HE YEAR 1919 comes to us with the appearance of one of the most pregnant and historic dates of the modern world. It has ended the greatest war in history, begotten a new thing in the history of mankind, a League of Nations which claims to be the foundation-stone for the future united life of the human race, and cleared the stage for fresh and momentous other constructions or destructions, which will bring us into another structure of society and of the framework of human life than has yet been known in the recorded memory of the earth's peoples. This is record enough for a single year and it looks as if there were already sufficient to give this date an undisputed pre-eminence in the twentieth century. But it is possible that things are not quite what they look to the contemporary eye and that posterity may see them in a very different focus. 1815 must have seemed the date of dates to the men of the day whose minds were filled with the view of the long struggle between the ancient regimes and revolutionary France and then between Europe and Napoleon. But when we look back at present, we see that it was only a stage, the end of the acutest phase of struggle, the commencement of a breathing-time, the date of a makeshift which could not endure. We look back from it to 1789 which began the destruction of an old order and the birth of a new ideal and beyond it to later dates which mark the progress of that ideal towards its broadening realisation. So too posterity may look back beyond this year 1919 to the beginning of the catastrophe which marks the first collapse of the former European order and forward beyond it to dates yet in the womb of the future which will mark the progress towards realisation of whatever order and ideal is destined to replace it. This year too may be only the end of an acute phase of a first struggle, the commencement of a breathing-time, the year of a makeshift, the
temporary halt of a flood in motion. That is so because it has not realised the deeper mind of humanity nor answered to the far-reaching intention of the Time-Spirit.

In the enthusiasm of the struggle a hope arose that it would sweep away all the piled-up obstacles to human progress and usher in with a miraculous immediateness a new age. A vague ideal also syllabled eloquently of peace, of brotherhood, of freedom, of unity, which for the moment partly enlightened and kindled the soul of the race and gave its intellect a broader vista. Men spoke of the powers of good and evil separated on opposite sides and locked in a decisive conflict. These ideas were the exaggerations of sentiment and idealistic reason and in their excessive and blinding light many things took covert which were of a very different nature. The hope could not but be an illusion, a halo scene of the dream mind when it sees a future possibility in its own light apart from existing conditions. Human mind and action are too much of a tangled coil to admit of such miraculous suddennesses; the physical shock of war and revolution can break down stifling obstructions, but they cannot of themselves create either the kingdom of good or the kingdom of God; for that a mental and spiritual change is needed to which our slowly moving human nature takes time to shape its customary being. The ideal, a thing of the intellect and the sentiment only, cannot so easily bring about its own effectuation; force of circumstance, the will to survive of existing actualities, the insistent past of our own nature are not so easily blown away by the eager shouting of a few high and great words or even by the breath of the thought behind them, however loudly blare the trumpets of the ideal. Nor was the war itself precisely a definite issue between pure good and pure evil,—such distinctions belong to the world of the idealistic reason of which our actual intricate existence in whose net opposites are very bafflingly fused together, is as yet at least no faithful reproduction,—but a very confused clash and catastrophe of the intertangled powers of the past, present and future. The result actually realised is only such as might have been expected from the balance of the forces at work. It is not the last result nor the end of the whole matter, but it
represents the first sum of things that was ready for working out in the immediateness of the moment’s potency. More was involved which will now press for its reign, but belongs to the future.

The cataclysm of the last five years had a Janus face, one side turned towards the past, one turned towards the future. In its dealings with the past it was a conflict between two forces, one represented by Germany and the central Powers, the other by America and the western nations of Europe. Outwardly, imperial Germany represented a very nakedly brutal imperialism and militarism satisfied of its own rightful claim and perfection and opposed to the broader middle-class democracy — but democracy tainted with a half-hearted, uneasy, unwilling militarism and a liberalised, comfortably half-idealistic imperialism — of western Europe. But this was only the outside of the matter, in itself it would not have been a sufficient occasion for so great a catastrophe. Imperial Germany and all it represented had to go because it was the worst side of European civilisation enthroned in all the glory of a perfect mechanical and scientific efficiency. Its figure was a composite godhead of Moloch and Mammon seated between the guardian figures of Intelligence and Science. It had its ideal, a singular combination of the remnants of the old spirit of monarchy and feudalism now stripped of all its past justification, of a very modern burdensome organised aggressive commercialism and industrialism and of a mechanised State socialism administered by an empire and a bureaucracy, all guided by an expert intelligence and power of science. This triple-headed caricature of a future ideal for the world with its claim to take possession of the race and mechanise its life for it had to be broken, and with it passed away almost all the old phantoms of aristocracy and survivals of aristocratic monarchy which still lived on in an increasingly democratic Europe. So much the war has swept away; but its more important and positive result is not the destruction of the past, but a shaking even of the present bases and a clearing of the field for the forces of the future.

The future does not belong to that hybrid thing, a middle-
class democracy infected with the old theory of international relations, however modified by concessions to a new broader spirit of idealism. The peace which closes the war is evidently in part a prolongation of the past and a thing of the moment, its only importance for the future is its association with the plan for a league of nations. But this league also is a makeshift, a temporary device awaiting the possibility of a more perfect formation. Its insecurity lies in the degree to which it is a concession to the past and founded on a present which is indeed still dominant, but very evidently doomed to a rapid passing. The future destined to replace this present is evident enough in some of its main outward tendencies, in society away from plutocracy and middle-class democracy to some completeness of socialism and attempt at a broad and equal commonalty of social living, in the relations of the peoples away from aggressive nationalism and balances of power to some closer international comity. But these are only symptoms, feelings out, mechanical tendencies, not likely by themselves, whatever changes they bring, to satisfy for long the soul of humanity. Behind them lies a greater question of the spirit and ideal which are to govern the relations of man with man and people with people in the age that is opening, the most critical because the most far-reaching in its hopes of all the historic ages of humanity.

Meanwhile much is gone that had to go, though relics and dregs of it remain for destruction, and the agony of a sanguinary struggle is ended, and for that there may well be rejoicing. But if something is ended, all has yet to be begun. The human spirit has still to find itself, its idea and its greater orientation.