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A WISE SENATE AND A FOOLISH DIPLOMACY

By

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When ~~these comments are printed~~, ^{The} Versailles Treaty ^{was} ~~will have been~~ rejected by the Senate, ^{The only other possibility was that it should} ~~or will have received~~ Senatorial consent with reservations so stringent as to leave the United States free of dangerous obligations, a merely consulting member of the League of Nations. The American people owe an immeasurable debt of gratitude to the wisdom, courage, and steadfastness of the Senate for narrowing to these innocuous alternatives that insensate programme of foreign entanglement and national peril which was so gratuitously drawn up and brought back from Paris.

Thanks to the Senate, and to their own good sense, the American people now clearly realize that that programme sought to entangle them in advance in all the broils of the world; to sign and deliver over to foreigners a blank cheque drawn on their independence, their influence, their economic freedom, their treasure and their blood; to discount, at ruinous rates, that vast ^{force} ~~influence~~ which, if held in reserve for real occasion, may so often and so well serve, and even again save, civilization. The American people clearly realize that the programme of internationalism vs. nationalism, ~~now~~ defeated by the Senate, cut at the roots of the national life. When self-respecting families cease to be the form of national life, when the nation becomes a mob, then only will it be indifferent whether self-respecting nations shall remain the form of

world life or whether the world mob of internationalism shall supplant them--and even then a man will prefer his own mob to an international Babel.

The only vital questions involved have been the issue between wholesale foreign entanglement and blind assumption of unknown and unknowable future obligations on the one hand, and national independence on the other; and the issue between a morbid internationalism on the one hand and a vigorous nationalism on the other. On the first issue the American people stand for independence; on the second, they insist that the U.S. shall mean us; that our foreign policy shall be a bi-product of our national life and our national interests; that our national life shall not be made a corollary to a lot of very doubtful international propositions. Upon these issues the voice of the people has been heard by honest patriot, by harkening politician, and by statesman (the combination of the two).

These two vital issues are decided in favor of freedom and nationalism. So much is sure; and the nation may well give thanks in serene relief. ~~Will the Senate consent to our being a merely consulting member of the League of Nations, safe-guarded by ample reservations, or will it not consent to our bearing any official relation to the League? If the former, will the President surrender to the Senate and complete our ratification~~

~~upon the Senate's conditions, or will he not? In either case,~~ America is safe from the abyss to which it had been led. Now no political party could with hope of success go to the polls advocating ^{wholesale} foreign entanglement and internationalism.

Whether the United States ~~be~~ a consulting member of the League or not is a matter of no great importance. Whether the League itself shall prove a thing of enduring practical importance is problematical. The British Ambassador to France, speaking some weeks ago at Liverpool, remarked that in a solid friendship between Britain and France lay a greater assurance of peace than the League of Nations could ever afford. How even greater as a bulwark of world peace is ~~of~~ a firm good understanding of all the English-speaking peoples! In that we shall find one powerful element in any sound American policy, and an element that true Americans whose care is all for our own country should stoutly insist upon.

If we ~~have~~ to do with the League, then American policy ^{would} ~~will~~ have the League's machinery definitely at its ~~d~~isposition. If we hold aloof from the League, then American policy can work probably quite as effectively through the ordinary machinery of diplomacy in all matters in which it is wise that we should take part, particularly if we are not insane enough to alienate the friendship of our natural allies. America cannot escape a share in

world concerns. The days of real isolation are done. And our recent allies in war, above all the English-speaking peoples, will be far from wishing to exclude this great

country from cooperation,--assuming our return to a reasonable diplomacy. So the remaining issue is a minor one.

whether or not we should be formally a consulting ~~but~~ member of the League was, after all,

League or no League, American diplomacy will have great work to do in returning to paths of sanity, to circumspect care for American interests and to discreet and benevolent influence in world affairs. Our foreign policy must descend from the clouds of speculation. It cannot afford to jettison a past of which we may be proud, or to close its eyes to the lessons of history. If all that wisdom has discovered be ignored, progress is impossible. A few principles at least must be regarded as settled, even in a protean world: for example, the laws of nature, including especially human nature. If we have established the idea that there must be no authority without responsibility, we must not play meddling mentor too officiously to the French, to the Italians or to the British, as to their self-protective measures. We are at any rate 3000 miles from their dangers; and we have by no means decided to run to help them except on very special occasions when we, too, are threatened.

~~Just here~~ It is well to remember that there was also signed and brought back from Paris a treaty pledging the United States, in certain eventualities, to join Great

Britain in the defense of France. This treaty has not been laid before the Senate; but the fact of its negotiation invites continued consideration of the question how far, under what circumstances, and by what steps America would be ready again to go to the rescue of Europe. It is only fair to ourselves and to Europe that at least some general lines of policy should be laid down upon this point. European policy, it may be hoped, will arrive at some fairly stable European equilibrium, if not interfered with and if not led to rely too much upon problematical aid from across the Atlantic. Better than any alliance, and excellently defining the probable limits that should determine the policy of the United States towards the question of any important intervention in European matters, is the declaration suggested by Senator Knox on December 18, 1918, in this language: "If a situation should arise in which any power or combination of powers should directly or indirectly menace the freedom and peace of Europe, the United States would regard such situation with grave concern as a menace to its own freedom and peace, and would consult with other powers affected with a view to concerted action for the removal of such menace." This has the effect of a potential alliance in a hypothetical case where the American people would agree that an alliance was needed. It lacks the objection to an alliance, namely, the stimulation of

hostile counter-alliances. It looks to a good understanding, of salutary influence, that could not become "entangling" unless, as was the case after August, 1914, "entanglement" became obviously necessary to self defense and national safety.

That there shall be government of laws, not of men, is another Shiboletth supposed to hold a settled principle marking an advance in civilization, and one unhappily abandoned by the unprincipled and mad American diplomacy of the last seven years. The enlightenment of a people, the consequent passage by them of wise laws, and the enforcement by them, through their government, of laws marking the highest morality to which the majority will, at a given time, consent,--such is the course of modern progress within the State. The old idea that a governing group shall bend the will of a people and force their action to conform to the governing will ~~of a people~~ has given way to the new. Just so in world society, it is in the evolution of a high international morality and of consequently sound international law, and of a high respect for that law, that progress is to be looked for. The old idea that a preponderant group of rulers should force men's wills and dictate to the march of Nature's laws had given way to the new. But with that impatience of law that is natural to enthusiasts and that too often characterizes executives, we have seen a group of men at

Paris led back a hundred years to the ideas that Alexander I of Russia had drawn from still much earlier times. We have beheld conservatism as to what was discredited and destructive radicalism as to what was authenticated by the lessons of history!

A league to enforce law would be a very different thing from a league to enforce peace, as democracy is a different thing from autocracy. Idealists need not lose heart. There are no short-cuts, but there are still open to us well-marked roads to substantial progress. America was leading upon such a road, the road to the judicial settlement of international disputes, to a better and more authoritative international law, to a wide extension of arbitration, and, perhaps most important of all, to a better international feeling, when American policy was diverted to the recent orgy of ~~hifalutign~~.

The same Nelson who said "Damn our enemies! Bless our friends! Amen. Amen, Amen," also said, "Nations, like individuals, are to be won more by acts of kindness than cruelty." The great fighter knew the importance of good feeling. A diplomacy that trusts more to the documentation of pretty thoughts than to consideration for the susceptibilities of its friends is very silly indeed, as might be proved by conversation today in Italy, France, Japan, or even Great Britain. Could the negotiation of any treaty relieve from anathema a diplomacy that should gain enemies and lose friends? Such a diplomacy would

merit what a French Academician says of radical socialism: "It consists in proclaiming eternal peace for humanity while kindling civil war among the people that compose it!"

The cells that form the human body silently obey the laws of the universal Will, and so the individual is what he is in body, mind, and spirit. All the individuals of the nation correspondingly obey the laws of their being, and so the nation is what it is. So with each nation; and the world society is what it is. Biology, rather than treaties, determines events. Our municipal law and our social and governmental dispositions succeed or fail, not as "solutions" but as modi operandi of progress,--according to whether or not they are, at a given time, in sufficient conformity to Nature's laws. Just so with our treaties and other international dispositions.

Evolution has kept conscience above the level of general conduct. Idealism has been the aspiration that conduct should overtake conscience. Religion, art, chivalry, and all that is good and beautiful have been its instruments. Then, when the gulf between conscience and general conduct ~~has~~ been sufficiently bridged, law has stepped in and a field has been won from idealism for political action. Nothing is more pathetic than that the horrible anachronism of war should persist in an age so comparatively kind. Especially the English-speaking peoples, who owe

so much to their genius for compromise, have been busy with the endeavor to compromise between the stark fact of war and the best thought and feeling of our civilization. It is a task ^{almost} like the mixing of oil and water. Senseless terrorization, individual cruelty and all such causes of special suffering that are not necessary, it should be possible to eliminate, as has hitherto been rather unsuccessfully attempted. A convention for the world-wide ostracisation of nations guilty of such deeds might be effective. But it would be fatuous, and traitorous to those fallen for their country, if either during or after a war the most humane nations, in the effort to compromise between a humane civilization and the fact of the barbaric anachronism of war, should make of their sacrifices mere cruel nonsense. In barbarous days, wars at least often stayed won. A German victory might for similar reasons have stayed ~~one~~ ^{won}. Will a victory won by the most civilized and humane of the nations stay won? The ice-cold French intellect doubts it. The clear logic of the French mind finds it difficult to compromise between war and mercy; finds it difficult to believe that German nature has yet been changed. Neither economic interests nor high sentiments should be allowed to make the English-speaking peoples too heedless of such considerations. The attempt at Paris to compromise between Utopian dreams and Hellish realities has added

much to the difficulty of the desirable course, a course that should be humane, subject to its safety.

Progress toward a day when wars shall be no more, like all human progress, will need ^{defense} ~~refuse~~ against its too impatient and too visionary friends as much as against its enemies. Utopians will continue their agitations: they will continue to pillory as reactionary those who believe in careful progress. It is well, therefore, although the people and the senate have upheld our independence and our nationalism, that we should continue to bear in mind the underlying principles that the imbroglio of our ~~d~~iplomat-ic affairs has ~~be~~ now dinned into the ears of the nation. Seas of words it has taken to appreciate and to condemn as unworkable a grandiose scheme which Talleyrand, when ~~the~~ ^{it} ~~scheme~~ was already in its essence hundreds of years old, envisaged and discarded in a few lines.

But they are very unjust and superficial in their sense of the enormous question at stake who condemn as dilatory the Senate, to which we owe so vast a debt for a wisdom, courage, and staunchness that American history will cherish. In the spirit of the best of the Senate's debates American ~~can~~ diplomacy will return to the paths of that intelligible, consistent policy of wise self-interest and international benevolence by which it can best serve itself and the world. Such a clear and thoroughly American policy was pursued by that great Secretary of State, Senator Knox. Such a policy can be traced in golden

threads of wisdom, benevolence, patriotism, and loyalty to principle through the series of brilliant addresses by which the same Senator, with many of his colleagues, has fought to neutralise the dangerous vagaries of a branch of our government intended by the Constitution to be coordinate. And once American diplomacy has returned to sound principles, means must be found to protect it from again being deprived, even in the earlier processes of negotiation, of the wise and restraining advice of the Senate, which, by the spirit and intent of the Constitution, were ever to guard America in its foreign relations.