

Ian Mitchell's Britain-related BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

13 – Larger Idea – Turner

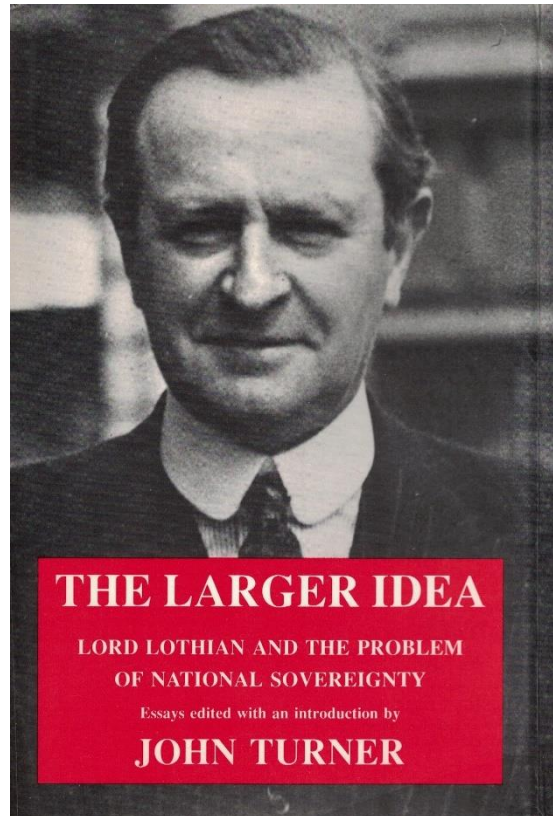
THE LARGER IDEA: Lord Lothian and the Problem of National Sovereignty

Author: Edited by John Turner

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Reviewer: Ian Mitchell, 12 July 2018



Reason to read: Describes the arguments for world government, international federation and transnational bodies like the European Union as put by the aristocratic Scottish diplomat and activist who was our Ambassador to the US in 1940 and responsible for negotiating the “transnational” Lend-Lease scheme which saved Britain (and therefore the US) from the arguably equivalent alliance of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia.

Main talking points:

1. As assistant to Lloyd George, it was Philip Kerr (as Lothian was before inheriting the 11th Marquessate in 1930) who drafted the “war guilt” clause in the Versailles treaty in 1919. He later came to regret having done so. Many people think the “world government” approach he advocated in the inter-war years was partly the result of his developing sense of personal guilt at having imposed national guilt on the German people. However, it seems to me not entirely unreasonable to say, as Kerr did in 1919 by way of justification, that “Germany saw fit to gratify her lust for tyranny by resort to war.” (Perhaps “dominance” would have been a better word than “tyranny”, but the jackboot ruled then too.) As is well known, the Reichswehr marched off to the front half-deafened by bands and cheering supporters, from the Kaiser to kinder. As a result, Kerr believed, “Europe must be freed from Prussian tyranny” and a “reign of law” substituted. (p. 50)
2. Later, Kerr tried to support the rule of international law by promoting the League of Nations. However, he was realistic about the unspoken aim. “His scheme for the League of Nations reflects the need to place Britain on a theoretically equal footing at least with the other Great

Powers... But Kerr could not easily give up the notion of British leadership, since justice and fair play were pre-eminently such British values.... *International organisations should be set up to keep other nations in order.*" (p. 59) (emphasis added)

3. Later still, Lothian came to understand that socialism was one of the most powerful forces encouraging centralisation, second only to war, and was therefore "the greatest enemy of democracy in the world." (p. 112)

Thought(s) provoked: Kerr had a point when he argued that "application of the rule of law to international affairs requires federation." (p. 122) He lived at a time when Europe was not unlike Russia today in that people in Moscow will tell you, with some justice, that there is *no such thing* as international law because law of any sort requires enforcement. Without a global policeman there can be no international *law*, only alliances for mutual protection. Kerr's view was that of a sportsman. (He was a scratch golfer and Oxford Blue.) Individuals who understand the etiquette of sport and apply it to public affairs are more likely than those who do not to respect laws they autonomously and voluntarily observe. (The same spirit applies to the etiquette, or "honour", of an officer class or an upper class, or members of a stock market.) By analogy, countries whose culture accepts reciprocity, law and sanctity of diplomatic contract are more likely than others to respect international law, such as it is in a world where there are no referees or line judges. Law to the Russian state has always been a simple question of power, and of violence against any subjects and neighbouring states who do not respect the state's power and behave accordingly. By contrast, sportsmanship implies self-limitation in the interests of a larger group, starting with your opponent. In that sense, Lothian was entirely correct to suggest that international organisations should exist to promote the rule of law amongst "backward" people like Ludendorff, the Kaiser, the Nazis, Stalin and, had he lived longer, the EU bureautocracy and their acolytes in Edinburgh.

Incidental interest: Kerr's first job, after narrowly failing to win a Fellowship at All Souls, was working for Lord Milner's "Kindergarten", a group of young, hand-picked Oxbridge "stars" (John Buchan was another) who had been sent out to govern southern Africa after the Boer War. For Kerr, as a future internationalist, this was a formative experience. He saw life beyond the British horizons of the day for the first time. His initial reactions were paternalistic and imperialist. He said of a meeting he had with the Chinese Ambassador that it was "uncanny" to talk to a "Chinaman" on the same level of intelligence as himself. (p. 20) His attitude to the Boers was even less respectful. Echoing the logic of the Highland "clearers" of a century before, he said "the ordinary backveld Boer was more or less a hopeless case, and that the sooner he was forced off the land the better." (p. 27)

Surprising points:

1. However, when he went to India in 1938 to help devise a constitution for the colony, Lothian, as he by then was, had "gone native", at least as far as treating Indians as equals was concerned. "A bemused Viceroy informed London of Lothian's conduct when resident at Gandhi's ashram: 'though he had been offered a chair and meals in his room, he had preferred to squat in the family circle.' In 1921 E.M. Forster wrote from Hyderabad that *Britain had lost India through bad manners*. No European did more to arrest this tendency than Lothian." (p. 76) (emphasis added)

2. When, in 1934, Gandhi withdrew from politics, he explained his view in terms which reflect the SNP approach to political disruption today. “To co-operate with Britain’s constitutional experiment meant that the Congress party would become merely one of the competing parties while the Raj kept the ring.” (p. 63) In other words, Gandhi wanted a constitution *imposed* so he could complain about it and rally the people behind him in opposing a “tyranny” he refused to help mitigate unless doing so brought him personal power and glory. He was operating less for the benefit of his country than of himself. How very Nationalist of him!
3. When he drafted the German “war guilt” clause, Kerr was a lapsed Catholic; by the time he became an internationalist and alleged “appeaser”, as part of the so-called Cliveden Set in the late 1930s, he had become a Christian Scientist (at the instigation of Lady Astor).

Negative issue(s): None

Style: Varied, as the essays are all by different people, but “high-end academography” might describe it overall.

Amusing bit(s): The British Ambassador to Washington in 1924 (a less tactful relative of Lothian’s) got the capital’s press corps on side by saying airily, at his introductory press conference, that “he played golf instead of reading their newspapers, but they would nevertheless get along splendidly because ‘they were just the same esurient, bibulous and concupiscent bipeds as the rest of us.’” (p. 90)

Author: N/A

Link(s): A newsreel film of Lothian’s last speech as Ambassador in the US (he died from illness in December 1940 after, as Christian Scientist, refusing medical help):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GbA110iz2wI>

Overall recommendation level: MEDIUM HIGH

About the reviewer: Ian Mitchell is the author of four books, including *Isles of the West* and *The Justice Factory*. He is writing a multi-volume study of Russian and Western constitutional history to be called *Russia and the Rule of Law*. He lives in Campbeltown and can be contacted at ianbookrec@gmail.com. For other reviews in this series, see: <https://www.moffatrussianconferences.com/ian-mitchell-s-russia>