

A Banner of Peace

From a Military Point of View. By Colonel A. E. Mahon, D. S. O. Sole Copyright by F. H. Rauleder

PROFESSOR Roerich's idea of creating a flag to be flown over cathedrals, museums, libraries, universities and other centres of culture in every country, and that such places should be regarded as neutral territory with the object of preserving them, not merely for the country in which they are located, but for humanity as a whole, is a practical proposition and not an Utopian ideal. It is an idea that is worthy of the most earnest consideration, and we can ill afford to delay the universal adoption of such a flag.

Although the idea has been welcomed in the highest quarters, and its practicability endorsed by no less an authority than Marshal Lyautey of France, there are still sceptics who express their doubts as to the possibility of respecting such a flag in modern warfare. Similar doubts have been expressed in the past with regard to the Red Cross and yet we must admit that, in spite of regrettable accidents, the Red Cross has been respected and that it has proved an inestimable blessing to all nations.

If it is possible to respect the Red Cross which, generally speaking, is for the protection of the sick and wounded and their attendants, would it not be equally possible to protect those places which, on the cessation of hostilities, are for the benefit of both belligerents?

If it is thought that any nation would sink so low as to abuse the proposed flag and use for military purposes certain buildings over which the flag was flown, it should be possible to make it one of the conditions under which this flag is to be flown in war, that officers belonging to neutral nations should be deputed to see that no building over which this flag was flown was used for any kind of military purpose, and to report to the League of Nations any case which the neutrality of the zone was not respected.

It has to be admitted that in cases of long distance bombardments, aerial bombardments by night, defective shells etc., accidents will happen. But we believe that, as has been the case in the past with the Red Cross, such cases are genuine accidents and that no nations would sanction the bombardment of any place which they had previously agreed to regard as neutral territory.

For the effective protection of any building it would, of course, be necessary to delimit a certain specified zone in the immediate locality of such building and the whole of this zone would have to be regarded as neutral and not made use of for any military purpose. But

it will undoubtedly be necessary in future to apply this rule to hospitals, and what would be possible in one case would be equally possible in another.

If nations can agree not to use soft nosed bullets and to conform to other agreed rules for the conduct of warfare there is no reason why they should not agree to preserve from destruction those edifices which can be regarded as international treasures or which are for the lasting benefit of humanity.

It is, moreover, not only in wars between nations that this flag is a necessity. Recent happenings in Spain have shown us that it is equally desirable in revolutions and internal disorders that are liable to occur in any country. When once it is realised that certain buildings really are international treasures it should not be difficult for the nations to agree to protect them. It is very true that the most effective protection would be a universal peace, but as this happy state is not likely to be obtained in this generation, the hope of a lasting peace should not blind us to the necessity for taking measures for the protection of irreplaceable treasures until the ideal peace on earth and goodwill among men becomes an accomplished fact.

Even in the heat of war, ships flying neutral flags have been respected. It is equally possible to respect a neutral flag that indicates a neutral zone on land.

There are always to be found individuals who will decry any new idea. Possibly because they were not the originators of it, or possibly because their visions are limited. Fortunately there are men with broader minds and wider visions. In his plea for a Banner of Peace Professor Roerich has given a lead to these men who are capable of thinking internationally and whose patriotism has not blinded them to the greater issues. One of the greatest dangers to peace is when patriotism runs riot, and the greatest enemies to their own countries are the misguided and over-zealous patriots.

A wider outlook, an outlook that goes beyond our present needs, that considers the future of mankind and the future of our own posterity will surely see that by limiting the destruction of war to purely military needs we are making a long step forward towards that higher state of civilisation that we hope may some day attain that everlasting peace we all so ardently desire.

If the Banner of Peace is not practical from a military point of view then the Red Cross is also not practical, but the Red Cross has been proved to be practical, therefore, as Euclid would say, Q. E. D.

