

Curtain for the League of Nations

(By GEORGES AVENEG in the "Christian Science Monitor")

MASSIVE, graceful, imposing, the concrete palace of the League of Nations stands on a ridge in Geneva's Ariana Park, overlooking the choppy waters of Lake Lemman. Eastward, across the lake, loom towering Alpine peaks, their summits crested with snow; while behind the palace rises the lesser Jura range, also snow-capped.

Time and the elements have yellowed the white travertine facing of the palace. It has a forlorn appearance. On nearly all its windows, blinds are drawn. Its car parks, providing accommodation for 500 vehicles, are empty; its courts and purple gravel walks, deserted. A lone peacock, last of the flock that strutted so proudly through the palace grounds, shelters disconsolately in the Court of Honour behind the gilded armillary sphere, gift of the Woodrow Wilson Foundation.

"Sic transit gloria mundi." The League of Nations, first great experiment in international co-operation, is to be disbanded and replaced by the new United

Nations Organisation, which will be quartered in the United States. Designed, like its successor, to safeguard world peace, the old League failed; not, as is often charged, because of intrinsic defects in its structure, but because timid or short-sighted statesmen declined to enforce its Covenant.

Arrangements for liquidating the League have been entrusted to its Control Commission, whose recommendations will be referred for ratification to the League Assembly at a final meeting in Geneva.

At least four of the 16 sections of the League Charter—those headed Opium, Economic, Finance and Health—are to be taken over by the U.N.O. Other sections, and the incomparable League Library with its 329,000 volumes, probably will be taken over also.

DURING the war most of the League's political activities were suspended. Diminished contributions soon necessitated drastic reductions in the Secretariat staff, but several of the non-political sections continued to render valuable service. In 1940, when German

troops appeared on the Franco-Swiss frontier, less than 15 minutes' march from the League Palace, and when Switzerland seemed in danger of invasion, precautions had to be taken against a possible interruption of remaining functions.

Accordingly, the Opium Section was transferred to Washington, D.C.; the Economic Section to Princeton, N.J., and the Finance and Health Sections to Great Britain. At the same time, the International Labour Office moved its working base to Montreal. However, the Permanent Court of International Justice, obliged to abandon its seat at The Hague, sent its Registrar and other officials to Geneva.

To-day, less than a fourth of the 400-odd offices in the League palace are occupied. The Secretariat, which in January, 1939, numbered 654, is now reduced to less than 140. The only part of the palace that is heated is the southeast wing, where the Secretariat is quartered.

Visitors nowadays to the League palace are comparatively rare. For the most part they consist of American soldiers

on leave, small groups of whom are shown daily through the building. They are advised against removing their caps and overcoats, as the temperature of the unheated parts of the building is at least six degrees below that outdoors.

Entering the grounds by the main gate, one no longer is halted by a guard. His duties have been taken over by the concierge, who sits behind the desk just inside the palace entrance hall. Outside and in, one encounters everywhere evidence of unremitting care. Walks, gardens and shrubbery are all in perfect order; clocks perfectly timed; the linoleum flooring of corridors as spotless and shiny as ever. The numerous committee rooms—the Assembly alone has 10—appear just as they were in the heyday of the League, ready for immediate use.

THE League palace is a masterpiece of architecture, approximating in dimensions the Palace of Versailles. It covers, roughly, an area of 20,000 square yards, has a volume of about 450,000 square yards, and its perimeter measures about



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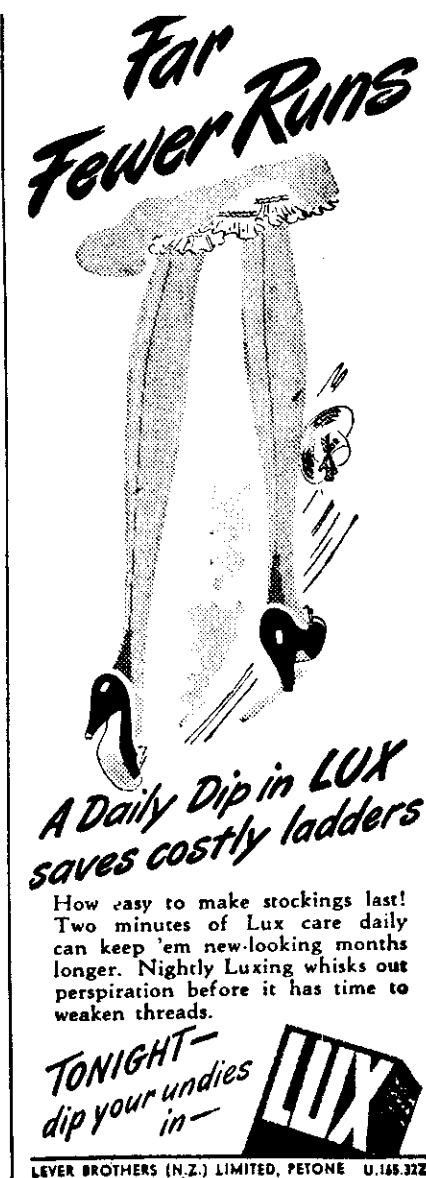


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