7 Rue de Tilsitt, Paris.
17th January, 1921.

Dear Bert-

One of your letters stated that O'Brien wanted me to write something about the League of Nations. I should hesitate if I were free to do so, but I am obviously not free. But I can give you what ideas happen to be in my mind at the moment, reserving the right to change them at any time, and I don't regard them as confidential, though, of course, my name must not be connected with them.

I don't think the language of the League Covenant of much importance. It will remain a world conference, whatever the language, and not a supernatural authority.

Other nations are suggesting all sorts of changes in the langauge of the Covenant, and the League has organized a committee to consider them; probably alsowith the idea of considering any suggestions of the United States. All the important Powers would accept anything in reason which the United States proposed.

I think it is even possible, absurd as it may seem, that Harding might succeed in an attempt to scrap this League and organize a new league or a new conference. I don't like this idea at all. It seems to me an unnecessary assumption of leadership and responsibility by the United States; an unnecessary slap at the Powers which have already accepted the present League; a failure to work along the lines of least resistance.

I think it would be quite possible for the United States to adopt temporarily the policy of unofficial representation on the League. Such a policy might be purely temporary, or temporary with a definite purpose to form permanent connection if the experiment proved satisfactory. The idea of unofficial representation is a natural thought to one who has been Unofficial Representative on the Reparation Commission for nine months, and has seen how practically effective it is, in spite of lack of legal standing and authority.

I feel quite sure now that the European nations took the League seriously from the beginning, and that they continue to do do. It is a mistake to regard it as a Wilson conception. It embodied in the beginning greatly exaggerated hopes, which were, as I say, serious. It embodies now saner expectations, but they are still serious. It was thought of in the beginning

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as a super-national body compelling peace. It is thought of now as a means for forming and formulating world opinion. The man in the street was seriously interested in the beginning, but has lost interest, as he always does, when his exaggerated hope is disappointed, and now is inclined to scoff; but I think that the interest of the statesmen and even of the politicians has grown rather than diminished now that the exaggerated notions have been sloughed off.

Everybody is sick of war, but the responsible men, and again I include even the politicians, are no more sick of war than they are afraid of it. They don't believe their people would fight. They don't believe they could get the money. They know that any additional war expense means quick bankruptcy for any one of them. They really believe that the general influence of the League will have substantial effect towards calming jealousies, arbitrating disputes, reducing armaments, and preventing actual fighting; and they see all the way across Europe eastward jealousies and disputes and, in some cases, thirst for vengeance, which may become sources of armed conflict, and they have found that nations which are bankrupt keep on fighting with avidity, sometimes it seems for the very reason that they have no other way to keep people employed, combined also perhaps with the fact that the armies can, as in the thirty years war, live more or less off the country and fight well for the mere hope of loot. We see even in business that the worst competition comes from the concern which has nothing to lose. There seems to be a tendency of that kind among nations.

So I think the League is worth while, but the thought with which I have the least sympathy is that the League can do anybody any harm, and that thought has been the main basis of the attack in the United States. There has been a queer combination of argument, first for the utter impotency of the League, second for the tremendous amount of harm it would do in the United States.

I sent you Balfour's report on the League, made to the House of Commons. It seemed to me a sane statement and, as I said, Balfour is never partisan one way or the other. I am told that he did not quite take the League seriously enough in some of the earlier meetings, and that his attitude changed quite markedly during the meetings, and that the general consensus of opinion there compelled him to change his attitude in certain respects.

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I am told that certain of the American papers and some of the French papers had direct instructions to "knock" the League. It looked so here in Paris, for in general the reports, particularly in the early stages, scoffed at the academic nature of the proceedings and made the most of disputes, particularly of the childish withdrawal of the Argentine representative. This man was at Brussels and I saw him a little there. He is quite smart but rather bumptious, and my impression of him and from his action at Geneva is that he was overimpressed both with his own importance and that of the Argentine, and was rather anxious to impress the importance of both on Geneva and the world, and I am told that he was much disappointed that the League was able to continue its sessions after his withdrawal.

The best of the European correspondents whom I know is Selden of the New York Post, whom I have seen everywhere I have been and also more or less in Paris. He is a real student of affairs and seems to have no particular instructions except to report facts as he sees them, and he has had pretty wide experience with all parts of Europe and with all sorts and conditions of men. For instance, when he was in here the other day, he had just returned from the meeting of the International at Lyons, where they voted to join Lenine. He was at Geneva all through the League Meeting, and I took advantage of his coming in here to ask for his impressions. He said that the meeting was tremendously impressive, and this in spite of his having gone there with the idea that it was not likely to amount to anything. He was particularly impressed with the fact that it was a meeting of men more than of nations, and that Vivianni, of France, and Robert Cecil, who, though an Englishman, represented South Africa, and Rowell, of Canada, and one or two representatives of small nations stood out as influencing the course of things because of their personalities and sense. Of course Viviani's oratorical power added tremendously to any sense that he happened to have with him. His feeling was that the League had successfully weathered the crisis and had shown efficiency so far as it was possible at this stage of the progress, and that the spirit of harmony and conciliation which grew as the men came to know each other and talked and lived together was one of its greatest successes, and that the influence of this spirit would filter back to the respective nations and particularly to the smaller countries and have a useful influence. He was impressed also, as is always the case in such assemblies, that the serious work and the greatest influences were to be found in the committees, and that the assembly did not appear to its best advantage in the public meetings.

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At a dinner the other night at Logan's Palmer the war correspondent was present and, strange to say, he even waxed enthusiastic over the League meetings. Whether he was partisan of the League before or not, I don't know, but he is a partisan now, and so I could discount a little from his account of it; but it was not out of harmony with Selden's account, though he is a little more enthusiastic. Like Selden he was particularly impressed with the personalities, and perhaps more with Robert Cecil than with anyone else; so that even though Viviani's oratorical power crowded the assembly hall whenever he spoke a few words, nevertheless it was Robert Cecil who by his character and honesty of purpose carried the most weight. Cecil has been one of the great champions of the League from the start and is always prodding Lloyd George about it in Parliament.

Palmer was particularly interesting in his account of the way in which the general influence of the assembly forced Roumania and Greece into line on one matter in which they, for reasons which in the judgment of all the others were purely selfish, were standing out. He said that they found that they could not maintain a selfish position in the face of world influence as represented by all the others there in the assembly, and scuttled quickly into line and ate their dish of crow almost as if they liked it.

Shaw has not made any kick but I guess this is a quite long letter for a late Saturday night; so I will let the League rest where it is.

Yours truly,

Albert Boyden, Esq.
60 State Street,
Boston, Mass.

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