

THE ADMISSION OF GERMANY TO THE LEAGUE.

By PROFESSOR GILBERT MURRAY.*

“ As for myself, I want emphatically a League of Nations, a League of all Nations, not a mere League of Governments, not a mere fresh piece of diplomatic machinery, but something which will bring into closer contact all the live forces of each of the nations of the world. Not a mere alliance of certain nations. If our conception has any truth in it, it means the end of the dividing of nations into separate camps. I see a great deal of discussion about the admission of Germany into the League. I have never concealed my opinion that, if the League of Nations is to be a reality, Germany, not less than Russia, must be included in it. I quite admit that we must in mere prudence insist on some guarantee that Germany comes into the League as a genuine friend of the League idea. We cannot forget that the whole basis of Prussian militarism was the very anti-thesis of international co-operation. We must be quite sure that the recent professions of Germany are sincere. We have a right to ask that the new Germany—if new it be—shall go through a certain novitiate; but, for my part, the shorter that novitiate can safely be made, the better I shall be pleased; and as soon as we can feel reasonably secure that the German Government is a real thing and not a passing phantasm, and it has shown by its actions that Germany has done with her bad past—and I see no reason why that should take longer than a few months—then Germany should be admitted to the League.” (Lord Robert Cecil at the Albert Hall, June 13th, 1919, pp. 7 and 8.)

“ We must make it clear that our object has been to have a League of Nations formed into which you can get Germany, and not one formed in order that you may find a pretext for keeping Germany out.” (Viscount Grey of Fallodon, at the Central Hall, Westminster, October 10th, 1918.)

The Covenant provides that “ any self-governing State may become a member of the League if its admission is agreed to by two-thirds of the Assembly, provided that it shall give effective guarantees of its sincere intention to observe its international obligations, and shall accept such regulations as may be prescribed by the League in regard to its military and naval forces and armaments.”

* Reprinted from the “ Journal of the League of Nations Union ” for September, 1919.

The question is whether, and how soon, Germany and other enemy or suspect States should be admitted to the League. The answer of the League of Nations Union is: "When once the conditions of the Covenant are complied with, as soon as possible."

OBJECTIONS AND ANSWERS.

Instantly and instinctively there will be objections to this. "How are we to admit into our League a State which is our chief enemy? Did Germany cease to be our enemy because she was beaten? Did her defeat make her love us any more? Is she now a contented Power, satisfied with her present condition of inferiority, or is she certain to strain every nerve to recover as much as possible of her lost prosperity and influence? Does she accept our terms of peace willingly? Would she keep them one moment, if by some accident she were put into a position of military equality with her old enemies? Is it not obviously better to face the fact that Germany is our enemy, and that our only path of safety is to confine the League to our friends, and make it a protection against our enemies?"

What is the answer to this?

(1) In the first place, the League is not an Alliance; it is not a League of certain Powers against certain other Powers. It is intended to supersede that whole idea. We do not want the world divided into two hostile groups, each of which will be free to attack the other when the chances are favourable.

(2) Next, members of the League are not in the least bound to love one another. They are only bound not to make secret agreements against each other, and, in case of difference, to go to law instead of cutting each other's throats. And you do not by any means love a man because you go to law with him.

The question is whether we would sooner have Germany entirely free to do what she likes, or have her bound both by covenant and by inspection. If she is in the League she is bound not to make secret treaties or prepare for war, and she is compelled regularly to sit at table with the rest of the League, and discuss openly her plans and her wishes. If she is outside the League, she goes her ways alone. She is perfectly free to conceal her plans, to make secret treaties, and, so far as she can do it, to prepare for war.

"But what is the good of her being bound? We cannot trust her." In international politics we cannot absolutely trust anybody. For example, the great difficulty about constituting an international General Staff for the League, which should make plans for military action against any member of the League which may break its covenants, is that obviously, if that were done, the enemy would always have been admitted beforehand into the Councils of the League; and you never know, if there is to be an enemy, who the next enemy will be.

That is a technical difficulty, and there are ways of meeting it. But the plain fact is that no nation can absolutely and without qualification trust any other. There are degrees of trust.

This is admitted in the Covenant. For example, there is no proposal that Germany should be admitted until: (1) she has a stable government, which is really responsible for the action of the people; (2) has accepted the limitations of armament prescribed by the League; and (3) has, by whatever guarantees are thought practicable, convinced two-thirds of the members of the League that she intends to observe her obligations. There is no question whatever of an armed and untrusted Germany forcing herself into the League.

There are also degrees of security. If Germany, or any other nation, first signs a covenant, secondly has habitually to meet us in council, discuss plans, be watched, be asked questions; and thirdly, knows that the League possesses absolutely overwhelming forces pledged to coerce and punish instantly any breach of the Covenant; that is surely a much more secure state of affairs than if she were outside the League, unpledged to any obligation and merely waiting her chance for revenge.

"But in any case she will want her revenge. She will not forget it because she is made a member of the League." True; but there are degrees of revenge just as there are degrees of trust. We may take it as certain that nearly all Germans are burningly anxious to recover their prosperity and their world-influence. One may presume that they would be rather pleased at any great falling-off in the prosperity of England or France. But it is a long way from that to wishing to renew the war, or to do anything that would bring about a danger of war. Even in the years before the war, when poisoned by persistent militarist propaganda, Germany still contained very large masses of people who did not want war, and did not believe that Germany's future welfare could be gained by war. It has now been made obvious to everyone in Germany that the policy of war has led to ruin; and further, instead of an imperial Government, based on the sword, Germany has now a Socialist Government, based on universal suffrage, and traditionally hating the militarist party.

The German people certainly does not want war now, and believers in the League of Nations believe that there is at least a fair chance of securing that they shall never again actively seek war. Not because we think that they will love us, or cease to wish for their own prosperity and development; but because (1) the League will secure that the prospects of a successful war shall be non-existent; war will mean with practical certainty the defeat and ruin of the war-maker; and (2) because, not by affection or special friendliness, but by ordinary fair dealing, the League will secure that neither Germany nor any other nation is goaded into war by mere oppression and despair.

The League of Nations involves two undertakings. First, a promise of fair dealing all round, to the weak as well as to the strong, to the unpopular as well as to the popular; and second, a promise to punish any signal breach of fair dealing with all the forces of the League.

ADMISSION TO THE ASSEMBLY NOT TO THE COUNCIL.

"Are we then to have Germany sitting at a table with France and America, and settling the future of the world?" No; that is not proposed. Admission to the League means admission to the Assembly, not to the Council. The Assembly will consist of some forty or fifty smaller States, with very little executive power, except on the occasions when the interest of one of them is concerned. Then the State concerned is summoned to take part in the Council with the present Big Five, and the four elected representatives of the smaller States. The Council is bound to consist of those States which are, as a matter of fact, the most powerful in the counsels of the world; and it is, of course, quite possible that a time will arrive when Germany or Russia, or, say Argentina, may actually be one of the most powerful States. Then the question will arise as to their admission to the Council. But such a time is not yet.

"Well, that seems to be not much harm. But why should we not keep Germany altogether outside?" Because in that case Germany would be a black-leg Power. The members of the League of Nations will have submitted themselves to a great many obligations—minimum wages, eight hour days, fair trade conventions, open diplomacy and the like. Germany, if outside the League, will be free from the restrictions, and will have an unfair advantage in all international competition. And we cannot boycott her; we want her markets too badly. Indeed there is already a heated competition among the Allies for German trade.

"Then we can coerce her to observe all the restrictions that we choose to place upon her?" If she is in the League, yes; but not if she is outside and unrepentant. We cannot permanently coerce her from outside. Imagine trying permanently to coerce a nation twenty times the size of Ireland, a great deal more hostile than Ireland, and situated in the heart of Europe with open frontiers on most sides, instead of being a small island! It is hardly an engaging prospect.

Remember, too, that if Germany stays outside the League, she will probably not be alone. There is a great deal of discontent in the world. China has at present refused to join the League; and her future attitude will depend on many things. The vast multitudes of Russia are certainly not friendly at present to the Entente Powers, who, rightly or wrongly, keep blockading them and making war on them. The Turks can

scarcely be expected to like us. There are great Moslem populations all over Asia and in parts of Africa who might be only too glad to join another League which is not ours, and which might help the Moslem world to throw off its Christian rulers. Hungary, Bulgaria, the revolutionary elements in Eastern Europe; all these are possible elements in another League—hostile to the true League—which would probably crystallise round an excluded and embittered Germany.

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No. If you want another war leave Germany out, and let her be the centre of another League of all the nations that are now malcontent. If you do not want another war, then, whether you like Germans or hate Germans, whether you trust Germany or mistrust Germany, have her inside the League, bind her with fair covenants, watch her, talk with her, treat her fairly, leave her no ground for violent resentment, and be prepared to crush her instantly if she breaks her pledges, just as any other pledge-breaker under the League will be crushed.

That is the way to safety. It is also the way which gives the best chance of eventually living down the passions of the war, and establishing some decent system of honesty and goodwill between nations.