

BLIMPERY IN EXCELSIS

WISHING no doubt to console a group who are more noisy at the moment than they are numerous, a firm of Catholic publishers has now perpetrated an English version of the Comte de Saint-Aulaire's venomous lampoon *Genève contre la Paix*,¹ a work well calculated to offset their former productions, *The Church and War* and *Peace and the Clergy*, which were—well, not quite nice.

It is the "stuff to give 'em." M. de Saint-Aulaire is the French equivalent of Colonel Blimp. But whereas our English hero is merely reduced by the thought of that dreadful League of Nations to an inarticulate spluttering of "Gad, sir! Stuff and nonsense, what, what," his Gallic colleague has a more vivid imagination and the gift of tongues. True, he has his lucid moments, only too rare in this book, in which his shrewdness delights us; but for most of the time he sees red, or, should I say, Red. So eloquent indeed is this excited old gentleman that it is a little difficult sometimes for one, whose humdrum job it has been for sixteen years to acquaint himself with the actual history of the League, to follow his flights of fancy. His essay is not very coherent. It begins by explaining that the League has never existed or, alternatively, (as the lawyers would say), has long since compassed its own decomposition. Having proclaimed the dogma of equality (Has it?), it has built, though decomposed, upon inequality and privilege. The real forces behind it (if it exists) are those occult Internationals, Bolshevism, Freemasonry, Judaism and Pangermanism—oddly united, these last two—which, as Colonel Blimp would heartily agree, are well calculated to make the flesh of all good Christians creep. The League is "a prostitute," "an abortion clinic," "a corpse," "a fantastic hoax," "a gravedigger," "a paralytic," "an assassin," "a suicide," etc. It has committed nothing but errors: it has told nothing but lies. The activities of the League, though filling many

¹ *Geneva against Peace*. (Sheed & Ward, 7/-.)

volumes, turn out never to have occurred, or to have been done by somebody else. The "passivities" of the League (which by this time, I suppose, exists) only add to its villainy. They consist chiefly in the fact that at the moment of birth it failed to make war upon Soviet Russia, and subsequently allowed the whole cause of civilization, i.e., France, to be betrayed by Locarno and the admission into the League of the German Mephistopheles (sic). We go on to the Reform of the League, which very properly consists in blowing it to smithereens. As the British people survey the ruins, they are thus consoled by our erstwhile Ambassador at the Court of St. James for their misguided sincerity, "When a people are deprived of a great hope, however foolish it may be, it is difficult to say what is removed along with it and how to replace that hope." He ends by a disingenuous admission, "If I do not supplement my criticism with an exposition of a new system of peace, it is because I have not one in my possession." Quite.

This masterpiece will find its place in libraries, where such objects are collected, among the more vicious political pamphlets of the eighteenth century, whose authors heaped every imaginable abusive epithet upon the heads of public personages, living and dead, with whom they did not agree. In this case, it is all those who failed to share the opinions of the late M. Poincaré, upon the necessity of keeping Germany in perpetual chains, who are consigned with every variety of invective to Hell Fire.

Difficult as it is to be serious about this choleric outburst, I fear that a little moralizing is called for. In the first place, *Geneva versus Peace* must be placed in its historical setting. It is one of the last and most livid products of that bitter controversy between *sanctionists and anti-sanctionists* which tore French political opinion asunder as, I believe, nothing has done since the Dreyfus affair. Then everyone was either *dreyfusard* or *anti-dreyfusard*. The Catholics, all but a tiny minority which kept its head, went wildly against Dreyfus, just as recently most of the Catholics of the Right, with truly gadarene speed and unanimity, went anti-sanctionist. I think they will find, when tempers have cooled sufficiently

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for the question to be objectively examined, as it has been by Jacques Maritain, for instance, for Yves Simon in *La Campagne d'Ethiopie et la Pensée politique Française*²—which is like a draught of fresh water amid all this pother—that they have been guilty of a miscarriage of justice as much in the latter as in the former case. Indeed M. de Saint-Aulaire in one place does go so far as to explain to his fellow countrymen the singular perversity of the English in this matter, by pointing out that they objected—owing, of course, to their curious sporting standards—to the Duce not keeping the rules of the game, even though the game was a farce.

What rules? Nowhere in this cynical book, which is a symbol of the state of mind of many whose position would enable them to lead Catholic opinion, do we find any inkling of the fact that there is an objective code of international morality to which, according to the age-long tradition of the Church, Princes are in conscience bound to conform. So far as M. de Saint-Aulaire and those whom he represents are concerned, not to speak of M. Charles Maurras of the *Action Française* to whom he refers in this book as to an authority, St. Augustine might never have laid, sixteen centuries ago, the foundations of a Christian theology of war. He might never have condemned wars of conquest as *grande latrocinium*, teaching that for good men even the most just war should be a cause for tears, to be avoided unless absolutely necessary; determining the conditions for a just war; welcoming the prevention of a war (incidentally a war in Africa between the Romans and the Vandals) with that magnificent epigram *Majoris est gloriae ipsa bella occidere verbo quam homines ferro*. Gratian might never have passed on to the Schools that noble Ambrosian axiom, *Qui non injuriam repellit a socio, ut potest, tam est in vitio quam ille qui fecit*. St. Alphonsus might never have reached his lucid conclusion that, because of the great evils inevitably attendant upon war, it may never lawfully be undertaken

² Société d'Impressions Littéraires, Industrielles et Commerciales. Lille 1936. 10 frs.

even with the greater probability of justice on one's side, but only with the certainty of justice. Vittoria and Las Casas might never have established, during the Spanish conquests of America, the rights of the native peoples and the limits imposed by justice and charity upon "colonial expansion." Suarez might never have written his famous passage in the *De Legibus* upon the natural society existing between States and (*ubi societas ibi jus*) the need of a law to regulate their social relations. Taparelli might never have developed this doctrine into a coherent and detailed thesis upon the necessity and functions, of a positive society of nations; nor Benedict XV based upon this teaching, as he evidently did, his constructive proposals of peace to the belligerents in 1917.

That is the real scandal of this book: that a cultivated Catholic gentleman should know nothing of these things or, if they are known to him, should not realize that the purely destructive and anti-social policy which he advocates, and the resort to war, which in a test case he approves, are in contradiction to the whole spirit of Christian tradition upon the observance of the moral and natural laws in international life, League or no League.

Obviously the existing League of Nations is imperfect in theory and practice. Is not any human endeavour at political organization in a hitherto untried field likely to be, especially in its early stages? Obviously a fearful amount of cant has been talked about the League by English Protestants and by French Radical and Socialist politicians. Have we not suffered from it! Obviously most countries are not yet prepared to limit their sovereignty to the extent required to permit the proper functioning of an international or ethnarchic authority; or to risk the lives of their peoples to save a distant state from injury. But that does not mean that an organized society of States is *not* a necessity, because by the nature of things it *is*. That does not mean that we have not got to begin this organization somewhere; or that having begun, and having achieved quite astonishing practical results in promoting the *bonum commune*—in the spheres of public health for instance and of the conditions of labour—we must suddenly throw the whole thing up. And

why? Because, on the one hand, the *de facto* Governments of two or three States, members of this embryonic society, are constructed upon a false political principle, and, on the other, the Church in Italy happens, by a turn of the wheel of history, to have become entangled with a particularly bellicose brand of nationalism? It is a complete *non-sequitur*. To put the matter a little more bluntly, the majority of the peoples of the world are invited to desist from all efforts to give practical effect to their social obligations simply because the Soviet Government is endeavouring, (without as far as I can see very much success), to exploit the League of Nations in the interests of *Russian* foreign policy and the Italian Government is trying to exploit the Catholic Church, rather more clumsily, in the interests of an aggressive *Italian* foreign policy to which the restrictions of the Covenant are an obstacle. Both are using, as means of propaganda, political "ideologies"—Communism and Fascism—which are equally repugnant to the political sense and the democratic spirit of Western and Northern Europe, the greater part of the English-speaking world, and, to tell the truth, the common people of most other civilized countries, where their minds have not yet been drilled and dragooned by dictators. What consummate insolence!

Quite different conclusions concerning the duty of intelligent persons in regard to the League of Nations are reached by those who, instead of allowing themselves to be duped either by the "United Front" of the Left or the Italian Ministry of Propaganda, have steeped themselves in that Catholic tradition which M. de Saint-Aulaire so pointedly ignores. Father Regout, for instance, the Dutch theologian, whose recent book, *La Doctrine de la Guerre Juste de S. Augustin à Nos Jours*³ is the most scholarly and exact account which has yet been published of the historical development of Christian doctrine on that subject concludes as follows:

The following condition is required to render war permissible, namely that there exists *no other means* to obtain the restoration

³ Pedone. Paris 1935.

of the Right. But in our days other means are *not* lacking—arbitration; jurisprudence; the League of Nations. The States, which have on this point contracted engagements in positive law, are bound by very definite juridical obligations. And further, a moral obligation in this regard lies upon all states, since the institutions mentioned above are *sufficiently* organized to offer a guarantee of impartiality . . . He who starts a war without having previously submitted the question at issue to arbitration or jurisdiction is waging an unjust war.

This judgment is valuable for two reasons. First, it is the logical and consequence of applying the ethical doctrines of the Schoolmen to the actual dispositions for the settlement of international conflicts by judicial decision, arbitration or mediation which are contained in the Covenant, the Statute of the Permanent Court and the considerable number of bilateral Conciliation treaties which have been contracted in the last seventeen years. Secondly, it is clearly informed by the right *intention*, which, after all, matters most, that is to do all that is possible to maintain the rule of law against brute force and to preserve peace. For that, *pace* M. Mauras, M. de Saint Aulaire, Signor Gayda and their un-English disciples in this country, is the right and proper object of the Catholic Church in the international sphere. We are so simple as to believe that Leo XIII and Benedict XV were true to their divine mission in upholding that view: "Nothing is more important than to avert the danger of war from Europe," wrote the former, and the latter, "Peace is the most beautiful gift of God." That no doubt is why both these Popes so strongly urged the Governments to set up a system of arbitration to replace the arbitrament of the sword, and why the latter went so far as to recommend "sanctions to be determined against any State which should refuse to submit its international disputes to arbitration or to submit to the arbitral award." It is not therefore surprising to find other Catholic authorities upon international morality such as Father Delos, O.P., a great master of the natural philosophy of international life, and Father Muller, S.J., the Belgian sociologist, expressing in their works the same conclusion as that of Father Regout. Nor is it surprising to discover a very positive view of the duty of Catholics to the

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existing League of Nations propounded by Catholic priests who have had a long experience of the League from within—Father Arnou,⁴ for example, the French Jesuit who spent many years on the staff of the International Labour Office, and Mgr. Beaupin,⁵ himself the Chairman of the Liaison Committee of International Organizations attached to the League's Institute of Intellectual Co-operation. Here are two non-political activities of the League directed to the common good, for which M. de Saint-Aulaire reserves his most vicious gibes, but which, as these Catholic experts show us on the basis of an unbiassed analysis of the actual work done, merit and require the active co-operation of their co-religionists. Why? For precisely the same reasons as those urged to encourage the participation of Catholics in municipal and national institutions, namely, to help forward that which is good and necessary and to counteract influences contrary to religion and good sense.

Now the Catholic-Fascist drive against the League of Nations, of which *Geneva versus Peace* is a fair example, exhibits no one of the elements which are displayed in those other works to which we have referred—a logical application of traditional doctrine; a right intention; an unbiassed appreciation of facts—elements which are essential to an equitable judgment. In their place it relies almost entirely upon appeals to sentiment and prejudice, and most of all upon the *fear of bogeys*, which is an aberration of the intellect comparable only to the scare of witchcraft in the later Middle Ages. Its methods are ridicule and sarcasm, which, as Cardinal Manning used to warn controversialists, “are like the Carthaginian elephants, fatal to the ranks of them that use them.” Those of us who do know something about the subtle endeavours of the Communist International to exploit the peace movement can only deplore this agitation and its tactics which, apart from their essential irrationality, play straight into the hands of the enemies of society and of religion.

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⁴ *L'Organisation Internationale de Travail et les Catholiques*. Ed. Spes. 1933. 6 frs.

⁵ *La Co-operation Intellectuelle Internationale: ses formes présentes*. (Chronique Sociale de France. Lyons, 1937.)