

Climbing from the Pit

FROM THE LEAGUE TO UN. By Gilbert Murray. Oxford University Press, London.

(Reviewed by M. H. Holcroft)

A MAN of much learning in one branch of education recently told me that he was not interested in "pretentious little fairy tales about United Nations." He was trying to say that he did not believe in international co-operation, presumably because the innate sinfulness of mankind made it impracticable. The world was in a deplorable state; but he thought he could live peacefully in New Zealand for another 20 years or so, and he saw no reason why he should worry about lunacy in other places.

This was an extreme example of the pessimism which some people feel about United Nations. Equally unhelpful is the optimism of those who imagine that peace can be maintained if statesmen make declarations, sign documents, and speak in high and noble accents about a universal brotherhood.

Peace-making is hard work, and those who devote themselves to it must be armed in spirit against extremists of both kinds — the optimists who urge them to do everything in five minutes, and the pessimists who say that it is better to do nothing. They are most likely to go forward steadily if they have a sense of history. After all, United Nations has not been set up like the giant's house at the top of the beanstalk: it has grown out of history, and if it fails in its present form it will have to be replaced by something else, until in the end the nations are in that single society which is clearly destined to inherit the earth.

In times of doubt and uncertainty, when the task seems to reach too far into the future, it may be comforting to pick up this book by Professor Gilbert Murray. Here is a man who has divided his thought, in a long lifetime, between two great interests — classical scholarship and international co-operation. He is fitted by training for the long and patient view. The evils that have come upon us in this generation



GILBERT MURRAY
"The long and patient view"

have happened many times before; and although a demagogue in a city-state of ancient Greece could not be as dangerous to the world as a demagogue in Nazi Germany, the principles of behaviour and the political consequences are roughly similar. There are conditions under which men lose their freedom.

Preparations for war, and the slow recovery from wounds when the fighting is over, make it harder for men to live the good life.

"The whole history of Europe," writes Professor Murray, "reinforces the judgment of two ancient Greek writers, that the source of most public evils is the desire for power over others . . . and that this power is like a wicked courtesan, who makes nation after nation in love with her and then betrays them, one after the other, to their ruin." But the world is now so small that the will for power cannot be satisfied in any part of it without involving the entire human race in misery and suffering. International co-operation is an attempt to restrain the aggressive, to bring peoples closer together, and to give reason its proper ascendancy. It is, in fact, an inescapable part of social evolution. "Historians have said that the worst thing about recent wars in Europe was that they were really civil wars, created by violent strains inside a whole which was striving to be a unity."

Against this perspective, internationalism becomes a practical aim as well as a political ideal. Professor Murray has been working for it since 1915; and in the speeches and essays collected in this volume there is an impressive depth and consistency of outlook. Many of the



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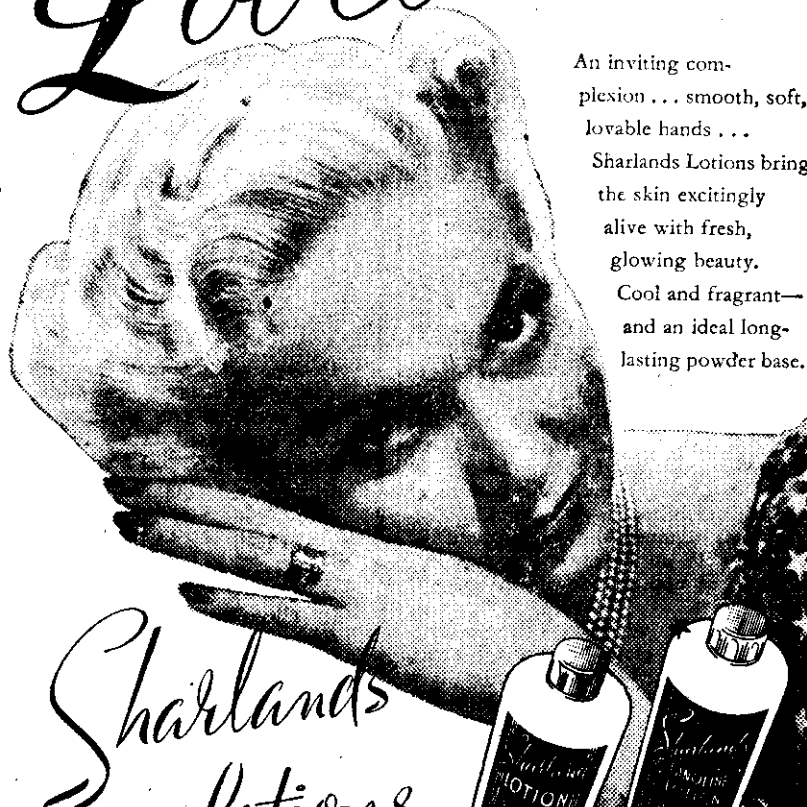
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