

of the League. M. Briand, with his great wisdom and experience, must have foreseen difficulties, but even he had to confess that there were some which he had overlooked. He said he came before the Assembly in order to tell it, on behalf of twenty-seven European nations, that they had recognized, after long and serious inquiry, that their collaboration in international activities in the form of a union was of primary importance for the maintenance of peace, but that when it came to the point of taking a definite decision to establish a federal union between Powers which were confronted by so many other problems it was essential to act prudently and not to take any step which would jeopardize the undertaking in future.

It is unnecessary to summarize the references by subsequent speakers to M. Briand's scheme, since all the speeches are given in the *Journal*; but the following quotation from a speech made on the morning of the 13th September by M. Motta, the delegate of Switzerland, deserves to be recorded here :—

“How was concrete shape to be given to this idea of European collaboration? In his view, the important thing to secure was a policy or state of mind rather than an autonomous organization. Those who spoke of a United States of Europe had not only anticipated a work which would require centuries of effort, but actually spoiled the prospects of a practical solution. A federal bond might be possible if it were understood that this bond, which would be of a moral character, would respect the sovereignty of States, but care should be taken to avoid advancing at this stage any idea of a federation or league.”

I think, perhaps, it would be as well to give here a non-European point of view as set forth by the Maharaja of Bikaner, principal delegate of India, who, in the Assembly, said :—

“Is there not a danger, in these early years of the League, that a plan for the closer union of Europe may give rise to misconception outside Europe itself as running counter to the basic foundation that the League exists not for Europe, not for Asia, but for the world.”

It was a note of warning to Europeans to proceed with great caution, and was, I am sure, not without effect.

The world economic crisis loomed large in the debate; indeed, at least two speeches were devoted solely to that crisis and to economic affairs. The results achieved by the League through the World Economic Conference of 1927 and the smaller Conference which met early this year and drew up the convention known as the “Tariff Truce” are almost negligible.

Addressing the Assembly, Mr. Graham, President of the Board of Trade, asked what were the prospects of future negotiations. Eighteen countries had signed the convention referred to above, and twenty-three countries had signed a protocol under which future negotiations would take place. In view of the gravity of the economic depression, however, it was feared by some delegates that tariffs would move upwards, and that certain countries, notwithstanding the Tariff Truce (which truce, by the way, has yet to be ratified), would still further increase their duties in the near future. He added that, so far, Great Britain could not suggest that any step had been taken by any country in derogation of the convention, and it was hoped that all countries concerned would approach the negotiations with a sincere desire for practical results and tariff-reduction.

I have left till last the few League political questions which are of importance to New Zealand, in common with other members of the British Commonwealth of Nations. The debate in the Assembly was merely in the nature of a prologue to the discussion in Committee, and it will be in those sections of this report dealing with the work of the First and Third Committees that I shall go into some detail. It suffices here to draw attention to the speech which Mr. Henderson, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, made in the Assembly on the afternoon of the 11th September. It is well summarized in No. 3 of the *Journal* of Friday, the 12th September.

After stating, in reference to M. Briand's scheme for a European federal union, that the British Government hoped that any final decision would be taken on the authority of the League, and that such a course would make it possible for the various Governments to satisfy themselves that the final plan was wholly consistent with the international obligations of the League, and that it would facilitate the disarmament policy of the Assembly, Mr. Henderson went on to say that the British Government stood for the acceptance by all States of the principle that disputes of every kind should be settled by peaceful means, and that it was hoped that the Covenant would be so amended as to bring it into line with the Pact of Paris. He therefore trusted that during the course of the present Assembly there would be drawn up an instrument bringing into force amendments based on the report made by the special committee which was constituted for the purpose of considering such amendments. (Document A. 8.)

There had been some reference in the English press during the summer to the possibility of Great Britain adhering to the General Act for the Peaceful Settlement of International Disputes, drawn up by the Assembly of 1928, and Mr. Henderson's pronouncement of his Government's policy on this point was awaited with considerable interest. He said that the British Government had always been favourably disposed towards the principles of the General Act, but that it had made it clear that in a matter of such vital concern it must proceed in close accord with the other members of the British Commonwealth; and he indicated that the Imperial Conference about to meet would consider “what further contribution the British Commonwealth could make to the cause of disarmament and world peace.”

Mr. Henderson referred to the acceptance by the British Government of the Treaty for Financial Assistance, but added that acceptance of that treaty and of the amendments to the Covenant was dependent on the carrying-through of a general treaty for the reduction and limitation of national armaments.