GERMANY AND GENEVA

I. A Swiss View

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WHEN the League of Nations was founded, no country regretted the absence of Germany more than Switzerland. None, from the very first Assembly, was as outspoken in advocacy of Germany's prompt admission. None was more disappointed when constitutional obstacles delayed her entrance in March 1926. None was more anxious to remove those obstacles nor more active to that end, her Foreign Secretary, Mr. Motta, being chairman of the committee which finally succeeded in doing so. None was more happy to welcome Germany to Geneva in September 1926.

It is therefore not surprising that no member of the League should deplore Germany's withdrawal more than Switzerland.

The reasons for this attitude are not far to seek. Besides ancient feelings of friendship for Germany, true concern in the welfare of the League, a genuine love of peace and an instinctive dislike of all policies which tend to substitute unilateral action for agreed co-operation, this attitude is based on a fundamental conception of the Swiss national interest.

Germany is one of Switzerland's four geographical neighbours and the most important of the four by reason of her population and her foreign trade. Furthermore German culture is, if not identical with, at least closely akin to that of about two thirds of the Swiss people, as the Swiss German dialects are, if not identical with, at least more akin to the German language than to any other. Finally Switzerland has for generations relied for her external security as well as for her internal harmony on a policy of neutrality.

Now, neutrality may, if not logically at least politically, be reconciled with membership in a universal League of Nations. In the spring of 1920 Swiss neutrality was even diplomatically reconciled with membership in a League of Nations which for that purpose was presented as being universal in principle and only provisionally non-universal in fact. But how to reconcile the neutrality of Switzerland with her membership in a League which has ceased to be universal is a problem which severely taxes the wisdom of the statesman and the subtlety of the jurist. This problem, although it does not seem as yet to have been fully appreciated by the man in the street, is all the graver for Switzerland, as Germany was always one of the four, and has, since the disappearance of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, become one of the three states whose co-operation is most essential for the maintenance of Swiss neutrality. As the Swiss people are at least as attached to their traditional neutrality as to the present League of Nations, they would be very reluctant to be obliged to choose between the two.

For all these reasons Germany's withdrawal from Geneva is by the most farsighted of my countrymen considered to be fundamentally contrary to the national interests of Switzerland.

These rational considerations, which underly the Swiss view and which are bound to be fully appreciated by the Swiss people as time goes on, have not as yet become the object of public discussion. They have been overshadowed and perhaps even temporarily eclipsed by the emotional reactions which the whole internal and foreign policy of Germany has aroused in my country.

This policy, of which the Geneva resignations are but a minor and, it must be admitted, a most consistent manifestation, is profoundly repugnant to all Swiss ideals. Switzerland is a genuine and a sincere democracy. The

Swiss people are so impatient of personal authority that they are even suspicious of personal leadership. They believe in equal political rights for all citizens, whatever their language, their race or their social position. They are supremely jealous of their liberty, of all their liberties. They are almost as attached to the principles of personal independence as they are to the freedom of their country. Under their constitution, the executive power is exercised not by individual leaders, but by a collective body of representatives of opposing parties. The freely elected legislature is absolutely supreme, subject only to the authority of the people themselves at the polls. The canton is autonomous within the federal state, the municipality within the canton, and the citizen within the municipality. This constitution and the ideals of the people which it faithfully expresses are therefore the most complete antithesis to Hitlerism.

The autocratic assumption of power by one self-appointed chief, the forcible suppression of parties and of traditional territorial autonomies, the denial of freedom of thought, of speech, of assembly and of the press, as well as the cruel injustice with which are persecuted not only the Jews, but also many of those so-called Aryan Germans whose political outlook most resembles that of the Swiss, all this would have sufficed to chill our national sympathies. Never have the Swiss people as a whole and not least the German speaking majority been as conscious of the profound differences which distinguish them from their neighbours across the Rhine. To this feeling of difference, inspired by the internal policy of Germany when compared with their own, the recent foreign policies of the Reich have added a sentiment of hostile uneasiness.

Having bullied Austria, molested Denmark and generally threatened all Germany's neighbours, giving special attention to the weakest among them, the Nazi Government began

to engage in, or at least to favour, a form of pan-German propaganda which appeals to a higher Teutonic loyalty and extols the ambitions of a greater fatherland extending to all peoples of German tongue. As the Swiss grew aware of these events and tendencies, the whole national-socialist system, its institutions and its spirit, came to be looked upon as offending not only against their country's ideals but also against their very jealous sense of national independence.

While these developments were taking place, several official declarations of friendship were rather ostentatiously made by responsible representatives of the German Government. These declarations were noted with due satisfaction by the Swiss people. As, at the same time, however, groups of Nazi zealots were repeatedly creating unpleasant frontier incidents, and as the German Government is increasingly prohibiting the circulation of Swiss newspapers in Germany, this satisfaction is becoming more and more sceptical and in fact is gradually being turned into its opposite.

As a result of all these happenings, one can note that never, not even during the war after the violation of the neutrality of Belgium, has Germany been as generally unpopular in Switzerland as she is today. As Fascism in Italy has suppressed the danger of disloyalty on the part of certain pan-Italian elements in Italian Switzerland, so national-socialism in Germany has completely covered up the once threatening ditch between my German and my French speaking countrymen.

This, of course, does not imply that Switzerland is abandoning her tradition of neutrality, nor that Swiss opinion is unanimous in blaming Germany alone for her withdrawal from the Disarmament Conference. But the refusal of pacific and democratic France, placed between two nationalistic dictatorships, to reduce her military establishment before her

security receives a fuller measure of international protection, is ever better understood. And the German demand for immediate equality, which under ordinary circumstances would be generally supported in Switzerland on grounds of natural equity as well as of national interest, is arousing ever less sympathy. Switzerland realizes that today, among her big neighbours, the most heavily armed is the most peaceful and that the least reassuring are the most clamorous for the disarmament of the least bellicose. As the Swiss people are more interested in the maintenance of peace in the concrete than in the defence of the principles of equality in the abstract, public opinion in our cantons is not backing the demands of Germany. As, furthermore, Switzerland is more concerned with the protection of her own territorial integrity than with the unfortunately sterile disarmament discussions, she is driven to spend ever more on her own army.

No one, of course, is happy about these developments. No one believes that the inequalities temporarily established by the Treaty of Versailles can be made the permanent basis of a real peace. No one believes that the economic depression can be overcome in the present state of international tension. No one believes that the Disarmament Conference can succeed nor that the League of Nations can prosper without the wholehearted co-operation of all the great powers.

The attitude of Switzerland today is therefore one of disillusioned uneasiness. As her people have never been characterized by a highly imaginative turn of mind, nor by excessive optimism, they are perhaps less surprised than aggrieved by the present setback of the Geneva experiment. But this very lack of imagination and of excessive confidence, combined with their long experience of self-government, preserves them from despair. Their alarm is tempered by the vague but earnest hope that international goodwill may in time be restored and that, as a necessary condition, Germany

may return to a more humane and a less fanatically nationalistic view of her rights and duties.

Deeply as they are interested in the goal of this evolution, the Swiss people do not feel immediately concerned with the diplomatic ways and means, if any, by which it might be promoted and hastened. They remain, as they always have been, most anxious that their government should not become entangled in the meshes of high international policy. They are quite content to leave to the wisdom and responsibility of the great powers the solution of the problem of combining the security of France, of Europe and of the world with the demands of a re-awakened Germany. They have read Herr Hitler's recent pacific pronouncements. Unfortunately for their peace of mind, however, they have also read " Mein Kampf." Comparing the tone and substance of the two, they cannot help wondering whether the undisputed leader of the German Reich is sincere when he is reassuring or whether he is reassuring only because and as long as circumstances do not allow him to be sincere.

Faced with Germany's policies of nationalistic dictatorship, self-willed isolation, and aggressive disgruntlement, Switzerland, faithful to her traditions of democratic freedom, of loyal but cautious co-operation with the League of Nations and of contented but vigilant national independence, is still hoping for the best while quietly and reluctantly preparing for the worst.

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