

Zeitschrift: The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK
Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom
Band: - (1954)
Heft: 1236

Artikel: The quest for peace yesterday and today [to be continued]
Autor: [s.n.]
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-693030>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 08.01.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

THE QUEST FOR PEACE YESTERDAY AND TODAY.

Memorial Lecture given by Professor William E. Rappard, of the University of Geneva, Director, Graduate Institute of International Studies, at the David Davies Memorial Institute of International Studies, in April, 1954.

INTRODUCTION.

OUR GENERATION AND OUR DUTY.

Never, as far as historians inform us, has any generation witnessed human tragedies as widespread and as terrible as that which, born toward the end of the nineteenth century, has survived the middle of the twentieth. And never before has any generation experienced such a cycle of terrors, hopes, disappointments, renewed apprehensions, renewed agonies, renewed hopes and renewed disappointments as ours.

Lord David Davies, to whose noble and generous memory all our affectionate and grateful thoughts go today, was an outstanding member of this generation. He lived through and intensely shared all its first terrors, hopes and disappointments, as well as its renewed agonies and its renewed hopes. He was spared its renewed disappointments and present anguishes only by his untimely death ten years ago.

We have not met together, however, to bemoan the fate of our generation. This is less than any other the occasion for what would be a sadly sterile and paralyzing exercise of self-pity. And, if I may add a personal remark, there is no one to whom such a theme should be forbidden as relentlessly as to the present speaker. Coming from a country whose part in the tragedies of the last generation has been that, not of a protagonist or an immediate victim but merely of a passive albeit a most sympathetic witness, speaking in the capital of the great Commonwealth which, twice in a lifetime, has been the very citadel of active and self-denying resistance to the forces of evil, and addressing those and the survivors of those to whose heroic sacrifices it is fully conscious of owing its own salvation, I should keep silence if I had nothing to offer but barren lamentations on the course of world affairs. Uttered by a Swiss in London in 1954, such an elegy would not only come with singular bad grace. It would be outright dastardly.

* * *

Our purpose here is to resume the quest for peace to which Lord Davies had devoted his life ever since his experience in the first World War and especially after the publication in 1930 of the first edition of *The Problem of the Twentieth Century*. His efforts were prolonged even beyond the grave, since his *Seven Pillars of Peace* appeared posthumously in 1945. We are here not as politicians or as diplomats entrusted with the defence of national interests. We meet as independent students and as citizens of the world responsible solely to our own conscience. That, however, is not a responsibility to be borne lightly. Less so today than ever before.

As I see it, that is so for three main reasons. First, because ours is the atomic age, in which peace is the condition of the very survival not only of civilisation, but of mankind itself. Is it indeed an overstatement to declare that with the advent of the hydrogen bomb, international peace has become a treasure both more precious and less secure than it

has ever been before in the annals of humanity? In fact, in listening to the Easter messages which from Canterbury, York, London, and Rome resounded all over the civilized world last Sunday, one could not but wonder whether there still remained a purely political road to peace in the present day.

Secondly, our individual and collective responsibility is enhanced because we pride ourselves on belonging to the minority of truly free and democratic countries and because we deserve that privilege only in so far as we are conscious of the responsibility it entails for everyone of us.

And, thirdly and finally, our generation is most vitally responsible for the future of international relations because, having been offered at least two historical opportunities to establish peace on an organized basis, it has signally failed to make the most of these opportunities.

Is this merely a provocative challenging assertion, or is it the statement of an indisputable fact?

True, the generation which preceded ours by a century also had its suffering and its opportunities.

The man who, born in 1780, for instance, witnessed the French Revolution in his childhood and the wars of Republican and then of Napoleonic France in early manhood, was fully grown up when peace was re-established in 1815. Fifty years of age in 1830 and not seventy in 1848, he may have lived to see the birth of the Kingdom of Italy in the 1860's and perhaps even of the German Empire in 1871.

His generation too, assuredly, saw many upheavals, political and other. In fact its lot can, in several respects, be held to be no less chequered than ours. But had it, in the organization of international peace, any opportunities similar to those of 1919 and of 1945? Can the peace of Vienna in 1815, in particular, in this respect at all be compared with that of Versailles a century later and with the parleys at San Francisco in 1945?

We have perhaps been too unmindful of the analogies. Writing in 1904, at the end of the last volume of his monumental work on Europe and the French Revolution, Albert Sorel says:

"The Act final of June 9, 1815, was the most comprehensive treaty which had ever been signed..... It was the first attempt that had ever been made to endow Europe, at least territorially, with a charter to define the rights of possession of each, to found them on the solemn recognition and the guarantee of the eight principal European powers, on the impossibility of breaking that covenant without placing oneself beyond the bounds of public law, as well as on the contrary possibility of modifying it with the consent of those who had given it their sanction; in a word, to base general peace on a collective undertaking. That was a new dispensation. A Europe in which the rights of each sprang from the duties of all was something so alien to the statesmen of the *ancien régime* that it had taken no less than twenty-five years of war to impress them with this conception and to convince them of its necessity. Even so they were driven to it only by their war-weariness and by the very exhaustion in men, in treasure, in blood and in expedients."

This remarkable statement was made by a leading French historian ten years before the beginning of the first World War. It contains both the words of

covenant (*pacte*) and of charter (*charte*) which were adopted in 1919 and 1945. It very clearly indicates the notion of mutual guarantees and of collective security. It should make us very modest to discover how oblivious has been our generation of the lessons learnt and taught by that of a century ago. It would ill become us, however, to express surprise on that score today. Have we not observed that the statesmen of 1945 seemed to remember the efforts of their immediate predecessors of 1919, some of whom had even been their senior colleagues in office, only to avoid the semblance of following in their footsteps?

The quotation from Albert Sorel would suffice to show, and a mass of documentary evidence which might be cited would corroborate, that the problems which faced European statesmanship in 1815 and the solutions then adopted were not at all unlike the problems and the solutions of our age. I still maintain, however, that the opportunities of our generation and therefore its responsibilities in the field of organizing peace are without true precedent. Lord Davies was fully justified in entitling his first book *The Problem of the Twentieth Century*, not because the technical problem of re-establishing peace after general wars had been unknown to previous centuries, but because it had never been posited in a democratic age.

The statesmen who in 1815 drafted the peace of Vienna were kings, emperors and their ministers. Their responsibilities have in the twentieth century fallen upon representatives of free governments which derive their power from the people, that is from all of us. It is therefore right and proper that we should all of us, be we monarchists or republicans, be we men or women, in or out of politics, students of history, civilian taxpayers or professional soldiers, sailors or airmen, actively concern ourselves with what the evolution of democracy has made, whether we like it or not, a concern of all citizens of all free countries.

That is why, in spite of my very real misgivings, I could not refuse the all too flattering invitation of our host to discuss with you the quest for peace yesterday and today.

How shall I grapple with this task, than which none in the field of politics is, as I see it, more important, but few are as difficult?

Conscious of the unprecedented responsibility of our generation in this quest for peace, and aware of the unique experience with which the events of the last forty years have endowed it, I shall attempt first to draw at least some of the lessons from these events. In order to do so, I shall examine in turn the League of Nations and the United Nations, in which I see the two major endeavours to protect the international community against the danger of recurring war. I shall ask myself, in examining both these international organizations:

Why were they conceived? How were they born? Why they have failed of their major purpose?

Against the background of what can of course be but the barest outline of this past, I shall, in conclusion, view the present and the future.

May I, before embarking upon my hasty inquiries into the past, state quite frankly that a knowledge of history I deem quite necessary but altogether insufficient as a guide to the future.

It is in my eyes necessary because I see no better

means of understanding and of assessing the probable consequences of present decisions than the insight into the development of the past which history alone can at least suggest. It would therefore be unforgivable if our generation were to count for naught the experience it has gained from its own previous attempts, even if and when unsuccessful.

History, knowledge and science alone are, however, bound to be insufficient. No one questions the usefulness for safe navigation of buoys and lighthouses. But no one will claim that buoys and lighthouses alone have ever brought a vessel to port, if its captain and mate disregarded their indications or if its crew revolted against the authority of their officers.

My metaphor, of course, is far from being as sound and therefore reassuring as it may appear at first glance. Clear-sighted, firm statesmanship and civic discipline are assuredly as indispensable to peace as are the corresponding virtues of seamanship to safe navigation. But history would be fully comparable to bouys and lighthouses only if it could as surely guide the political mariner on his chosen course. But that is, alas, out of the question, the seas of the future having the unfortunate attribute of being ever uncharted.

Valuable as knowledge of the past is bound to be to the statesman and therefore, in free countries, to the citizen, it is infinitely less so than political wisdom, judgement and character. These are the supreme virtues, which knowledge can enlighten, but never replace. Without them even omniscience would be of little avail. And in the composition of these

Winter Night Tourist Fares to Switzerland

Commencing 18th December 1954, Swissair are again operating Night Tourist services to Zurich and Geneva with new low fares for the winter season. Tickets valid 23 days.

LONDON/ZURICH — £19 7s. Return

LONDON/GENEVA — £18 4s. Return

ASK YOUR TRAVEL AGENT FOR FURTHER DETAILS



SWISSAIR

126, REGENT STREET, LONDON, W.1

Also Manchester
and Glasgow.

virtues the ethical ingredients are of much more significance than their purely intellectual adjuvants.

In our conclusion we shall ask ourselves what could, and therefore what should, be the aims of pacific statesmanship today and what means could, and therefore should, be considered to attain it. Before we make the bold attempt to look into the future, however, we must cast a glance into the past. What is to be learnt from the experiments in organizing the world for peace which we have witnessed after each of the two late world wars?

THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS.

WHY IT WAS CONCEIVED.

Every political institution, and more than any other an international organization born under democratic conditions, is always the product of a great many different human wills and of a great variety of different external circumstances. Its embryo, however, must always have sprung from one original conception. It is not my purpose to undertake any investigation into the real fatherhood of the League of Nations.

Not that such an inquiry would arouse any jealousy among possible pretenders. Individual scientists and even nations may quarrel as to whose genius the world owes such unmixed human blessings as the atom bomb, for instance. But, as in most other *recherche en paternité* proceedings, the problem in discovering the authorship of the League idea is more to fix responsibilities than to select the most worthy from among a long panel of rival candidates!

This was so from the very start. When the League settled in Geneva in 1920, the enthusiastic municipal authorities of my city changed into "Quai Wilson" the name of the embankment on which the Secretariat had taken up its temporary abode. On this occasion, not unnaturally, the Consul of the United States was invited to participate in the dedication of a modest tablet set up in honour of the "Président Wilson, fondateur de la Société des Nations". This unfortunate official, torn between his loyalty to the stricken President of the United States and his desire not to be accused of disloyalty to the already professed American policy of absolutely ignoring the League, proved himself to be a true diplomat. He delivered an eloquent address in honour of the chief magistrate of his country without committing the impropriety of even mentioning the institution of which he was acclaimed as, or accused of being, the founder.

I must apologize for the irrelevance of this true but trifling anecdote. My excuse is that it shows that popular opinion in Switzerland, as doubtless elsewhere in the world, held Woodrow Wilson to be the father of the League. That was so even if the American Senate felt impelled to repudiate the child as not having been conceived within legitimate wedlock.

What is much more significant than the juridical problem of paternity, are its motives. Why did President Wilson and the other statesmen who shared his views hold that the first World War should not end without giving birth to an international organization which would render its recurrence impossible or at least much more difficult? The following are just a few quotations which show how much the idea was in the minds of various British leaders even before it was expressed by their American colleague.

Thus Mr. Asquith, as early as September 25, 1914, speaking in Dublin on the objects of the war which had just broken out, said that it should bring about "...the substitution for force, for the clash of competing ambition, for groupings and alliances and a precarious equipoise, of a real European partnership based on the recognition of equal right and established and enforced by a common will."

He added:

"A year ago that would have sounded like a Utopian idea. It is probably one that may not or will not be realized either today or tomorrow. If and when this war is decided in favour of the Allies it will at once come within the range and before long within the grasp of European statesmanship."

Less than a year later, we find Mr. Asquith's Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, writing to Colonel House, on August 10, 1915, as follows:

"My own mind revolves more and more about the point that the refusal of a Conference was the fatal step that decided peace or war last year, and about the moral to be drawn from it: which is that the pearl of great price, if it can be found, would be some League of Nations that could be relied on to insist that disputes between any two nations must be settled by the arbitration, mediation, or conference of others. International Law has hitherto had no sanction. The lesson of this war is that the Powers must bind themselves to give it a sanction."

I have traced elsewhere the evolution of President Wilson's peace philosophy during the first World War. Without going into any detailed analysis here, we may distinguish two distinct phases in this evolution. At first, while he felt himself to be the responsible guardian of American neutrality, he insisted mainly on the necessity of erecting the peace of the future on the foundations of justice. Thus, on October 11, 1915, addressing the very nationalistic body of the Daughters of the American Revolution, he said:

"Believing that America stands apart in its ideals, it ought not to allow itself to be drawn, so far as its heart is concerned, into anybody's quarrel...Peace can be rebuilt only upon the ancient and accepted principles of international law, only upon those things which remind nations of their duties to each other, and, deeper than that, of their duties to mankind and to humanity."

Soon however, under the influence of external events and no doubt also of various British suggestions, he began to show an increasing interest in the formation of what, on May 27, 1916, he called "an universal association of the nations" for the mutual protection of their "territorial integrity and political independence".

From this it was but a short step in the same direction to declare, as he did on January 22, 1917, in his address to the Senate:

"In every discussion of the peace that must end this war it is taken for granted that that peace must be followed by some definite concert of power which will make it virtually impossible that any such catastrophe should ever overwhelm us again."

In the course of the same speech he offered the participation of his country in such a "concert of power". This offer, he added, was conditional upon the peace being, by reason of its terms, "worth

guaranteeing and preserving", thus showing that he had not in the least abandoned his original contention that "only a peace between equals can last".

When, less than three months later, the United States became a belligerent, this changed status brought about notable modification in Wilson's views as to the double aims which should be attained at the peace that was to crown the Allied victory: a settlement both fair and assured.

HOW THE LEAGUE WAS BORN.

The League of Nations that had thus been conceived during the first World War was born of the peace of Versailles. Most of the essential features both of the League and of the peace itself conformed to Wilson's conceptions. This was so in the following four main respects:

1. The peace settlement itself was inspired, if not dominated, by Wilsonian ideals of justice.

2. The League, whose birth was made to coincide with the legal coming into force of the peace treaties accepted by the defeated foes, was not to be a mere prolongation of the alliance of the victors. Neutrals were admitted as original members and it was to remain open to the late enemies of its founders.

3. The main purpose of the association of nations thus created was to protect them against aggression by the common action of all.

4. Provisions were made for the pacific adjustment of all international disputes by conciliation, mediation, arbitration and judicial settlement. Even the possibility of peaceful change was, however weakly, considered in Article 19 of the Covenant.

This interpretation of the general philosophy of the work of the peacemakers of 1919 may even now seem tendentiously optimistic. It would certainly have struck me as such had anyone questioned me about it at that time. Nor is there any doubt in my mind that it would have been deemed so by Lord Davies had it been submitted to him in 1930 when he first published his remarkable book on *The Problem of the Twentieth Century*. I wonder what he would think of it today?

What has happened to make all of us much more lenient in our appraisal of the efforts and of the achievements of the men of 1919? It is not exhilarating nor even pleasant to give what I believe to be the only sound answer to that question. We have all been led to look with much more favour on the efforts and achievements of the peace-makers after the first World War because we have since witnessed the efforts

and achievements of their successors after the second. As I shall revert to them presently, when considering the United Nations, I will be content here very briefly to seek to justify my views on the birth of the League of Nations.

When I spoke of the peace settlement of 1919 as having been inspired if not dominated by Wilsonian ideals of justice, I was thinking of its general tendency as well as of many specific provisions.

Wilsonian ideals of international justice were but the projection on the screen of world affairs of his national conceptions, according to which the legitimate political authority could be derived solely from the consent of the governed. This is obvious from most of his public utterances. It was never more clearly and more concisely expressed than in his address to Congress delivered on February 11, 1918, from which I beg leave to quote a few typical sentences:

"National aspirations must be respected; peoples may now be dominated and governed only by their own consent. 'Self-determination' is not a mere phrase. It is an imperative principle of action, which statesmen will henceforth ignore at their peril. We cannot have general peace for the asking, or by the mere arrangements of a peace conference. It cannot be pieced together out of individual understandings between powerful states. All the parties to this war must join in the settlement of every issue anywhere involved in it; because what we are seeking is a peace that we can all unite to guarantee and maintain and every item of it must be submitted to the common judgment whether it be right and fair, an act of justice, rather than a bargain between sovereigns...

The principles to be applied are these:

First, that each part of the final settlement must be based upon the essential justice of that particular case and upon such adjustments as are most likely to bring a peace that will be permanent;

Second, that peoples and provinces are not to be bartered about from sovereignty to sovereignty as if they were mere chattels and pawns in a game, even the great game, now forever discredited, of the balance of power; but that

Third, every territorial settlement involved in this war must be made in the interest and for the benefit of the populations concerned, and not as a part of any mere adjustment or compromise of claims amongst rival states; and

Fourth, that all well defined national aspirations

Telegrams and Cables: TRANCOSMOS LONDON.

Telephone: HOP 4433 (8 Lines.)

COSMOS FREIGHTWAYS AGENCY LIMITED.

INTERNATIONAL FREIGHT FORWARDERS

By Road, Rail Sea and Air

1, CATHEDRAL STREET,
LONDON BRIDGE, LONDON, S.E.1.

REGULAR GROUPAGE SERVICES WITH

SWITZERLAND

ANGLO-SWISS CUSTOMS EXPERTS.

Agents: WELTIFURRER INTERNATIONAL TRANSPORT CO. Ltd., Zurich, Basle, Buchs, Schaffhausen, Geneva, St. Gall.

ALSO AT

LIVERPOOL, MANCHESTER,
NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE,
HULL, BRISTOL, CARDIFF,
SWANSEA, NEWPORT, Mon.
GLASGOW.

CONNECTED
THROUGHOUT
THE WORLD

OFFICIAL FREIGHT AND
PASSENGER AGENTS FOR
SWISSAIR AND ALL AIR LINES
TO SWITZERLAND AND ALL
PARTS OF THE WORLD.

shall be accorded the utmost satisfaction that can be accorded them without introducing new or perpetuating old elements of discord and antagonism that would be likely in time to break the peace of Europe and consequently of the world."

When, on the morrow of their publication, we examined the peace treaties of 1919 in the light of these lofty sentiments, we were inclined to be very critical. This was so partly, perhaps, because we had been so exalted by Wilson's inspired eloquence that we had come to expect the impossible. When we examine them today, however, especially in the light of what has happened since, we are driven to be much less exacting.

In 1918 Germany and her allies had been utterly defeated in a war for which their almost exhausted victors were not alone in holding them primarily responsible.

In spite of these circumstances, which might well have explained if not justified the worst excesses, Germany's frontiers in the East as in the West were hardly modified at her expense except in so far as the principle of self-determination demanded it. In the name of that principle also, Poland and Czechoslovakia were set up as independent states and the frontiers of Serbia and Roumania enlarged. Furthermore, political and racial minorities were offered international protection where geography obviously prevented their complete political emancipation. Besides, plebiscites were provided for in several doubtful cases. As for the former German colonies, they were not annexed by their victors but placed under a system of international mandates.

In view of all these facts, which can only be very briefly recalled here, it does not seem unfair to declare that the peace settlements of Versailles were inspired if not dominated by Wilsonian principles. What went wrong after 1919 can much more truly be attributed to the executors of those treaties than to their authors.

As for the League of Nations itself, it also clearly bore the traces of Wilsonian principles. On September 27, 1918, a few weeks before leaving for Paris, he had declared in New York:

".....As I see it, the constitution of that League of Nations and the clear definition of its objects must be a part, in a sense the most essential part, of the peace settlement itself. It cannot be formed now. If formed now it would be merely a new alliance confined to the nations associated against a common enemy. Is it not likely that it could be formed after the settlement. It is necessary to guarantee the peace; and the peace can not be guaranteed as an afterthought....."

But these general terms do not disclose the whole matter. Some details are needed to make them sound less like a thesis and more like a practical program. These, then, are some of the particulars, and I state them with the greater confidence because I can state them authoritatively as representing this Government's interpretation of its own duty with regard to peace:

First, the impartial justice meted out must involve no discrimination between those to whom we wish to be just and those to whom we do not wish to be just. It must be a justice that plays no favourites and knows no standard but the equal rights of the several peoples concerned;

Second, no special or separate interest of any single nation or any group of nations can be made the basis of any part of the settlement which is not consistent with the common interest of all;

Third, there can be no leagues or alliances or special covenants and understandings within the general and common family of the League of Nations;

Fourth, and more specifically, there can be no special, selfish economic combinations within the League and no employment of any form of economic boycott or exclusion except as the power of economic penalty by exclusion from the markets of the world may be vested in the League of Nations itself as a means of discipline and control.

Fifth, all international agreements and treaties of every kind must be made known in their entirety to the rest of the world.

Special alliances and economic rivalries and hostilities have been the prolific source in the modern world of the plans and passions that produce war. It would be an insincere as well as insecure peace that did not exclude them in definite and binding terms."

If the Covenant as drafted in Paris did not fully measure up to the standards thus set by President Wilson, it undoubtedly did reflect his essential conceptions. Two points seem particularly valuable and would hardly have prevailed had he not willed them. Thanks to him the League was not created before the end of the war merely as "a new alliance confined to the nations associated against a common enemy". Also, the Covenant did not provide for any "leagues or alliances...within the common family of the League of Nations".

The last two features I stressed above call for no special remarks. I mentioned them merely because they too owed much to President Wilson, Lord Cecil, General Smuts and a few others. By public discussion and by insistent public advocacy of these features, these great statesmen had successfully sought to interest the citizenship of the whole free world in the technique of peace-making and thus to gain friends for the League even before its legal birth.

(To be continued.)

CITY SWISS CLUB

Will members kindly note that the next

MONTHLY MEETING

will take place on **Tuesday, October 5th 1954, at 6.30 p.m. for 7 p.m.** at the **Dorchester Hotel, Park Lane, W.1.**

The Dinner will be followed by a game of Jass, Bridge or Canasta.

Members wishing to be present should send their card to the Manager of the Dorchester Hotel, Park Lane, W.1. to reach him not later than Monday, October 4th, 1954.

Ch. GYSIN

Hon. Secretary.