CHAPTER XIII

LEAGUE OF NATIONS POLICY
AN AGONIZING REAPPRAISAL

In view of their long attachment to the policy of neutrality, it is surprising that there was so little opposition among the Dutch to joining the League of Nations. The step was not taken, however, without grave misgivings. The Dutch attitude was graphically described by Foreign Minister van Karnebeek in reply to a member of parliament who had spoken of the act as a jump in the dark: “When there is darkness and a jump must be made into it, the question which this assembly must answer is: is it not better to jump with than without the League?”

There were two currents in Dutch foreign policy which, if they were not contradictory, were hardly complementary and the decision to become a member of the League of Nations represented the triumph of one over the other. One current was that of interest in the peace movement and the development of international cooperation and the other that of an timid neutrality which questioned and feared any positive move in foreign policy as a dangerous involvement in great power politics. Though thoroughly committed to it, the Dutch were not altogether happy about this cautious policy. Professor A. Anema of the Free University of Amsterdam gave expression to this feeling in the First Chamber in 1923,1 While he was in general agreement with the old policy he declared that it had a dark side. It was chiefly negative and did nothing to develop an international conciousness. The Dutch felt no responsibility for developments in the international fields; they had come to stand egotistically in a small corner and no longer felt themselves members of the world community. “Something small entered our politics, something restrictive which left no room for enthusiasm for a great idea, no eagerness to cooperate for the realization of a great international ideal.”

During the last two years of World War I Foreign Minister Loudon had been urged to give active support to movements for the organization of peace. Mr H. C. Dresselhuys, chairman of the Anti-War Council and member of the Second Chamber, on January 24, 1917, inquired of the Foreign Minister as to what the attitude of the Ministry was toward the League to Enforce Peace and the views of President Wilson and on December 21, 1917, he asked Loudon what he had done and what he planned to do for peace. He also requested financial support from the Government for the peace movement. Similar questions were asked by other members of parliament. Some members urged upon him the desirability of cooperating with other states in forming plans for a durable peace for Europe after the war. Vincent Rutgers, member of the Anti-revolutionary Party, warned his parliamentary colleagues that the Netherlands might soon be confronted with the problem of international organization and that the States-General would have to participate actively in considering this important question. He regretted the lukewarm reference to the League of Nations in the Speech from the Throne. He urged the Foreign Minister to appoint a commission to study the matter and enlighten the public on the issue. Other members advised the minister to be cautious, but it was clear from Loudon's replies that this advice was wholly unnecessary. He answered all the questions and proddings in vague, negative terms. He thought it unwise for a country like the Netherlands to bind itself to participate in collective sanctions, whether economic or military. Answering neither yes or no to the question of whether he was prepared to discuss with other neutral governments the formation of an organization for peace, he promised only to consider it.

When the invitation to become a member of the League of Nations came, the Government decided to ask parliament for authorization to ratify the Covenant. In the explanatory memorandum accompanying its request, the Government dealt with the problem in realistic terms. It stated that League membership would involve obligations which could not be reconciled with the rules of neutrality which had thus far prevailed and would in-