

military necessity would ever, under any circumstances, allow their armed forces to damage in any way cultural property of any other power that has signed this treaty."

Although it is considered a great forward step for so many of the world's leading powers to come to an agreement about just what should be done to protect man's cultural heritage, thus marking a forward step toward taking some of the barbarity out of war, such a concern is not new. The United States for many years has taken the leadership in measures toward this end.

Civil War Plan

Our concern for the protection of cultural monuments and rare and beautiful objects dates back to the Civil War, when Dr. Francis Lieber worked out a plan that resulted in General Order 100 to govern the action of Federal forces in the field. The forces were not charged with the active protection of cultural treasures, but they were prohibited from wanton destruction of them.

The United States took part in international discussion of the problem in 1899 and again in 1907. These meetings, as this year's, were held at The Hague. Before World War II, the United States joined in the signing of the Roerich Pact for the same purpose.

In 1943, by presidential order, the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic Monuments in Europe was established. This commission came to be known, from its chairman, the Hon. Owen J. Roberts, Justice of the Supreme Court, as the Roberts Commission. The Roberts Commission aided the military in starting a specialist branch of expert monuments, fine arts and archives officers.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Handshake Spreads Germs

► HANDS AND fingers can have disease germs on them and can therefore spread disease from one person to another. If you have wondered whether you could get or give some disease by shaking hands with another person, here, in part, are answers given in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (July 31) to a doctor who inquired about it:

"In contagious disease hospitals especially but also in children's hospitals, the hands can be an extremely important factor in transmitting infection from one patient to another. But such accidents can be prevented by adhering to the principles of medical asepsis. This includes of course the washing of hands whenever contaminated.

"Outside of hospitals and similar institutions, mere handshaking probably plays an insignificant part in transmission of disease under ordinary circumstances. Even persons with fungus infections of the hands might not transmit the disease by a momentary clasp of one's hand, nor would apparently

There were a total of 200 such officers, known in the field as the "Venus Fixers." The effective work of these officers and the Roberts Commission created much lasting good will for the United States in Europe. They accomplished a great deal in returning to their rightful owners, works of art that had been removed in the course of military action.

European Nations Exposed

The European nations, particularly France, Italy and Holland, because of their peculiarly exposed geographical position and their wealth of the world's artistic and historic treasures, have had particular concern with this problem of cultural protection.

Holland has made a magnificent effort on her own part and in a very practical way to provide refuges for her own cultural treasures, including a so-called atomic-bomb-proof shelter for great works of art.

It was through the initiative of Italy and France, and particularly UNESCO, and at the special invitation of the Netherlands that the recent meeting was held at The Hague.

Significant provision of this year's treaty is the pledge made by each nation signing it to respect not only the cultural treasures of other nations, but also their own. This means that each nation signing has promised not to make use of museums, art galleries, cathedrals or similar buildings or their environs either to house troops, or to serve as lookout stations or for any other military purpose.

In the past, where such cultural objects have been destroyed, it has sometimes been due to the action of the military forces under attack in misusing a cultural shrine as a military post.

Science News Letter, August 14, 1954

To people who want to write but can't get started

Do you have the constant urge to write but fear that a beginner hasn't a chance? Then listen to what the former editor of *Liberty* said on this subject:

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