

Anarchy or Peace ?

By The Rt. Hon. LORD DAVIES.

We reproduce below an extract from Lord Davies' forthcoming book, "Nearing the Abyss : The Lesson of Ethiopia." In view of the important bearing of many of the author's conclusions upon the problem of League reform, we welcome this opportunity of presenting these passages to our readers without delay. The chapter from which the extracts are taken has been issued as a NEW COMMONWEALTH pamphlet.

WE are told that the League must be reformed. How is it to be reformed? Is it to advance or recede; to be pruned or expanded; to be emasculated or vitalised? These are the urgent and paramount questions. It is true that after an experience of eighteen years it is necessary to overhaul its machinery, to tighten up the bolts, to replace defective parts and to supply new ones where they are urgently required. Above all, it is vital that there should be an adequate supply of motive power without which the machine, however perfect or imperfect it may be, will come to a standstill. Let us also satisfy ourselves that the motive power is derived from unadulterated sources and that it is supplied under a reliable guarantee. We are told by some people that because the machine came to grief on the Chino-Japanese and Italo-Abyssinian roads, it must therefore be scrapped. Why did it come to a standstill? Because a vast amount of water had found its way into the petrol tank, and no plant existed to test the quality of the petrol, and no attempt was made to ensure that the guarantees of its quality were forthcoming.

The defects in the League are due partly to the absence of those essential institutions—an Equity Tribunal and an International Police Force—through which the common will for peace could assert itself. But the inability of the League to pursue a consistent and successful course in the Italo-Abyssinian conflict was mainly due to the lack of determination and cohesion on the part of its States Members. The immediate cause was the attitude of France, especially her refusal to co-operate in imposing the oil sanction and in initiating the Hoare-Laval proposals which, at a critical moment, completely undermined the moral authority of the League. The French attitude was the result of an understanding concluded between Laval and Mussolini which, in turn, had been brought about by the determined opposition of Great Britain to the organisation of sanctions at the Disarmament Conference. What, in effect, appeared to be her repudiation of Article XVI reacted on the policy of France, and compelled her to seek compensations elsewhere, both in Italy and Russia. Had the guarantee of an International Police Force supported by contributions from all the members of the League been in existence, it is reasonable to suppose that none of these things would have happened. Moreover, in existing circumstances, effective action or intervention on the part of the League is at the mercy of domestic events and fluctuations of public opinion, especially in Paris and in London. For example, a Press campaign lavishly financed by the aggressor, or induced on his behalf by some other consideration, may, at the critical moment, produce decisive results. It does not follow, however, that these results represent the considered opinion of the electorate. On the contrary, when the testing time comes, they may be repudiated by public opinion, just as M. Laval's

policy was repudiated by his fellow-countrymen at the recent elections.

Moreover, the time factor enters into these calculations. Domestic events which may have a decisive bearing upon the policy and actions of the League unfortunately do not always synchronise. For example, the British elections came in time, but the French elections came too late, with the result that Mr. Eden supported the oil sanction whilst M. Laval opposed it. On the other hand, it is reasonable to assume that M. Blum, had he been elected in time, would have supported it. It is obvious that neither the people of France nor of Great Britain have repudiated the system of collective security, nor have given a mandate to their respective governments for the elimination of Article XVI from the Covenant. On the contrary, they have supported the underlying principles of both. The peoples of France and Great Britain have endorsed the Covenant in its entirety.

But how, it may be asked, under these conditions, is the League to maintain the principle of continuity of policy? How will it ever be able to assert consistently the principles and provisions of the Covenant? Only through the establishment of those vital institutions through which the combined will can function automatically and successfully.

The creation of these institutions is the practical expression of the combined will. It is the only conclusive test, because it does not deal with a single dispute or international event arousing the passions or affecting the immediate self-interests of nations, but is designed to strengthen and consolidate a system—the rule of law. Can the individual national wills represented by the governments at Geneva ever be synchronised into a combined will which will create a peaceful procedure for the settlement of all disputes and a single instrument for upholding the public law? The day that happens, the future of the League will be assured and the most far-reaching step in the annals of mankind will have been taken for the prevention of war.

In existing circumstances, this step is not an impossibility, it is purely a matter of chance. Such an occasion was the 1924 Assembly, which registered the high-water mark of League solidarity when, for a brief period, the national wills of France and Great Britain synchronised in the Protocol for the pacific settlement of international disputes. But a few months later, after an election in Great Britain fought entirely on other issues, a Conservative Government came into power. The result was that the Protocol, which had been fathered by a Labour administration, was killed. Subsequently, Sir Austen Chamberlain, having succeeded Mr. Arthur Henderson at Geneva, launched his Regional Pact of Locarno as a substitute.

Now, as then, a section of the Conservative Party—wittingly or unwittingly—propose to commit an act of