THE CASE FOR THE LEAGUE

BY LORD ROBERT CECIL

[We print below Lord Robert Cecil’s address upon the League delivered at the University of Geneva on September 1. Though not designed to serve that purpose, it is in some respects a reply to the criticisms of the League by J. L. Garvin, editor of the Observer, and Stéphane Lussanne, editor of Le Matin, published in our issues of November 24 and December 8 respectively.]

FROM La Revue de Genève, October
(Swiss Political and Literary Monthly)

The League of Nations is formally established; it is an international reality. Its Council and its Assembly convene at regular intervals to perform their duties. It is no longer a hope, an ideal, but an actual thing. The solidity of its foundations has been proved in more than one way, and not the least of these, in my opinion, is the growing custom of submitting to it every difficulty that arises, every question that demands an impartial inquiry.

I shall cite two very recent examples. The Treaty of Lausanne has just been signed. I have studied this document carefully, and I have discovered that in several places it provides for an appeal to the League of Nations. If any difficult question is to be settled, such as the control of an international railway, there is a resort to the League. If a great ocean route calls for international control, in order that it may always be open to commerce, as in the case of the Dardanelles, it is provided that the International Commission in charge shall appeal to the League of Nations in case of controversy. When a solution was sought for the frontier puzzle created by the diverse and hostile races in the Near East, the League of Nations was specified as the organization to deal with the difficulty. All through this document — the latest great international contract that has been drafted — we find the idea constantly present that the League of Nations is the natural authority to which to appeal when unquestioned impartiality and wisdom are demanded.

Here is another instance that I cannot discuss here except with great discretion. Very recently, as the result of an international difference of an exceedingly acute and complex character of which we have all heard through the press, the feebler of the parties appealed to the League to settle a dispute that had arisen between it and its neighbor. The mere fact that the controversy between Italy and Greece was submitted to the League is of itself testimony to the impartiality, the probity, and the courage of that body. I am most hopeful for the future.

Some people think it is imprudent to bestow too many tasks upon the League; they fear it will be crushed by its burdens. That is not my opinion. I believe that it will be far less endangered by having an excess of duties thrust upon it than by being disregarded where great international problems are at stake, and left to deal merely with matters of minor importance. That would be a disaster. The real danger does not lie in overstrain, but in idleness, routine, and apathy; for this is not an ordinary machine. Indeed, the League is not a machine
at all, it is a living organism, a body that obeys the universal laws of life. It must either grow or diminish. If it abandons itself to indolence and inertia, if it is allowed to become flabby and weak in idleness, it will lose its strength. But if, on the other hand, every function is kept employed and active, it will continue to grow and develop like any other living organism, and attain its maximum force and power. For my part, I do not believe that the League can be killed by too much activity. It is created to grow. Its functions compel that. But in what direction, and to what extent is that growth possible? Nothing is more dangerous than prophecy. We have an English saying never to prophesy what we do not know, which is equivalent to saying that we should never prophesy. However, I may venture to say one thing—by studying the past of a living organism you can foresee to some extent its future. The League of Nations is four years old. We can at least review what it has done up to the present.

It will be illuminating, in taking you back, to compare what the League of Nations is to-day with what it was in 1920. I have a very lively recollection of that. I recall that when I came to the first Assembly, in 1920, doubt and hesitation weighed upon us—upon myself and those who were better qualified than I to judge what the future might bring forth. The general opinion was that the first Assembly of the League would speedily prove it to be a naive and utopian conception. It was predicted that when so many different nations met together they would immediately set to quarreling with each other, and wreck the whole organization. I see before me my friend, M. Hymans, who performed such good service as the President of that first Assembly. He will remember the howls of triumph from the enemies of the League when a South American Government withdrew from the Assembly. That Government, I am happy to say, is now proposing to come back. It has already taken a definite and very helpful step in that direction by paying up its past contributions to the League.

We came together there, representing forty-two Governments. There was no organization, so the first task of the Assembly was to create one, or at least to lay its foundations. These foundations were recognized to be important, but they did not represent the real labor of pacific international cooperation for which the League of Nations had been created. We had no rules of procedure; we had to draft them. We had no budgetary system. For a long period we were unable to decide whether the Allied nations would consent to work shoulder to shoulder with the neutral nations. Some insisted that no enemy country should be admitted to the League.

All the unfavorable prognostications that greeted us have been disproved. Our difficulties have been surmounted, and to-day we see the nations of the world working together. We now know that by bringing together under one roof the delegates of the most distant countries, of the most diverse religions and races, of the most alien civilizations, and by working fifteen days together, as we did in the first Assembly, we speedily banish our sense of differences, we become a united body, acting as if all our members had identical antecedents and traditions.

I shall not describe further this first Assembly. I merely ask you to consider, now, the present Assembly, which opens next Monday. There will be fifty-two States represented, and two more applying for admission.
You will see not only former Allies working shoulder to shoulder with former neutrals, but you will also see several former enemy Governments taking their part in the common labor for peace. Everyone is agreed that, as soon as circumstances permit, the circle of the League of Nations will enlarge until it embraces all the world.

In fact, our hopes have been exceeded. The Assembly gets down to work with the greatest ease. Its rules of procedure function perfectly. There is no difficulty on that score. A budgetary system, which we rightly regarded one of the most difficult matters to agree upon, has been adopted. Although it would be impossible to say that any budget plan is perfect, because those who pay and those who receive never see things from the same point of view, we are justified in asserting that the League of Nations budget has worked marvelously well, especially during the last two years. Payments which at one time gave rise to some difficulties are now made punctually and in full.

But there is still more than the Assembly. We have organized a vast and admirable group of technical bureaus that are performing excellent service. I read the other day the report of the Sanitary Commission, which we submitted to the Council of the League. It is a remarkable document. This Commission embraces some of the greatest sanitary authorities in the world. Its president is a man of distinguished ability. The members of the Commission are giving their services to the League, in most instances, without compensation, for studying such all-important questions as combating epidemics, improving sanitation, bettering the physical conditions of this or that social class, and taking measures against such terrible maladies as, for instance, cancer.

Under this concentrated study by experts from all parts of the world, many a problem is advancing rapidly toward final solution. At least we are making decided progress in that direction.

Every year some Governments appeal to us to assist them in solving the sanitary problems they have to face. The Government of Holland has only lately submitted a proposal of great interest, relating to the health of the crews and passengers on vessels. It is impossible to explain it in detail here. The Government of Albania has asked our aid to study the problem of malaria in that country. This Commission is therefore performing efficient service in bettering health — the greatest blessing of mankind.

Much progress has also been made in other directions. Consider, for instance, the problem of disarmament, with which I am personally concerned, and which, in my opinion, is the cornerstone of world peace. I need not dwell upon this point. Compare, however, the attitude of the first Assembly, too keenly aware of its weakness to dare to do more than declare — and quite rightly under the conditions — that disarmament was impossible of accomplishment in the unsettled condition of the world at that moment — compare that with the definite treaty for mutual aid, marking a decided step toward universal disarmament, that we shall submit to the present Assembly. You have in this single question a symbol of the very considerable progress that we have made from the hesitating and timid attitude of four years ago to the confident advance toward our objective that we feel strong enough to undertake at present. This is characteristic of general tendencies in the League of Nations.

Permit me to enumerate briefly the principal organized activities of the
League. They are the Commissions on Finance, Economics, Sanitation, Opium, White Slavery, and Labor. Then there are several missions dealing with refugees, the administration of the Saar and of Danzig, and the High Commission for Austria. Furthermore, there are the various conferences that have been held, such as the Financial Conference at Brussels, the Communications Conference at Barcelona, and the White Slave Conference, without including the Labor Conferences and all the good service they have rendered. In addition, there is the service of the League in repatriating war prisoners, which is closely associated with the refugee problem, and the reconstruction of Austria. All these things, and many others that I might mention, are being practically carried out on a basis of international cooperation through the League of Nations, and are more or less directly associated with its principal object, which is to restore peace in the world.

As I have said, a wonderful amount has been accomplished. The other day, when I looked over the list of commissions actually at work, I was struck with the importance of what they were doing. . . . One of these interested me particularly: the Commission on the Reform of the Calendar. The composition of this body, perhaps more than the character of its work, gives it significance. You will find meeting upon it, to study this question of the calendar, representatives of the Pope, of the Patriarch of the East, of the Archbishop of Canterbury, a French savant, and two or three other experts. I have been told, though I have not been able to verify the fact personally, that this is the first time since 1453 that representatives of the Roman Church and the Eastern Church have met in conference.

This is part of what has been accomplished, but it is not all. In fact, such cooperation among nations, valuable as it is, serves principally as a stepping-stone to mutual understanding, which is the only real guaranty of peace. The chief task of the League of Nations is to strengthen this guaranty. What has it done in that direction? A good deal already; more than most people think. I cannot go fully into details. Those who have studied the question know that the League of Nations has intervened successfully in international disputes six or seven times. To be sure, the disputes were of relatively secondary importance compared with the great questions that have not yet been referred to the League. But it is precisely here that I foresee a grand future for its work.

I foresee a time when every great international conflict will be submitted to the League of Nations as naturally as disputes between individuals are submitted to courts of law. It will eventually seem just as impossible and absurd for a nation to make war as it would be for an individual in a modern State to try to settle his title to property by violence. That is the great goal I see before us.

What obstacles stand in the way of reaching it? I have already told you that the League of Nations is a living organism. It is therefore, like all living organisms, exposed to dangerous enemies, diseases, infirmities. Let us see which of these threaten it most.

First of all, there are financial difficulties. What does it cost to run the League? Including the International Labor Bureau and the International Court of Justice, about $5,000,000 a year. This is the premium that the nations of the world are paying for peace insurance. Before the war, men commonly said in England that what we spent on our army and navy was the
body contains in itself all the principles of development, but that body needs blood, that mechanism needs power. And the vital fluid, the power, of the League of Nations is public opinion.

And this is just as it should be. After all, what is the doctrine that the League of Nations teaches? Is it not the doctrine that force ought not to prevail in disputes among nations, that we should no longer appeal to violence and brutality, but to reason? And how can you appeal to the reason of a nation if you have not first educated that nation? Therefore public opinion, publicity, education, propaganda are the factors upon which the future of the League depends. We must keep coming back to the people on whom we depend for our support. Recall the fable of the giant Antaeus, who drew his strength from contact with the soil. The more often he was thrown to the ground, the stronger he became. Hercules, in order to subdue him, had to lift him off the earth, and this broke his connection with the source of his strength.

We must prevent the Hercules of prejudice, of militarism, of bureaucracy, of apathy, from separating the League of Nations from the peoples of the world from whom it draws its strength. If we maintain that contact, if we draw into the movement the common people of the whole world, you may be assured that we have nothing to fear from our enemies. We shall advance surely and rapidly toward the achievement of our grand ideal, toward the time when force and violence will no longer rule the world, when an attempt to crush a little nation, to exaggerate a national claim, to disregard justice, will be as rare, indeed rarer among nations than it is to-day among civilized individuals. That is our goal. It is a great goal; no greater could be set before the peoples of the world.

Let us not falter in our duty. We are facing the most glorious opportunity that has ever been set before mankind. How shall we justify ourselves to our children and our children's children if, through our apathy, our indolence, our lack of energy, we fail to carry forward to triumph this great effort for the welfare of humanity?

THE POET PRAYS TO GOD

BY MONK GIBBON

[Irish Statesman]

The poet prays to God
That he may say
Something that all may heed
Some day.
But he will never know,
Nor maybe care,
Whether they heard his words,
Or God his prayer.