

## Roosevelt and Righteousness

"I am for righteousness."

—THEODORE ROOSEVELT.

**I**N the current issue of the *Metropolitan Magazine* Mr. Roosevelt breaks loose in a violent onslaught upon the idea and the advocates of a League to Enforce Peace. His intention in publishing the article was to check the obviously increasing popularity of the agitation in favor of American participation in such a league, and its effect cannot fail to be mischievous because the article is loaded with the authority of an ex-President of the United States whose words always carry a certain amount of weight at home and abroad. But in this instance Mr. Roosevelt has overreached himself. The article will do more damage to Mr. Roosevelt's own reputation than it will to the popularity of a League to Enforce Peace. It is not a frank and well informed discussion of the idea of a peace league, such as one has a right to expect from an ex-President who is peculiarly competent to deal with questions of foreign policy. If it were, it would deserve respectful consideration on its merits, no matter how sharp and how emphatic Mr. Roosevelt might be in his expression of an ultimately unfavorable verdict. It is a vindictive personal attack on the President and the ex-President of the United States who are the most prominent supporters of American participation in such a league, combined with a disingenuous attempt to explain away Mr. Roosevelt's own former advocacy of the principle underlying the plan. The mere repetition of his reasons for dissent and the comparison of these reasons with his earlier arguments in favor of the idea will be sufficient to expose the quality of the discussion.

In the course of the attack Mr. Roosevelt makes the following statement about the peace league and its supporters: Agitation in its favor is "infamous" and "against international morality" because it tends to "distract attention" from the higher duty of "protesting" against the Belgian deportations. The league is supported by too many "professional pacifists," whose influence is an "unmixed evil" and whose proposals should be disregarded because they are "failing in their duty" in not "protesting" against the violation of the Hague Conventions. It is only "one more quack nostrum for international wrong." "In some form or another it has been made now and then for centuries." Mr. Roosevelt himself "outlined" it in his address to the Nobel Peace Committee and subsequently elaborated it in a chapter, entitled "Utopia or Hell?" of his book "America and the World War," but he now considers

it a "mischievous sham," because we have not since adopted "obligatory military training" for all young American men. It would commit the United States to submitting the question whether the Monroe Doctrine should be abolished to "an arbitral tribunal upon which Chinese and Turkish judges might deliver the casting vote." "We should be obliged under penalty of breaking faith to devote our whole military and economic strength to a long-drawn and bloody war for a cause in which our people had no concern and in some place where we could hardly exert even a tiny fraction of our strength." Agitation in favor of a peace league is "peculiarly mean and odious hypocrisy" on the part of a man "who has not raised his voice in specific and emphatic protest against the brutal wrong done to Belgium and in specific and emphatic denunciation of the wrongdoer, Germany, and of our own government for refusing to take any action in reference thereto." No such man "is entitled to speak on behalf of any proposal to prevent such wrongs in the future." "It is wicked at this time to press any movement which interferes with the all-essential movement for spiritual and material preparedness."

Many of these criticisms of a peace league and its supporters are either mutually incompatible or should have seemed so to Mr. Roosevelt. The idea of the league has appeared and reappeared during centuries; it has been advocated by Mr. Roosevelt himself; yet it is a "quack nostrum." It would necessitate the submission of vital American interests to the casting vote of Chinese and Turkish judges, and it would commit us to exerting our whole military and naval strength in places where we could hardly exert even a tiny fraction of our strength. If Mr. Roosevelt's discussion of the peace league were limited to assertions such as the foregoing, it could be dismissed with a gesture of weariness and with a feeling of personal sorrow on the part of people who once believed in Mr. Roosevelt. But the article contains other arguments against a peace league and its supporters which cannot be so lightly disregarded. In it Mr. Roosevelt denounces as "infamous" and so on the advocates of a plan of international organization, which only two years ago he himself ably and strongly supported. This revolution in his own opinions raises questions of consistency, of personal good faith and of readiness to act upon his own words much more substantial than those which he raises against the friends of a peace league. Of course a man may change his mind; but if he changes his mind he should explain to former converts like ourselves, why his former reasons no longer hold good. As a matter of fact they do hold. The

arguments which Mr. Roosevelt used two years ago to support a league of peace as a promising experiment in international organization have even more force now than they had then. The kind of abuse which he lavishes upon advocates of the proposed league was more deserved then, when he himself was its advocate, than it is now when he is a backslider. No change has taken place except one in Mr. Roosevelt himself; and it is a change which makes some of us sceptical of his title to be considered the undisputed Chief of the Kingdom of Righteousness.

In the book entitled "America and the Great War," which he published in 1915, Mr. Roosevelt sought to indoctrinate his fellow countrymen with what he believed to be the lessons for them of the catastrophe in Europe. The dominant idea which pervades the book is that of a necessary increase of American armaments for the protection of American liberties; but Mr. Roosevelt at that time expressly rejected the idea that American security could be guaranteed by armaments alone. He declared (page 107) "we ought not and must not rest content with working for our own defense." He reached this conclusion as the result of a careful analysis of the causes of the war. He pointed out (page 67 and following) that all "the peoples of the several European nations believe themselves to be fighting for righteous causes" connected with their national safety, and that if "we are to prevent a repetition of this world tragedy" the intensity of this conviction of national righteousness becomes "a prime factor for consideration." Mere preparedness will not avail, because the European nations were prepared almost to the extent of their resources previous to the present war. On the contrary, Mr. Roosevelt uses phrases which imply that the greater the military preparedness the greater the danger of such catastrophes. It creates mutual fears, and these fears paralyze the forces which make for righteousness within a nation. "The fear among the plain German people of the combined strength of France and Russia made them acquiesce in the policy of the military party which was to disregard the laws of international morality" (page 73). "At present each nation has cause for the fear it feels. Each nation has cause to believe that its national life is in peril unless it is able to take the national life of one or more of its foes or at least hopelessly to cripple that foe." The causes of this fear must be removed or "these causes will bring about a repetition of the same awful tragedy."

After this analysis of the origin of the world war Mr. Roosevelt goes on to consider the remedy. The difficulty consists in the entire lack of "connection between force on the one hand and any

scheme for securing international peace or justice on the other" (page 81). Such a connection can be established by creating some kind of an international police power to stand behind international sense of right as expressed in a competent tribunal (page 62). Mr. Roosevelt returns to this idea again and again, and it is not necessary to repeat his repetitions. In so far as he develops his plan in detail it differs in certain respects from the program which the advocates of a peace league are now recommending to the American people; but the object which Mr. Roosevelt was trying to accomplish in 1915 is the same as that which Mr. Wilson is trying to accomplish in 1917. Both were or are seeking the creation of a legal obligation on the part of powerful nations to use force for the guaranteeing of international security and justice. "Under such conditions," Mr. Roosevelt says (that is, if a peace league were instituted) "Belgium would be safe from any attack, such as that made by Germany, and Germany would be released of the haunting fear its people now have lest the Russians and the French smash their empire to pieces." He calls the alternative utopian, but it is "a Utopia of a very practical kind," a working and realizable Utopia; and "the *only* alternative" to Utopia is the perpetuation of war or the perpetuation of hell.

Consider the situation in which Mr. Roosevelt is placed by the comparison between his arguments of two years ago, and his attitude of to-day. In 1915 preparation for national defense was called insufficient because the more thoroughly nations prepared without establishing some connection between the use of force and the organization of international peace and justice, the more intense and dangerous became their apprehensions one of another. To-day anybody who advocates American participation in this organization of international peace is "wicked" because the agitation may distract attention from the military preparedness which, in the absence of such organization, Mr. Roosevelt has himself declared to result in calamitous war. True, Mr. Roosevelt was as emphatic then as he is now in advocating military and naval preparation; he was as emphatic then as now in proclaiming the futility of American participation in the organization of peace, unless the nation were better prepared to contribute its share of the effective force by which the authority of a peace league would have to be sustained. But in the interval between 1915 and to-day such preparations have been begun. The government adopted in 1916 a program of naval construction whose cost exceeds that voted in one year before the war by Great Britain and Germany combined, and which aims to make the United States the

equal of any other naval power except the British Empire. The program of military preparation adopted in the same year is a failure for which the administration is justly censurable, but the nation has fully made up its mind to increase its army and so to add to the force which would be available either for self-defense or to sustain the responsibilities of possible American participation in a peace league. If it is "wicked" in 1917 to agitate for such a league, it was more "wicked" in 1915. And what about the wickedness of advocating military and naval preparedness which, according to Mr. Roosevelt's own testimony, would result in hell unless it is accompanied by participation in organization, now condemned by Mr. Roosevelt, to promote international security and justice? The truth is, of course, precisely the opposite of what Mr. Roosevelt now proclaims it to be. What takes the curse out of American military and naval preparedness is the official support of the peace league. It is because we have begun to prepare that the peace league should become part of American foreign policy.

The Belgian argument shows even more clearly the extent to which Mr. Roosevelt is falsifying and cheapening great issues for the gratification of personal animosities. The Belgian deportations constitute a hideous and detestable abuse of military power; but what are we to make of a man who stigmatizes as "infamous" the agitation for a peace league designed to prevent or discourage such outrages on the ground that it distracts attention from the outrage itself? The outrages are real, but they are irretrievable. The most formidable array of economic military and naval force ever brought together in the world's history is now being exerted to stop them. Much can be alleged in favor of participation by the United States in the job undertaken by the Allies of redeeming Belgium. Still more can be alleged in favor of making the Germans feel in every effective way American detestation of such behavior. But why should the need of "protesting" against the Belgian deportations condemn to infamy the agitation for a peace league, which, if it were organized, would according to Mr. Roosevelt's own testimony safeguard Belgium in the future from a repetition of "any attack such as that made by Germany"? The "protest," however useful in other respects will not avail to put a stop to the outrages, whereas the organization of a peace league may put a stop to their repetition. Its advocates believe in it precisely because it would place beyond controversy the obligation of this country to interfere in case of the repetition of such an offense. Moreover, if it was an act of righteousness in 1915 to distract attention from the Belgian calamity by agitating

for a peace league, why should it be "infamous" in 1917 to follow this example? In the meantime the idea of such a league has been expressly approved by representatives of three of the most powerful European governments, and a very considerable measure of popular interest and support has been created in this country and Great Britain. It is less utopian now than it was in 1915. It has become a matter of practical foreign policy, which must enter into the calculations of ministers of foreign affairs. And if the peace league is less utopian than it was, what Mr. Roosevelt described as the *only* alternative has proved to be more calamitous than could have been anticipated in 1915. In describing such an alternative as the present war as hell, Mr. Roosevelt was not exaggerating, yet he now sanctifies as righteous a policy of deliberately preferring the descent into the abyss, and he condemns to some other kind of damnation people who object to accompanying him on the journey.

## The Will to Believe

FOR two and a half years, the war has put upon men's minds a responsibility for which few had any preparation. It is literal truth that so varied a number of people have never before had so tangled and so delicate a situation to deal with. They have had to grope through veils of illusion for judgments which meant life and death to millions. Every man who looks candidly into his own mind knows that it is a haphazard collection of rumors and flashes, of sharp experiences, of jostling memories and hopes, odds and ends of fact, pale little schemes of history. Many people, to be sure, resent any such confession, and insist on walking about in patent-leather certainties. They know, by God, they know, like the fashionable rector in New York City who recently offered to sacrifice ten million European lives for what he called righteousness. They know, oh yes they know that the war must be fought to a finish though they could not define what they mean by a finish if their immortal souls depended upon it. What this kind of assurance comes to really is a moral detachment from the issues of the war. To sit by as a neutral and refuse to consider the awful complications of the struggle is to wash your hands of it, no matter how violently you repeat that you want one side or the other to win. It is to be no less aloof from the actual problems than are those who, seeing only horror, cry peace on any terms.

Yet the effort to find a way through is difficult beyond precedent. We are in the midst of it, and