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The Grand Truce of Europe

By LUDOVIC NAUDEAU.
(From L'Illustration)

We have been living for nearly two weeks amid a setting of gallant faces, and bathed in the soft and languorous air of Italy's Switzerland, where the smiles of a turquoise sky are reflected from the surface of entrancing bays and gulfs whose verdure-bordered shores peep out from both sides of Lake Maggiore. Never before, I fancy, has a great political conference been held in an atmosphere of such cheery goodwill. It has seemed as if the fragrant breezes that whispered across the flowery mountains bore on their wings the magic of imperturbable optimism.

Several hundred of us journalists took our turn daily in besieging the representatives of our respective countries to learn the latest news. At the slightest pretext, whenever the official speaker ventured the most insignificant pleasantries, the most anodyne allusion, everybody roared with laughter, whether he were a German Nationalist, a phlegmatic Englishman, or a smiling Frenchman.

The negotiators of the different countries invariably wore a jovial, humorous expression on their faces whenever we saw them. Chamberlain was delighted to be alive; Briand was wreathed in smiles from the moment he came until he left; Stresemann emptied glass after glass of beer on cool terraces, or under the arcades, with the happy abandon of a care-free tourist. Skrzyński, the Polish Foreign Minister, quickly lost the look of distrust he brought with him and assumed the beneficent air of his colleagues. Mussolini himself, who burst in upon us in an automobile the night before the signatures were to be affixed, was cold and reserved for only a brief moment, and then quickly thawed out under the sunshine of universal cordiality.

Every minute between the conferences was occupied with excursions to romantic mountain gorges, boat trips upon the Lake, jolly gatherings at charming, vine-bordered inns, and joyous forays to the hamlets that cling smilingly to the flank of the mountains like ripe fruit on a trellis. Two hundred journalists, representing seven or eight nations that were fighting each other only the other day, jointly invaded the Borromean Islands, where they danced, frolicked, and disported themselves like a lot of boys, and learned how much their common likings overbalance their dislikes.

And how, pray you, could people continue to chant litanies of hate and vengeance upon these golden islands that seemed like great caravels anchored in a sea of glassy blue and laden to overflowing with all the bounties and beauties of a Watteau landscape? It was indeed the land of dreams of which Goethe's Mignon sang.

These terraced island-gardens exposed to the sun their sturdy orange and lemon groves, their camellias, their magnolias, their clusters of palm-trees intermingled with giant cypresses, and their beds of tuberose and purple sage. Such a terrestrial paradise made ill-will seem absurd and the logic of mutual forgiveness self-evident. Let me mention a single extraordinary yet absolutely veridical detail. Some German Nationalist newspapers, finding their special correspondents too conciliatory, recalled them and sent others in their place. But the latter were at once infected by the universal friendliness, and became as conciliatory as their predecessors.

A well-known diplomat said to me one day: "Here, in this luminous atmosphere that seems to light the very depths of the individual soul, our negotiators, illumined with mutual comprehension, are far in advance of the peoples they represent, who are separated from each other by absence and misunderstanding, and are not yet ripe for the grand and decisive transformation of the European mind." So we have lived here for the time being like the flora in a sheltered southern nook where the most delicate flowers fearlessly unfold their full beauty to the gaze. If only all Europe could be transported by some magic to this point, could breathe its genial atmosphere and catch the infection of its kindly spirit, I doubt not for a moment that we should have perpetual peace. But what will happen to the ideals of Locarno when we try to transplant them far away among hostile multitudes still obsessed by fixed ideas and obstinate suspicions, which harassed populations hurried by Berlin's icy breezes, groping in the fogs of London, or splashing under Paris's autumnal rains? I ask myself this question with a vague uneasiness as I watch the palm fronds dance and sway and my ears try to catch the great hearty laugh of giant blossoms intoxicated with their own perfume.

It is in the midst of this natural setting, so propitious to kindly understanding, that an agreement has been reached which, whatever happens, cannot fail to have an immense influence upon future history. In severe Geneva a mellow-minded toris tolls away at his chimerical task of perfecting an impossible synthesis of humanity. But at Locarno we meet Europe, and Europe alone has for-

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gathered here to work out her own salvation, to discover her own way to peace and security. "Ever since the Armistice this has been the first care of France. To win it Foch demanded the Rhine frontier. We surrendered that, and were promised the double guarantee of England and America in return. When someone suggested in M. Clemenceau's presence that this guarantee might fall us, the old statesman waved his arms in the air and shouted: "Then—then, there will be no more treaties. There will be nothing at all."

That was the way a practical-minded man then saw the situation. As season followed season, however, we heard rising louder and louder the sullen threatnings of a Germany that grew more rebellious daily under the yoke of a treaty that she claimed had been imposed upon her. It was true that in 1921 a peace had been imposed on France. We never assented to it. If we did not protest constantly against it, we nevertheless always cherished that protest in our hearts; and that silent protest was unquestionably one of the indirect causes of what happened in 1923, notwithstanding our pacific intentions and our wish to avoid a war.

Ought we then to encourage the same thirst for revenge in Germany, if that could possibly be avoided? Were we, by our obstinate refusal to reconsider the terms of that peace, to put in her hands the argument that only brute force rules the relations between peoples? She ceded Alsace-Lorraine to us at Versailles, it is true, but under duress. She declares at Locarno that she freely and forever recognizes that cession. This alone is of immeasurable importance. She accepts of her own free will the demilitarization of the left bank of the Rhine. All thought of war between France and Germany is dismissed forever, and the two nations agree that whatever happens they shall adjust their differences by arbitration. This accord is placed under the solemn guarantee of our former Allies, at the head of whom stand England and It-

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Are we not justified in calling these achievements beyond our hopes, which it would have been impossible even to imagine only a short time ago? As Mr. Benes said, there has been no Treaty of Versailles until today, no treaty freely entered into and formally guaranteed by all the Powers.

Why did the Germans propose last February this Rhineland Pact, which has just been signed at Locarno? First of all because they wanted to borrow the American and English capital indispensable for their economic revival. Although they possess an immense industrial plant and inexhaustible natural resources, the Germans are in acute need of liquid funds. They are threatened with a great business-crisis. But the United States refuses to loan large sums of money to a Europe threatened with new wars. Oh, irony of human destiny! The imperious necessity of eating that made the Germans of yesterday a predatory nation makes them to-day converts to pacifism.

It was absolutely necessary, therefore, for the German people to escape from their distressing isolation. They must restore the world's confidence in themselves before they could recover the place in the world they occupied before the war. America, sitting tight on her strong-box and eager to pacify the universe, said to the French: "Disarm!" The French answered: "Impossible! The wicked Germans would destroy us." America thereupon said to the Germans: "Give these Frenchmen unquestionable proof that your intentions are pacific. Make peace with them, or you can get no more money from me." That is the history of Locarno.

Furthermore, when the Germans join the League of Nations, they will at once find themselves in an influential position there. They can count from the outset upon the sympathetic support of the Scandinavian countries, Holland, Austria, Hungary, and possibly in many cases of Italy. It is still a plausible contention that their original intention last February was to tempt us to discredit ourselves by rejecting their friendly overtures. It is conceivable that M. Briand's prompt acceptance has carried the Germans beyond the point where they wished to go. But can we suppose that the subsequent developments, which give them credit for having contributed to the pacification of Europe, really sadden them?

Everybody present saw at once that if we and the Germans had been alone at Locarno we could have come to an agreement within three days. But our obligation to stand by Poland made the negotiations extremely delicate. It is unnecessary to recur here to the well-worn theme of the conflict between the Germans and the Slavs over the mouth of the Vistula. That conflict remains, but it has been regulated and circumscribed with legal forms. The Germans have solemnly promised never to try to settle it by force. Isn't that also a great achievement?

At Locarno our negotiators could not insist that France should be the exclusive guarantor of the arbitration treaty between Germany and Poland; but can our friends at Warsaw complain because that treaty was placed under the safeguard of the League of Nations? . . . And what likelihood is there that the League will ever un-animously agree and unanimity is necessary under the Covenant to change these frontiers to the disadvantage of Poland? I made this remark to a well-known German publicist, who replied:—

"You are thinking and you are speaking in the present. But the future is unpredictable. We could not dream of persuading the League of Nations today to support our point of view un-animously. But who can say that the situation may not be entirely different twenty years from now. In any case, it was indispensable to keep the question open. It remains an open question. You must also bear in mind that Poland as at present constituted does not seem to us likely to survive. Incidents may happen that we cannot foresee which will make our claims seem much more logical than they appear to-day."

So the question of the Polish Corridor has not been finally settled at Locarno. It has simply been adjourned. But we have at least safeguarded our friends against aggression. France has done everything in her power for the security of Poland. M. Benes said to me: "France has done her loyal best. We could not reasonably ask more. Poland has secured all that any intelligent man could expect."

Those who, through either ignorance or blindness, insist upon thinking that Germany can be kept indefinitely in a state of tutelage, and powerlessness, will undoubtedly criticize the Locarno Agreement. It is perfectly true that this Agreement recognizes the latent strength of Germany, with which the former Allies must now deal on a footing of equality. But what Frenchman who has visited Germany of late would question her vitality, her formidable gift for growth? What good does it do to deny facts that the whole world recognizes? It is not the Locarno Agreement that has made a strong Germany, but it is a strong Germany that has made the Locarno Agreement necessary. How could we compromise ourselves in the eyes of all the rest of the world by capriciously

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refusing the precise and formal advantages that were offered us, and by obstinately repelling for all time to come, irrespective of any reparation made to us, Germany's proffers of friendship? To take that attitude would have been to proclaim that a new war—a war of extermination—was inevitable.

Without doubt, controversies will arise over the interpretation of the Pact. If at some future time Germany should try to evade her obligations under the Dawes Plan, we should not, as things are now, have any means of coercing her. That alone creates a great temptation to repudiate those payments. It is true, on the other hand, that we are less interested in receiving money from Germany since we have discovered that we shall have to drop it anyway into Uncle Sam's bottomless money-box. Moreover, what has been done so far will amount to little unless we also conclude the broad economic accord now under consideration, that promises to give Franco-German relations an entirely new and permanently friendly character. I, to repeat M. Briand's saying, we have laid the foundations for a United States of Europe, we must, without committing ourselves too far, contemplate that gigantic innovation courageously and in a large way, instead of from the petty standpoint of hate-hoarders and vengeance-zealots.

Let us then accept with confidence and enthusiasm the spirit of Locarno and persuade ourselves that it is the

magnificent prelude to the renaissance of Europe that is struggling to become a powerful unity. Even if the spirit of Locarno gives us only a truce—the truce of thirty years that M. Benes thinks is the minimum—that alone will be a marvellous result that will harrass Europeans may well greet with joy.

At the same time let us bear in mind that, should we be fated to enter a new military era at some future time, the laws that preside over the growth and decay of nations are still in force. They do not cease for a single second to exert their influence. A truce! If Germany, with her sixty-three million people and her colossal industries, feels to-day the need of a truce, it is because she wishes to attract foreign capital, to initiate new and greater undertakings, to develop her new resources, and to win new economic victories. A truce? But if thirty years from now Germany has ninety million people and unquestioned industrial supremacy, while France is struggling along with her present thirty-nine million, isn't it true that we shall have suffered the most irretrievable of defeats in the very midst of peace? Germany understands that, whatever happens, time works for her. That is doubtless the secret of her wisdom.

A truce? And what shall we do with this truce? Shall we complacently re-assured, and indulgently pardon her transgressions? Yes, if we are content to

fall into final decay. But if we want to survive, we must profit by this truce to reform our manners, to re-make our country, to reinvigorate our science, to improve our sanitation, to combat infantile mortality, to encourage large families, to protect maternity—in a word, to reinvigorate our people physically and morally.—The Living Age.

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