

The American MERCURY

THE WAR TO START WAR

BY NATHANIEL PEFFER

SEVENTEEN years ago there came to an end the war to end war. Ten years after that, somewhat superfluously it would seem, all the great nations of the earth bound themselves in a solemn compact never again to resort to arms. Concurrently there have been numerous mutual pledges of nonaggression, international engagements in guaranty of security, and a world-wide ferment of antiwar movements almost revivalistic in intensity and fervor. But in these seventeen years since the Great Crusade, while war has been abolished over and over again, there has not been one year in which armed men of one nationality have not been killing armed men of another nationality for what has been conceived to be a national purpose.

Since 1919 there have been four major wars: between Russia and Poland in 1920; between Greece and Turkey in 1921 and 1922; between China and Japan in 1931, 1932, and 1933; between Paraguay and Bolivia intermittently since 1928 and on a large scale since 1934. It is perhaps most significant of the times that, whereas before 1914, when we still had little hope of abolishing war, any one of these wars

would have galvanized the world, now they have been almost taken for granted. In the last few months sharp battles have been fought in the Gran Chaco between the Paraguayans and Bolivians which a generation ago would have been reported by correspondents mobilized from all parts of the world. Today they do not get space on the first pages of the newspapers. They appear to be the normal procedure, something in the nature of railroad wrecks. This, too, is significant, that in not one of these conflicts has there been a formal declaration of war. To that extent war has been abolished.

I have set out for emphasis these four wars because they have been the most sustained and the most serious. But they are not all. Because the record is more eloquent than any analysis, I wish to draw up what might be called a calendar of war in a world officially warless. Here it is:

1919

The World War broke up into segments of small local wars. Literally they cried peace, but there was no peace. The former

Eastern Front had been reconstituted under another name. The Bolsheviki were fighting in Esthonia, in Finland, in Latvia, against the Allies in the Baltic region, against the Poles in the Ukraine, against White Russians with Allied support in the Caucasus, and against Rumania.

In Asia Minor the Greeks, incited by the British, occupied Smyrna, and there was fighting against the Turks.

The Czechs and Poles fought around Teschen.

Hungary, newly become communist, started a war against Serbia.

Rumania invaded Hungary.

D'Annunzio occupied Fiume.

In Asia the White General Kolchak, with the aid of an inter-Allied expedition including American forces, conducted a campaign across Siberia, being finally defeated by the Reds.

In Korea there was a rising against the Japanese which was crushed with ferocity.

1920

Greek troops took the offensive in Asia Minor, extending their occupation over a large part of Anatolia.

First the Russians, then the Poles, seized Vilna in Lithuania. Russia invaded Poland and then was driven back. The White Russian General Wrangel, supported by the British and French, began a campaign against the Bolsheviki in the Crimea and the Ukraine but was crushed.

In British Somaliland, in Northeast Africa, there was a native uprising, which had to be put down by a British expedition.

The Turks invaded Armenia.

There was a rebellion in Iraq, and the British had to send troops.

A French expedition had to be sent against Syrian Nationalists.

1921

In Anatolia war broke out in earnest be-

tween Turkish Nationalists and the Greek force of occupation.

Poland invaded Upper Silesia.

French planes carried out aerial bombardments in Syria.

The Moroccan tribes revolted against Spain, with sharp engagements at intervals in the course of the year.

Under Arab attacks, British troops were forced to evacuate the Yemen in Arabia.

1922

Turkish troops under Mustapha Kemal took the offensive in Asia Minor and drove the Greeks out of the country after months of bitter fighting, with losses on the scale of World War casualties.

There was continued fighting in Morocco, with Spanish reverses.

There was fighting in Arabia in which the Mohammedan fundamentalist Ibn Saud was victorious.

The British put down native risings in the Kenya colony in Africa.

1923

Italian forces bombarded and took Corfu, off the coast of Greece. The League of Nations "settled" the incident by ordering Greece to pay an indemnity.

Lithuanian troops occupied Memel. The League of Nations "settled" the incident by awarding Memel to Lithuania, but with an autonomous status.

The British were involved in fighting which broke out in Iraq.

1924

The Moroccan rising became general, led by Abd-el Krim, and both France and Spain were engaged in it.

The British suppressed a mutiny in Khartoum, in the Sudan.

Ibn Saud began a general attack in the Hedjaz which lasted intermittently until 1926.

1925

There was a border clash between Greece and Bulgaria. The Greeks took twenty miles of Bulgarian territory but were forced by the League of Nations to evacuate.

Fighting continued throughout the year in Morocco, where the French bore the brunt of the attack against Abd-el Krim.

The Druse rebellion broke out in Syria, and the French bombarded Damascus.

1926

United States Marines were landed in Nicaragua. Desultory fighting against the rebel leader, Sandino, lasted until 1929.

Ibn Saud completed his mastery of the Nejd and the Hedjaz.

The French again bombarded Damascus, destroying a considerable part of the city.

1927

The French crushed Abd-el Krim and brought the war in Morocco to a close.

Military expeditions were landed in China by the Western Powers (including the United States) and Japan to defend foreign possessions against Chinese nationalists.

1928

Fighting broke out between Bolivia and Paraguay in the boundary dispute over the Gran Chaco.

Italy sent a punitive expedition to Libya.

1929

In reprisal for China's seizure of the Chinese Eastern Railway in North Manchuria and imprisonment of Russian officials of the Railway, the Soviet army took the offensive in Manchuria and administered a crushing defeat to the Chinese.

1930-35

These years are too close to need itemizing. There have been two first-class wars and the preliminaries of the next European war. The conflict in the Gran Chaco is unabated. Large forces are engaged on both sides, with losses in proportion. More serious is the war in the Far East, where Japan has invaded and conquered an area more than twice as large as France and, incidentally, has shelled and occupied Shanghai, one of the largest ports in the world. For six months following September, 1931, there was continuous fighting in Manchuria and around Shanghai. In 1933 Japan added the province of Jehol in Eastern Inner Mongolia to its conquered territory, incorporating the whole as the pseudo-independent state of Manchukuo. Since then there has been periodic fighting in Manchukuo, nominally for the suppression of "bandits," as the Japanese call the Chinese guerilla forces that refuse to submit. War casualties have become too much a matter of routine in recent years to be counted, but that the losses in the various Chinese-Japanese encounters exceed 100,000 cannot be doubted.

II

No great argument is required to establish the conclusions from this evidence. We have not abolished war. We have not even curbed it. There has been prohibition, in the connotation of that word familiar in recent American history. The so-called peace efforts from the signing of the Covenant of the League of Nations to the latest international conference (I do not know how many more conferences there will be between the time that this is written and the time it appears, and it does not matter) all may be classified as another "experiment noble in purpose." Perhaps that is unjust

to the Eighteenth Amendment, since those who advocated that amendment were sincere, while those who have sponsored all the enactments, covenants, pledges, and guaranties against war have been palpably insincere. They have not really meant to prohibit war. Acknowledging it to be evil, they have not been willing to deprive themselves of its uses. In the Kellogg Pact, for example, the nations bound themselves not to resort to war to attain national ends, but thereto they attached reservations which made weasel words of the treaty. They exempted defensive purposes, which is to excuse war for any purpose, since there never has been a modern war that was not called defensive by the nation waging it. When the nations entered that reservation, they revealed their real intentions or lack of intentions.

It is undeniable, of course, that on the part of large numbers of individuals who have been actively engaged in the peace movement there has been sincerity and genuineness of purpose. But their psychology and their reading of the way of the world have been fallacious. War is by common consent a curse, and the judgment was impregnably reinforced by the experiences of the years between 1914 and 1918. There was an almost unanimous resolve to rid mankind of the curse, and all over the world men of the finest cut dedicated themselves to that end. And they sought to succeed by means which were thought peculiar to America and which, for that reason, commended themselves so warmly to Americans. They passed a law. War is an evil, so they legislated it out of existence.

There was the Covenant of the League of Nations. There was the World Court. There was the agreement at Locarno. There was the Kellogg Pact. There were numerous resolutions, half-hearted it is true, for disarmament. All were just so many laws.

And as we assume in America that, when a law is passed proscribing an evil, the evil is thereby eliminated, so it was assumed that, war having been forbidden by law, war was thereby ended. The facts show that we were wrong, tragically wrong; but no demonstration should have been necessary. Reasoning from experience should have been enough.

An evil with roots so deeply imbedded in human society and human instincts cannot be eradicated by proclamation, certainly not an evil from which so many elements in society derive both profit and satisfaction. There is much that can be established by legislative enactment, but there is very little that can be eliminated by legislative prohibition, and of that little almost nothing that goes to fundamentals. This, however, is argument from theory, and it is better not to argue from theory when unchallengeable facts are at hand.

The facts are indisputable in 1935. Europe sits uneasy over a volcano. The armament race is on, as of the decade before 1914. In that decade armies and navies alone were involved, and since the main rivalry was between Great Britain and Germany the navy mattered principally. Today the air forces matter most, and Germany's strength in the air has released a competition in planes. History shows that, when you have national rivalries, and the rivals begin girding themselves to make good their own positions, the clash is only a matter of time. In Europe the time factor can be calculated as from five to ten years, or as from five to ten months. Peace in Europe hangs today on an accident, on the parallel of the assassination at Serajevo. Asia is still a stage or two behind Europe but in the same line of development. The prelude to the naval race on the Pacific is on now. Soviet Russia and Japan are at swords' points; the United States and

Japan are unsheathing their weapons. Japan is forging a great empire out of the malleable masses of the East, an empire which will exclude the Western nations and give Japan a military and economic power which will constitute a challenge for world supremacy. Therefore, the Western nations, led by the United States, are standing in Japan's way. The signal for the opening of conflict will be given when Japan takes the step of formally establishing hegemony over northern China.

It is plain that all the legislative prohibitions of war have been ineffectual, and it should be plain that they must be ineffectual. We are where we were before 1914. The steps we so vigorously took and so passionately acclaimed were steps on a treadmill. There was no genuineness of desire or conviction behind all the legislation and resolutions, and, even if there had been, legislation, resolutions, or benevolence of intention are futile if all the underlying international, social, economic, and political conditions remain untouched. If, therefore, there is any real desire to deal with the problem of war we must backtrack on our course and start fresh. The negotiations now under way in Europe can result in a new set of security pacts or, even, armament standstill agreements. They will come to nothing. They will only be repetitive of the old post-1919 formulas. It is sounder to write off everything since Armistice Day, 1918, as sad experience, taking wisdom in recompense for disillusionment.

III

Emancipation from war, if it can be achieved at all, is more than a matter of words. It requires an unshrinking confrontation of what makes war or, rather, what at least prevents its abolition. Clearly, independent and sovereign nationalism is incompatible with peace in a world in

which trade and finance cross boundary lines. Now, nationalism as an institution and nationality as a value may both be worth preserving, even at the cost of periodic wars. I am not arguing that question now. It is too large a question for incidental discussion. Each may reach his own conclusion according to his own reflection and temperament. For my own part, I do not think they are. For one thing, nationalism is not eternal. The Western world lived through the larger part of its history with only a vague sense of nationality. National consciousness has been dominant only since the Napoleonic Wars. As the Catholic Church once served as a bridge between areas inhabited by men of different strains, so another causeway might be found. However that may be, the point is that if we wish to preserve sovereign nationalism, with each nation free to make ultimate decisions for itself, unchecked by any other force than the military power of other sovereign nations, then it is both impossible to prevent war and useless to try. In that case war is the price we pay for sovereign nationality. Thus far we have been in a position of having our cake and eating it too. And that cannot be done in international society any more than in the narrower and lowlier walks of life.

Further, if the national state is to continue in the role of sales agent and investment manager for the business of the nation, then too it is impossible to prevent war. For this also is incompatible with peace. It is all very well to talk high-minded words about the interdependence of nations and lowering trade barriers and co-operation for the common good of all, but the tough fact is that nations are not interdependent. They might be and they could be and perhaps they ought to be; but they are not. To remove all European tariffs, for example, is not just a gesture of magnanim-

ity. It would wipe out a large part of the new manufacturing industry of Czechoslovakia for one thing. Europe might be economically organized on a more scientific and efficient basis then, but the Czech industrialists would doubtless object. So also would many of the German landowners whose agricultural products would lose their home markets. America's tariff wall is beyond doubt an impediment to world recovery and to an international exchange of goods that ultimately would work to the good of the greatest number. But to repeal it outright would penalize specific American interests and groups. Their sacrifice would be to the common good, but also it would be to their own acute discomfort. The same argument holds for currency manipulations. Money has become a barrier to exchange as well as a medium of exchange, but no nation can forego the use of devaluation of its money without suffering a diminution in its export trade. And while an allocation of markets in colonies and undeveloped territories would make for more rational international relations, it would also penalize those nations which now have control of such markets. It would, for example, deprive Japan of the fruits of her conquests in the Far East.

The interdependence of nations is an empty phrase so long as business is organized within national compartments, depends on national governments to act as advance agent and protector, and otherwise is privately controlled. When the American government decides to lower certain tariffs to reopen the channels of international trade, and thereby wipes out a group of American corporations, it is committing an act of confiscation of one group. That might be for the general good, but there is no way now of spreading the loss over those who benefit. What happens, then, in practice is that every nation pur-

sues the advantage of its own nationals at the expense of others. It must under existing circumstances. As I write, there is the beginning of an outcry to bar Japanese textiles from the United States. Great Britain has already done so in various parts of the Empire. Japan is threatening to retaliate by placing a quota on imports from Canada. And so on. But unless national governments take such action, part of the population of each nation will be unemployed and the rest will be taxed to pay doles and work relief.

So long, then, as you have the world organized on a basis of national sovereignty and national competition, you have the elements of national conflict. And so long as you have the elements of national conflict, all treaties pledging security and non-aggression and rules of procedure for international conferences are just declarations that war is disagreeable, or else expressions of pious wishes. These are the conditions that any intelligent approach to the problem of war must face. Passing a law will have just as much effect as it has in American domestic affairs — the effect it has had since 1919, the effect graphically presented in the table set down earlier in this article.

IV

Two conclusions may be drawn from this analysis. One is that war is inevitable; that, so long as men have consciousness of kind and are moved by the instinct to better their material condition, they will strive against each other; and that, as between nations, the only form of strife that brings decision is warfare with lethal weapons. This may be so. Certainly precedent argues in its favor. But I do not myself think that it has been proved. I see no reason to accept this as an immutable fact, as immutable as death or the change

of the seasons. It may be immutable up to the present only because it has been accepted as immutable. No very great effort has yet been made to change the fact or nullify it.

The other conclusion is that we have made the wrong kind of effort. Our approach has been evangelical and emotional and rhetorical. We have passed resolutions and declared high aspirations, but we have not addressed ourselves to the causes of war. We have not even thought about them. That lesson these last fifteen years

have taught us. The peace movement is defunct because it has not been a peace movement. But there is a place for a peace movement. If and when one is launched and fails, then we may draw deductions about the inevitability of war. Now only one deduction can be drawn, and that one irrefutably: we have made a sorry and ignominious mess of our high resolves for all the lofty idealism of phraseology. The most acid comment on our times is the tabloid biography of Mars sketched in the military history of the past seventeen years.

THAT WILL BE FINE

A Story

BY WILLIAM FAULKNER

WE COULD hear the water running into the tub. We looked at the presents scattered over the bed where mamma had wrapped them in the colored paper, with our names on them so Grandpa could tell who they belonged to easy when he would take them off the tree. There was a present for everybody except Grandpa because mamma said that Grandpa is too old to get presents any more.

"This one is yours," I said.

"Sho now," Rosie said. "You come on and get in that tub like your mamma tell you."

"I know what's in it," I said. "I could tell you if I wanted to."

Rosie looked at her present. "I reckon I kin wait twell hit be handed to me at the right time," she said.

"I'll tell you what's in it for a nickel," I said.

Rosie looked at her present. "I ain't got no nickel," she said. "But I will have Christmas morning when Mr. Rodney give me that dime."

"You'll know what's in it anyway then and you won't pay me," I said. "Go and ask mamma to lend you a nickel."

Then Rosie grabbed me by the arm. "You come on and get in that tub," she said. "You and money! If you ain't rich time you twenty-one, hit will be because the law done abolished money or done abolished you."

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So I went and bathed and came back, with the presents all scattered out across mamma's and papa's bed and you could almost smell it and tomorrow night they would begin to shoot the fireworks and then you could hear it too. It would be just tonight and then tomorrow we would get on the train, except papa, because he would have to stay at the livery stable until after Christmas Eve, and go to Grandpa's, and then tomorrow night and then it would be Christmas and Grandpa would take the presents off the tree and call out our names, and the one from me to Uncle Rodney that I bought with my own dime and so after a while Uncle Rodney would prize open Grandpa's desk and take a dose of Grandpa's tonic and maybe he would give me another quarter for helping him, like he did last Christmas, instead of just a nickel, like he would do last summer while he was visiting mamma and us and we were doing business with Mrs. Tucker before Uncle Rodney went home and began to work for the Compress Association, and it would be fine. Or maybe even a half a dollar and it seemed to me like I just couldn't wait.

"Jesus, I can't hardly wait," I said.

"You which?" Rosie hollered. "Jesus?" she hollered. "Jesus? You let your mamma hear you cussing and I bound you'll wait. You talk to me about a nickel! For a nickel I'd tell her just what you said."