

Where the League of Nations Meets

By GAIUS GLENN ATKINS

THE determination to make Geneva the headquarters of the League of Nations lends a new interest to a city whose beauty of situation is equalled only by its great history. It has a population of less than 120,000 but it stands out like the mountain which looks down upon it in the long story of the fight for ordered liberty.

The region belonged to Rome to begin with. Caesar conquered it and Rome held it for almost 500 years. The Huns—the real Huns, not the recent imitators—razed Geneva to the ground in their invasion of Central Europe, and the Burgundians—Burgundy is named after them—rebuilt it. Charlemagne made it part of his great empire in 800 and, dying, left it pretty much to itself. Thereafter for seven hundred years, the town belonged to the German Empire or to the Bishop of Geneva or to the Duke of Savoy as one or another was strong enough to possess it. And the people, being from the first sturdy and liberty loving, drove sharp bargains with their masters. They played Bishop against Duke and Duke against Bishop as best served their own ends and secured, through the centuries, privileges and franchises which they guarded most jealously. Finally they drove the Duke out altogether, sent the Bishop about his business, and became a free city. All this by the time of the Reformation and most of it before Columbus discovered America.

The town was astonishingly small to have played so great a part. It had 5,800 inhabitants in 1340, 6,490 in 1404 and 12,500 in 1545. The Geneva of the 16th century was mostly on the right bank of the Rhone with a smaller town on the left bank, the two joined by a bridge which was, itself, a crowded street of houses—that bridge was later destroyed in a famous fire. The houses were roofed with red tile and high above them all was the red-tiled cathedral. The city had walls and moats and drawbridges—a full medieval outfit. One may still follow, as he climbs the hill above the quays and the fascinating shop windows, the narrow, turning streets of the old city. Sometimes you may touch a wall on either hand, so narrow are they, and sometimes the houses meet over your head and you climb through a tunnel whose stone steps are worn deep by the passing feet of generations. (They still drive goats along these narrow ways to be milked while you wait, assuring you of an uncontaminated supply drawn direct from the source.) It is all as clean as a polished floor today—you might eat off those streets—but the Middle Ages had different habits. Carefree citizens had an unpleasant way of emptying slops out of their windows to the inconvenience of those in the streets below, of establishing refuse heaps at their front doors—a practice to which rural Switzerland still clings—of giving their pigs the freedom of the city and slaughtering the same pigs in their back yards. The city was full of beggars and lepers. They were a merry people with it all, much given to gossip and outdoor dancing, and careless in their habits and speech. It was ordered, among other things, that whoever "swears without necessity"—just what justified swearing we are not told—should kneel down in the place of his offense and kiss the ground, or else pay a fine of three cents. Considering the character of the soil, it is likely that the more well-to-do paid the fine. The Reformation changed all this and it is with the Ref-

ormation that the greater history of Geneva begins. And it began stormily enough. The people of Geneva had no great reason for thinking kindly of the Bishop and they were, doubtless, glad enough of an excuse to be rid of him. Faith and disorder, piety and the breaking of church windows went hand in hand until John Calvin, passing through Geneva with no mind to stay longer than overnight, ended by spending his life there and disciplining that community as no people has been disciplined before or since. He had trouble enough doing it; he was exiled and recalled, he lived an austere and laborious life, he strangely confused the great and the unessential, he did many things he might well have left undone and stained his administration with the blood and ashes of martyred men. It was a bitter age and he shared its faults, but nonetheless he laid in Geneva the foundations of free government and free faith. Geneva became a refuge for the persecuted followers of the reformed faith for the whole of Europe. Her citizens shared their last loaf with the refugees of France after St. Bartholomew's, and manned their walls and kept them free.

THE deeper, stronger currents of English, Dutch and American Democracy flow from Geneva as the Rhone from the lake, and there is a connection of which every historian must take account between the faith and discipline of Geneva and the beginnings of free government. Whatever faith a man holds today, the story of Geneva during these troubled times must move him as a bugle call heard across the hills of time.

They have just been completing in the city a noble memorial to Calvin and his associates, and the names of the men who live again in marble and bronze are a part of the story of the freer Europe and America.

Calvin gives Geneva and Switzerland the beginnings of an educational system which has been perfected until the Swiss schools are probably, as a whole, the best in the world. They are especially strong in technical education—no Swiss boy is allowed to leave school until he is trained for some specific work. The industrial prosperity of Switzerland is rooted in the fine quality of this technical education. After the Reformation Geneva grew and pros-

pered, though not without its troubles. In 1798 it was made the capital of a department of Napoleonic France, and, after Waterloo, it joined the Swiss Confederation. In 1847 the Canton of Geneva adopted a purely democratic constitution which is still substantially in force.

Geneva is rich in literary and scientific association. The first printing press was set up in 1478 and the first historian of the town was Francois Bonivard, the Prisoner of Chillon, whose history is a most human document as Bonivard was a most human sort of man. He was captured in the course of a private war he was conducting against the Duke of Savoy for the capture of certain lands belonging to a certain Priory to which he thought himself to have a right, and was thrust into a dungeon below the level of the lake where he was kept for five years. "I had such abundant leisure for walking up and down," he says, "that I wore a little pathway in the rock which forms the pavement of the dungeon just as though it had been knocked out with a hammer"—and that pathetic way, so deeply and so

wearily worn, is still there. Sebastian Castillio, one of the greatest scholars of his time and perhaps the first spokesman for toleration in an intolerant age, came to Geneva for a little while. Calvin was there and he was driven out—his day had not yet come.

Voltaire lived, toward the end of his life, just outside Geneva and greatly scandalized that staid community by his love of the theater and his determination to mislead the populace into attending plays—and he succeeded.

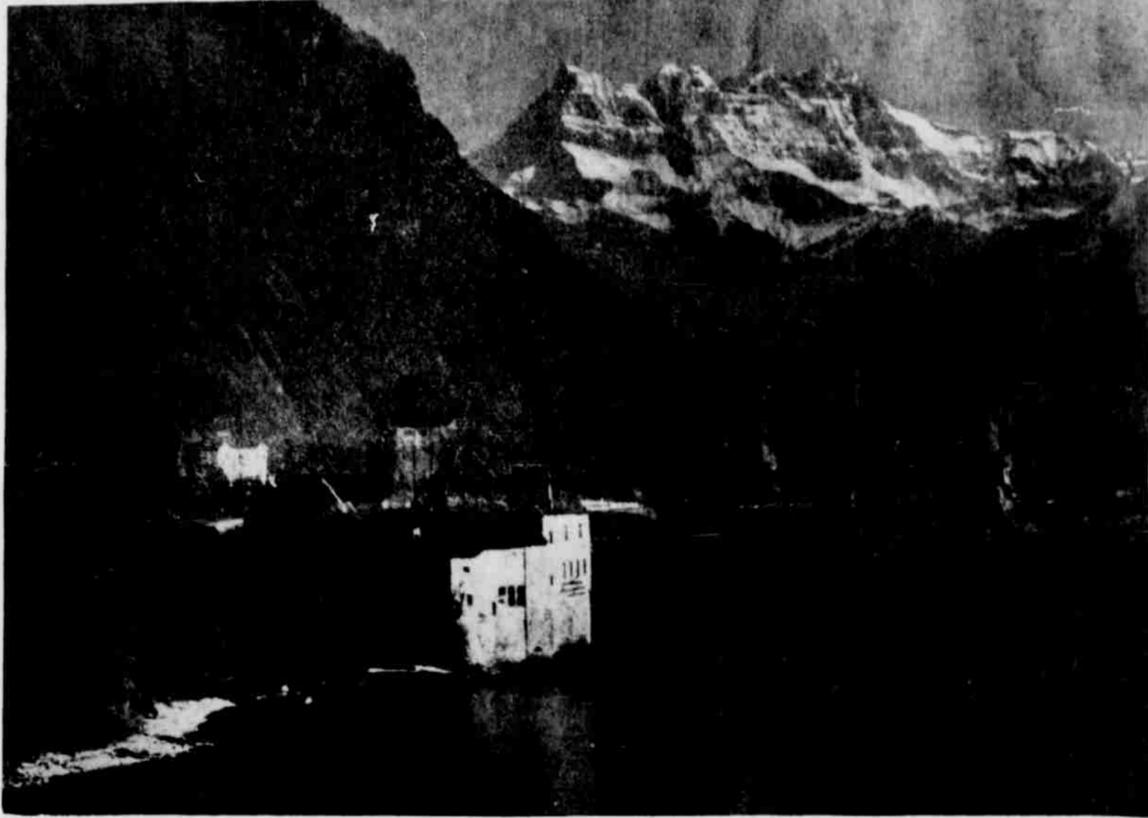
Rousseau came and went from Geneva—a man whose life belied all his principles but who began a revolution with a novel, and released forces which have remade the world.

Gibbon lived at Lausanne—a little up the lake—and finished his famous history in an arbor which commands a view of mountains and blue water which might well lift a man's eyes from any task.

Madame de Staël defied Napoleon from the safe shelter of the walls of Geneva, proved that the pen was mightier than the sword, and carried on unsavory love affairs at the same time.

After 1848 the Swiss Republic showed a peculiar hospitality to exiled revolutionists from France, Germany and Russia. Geneva was, for years, the headquarters for the earlier and more devoted Russian lovers of freedom. Today the city is such a combination of old and new as one will find almost nowhere else. Its battles are but memories. Its shop windows are the most fascinating in Europe, its islands and bridges rich in beauty. The blue waters of the lake wash its quays and the swans float gravely along its shores. The Rhone flows so clear and blue as it were the sky itself made liquid, and the craft of the lake spread their brown and purple sails wide and wing like birds. Mont Blanc lies along the southeastern horizon, white with eternal snows, a prophecy in the dawn, a glowing memory in the sunset. And the lesser mountains, their terraced sides rich in gardens and vineyards, guard the city as though they loved it.

It is a fit place to begin a new experiment in the co-operation of the nations—a city old in story, rich in high associations and dauntless in its devotion to freedom.



Chillon Castle, containing the dungeons of the "Prisoner of Chillon." One of the historic sights of Geneva, Switzerland.



John Spargo is one of the best known authorities on Socialism. He represented that point of view at the Federal Industrial Conference. (C) Harris & Ewing



Matthew Woll is one of the younger labor leaders who helped discuss the causes and cure of the prevalent industrial unrest in the United States. Press Ill. Service



The farmer is a laborer, as well as a capitalist. O. E. Bradlute, Ohio farmer, represented Agricultural interests at the Washington conference. (C) Harris & Ewing



Lord Deerpurst is either lucky or far-seeing. He married an American fortune and now his aunt has died leaving him a legacy of \$3,000,000. (C) Press Ill. Service