

APPENDIX IV.

SPEECHES REGARDING THE WORK OF THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS.

11TH OCTOBER, 1923.

STATEMENT BY LORD ROBERT CECIL, K.C., M.P., LORD PRIVY SEAL AND BRITISH REPRESENTATIVE ON THE COUNCIL OF THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS.

Lord Robert Cecil: Prime Minister, I am in a little physical difficulty, and I hope the Conference will pardon me if my statement appears to be inadequate to the importance of the cause.

I propose, with your permission, to deal a little generally with the topic of the League, and not merely to confine myself to the particular issue of the Italo-Greek crisis, unless the Conference desires me to do so.

I do not propose to give you, or attempt to give you, a review of the history of the League proceedings during the last few years, because, in the first place, I have so recently joined the Government that I should not be qualified to do it from the inside point of view, and from every other point of view everybody is equally qualified with myself, because the whole of the proceedings, as you know, are always published either immediately or at a very short interval after they have taken place.

Aims and Position of League.

What I would like to try to do, if I may, is to make some kind of estimate of the present position of the League, and what place it ought to occupy, and does occupy, in the foreign policy of the Empire. And it is necessary, though I should have hoped it would not have been, to begin by one or two elementary observations, owing to certain criticisms from highly-placed quarters, which have been passed on the recent proceedings of the League. It seems necessary to emphasize once again that the League is not a super-State, and it is not there to give laws to the world; it is not an organization which either legislates for or administers other countries; nor is it a mere debating society, a collection of more or less eminent persons who go there to indulge in futile oratory. I think it may be defined as an international organization to consider and discuss and agree upon international action and the settlement of international difficulties and disputes. Its method is not, therefore, the method of coercive government; it is a method of consent, and its executive instrument is not force, but public opinion. Now, I am sorry to insist upon what to many of my hearers must be very elementary observations, and I only do so because, in connection with this crisis, there was published a very strong criticism of the League and the action of the British representatives, on the authority of an ex-Prime Minister, which seemed to me to show that there was a considerable misapprehension, even in the highest quarters, of what the League really strives to do.

Object of League is to promote Agreement among Nations.

The League's business is not to impose a settlement, even when a controversy is brought before it: it is to promote agreement. The recent controversy was brought before the League under Article 15, as I shall show in a minute, and its business was to get a settlement of the controversy and an agreement of the parties, and, if they did not agree, there was no power under the Covenant, nor would it have been at all in accordance with the general principles of the League, for the League to attempt to enforce what the Council of the League might think was the proper settlement. As everybody, I imagine, in this room knows quite well, there is only one occasion in which, under the Covenant, force is to be used—*i.e.*, under Article 16—and the object of that is not to enforce any particular settlement or a particular action, but to prevent nations from fighting, especially until an opportunity has been given for discussion, and consideration, and agreement. It is rather important, I think, that that should be realized in considering the actions of the League, and not least its action in connection with this Italian-Greek crisis. There ought to be no doubt about it, because the very words of the preamble describe its objects—"To promote international co-operation and to achieve international peace and security." Those are the two objects of the League, and they are to be accomplished, as I say, by inducing the nations to agree and act together, and not by any attempt by a group of nations, or by the majority of the League, to enforce on any particular nation any particular line of conduct which is approved.

Results already achieved.

Now, I would like—I will be as brief as I can—just to ask whether this conception—because it is necessary to ask it in view of what has recently been said in some quarters—whether this conception has, in fact, worked out successfully. Let me just take the first object of the preamble—international co-operation. I do not think the severest criticism of the League will deny it has achieved an immense amount of co-operation of the most valuable kind and of the most multifarious description. I only propose to mention—I do not propose to discuss or describe—what it has done, but, when we come to consider the enormous number of different ways in which it has acted in order to promote international co-operation, I think there will be no doubt in the minds of anybody in this room that it has carried out this part of its duty with very remarkable success. Take its humanitarian exertions: the repatriation of hundreds of thousands of prisoners of war, the relief of hundreds of thousands of