

The Evil Lives After

DO YOU REMEMBER the League of Nations? It died last month, and only its faithful Secretary-General remained to do the decent thing by the deceased. No requiem was sung. Friends there were none, enemies had departed long ago in what the League was intended to forestall. The newspapers were niggardly in their obituaries.

Even as short-lived as political pacts are wont to be, the League was not so old. About twenty years ago, it came into being, with fanfare and with oratory, with fulsome promise of eternal grandeur. All nations, except the few uninvited and a skeptical Uncle Sam, were its godfathers. Woodrow Wilson, from whose intellectual pangs the League sprang full-fledged, was restrained by a group of "contemptible" senators from pronouncing a well-phrased blessing on the hope of the world; a brilliant spokesman of the late French Republic substituted.

And now it is dead. Only three years ago the ten-million-dollar edifice which was to typify the League's eternal life was completed. But long before this imposing palace began to cast its shadow on beautiful Lake Geneva, its occupant began to show symptoms of the fatal disease which, as we now know, was pre-natal in origin. For the League was an instrument of the Versailles Treaty, and was impregnated with that conglomeration of maladies. As the impossible treaty was torn up bit by bit, first by one then by another of its perpetrators, so the League succumbed to each of its inherited weaknesses.

The League died because it was conceived to perpetuate an injustice. True, some of its foster parents recognized its iniquitous conception, but hoped that through proper nurturing it would develop into the creation which their idealistic phrases described. But justice can never evolve from injustice, and immoral means can never produce a moral end.

The League was intended to maintain the power of its most predatory members, and was doomed to disintegrate as their power, or their willingness to exert power, waned. Power requires constant application, which is the reason for its dissipation. It is a relative thing. The security it confers produces disintegration, while the lack of it stimulates the will and energy necessary for its acquisition. The lassitude resulting from the possession of power is the signal that the center of its gravity is shifting to those upon whom it has been exerted. England and France, hoping that the League would prevent this shift, grew slovenly and decadent.

No good end can ever come from the use of force. A league of nations is a desirable ideal, provided it is conceived in equity, utilizes knowledge as its instrument and recognizes no end but justice. A league of nations can endure only if absolute freedom of exchange between its members is the keynote of its structure.

Such a league would be a clearing house of economic knowledge. It would be to the advantage of each member to learn at this exchange center what goods and services are most needed the world over, so that its natural resources and skills could be directed to supply the need.

Customs officials and restrictions would disappear, boundary lines would be merely administrative conveniences. Navies would be police boats to guard against piracy and to furnish weather reports; armies would be internal constabulary. Only such a league of nations can endure—and it needs no political implementation.

But the League of Nations was not that kind. It was composed of tariff-protected countries, each jealous of its neighbor, each hoping to gain advantage over fellow members, each having an internal economy of decay. Therefore, it died.