt implicit in the League, as anyone who reads the provisions of the Covenant will agree. However, in the condition of public opinion when the League was founded, this was necessarily kept in the background. It is only right to recognise that the French representatives from the earliest times never ceased to urge greater clearness and definiteness in this. And now their opinions have prevailed and the negotiators of San Francisco used much ingenuity to provide for greater force to resist and crush aggression. They have given to the Five Great Powers special rights and, more important, special responsibilities in this respect . . .

“ But I have no wish to discuss the detailed provisions of the Charter or the Covenant. It is enough for my purpose to insist that, but for the great experiment of the League, the United Nations could never have come into existence. The fundamental principles of the Charter and the Covenant are the same and it is gratifying to some of us that, after the violent controversies that have raged for the last quarter of a century, it is now generally accepted that peace can only be secured by international co-operation, broadly on the lines agreed to in 1920.”