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SWITZERLAND AND THE ATOMIC BOMB.

You may think this is a surprising title. Everyone knows Switzerland has never dreamed of manufacturing atomic bombs or anything else of so destructive a nature. We are determined to defend our soil in all circumstances, but we shall never use weapons of aggression. It is true that a few years ago the Swiss parliament allotted a substantial sum, several million Swiss francs, to atomic research, but it was well understood that what was being aimed at was technical research into the possible peaceful uses of nuclear energy. Switzerland has always been in the forefront of industrial research and she could not afford to lag behind in this particular branch.

But some weeks ago the Swiss Government did make an announcement about the atomic bomb, that terrible weapon whose use threatens to destroy civilisation itself. This announcement did not propose to manufacture the atomic bomb, neither did it consider what counter measures could be taken to the terrifying armaments which certain great powers are accumulating. The purpose of the Swiss Government's announcement was to reply to the initiative recently taken by the International Red Cross.

As you know, the International Red Cross has its headquarters in Geneva and is composed only of Swiss citizens, and is a humanitarian organisation which for more than a century past has undertaken the protection of the innocent victims of war. The services it rendered during the last world war are well known — it managed to save countless lives. But it realises also that it was powerless to save the lives of innumerable other victims, and for this very reason — because it could not succeed in doing all it wanted to, because it was cramped by limitations on its field of activity which had been agreed upon long ago and had become out of date, the International Red Cross has been trying since the end of the war to reach a more solid basis for its operations. It has had its constitution brought up to date by a successful international diplomatic conference held under Swiss auspices in Geneva.

But the International Red Cross could not rest content with this. Its moral prestige required it to intervene with all its authority now that it has become clear that the ideological conflict between two groups of powers is in danger of seeking a solution by force, in which the most destructive weapons would be brought into play. It therefore recently made a sensational

appeal to all countries to redouble their efforts to arrive at an agreement to prohibit atomic weapons.

Switzerland was, of course, among the nations who received this appeal although the matter is not of direct concern to her. The Swiss Government has just replied congratulating the International Red Cross on her generous action. A formal acknowledgement would clearly not have been enough, but Switzerland is too small a country to presume to teach other nations a lesson and so could not take any sensational steps in this respect.

But our Government did go somewhat farther. It did not offer its good offices, but it did declare that it was "ready to support future efforts to obtain effective protection against the danger" represented by the atomic bomb. In other words it is ready to render all services which it could reasonably be expected to render in order to solve the problem on which the fate of humanity in great measure depends. It is ready, for example, to call or to preside over an international conference. It has not thrust itself forward but it has placed itself at the disposal of the interested parties in order to canalise whatever good will may show itself. It is hoped that the quiet way in which this offer has been made will not lead to its being overlooked. Switzerland seeks no praise for the part it may play in solving the most fearful problem of modern times. But if its offer is accepted it may possibly lead to a solution. And that is what the people of every nation wish for with all their hearts.

PIERRE BEGUIN.

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