

Switzerland and international affairs

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SWITZERLAND AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS.

By PIERRE BEGUIN.

There is no need for me to repeat that Switzerland is in the fullest sense of the word a peace loving country. Before the sixteenth century she was a great military power, but in the sixteenth century she adopted the policy of neutrality in order to safeguard her own internal peace. At the beginning of the nineteenth century she proclaimed her neutrality to the world at large, and got it respected, not only to save herself but also to constitute an element of peace in the middle of Europe.

It is enough to recall these historical truths in order to make it clear that Switzerland did not wait for the so-called "partisans of peace" before she joined in, whole-heartedly, with every movement to safeguard peace. In the interval between the two wars she did her utmost to develop, in her relations with other countries, peaceful methods of settling international differences, that is, arbitration, mediation and conciliation. At the end of the second world war it was in accordance with Swiss traditions that we hoped that now that the East and the West had become comrades in arms they had become reconciled with each other and that their wartime collaboration would continue, so that the communist world and the liberal and christian world, would grow to be more closely united even than during the war. Observers of international events, political thinkers and journalists in Switzerland even reached the stage of believing, in 1945, that a sort of synthesis between marxism and liberalism was possible — a harmonious conciliation of mankind's two fundamental needs, liberty and security.

These hopes have vanished. Instead of the synthesis we hoped for we have seen the gulf grow wider, and the differences more alarming, between the two ideologies. We are farther than ever from peace. In fact there has never been any real end to the war, in spite of the temporary suspension of hostilities in those countries nearest our frontiers. At the other side of the world a localised war is raging, and people are wondering whether it will not develop into a general war, the third in a single generation.

In the old days we should have thought that a war going on in some little peninsula in Asia was no concern of ours, and we should have been pretty well indifferent to it. That is not our attitude to the Korean war. This is in no sense of the word a colonial war, it is one aspect of the conflict between East and West, and is perhaps the forerunner of upheavals which will take place in the more or less distant future near the frontiers of Switzerland.

But it can hardly be said that Switzerland is living under a cloud of pessimism and anguished apprehension. We are peace lovers, and even peace worshippers, to such an extent that we really cannot believe that such a frightful catastrophe as another world war will take place. Our minds refuse to consider that it is possible. Generally speaking, although the Swiss does not live in a cloud of wishful thinking or in ignorance of what is going on in the outside world, they really cannot believe that there exist people mad enough to precipitate another world war in which

there would certainly be no distinction between victors and vanquished; and in which there would be frightful casualties, since none of the belligerents could deal his enemies a vital blow and occupy his territory.

Switzerland realises how serious the present situation is, and knows perfectly well what dangers are latent in it. But she cannot resign herself to give up the hopes which she has placed in the maintenance of peace, and even in the establishment of a durable peace on a more satisfactory basis than before, in the more or less distant future. She remembers from her own national history that it took centuries to set up the present equilibrium which she at present enjoys. She hopes fervently that long term efforts will allow the establishment of a world equilibrium, reproducing her own but on a larger scale. And at the same time she realises that this can only be attained on condition that there is no falling off in goodwill, and that none of the parties yields to the temptation of seeking a solution by force, for example by using weapons of mass massacre.

In other words, we are incurable optimists. But not blind ones. Switzerland will continue, as she always has done, to do whatever she can for the continuance of peace. Being a realistic nation, she knows that she may be disappointed in her hopes, and accordingly she is neglecting no precaution which might ensure her own security if another war were to break out. For it has been said that humanity will work out its salvation, if it can resist the evil counsel of Fear.



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