

their part would be entirely out of the question; besides which the league of nations will see that the Poles and the Jugoslavs and the other new nationalities do not cast covetous eyes upon their neighbors.

This is, I fear, too rational a solution to be accepted by this peace conference. Disarmament is the most important thing to be achieved. Therefore one hears less about that than about anything else. The word is not used. The limitation of armaments is urged by General Smuts though he is apparently unaware that the dictionary holds such a word as navy. On the other hand, the American who is perhaps best informed on the league of nations tells me that the leading British advocate feels there is no possibility of disarmament at present. This is grave news, indeed, for if the nations must go on with the mad race for armaments, burdened as they are with present war debts, the prospect of human happiness is dark. The most unpopular thing in the world to-day is the carrying of arms—about which I could tell some interesting things if the censor permitted.

I laid these proposals, as to German disarmament, before a high military authority here and found him in sympathy. He himself would have had the armistice require the complete disarmament of Germany on sea and on land and would have limited the terms to that. There would then have been no need for an army of occupation, and the Allies could have gone on with their plans for disarmament. But the remedy was too simple. Will the Allied military men try to prevent the complete disarmament of Germany to protect their profession? Not if they are like the veteran I have quoted. He is heart and soul in favor of the immediate limitation of armaments, and the absolute forbidding of compulsory military service everywhere. He said, incidentally, that there would never be universal military service in America unless America had gone mad. He then remarked significantly, "I should not be surprised if the Germans forestalled the peace conference by themselves abolishing universal service and substituting some form of national militia."

This would, of course, be the best answer to French fears. The French have had one man killed of every thirty souls living in France when the war broke out, and a similar number disabled—one in every thirty. A recurrence of such a catastrophe must, of course, be made impossible. But the question is which course will be more effective to this end—disarmament, or a retention of the military system which made the explosion of 1914 inevitable? Even with the menace of German militarism removed there are still territorial claims made by France which must be reckoned with.

It is not fear of Germany which made MM. Franklin-Bouillon and Chéradame begin their counter offensive to Mr. Wilson for his humane action in regard to Russia. It is not for the permanent safeguard of her eastern boundary that France lusts after Syria and part of Armenia, desires a controlling hand in the Balkans, and covets one of the two German cables to America. These matters stand in a different category. Some are championed by a few militarists, some by a handful of imperialists. Some of them are probably advanced as trading points, and are not to be taken too seriously. Yet it is undeniable that they bear seeds of possible discord between France, England, and America, and the sooner they are uprooted the better.

The Chéradame incident is disquieting because the atmosphere here is already so electric. A keen British observer

said some time ago that during the first month of Mr. Wilson's stay in France he would be the most popular man who ever entered Paris; in the second month of his stay there would be mutterings and protests against his leadership; and at the end of three months he would be the most unpopular man in France. The first two prophecies seem to have been verified. All the more important, therefore, that the third should not be. It would indeed be a misfortune if any thing could mar the fine feeling between the two countries. If rocks are to be avoided, it is essential that we have a clear understanding of the attitude of France, which seems to onlookers grossly materialistic and imperialistic. Americans at home may perhaps judge more leniently and with greater appreciation than do many here, who feel that the French proposals make not for a better world but for a worse one. The only safety for France, as for all the world, is to do away with the weapons for human slaughter.

OSWALD GARRISON VILLARD

## II. The Question of the Scheldt

*The Hague, December 15*

THE question of the Scheldt has been a bone of contention between Holland and Belgium ever since the seventeenth century. In those early days, when political economy was based on the Christian maxim, "My neighbor dead, I'll have more bread," Holland abused her new power to settle the question in such a way as to cut Antwerp off from all connection with the sea. After the city, in 1585, had surrendered to the Duke of Parma, the Hollanders felt no scruples in treating the old rival of Amsterdam with all the severity which subjects of the Spanish king deserved. So, at the peace of Münster, the States General claimed and obtained the right to close the Scheldt. For a century and a half Antwerp was a dead city. When, in 1803, Napoleon visited the place, he found it little more than a ruin. "It is hardly a European town; I felt as if I walked through some place in Africa," he said to the Burgomaster on returning from an inspection of the docks. He intended to make Antwerp the naval base for his attack on England, but everything had to be built anew; wharves, quays, docks, arsenals. In England the danger was realized; the British sent an expedition that was to capture Antwerp, destroy the French fleet that was building there, and demolish the arsenals. The story of its disastrous failure on the Isle of Walcheren is a well-known page in British history. Nor did the Allied Powers, five years later, fare any better in their attempt to take the city, which was successfully defended by Carnot. Only by the convention of April 23, 1814, did the French agree to evacuate Antwerp and the other fortresses they still held on foreign ground in exchange for the withdrawal by the Allied Powers of all their forces from French territory. Thus the danger was for the time averted, and at the Treaty of Paris, May 30, 1814, the British delegates insisted that Antwerp should be declared a commercial port only.

"*L'histoire se répète*," but the repetition, in this case, has not been an exact copy. When Napoleon planned an invasion of England, he was in a better position than Germany commanded after the fall of Antwerp in October, 1914. The French had, in 1795, extorted from Holland the cession of Dutch Flanders, south of the Western Scheldt, but, realizing that its occupation would not make them

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masters of the Scheldt unless they had a footing on the opposite shore as well, they also demanded the right to place a garrison in Flushing, on the Isle of Walcheren. After the British expedition of 1809 had proved the insufficiency of that garrison, Napoleon obtained, by a treaty of March 16, 1810, the cession of the entire province of Zeeland "in order to safeguard Antwerp against a renewal of the late danger." During the recent war, however, it was not Germany, but Holland, that possessed the shores both north and south of the Western Scheldt. And in obedience to the rights of neutrality as formulated at The Hague in 1907, Holland exercised not only a right but a duty when she prohibited the use of the territorial waters of the Scheldt for military purposes by either of the belligerents. In that way the pistol aimed at the heart of England, which in the hand of Napoleon had been a dangerous weapon, was made as harmless as if it had been unloaded.

It is not fair to overlook, as some Belgians do, the advantage which the Entente has derived from this strict observance by the Dutch Government of the rules of neutrality, whereby the Germans were prevented from using the port of Antwerp as a naval and submarine base—the very danger dreaded by Great Britain in the days of the Napoleonic wars. While forgetting that their British protector owed to Holland a safety which, a century ago, Britain failed to secure by an expedition of 40,000 men, these Belgians grumble because Holland by her possession of the Western Scheldt has hindered England from sending her fleet up the river against the Germans in Antwerp. They cannot eat their cake and have it, too. It is doubtful whether Mr. Churchill's Naval Brigade, in October, 1914, could have saved the city, if Holland had allowed the Entente to make use of the Scheldt. But let us suppose for a moment that Holland had given up her strictly neutral attitude, letting the people's wish to come to the rescue of the sister state overrule the country's international duty. What a train of calamities would have followed that step if it had not conduced to the saving of Antwerp! Germany, then at the summit of her military power, and convinced of her invincibility, would eagerly have grasped that pretext for invading Holland; the Dutch army, unprepared and insufficiently munitioned, could not have long withstood the onslaught of the enemy; Dutch Limburg, North Brabant, and Zeeland would have shared the fate of the greater part of Belgium; the invader, having the province of Zeeland in his grasp, would have become sole master of the Western Scheldt as Napoleon had been in 1810; from Antwerp submarines would have swarmed out in greater numbers than the port of Zeebrugge could ever have harbored; and Holland under German occupation would have ceased to be a refuge for the hundreds of thousands of Belgians who had fled thither before the onrush of the Kaiser's armies. Refusing to admit or even to consider the possibility of this course of events, the annexationists in Belgium lay all the blame for the fate of Antwerp on Holland and insist that their Government shall demand the cession of Dutch Flanders, south of the Western Scheldt, to Belgium.

The Dutch people and the press have taken the alarm before any official support has yet been given to this annexationist movement. Bitter words have been said and written about the ingratitude of a people that repaid a four years' hospitality to thousands of its poorest refugees with an attempt to rob the benefactor. "War would be the

result," declared Mr. Marchant, the leader of the Liberal Democrats and a man of great prestige in the Second Chamber. But the danger of serious complications lies in the tragic attitude in which the Hollanders are taking these demands of their neighbors rather than in the expansionist desires themselves. The inflammable Belgian temperament, fired by the hated enemy's overthrow and the liberation of the country, gives impulsive utterance to wishes which, at a cooler moment, it will admit to be at variance with those very ideas of justice for which Belgium, together with the Allied Powers, has bravely withstood the German attack. Prussian militarism demanded the annexation of Belgium on the ground that Germany's safety could not suffer that country to remain a bridge-head for British aggression. Belgian expansionists demand the cession of Dutch Flanders, and Limburg to boot, on similar grounds of military exigencies; for on commercial reasons they cannot base such a claim.

Since 1842 the navigation on the Western Scheldt has been free *sous le rapport du commerce*; to the kingdom of the Leopolds and Albert, Holland has never raised any economic obstacles such as lamed the Belgian sea-trade in the days of the Spanish and Austrian occupation. The rapid growth and prosperity of the Antwerp harbor during the past fourscore years is sufficient proof that Belgium cannot have any grievance on that score. The military safety of their country is what these annexationists have in view. But the peace that is to come must be based not on considerations of a new war, but on conditions that preclude war in the future. By demanding half the Dutch province of Zeeland on the plea that, without it, Antwerp can never be used as a war harbor, the Belgians discredit the noble end for which their soldiers fought and bled. For to suppose the possibility of a relapse into the pre-war competition in armament and military preparedness is an insult to the wisdom of those statesmen who have promised the world a new era of peace under the rule of a league of free nations. But both the league and the freedom would be in jeopardy, if those whose task it will be to make the peace should consider it their chief concern to prevent the success of an aggressive war and not to remove the causes of all war. The population of the area claimed by the Belgian annexationists have now made clear their own feeling in this matter. It may be said without exaggeration that ninety-nine per cent. of the inhabitants of Dutch Flanders and Limburg wish to remain subjects of Queen Wilhelmina. If they were forced to become Belgian citizens, the right of self-determination, which Prussianism has always ignored, but which the Allied Powers have recognized as one of the basic conditions for a lasting peace, would be sacrificed to military exigencies, which, among a league of free nations without conscription and under protection of a British-American sea-power, have no need to be urged any longer.

The Hollanders, therefore, have better reason to rely on the consistency and wisdom of Mr. Wilson and the other leading statesmen of the Entente than to fear the effects of an agitation in certain chauvinistic Belgian circles.

A. J. BARNOUW

### Contributors to this Issue

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## Deported

By FREDERICK PETERSON

Chill blow the winds of the world;  
There are thorns and bruises for the feet,  
And lurking shadows spreading snares,  
And there are bitter herbs to eat.  
The only home-light shining far  
Is the cold splendor of a star.

## In the Driftway

APROPOS of the Lowell centenary, the Drifter recalls an anecdote which he had years ago from the lips of George Ellis, intimate friend of nearly all the New England Olympians of the past century. Ellis was travelling in Europe with Lowell's father, when one day came a letter announcing that the son, then a student in Harvard, had been elected to the office of class poet. The elder Lowell, obviously depressed by the news, confided to Ellis that he "had hoped James was through with all that poetry nonsense." One thinks, in this connection, of another genius born in that *annus mirabilis*, 1819—John Ruskin, and of the bitterness which came to him and to his parents because of his inability to renounce his genius and become the shining figure of their dreams, an evangelical clergyman! One of these days, the Drifter hopes, we shall have from the pen of some inspired bachelor or spinster that instructive and long awaited work entitled "How to Become Great in Spite of One's Parents."

\* \* \* \* \*

AN old letter lies before the Drifter, sent from Paris soon after the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war. It was written by the first woman oculist who performed the operation for cataract. She had left the Vienna hospital, declining an appointment as assistant surgeon with the German army, and had with great difficulty reached Paris alone. But it was not the rumble of war and the Marseillaise echoing through her letter that caused the Drifter to unfold the yellowed pages to-day. Those were stirring times as well as ours, but there was still leisure for the spirit, and the spiritual pilgrimage:

While I was in Vienna, Lowell's "Cathedral" was published, and Charles Putnam, his cousin, and I, between operations and clinics had made time to commit the whole poem to memory. I was not going to be in Paris and not go to Chartres even if a war was going on. The hotel proprietor seemed to think I was a little crazy and perhaps I was. He was for dispatching me out of France without delay. Instead I took the earliest morning train for Chartres. It happened to be Napoleon's fête day. The glorious old cathedral was ablaze with candles, and the sweetness of ten thousand white lilies, the only decoration, filled the air. I found a corner and sat down and repeated to myself the whole poem.

A day at Chartres, with no soul beside  
To roil with pedant prate my joy serene  
And make the minister shy of confidence.

The Drifter closes the letter fondly, picturing the blue-eyed little woman reciting the stately lines amid the lilies in the Cathedral—in war time. He recalls Lowell's pleasure when he was told of the incident some years later. Was higher tribute ever paid the poet?

THE DRIFTER

## Correspondence

### Protracted Censorship

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NATION:

SIR: The following letter may interest your readers who may think that the censorship of the mails ended with the cessation of the war. The pamphlets referred to in the letter were published openly in a Dublin journal during the war.

VIGILANTE

New York, Feb. 2

"THE IRISH PROGRESSIVE LEAGUE,

"229 Lexington Avenue, New York, N. Y.

"GENTLEMEN: In accordance with advice from the Solicitor for the Post Office Department, you are hereby notified that the pamphlet entitled 'How Ireland Has Prospered Under English Rule and The Slave Mind,' by Arthur Griffith, published by you, is non-mailable under the Espionage Act.

"Very respectfully,

"T. E. PATTEN, Postmaster"

January 20, 1919

## A Bulwark of Reaction

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NATION:

SIR: President Wilson is reported to be giving considerable attention to the problem of safeguarding the rights of minority nationalities in the peace treaty. The problem is by no means easy of solution, owing to the fact that in nearly all the countries seeking recognition of their claims based upon historical or ethnological grounds, a variety of mixed races may be found. Several plans, it is said, have been pointed out by which the minority nationalities may be protected. One of these plans is proportional representation in representative bodies, by communal governments of the minority races, where there is a local majority, and by constitutional guaranties for equal religious and civil rights.

While it is indeed commendable that the President should be giving his attention to this very important and intricate question, one which must have a great bearing on the future peace of the world, it is nevertheless strange that neither he nor his party has given even slight attention to the question of safeguarding the rights of American minorities. Every national election sees thousands upon thousands of votes "wasted"—"thrown away" for the simple reason that while he has been trying to make the world "safe for democracy" he has overlooked the United States. Nationally, close to a million voters are without a voice in Congress. There is certainly nothing democratic about that.

How long, we should like to know, is the United States to maintain its anachronistic position as the last bulwark of reaction? Even England has somewhat tardily and reluctantly enfranchised its women, who seem now on the highway to obtaining absolute political equality with men. That country has also adopted a more or less scientific plan of reconstruction, and on the whole is becoming more liberal in its policies. In this respect even its colonial governments are ahead of the United States. In this connection it may be interesting to note that on December 19 New South Wales passed a bill regulating elections on the basis of proportional representation. Switzerland has had proportional representation for years. As for our whole system of representation—city, State, and national—it is hopelessly archaic and a sad commentary on the low level of the intelligence of the electorate.

WILLIAM GREENE

Chicago, January 13.

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