The London Peace Congress

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The London Peace Congress.

The London Peace Congress, which was looked forward to with exceptional interest, has come and gone and built its section into the rapidly growing structure of the world's peace. An extended account of the proceedings appears elsewhere in this issue.

The Congress, in many respects, resembled all the other recent International Peace Conventions. There was the same delay and confusion, caused by differences of language and of methods of transacting business. There was necessarily a good deal of threshing over of old straw in the discussions and resolutions, for the great subjects with which the movement deals are practically the same from year to year, as in the case of all reforms. But there was also the same interest and earnestness as in previous years. Not only so, but there was a clearly marked increase in confidence, enthusiasm and determination to carry the movement forward to completion with all possible dispatch. Any reactionary and compromising utterance was quickly discountenanced and found no support anywhere. The whole body of delegates from twenty-four countries seemed peculiarly pervaded by the same spirit of high idealism, positive purpose and determination. One could feel the spirit and power of the peace movement, in its present greatness and strength, throbbing in the meetings day after day; and equally so in the public meetings held in different places in the evenings.

One who was present at the former London Peace Congress, eighteen years before, which met in the same hall under the presidency of the distinguished David Dudley Field, could not help noticing the contrast between the two meetings. That early meeting was the second in the modern series of Peace Congresses, the first having been held at Paris the year before, during the Exposition. The men and women who composed the London Congress of 1890 were able and far-seeing,— none more so. Among them were Hodgson Pratt, Frederic Passy, E. T. Moneta and others, since famous for the work which they have done. But they were comparatively few in number and had only a small constituency behind them. Prophets that they were, they uttered their thoughts and set forth their practical ideals in a brave and noble way, but little attention was paid to them, either by the press or the general public. Their purposes were either patronized as beautiful, though unrealizable dreams, or openly scoffed at as chimerical and absurd. No member of the British Cabinet at that time, or of any other Cabinet, would have ventured to show his head inside of a room where a peace meeting was going on.

What enormous progress has been registered in the eighteen years! The peace movement has extended itself to the ends of the earth. The Hague Conferences have been held, and every government on the globe has in some form given its adherence to the great cause. The most prominent feature of the recent Congress was the open and active connection of the British government with it. The reception and welcome given by King Edward and the Queen to a deputation of delegates, including one from each country represented in the Congress, was the first direct official recognition, by the head of one of the Great Powers, of the Peace Congress and its work. The Interparliamentary Union had already been received in the same way by the President of the United States. But the movement on its popular side was this year, for the first time, so recognized. The significance of this recognition cannot be overestimated. It would have been very great in any event, whatever might have been the personal attitude of the

King toward the peace cause. The movement has reached a position where it now compels the attention even of unwilling potentates: but it has reached a standing even beyond that. It receives the voluntary and spontaneous sympathy and support of the heads of great governments, as well as the small ones. That is the real and high meaning of King Edward's reception, at which he declared, with perfectly evident sincerity, that "rulers and statesmen can set before themselves no higher aim than the promotion of mutual good understanding and cordial friendship among the nations of the world." "Its attainment," he said, "will ever be the object of my own constant endeavors."

But King Edward's reception of the deputation was not the only and, indeed, not the most significant attention paid the Congress by the British Cabinet. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. David Lloyd-George, in a fine speech at the great public meeting of the Congress, in Queen's Hall, in which he dealt frankly with the absurdity and the mischief of war scares and the deplorableness of misunderstandings between nations, out of which he thought nine-tenths of their mutual trouble grew, showed himself to be quite abreast of the peacemakers themselves in his conception of what international relations ought to be. The crowning feature of the government's courtesy and coöperation — for it was, in the best sense of the term, coöperation — was the banquet given the Congress on the closing evening in the Hotel Cecil. At this dinner, at which more than four hundred guests sat down, the Right Honorable L. Harcourt, a member of the Cabinet, was in the chair. Among the distinguished personages present were the Prime Minister, the Lord High Chancellor, Ambassador Bryce and others. The Prime Minister was the chief speaker. We give his speech in full on another page. But this speech, which is open in parts to criticism, was not the chief thing to note about the occasion. The chief thing was that the dinner was given by the government to the Peace Congress in recognition of the high and pressing importance of the movement which it promotes. The expense of the banquet was met by a draft upon the new International Hospitality Fund, which the Chancellor of the Exchequer has established for the promotion of friendly relations with other countries. What more fitting consecration of this fund could there have been than the devotion of £500 of it directly to the great cause embodied in the Peace Congress!

It was this cordial support, in various ways, of the Congress and the cause in which it is engaged, by the government of Great Britain, one of the greatest powers on earth, that will make the Seventeenth Universal Peace Congress forever memorable in the history of the movement. All that the occasion means cannot be seen at once, but it will appear as time goes on and the governments of the world become more and more seriously and earnestly active in bringing to speedy completion the world institutions which the Hague Conferences have so auspiciously begun.

There is not much of any novel interest to be said of the general work of the Congress. The committees which prepared the business and drafted the resolutions did an immense amount of hard, painstaking work. The speeches and discussions were for the most part strong and vital. The Congress laid stress on the work of the second Hague Conference as far as that work dealt with the constructive lines of the peace movement and not merely with the regulation of war. It urged upon the governments the early completion of the institutions which are to bring about settled order and peace among the nations, whose foundations have been laid by the two Hague Conferences. It emphasized the necessity of thorough education in all countries, in the schools and elsewhere, in the great principles of international justice, friendliness and peaceful relations. It gave its cordial approval to the efforts of the labor organizations in different countries to establish a reign of concord and mutual service among all the toiling populations of the world. It impressed upon the great powers the necessity of recognizing and practicing the principles of justice, equity and fraternity in dealing with weaker races and peoples. It once more urged upon the governments — and this, we believe, was the supreme accomplishment of the Congress — to take up the problem of arrest of the present rivalry in the building up of great armaments and to study the question seriously with the view of putting a speedy end to this competitive arming, which is throwing ever greater and more exhausting burdens upon the inhabitants of the different countries in order to secure, if possible, without further delay, a commencement of the solution of this difficult problem. It extended an urgent invitation to the British Government, whose labors in this direction before and at the second Hague Conference were fully recognized, once more to take the initiative in an effort to secure among the nations an agreement which will put an end to the present competitive arming, the burdens of which the governments themselves frankly recognize to have become greater than the peoples ought to be called upon to bear.

Considering the representative character of the members of the Congress and the cordial coöperation of the British Government in making it a conspicuous success, we think it reasonable to believe that the Seventeenth International Peace Congress will prove to have been one of the most efficient and fruitful in hastening to its completion the movement whose aim it is to rid the world of the inhuman system of war and to reconstitute international society on a basis of genuine amity, trust and peaceful coöperation.