

THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS.¹

I am pleased to associate myself with the sentiments just expressed by His Excellency, and to offer my warm congratulations to the Ottawa branch of the League of Nations Society on the success of this gathering as well as on its assuming the initiative and the leadership in that opportune campaign which is being inaugurated to promote the ends of their association.

May I also, as a sincere and devoted friend of the League of Nations, say to Their Excellencies how grateful we are to them for giving their eminent adhesion and the help of their high prestige to the work of the Society. It is indeed a necessary work.

The worst enemies of the League of Nations are no longer the members of the old school of thought, those who believed that the world can and must be governed by force and that war is a necessary institution. The world has moved forward. The real and dangerous enemies are indifference and lack of information.

The only way of securing peace is what is usually called moral disarmament, and moral disarmament can be obtained only when a strong public opinion, the opinion in the shops, in the factories, on the farms, in the universities, in the schools, when opinion everywhere is deeply and intimately convinced that war is a calamity, the worst of all calamities.

A policy of peace is not merely a statement of views, the expression of a wish. It is a state of mind, the creation of an atmosphere, a collection of actions which develop in a country such a strong public opinion that it could not be successfully thwarted.

Men who don't believe in peace cannot achieve it. They cannot look ahead with eyes of peace if they think that war must inevitably come.

But not only words of peace are needed; they must be accompanied and followed by deeds of peace.

Words of peace are usually cheered, but when somebody suggests deeds and actions there are those who say: This man is dangerous,

¹Address delivered by the Honourable Ernest Lapointe, K.C., Minister of Justice for Canada, before the Ottawa Branch of the League of Nations Society. Mr. Lapointe followed His Excellency the Governor-General in addressing the meeting.

he is a dreamer, he should not be trusted. That is the state of mind which we should fight against.

Let me say that the friends of the League have every reason to be satisfied with the work already done. Some are impatient and eager for immediate results, and they complain occasionally that the work of peace is not proceeding with enough celerity. They blame the League of Nations for not being perfect. They seem to despair because peace, a true and lasting peace has not yet been established on a permanent and indestructible basis. My own view is that after the experience of centuries, it is rather to be wondered at that in so few years amidst so many material and moral ruins, after such a catastrophe, in a world trained in an education of war, such a beginning of organisation for peace has been made and that we have entered into an era of international justice.

In the history of mankind one hundred years are very little. If we could be assured that the 20th century will see the dawn of universal peace there would be ground for gratification. Meanwhile is it not a source of satisfaction that the barriers between nations have been lowered to such an extent as to allow the getting together of representatives of all countries in political, economic and social spheres, and that over and above their respective interests and their particular rights, the great national families are able to visualise in a not too distant light the ideal of a supreme united civilisation?

Peace is a difficult aim to reach. It is a modest idea which moves ahead slowly, which has no showy and brilliant attire, which is even frequently met with irony and ridicule. Its appearance has not the glowing figure of war. The idea of war is accompanied by historical souvenirs, capable of raising enthusiasm, and for that very reason rather dangerous. That is why it is so important to bring people to realize what a new great war would be with the developments which have taken place. Such a war cannot be discussed except in terms of wholesale slaughter. Whole nations would be within the range of explosives of terrible power. Populations would stand helpless under a rain of deadly gases. The military potentialities of the aeroplane are beyond calculation being limited by neither land nor sea. From the very first day of the conflict normal life will stop. Every man, woman and child will be involved. It will be a war of peoples, not merely of armies. And in such a war there could not be any winners. All the participants

will be bound to lose and to suffer tremendous destruction. They will all be ruined.

Ladies and gentlemen, our glorious dead are reminding us of the promises and pledges which were given to them. We have promised the dead that their sacrifice, that their blood, should be the seed of peace. "Never again" was their rallying cry. They fought for the supreme idea of ending wars and assuring a lasting peace. Is it not our duty that each of us should do his share in order that this sacred pledge should be redeemed?

Civilisation has been the common work of all peoples, including those who have been traditionally fighting one another, and it is because of such an association and of the desire to maintain and develop it, in spite of divergencies, that the League of Nations has become a living organism.

The League stands as the only outward symbol that binds nations together. Indeed, even the non-members are taking part in many of its conferences. The League is not a Superstate. It is a method of doing business. It is a machinery for getting peoples together. It is an agency for conference and consultation. It is consent and not coercion that is the incentive to activities through the League. That great institution is to-day, in the relations between peoples, the highest political and judicial tribunal, and the value of its decisions lays, in the last analysis, on the assent of mankind.

Personally I am in favour of arbitration of disputes between nations, and I earnestly hope that the efforts of the League in that direction will be successful.

Justice means that nobody is a fair Judge in his own case. There must be a higher and a more impartial tribunal. And all countries must be prepared to accept the decisions of that Court, whether they are favourable or not to their viewpoint. Arbitration should be accepted by nations as judicial decisions are accepted in relations between individuals.

It is sometimes argued that mistakes might be made by arbitrators, and that strict right may not be upheld. Does right stand a better chance of being always upheld by the fate of arms? Has might always been right? Surely shells, machine guns and bullets hardly possess the qualifications of impartial judges.

May I say a word now about those critics who think we have no interest at Geneva, who seem to be afraid of seeing Canada occupying herself with world's affairs and to believe that she should

remain apart from all international activities, on account of the obligations she may incur. They forget, they cannot see that peoples to-day are more and more dependent upon one another. Every country has now a vital interest in the economic and social life of all others. A spark anywhere may start a general conflagration. The old policy of isolation has become impossible. Indeed, even though a nation may desire peace, if its neighbours are determined on war, it is not the less menaced. It takes two to make peace the same as it takes two to make war. With the communications of all sorts which have been established, ideas are propagated throughout the world passing customs barriers freely, crossing military lines without passports, and circulating, without impediment from continent to continent. Every new progress of science makes the earth smaller and suppresses distances. Peoples are forced to take cognizance of the bonds of solidarity which are being drawn ever more tightly about them. It is idle and illusory to look for national solutions of problems which are international in their scope. The 60,000 Canadians who rest in French soil should continually remind us that when a great conflict bursts out upon the world we cannot remain outside of it. That is the reason why it is our duty to co-operate and to contribute to everything that works for peace, social appeasement and civilisation.

The contribution of Canada to international life may be modest, but it is inspired with sincerity, frankness, and an ardent good-will.

It is not only an imperious moral obligation, it is also our highest interest to bring our active collaboration to the establishment of the supremacy of law over that of arms. The surest means of avoiding wars is to remove the pretexts for it and to suppress the causes. To all these enterprises for peace, Canada must offer eagerly the help of its youth, its vigour and its disinterestedness.

It is not true that only the big powers can wield an effective influence in the work of the League. A leading part in solving difficulties and disputes has been repeatedly taken by small nations, such as Greece through M. Politis, Czechoslovakia through M. Benes, Norway through Dr. Nansen, Sweden through the late M. Branting.

May I add that the position of Canada in the League and the part played by our representatives at Geneva have been worthy of the dignity and the rank of our country. The election of Canada to a seat on the Council of the League has been a striking tribute to the work and influence of the Canadian delegates.

The other day I had the privilege, in common with you, Mrs. Wilson, and other members of this audience to listen to an inspiring address by Colonel Carnegie, who has been one of the British experts on the preparatory commission on disarmament. On behalf of a large body of public opinion in Britain, on behalf of those devoted supporters who have consistently upheld the principles of justice and social charity upon which the League is based, he made a fervent appeal to Canada to assume the leadership in the promotion of the aims of this great organisation. He told us to what extent it would strengthen the hands of all the promoters of peace in England and the other parts of the Empire.

Ladies and gentlemen, Victor Hugo writing to Ferdinand de Lesseps after his successful completion of the great work of building a canal joining two oceans, was telling him: "you are astounding the world by great achievements which are not wars."

It has been stated by an illustrious Canadian statesman that the 20th century will be the century of Canada. We have the deep conviction that this prediction shall be realized. But we have also the firm determination that the great achievements of Canada shall not be wars and that her mission will be one of peace, progress and civilisation

Many States are hampered by the past. They have inherited the hatreds, the quarrels, and remembrances of former injustices. Their progress is made difficult by all sorts of obstacles. Canada has no such impediment. Our road towards the future is free.

We do not wish to create obstacles for ourselves. But we earnestly desire to unite our energies and our hopes and devote them not only to the advancement of our country, but also to the peace, progress and prosperity of the world.
