

Counsel of Humility

I HAVE recently received a letter from an Englishman, which may, perhaps, interest other people as much as it has interested me. I must conceal his name but the name is not essential. He is speaking less for himself than for a class of men who later will enjoy every opportunity of controlling the destinies of their several countries, the class of the citizen soldiers returned from the prolonged vigil and abomination of trench warfare. No one can do more than guess what the state of mind of these soldiers will be. My correspondent's guess is peculiarly interesting both because he has talked with many British soldiers on leave from the front and because of the nature of his observations and inferences. He attributes to the citizen soldier an attitude toward war and peace sharply contrasted with the attitudes of those who are now most vociferously articulate back of the line; and if this attitude exists to the extent which he believes, and continues to exist after the war, it is bound to have a formative influence on the future politics of the British Commonwealth. Let us see how the soldier's state of mind looks to a close but detached observer:

It is unfortunately inevitable that at this time the war should be interpreted and the ideals of peace prepared by men who have stayed at home—that is to say, in the vast majority of cases, by those who have suffered and sacrificed least. It is the plain duty of us "thinking men" and "writing men" thus to interpret and prepare, but we should do well to realize how easily our work may, through lack of understanding or imagination, become a betrayal of our brothers.

England is perhaps the best country to study for the divergence between opinion at home and at the front. No Englishman with eyes to see can have failed to experience the pathetic misunderstanding between the trenches of France and the writing desks of London. Let a wounded officer or enlisted man meet a thinker of his own country, who is sure of himself and his opinions, whether that thinker be pacifist or jingo, leader of labor or win-the-war Tory statesman, philosopher of democracy or clergyman of the Established Church. Let the thinker explain his highest hopes or his darkest fears for society, according to his temperament and training. Let him spread before the soldier—not the professional fighter of old days but the boy snatched from his first keen year at the University or from the deadening routine of the clerk's desk—all the high words that have been spoken about Democracy by statesmen, journalists or professors, or all the beneficent reforms and triumphs of reconstructive administration in the industrial world which have undeniably been in some sort the product of the war. Then you will see that, so far from impressing the soldier, these thoughts and this information reduce him to helpless despair.

He knows intimately what war is and feels therefore more keenly the inability of statesmanship to prevent it.

As a member of that most rigidly governed community in the world, an army on active service, he has daily and hourly experience of the limitations of human authority and wisdom. His half humorous criticisms of the "brass hats" of the staff and the politicians at home are the signs of his surface discontent; but there is a deeper source of impatience of which he is scarcely aware himself. Fundamentally, he has been driven back upon the eternal problem of man's incapacity for righteousness to which the modern world had become deadened in the same manner and for the same reasons as the Jewish world became deadened to it centuries ago. He has vividly learnt again that formulated law is necessary and obedience to it a duty, but that every law so formulated falls short of the true standard and, to the extent of its shortcoming, creates a conflict of loyalty between the imperfect rule to which he can conform and the perfect commandment of his allegiance to which he is a perpetual confession of failure. He has recognized war as his duty, but he has never ceased to regard it with horror and, having made his choice with conviction, what he seeks is not an escape from the horns of a moral dilemma but a reconciliation of two moral certainties. He is less interested in Mr. Lloyd George's ministry of reconstruction than in St. Paul's ministry of reconciliation. He has no patience either with those who advocate "peace through negotiation" or with those who go forth to battle by proxy with "Democracy and no quarter" on their banners. He is quite willing to be interested in a League of Peace as a convenient expedient; but he will not recognize it as even beginning to satisfy his determination that this shall be "a war to end war." He certainly would not be content to construe Miss Cavell's last words in the light of it. To him, surely, "patriotism is not enough" means nothing less than "politics is not enough." As a matter of awful fact and experience, and not as a matter of political theory, it is very doubtful whether a man dies more cheerfully for a world state, for a league of nations, than for his home. Something there is, indeed, in his heart for which he will sacrifice more than for his country, but modern psychology has not yet found a new name or a new "moral equivalent" for that secret treasure. It remains true that, even in a world war for an enduring peace, men, even Germans in theory, demand the exemption of women and children from physical suffering, while no persecuted sect has ever claimed their exemption from martyrdom.

We have heard much, and very truly, of the "failure" of the church in this war, but is the failure on the whole so great as that of the political thinker? The Pharisee and the Herodian are in the same boat with the scribe in this matter, but no one can have failed to observe that here and there at the front and even at home, the "padre" has lately been winning on the editor and the orator by virtue simply of a willingness to confess that, while he knows surely from what direction the solution will come, he yet, to his shame, neither knows exactly what it is nor is able to offer it to those who seek it. Assuredly, unless those who put their faith in democracy and internationalism can achieve a like humility, the eventual decision of the peace conference will be sadly misrepresentative of the best minds and hearts in the belligerent countries.

And here we have to face a very real danger. "Democ-

racy," to those who have authoritatively pronounced it to be the aim and sanction of this war, surely means a painstaking effort to adapt all the members of our national communities, little by little, and step by step, to the changes and chances of modern life; having in view the end conceived by Greece, of a "good life" shared unbrokenly by every individual member of a common human society. But this same "democracy" is now being trumpeted in our ears by a thousand preachers as a gospel of human mastery, claiming the absolute allegiance of thinkers, and therefore of those whom they teach, to the exclusion of every other faith and every other hope. It is the preaching of an orthodoxy professedly rooted in scientific certainty, whose impact upon the human mind bids fair to create an active intolerance more ruthless and loveless than that which any hierarchy has yet conceived.

Now it is against this class of conception in general as much as against that particular form of it which we call Prussianism that our brothers and sons are fighting in the trenches today. This is their developing faith—to this they are winning through their struggle with a living horror which to us has become skeletoned into certain half-mistaken formulas about "militarism." We will have no government that claims impeccability, no governmental principles that seek to impose themselves as principles of life and thought. We know that these things are evil. We know that they make for war. We believe that the effects of such beliefs on national education were more potent factors in this war than any "international anarchy" and for preventing future wars we look not so much to expedients of internationalism as to a fundamental revision of national education and of those catchwords of competitive internal government and pseudo-scientific teaching in which modern nations have latterly put their trust.

Of course you will not be able to find a soldier who will say anything of all this to you. You will find him inarticulate, usually silent, sometimes vaguely explosive. But this is not far from what he is beginning to feel. We cannot any longer dismiss him as a mere soldier, for the citizen army to which he belongs is the best and most normal blood of the country. It becomes us rather to say in the words of Ruskin, spoken many years ago: "Gentlemen, I tell you solemnly that the day is coming when the soldiers of England must be her tutors, and the captains of her army captains also of her mind."

London, England.

The foregoing account of the returning soldier's mind may or may not be true. If a cynic prefers to prophesy that collectively they are more likely to behave like a Grand Army of the Republic than with a Franciscan mixture of humility and faith, there is no way of proving him wrong. But although the account is necessarily largely a matter of interpretation, it is worth while to accept it provisionally as true and to consider what the meaning and consequences of its truth may be. The interpretation even though it happen to be false might well be true, provided only the citizen militant permits his attitude toward war and peace to reflect the realities of his own situation and experience. The men whose experience in this war promises to be of most value to their fellows are not those who are fighting jubilantly or thoughtlessly or

with absolutely righteous self-satisfaction. They are not those who from motives which they consider lofty have shirked the common burden and have refused from conscientious scruples to fight at all. Least of all are they men who because of age or some other physical disability have been unable to fight. They are the citizens who have recognized a binding obligation to throw themselves into a war which began with a clear violation of right by one of the combatants and upon the issue of which depended the future fulfillment of so many human lives, but who have never ceased to regard the performance of that obligation with abhorrence. It is these last who, if they are robust enough in mind and conscience to live through this conflict of moral certainties without losing faith and without capitulating to any quick and easy escape, would have qualified to pass from being captains of their country's armies to captains of their country's mind.

My correspondent does not attempt to anticipate how this conflict of moral certainties in the souls of the citizens militant will work out, nor what positively they will do with the mind of England, when they enter into their captaincy. Of one character and of one only is he wholly convinced. The citizen militant, as the result of the conflict, will be relieved of any pride of his own wisdom or that of others. He will distrust human government, foresight and presumption, and this distrust will have one salient and salutary expression. He will have no confidence in the proposals, above all the political proposals, with which the stay-at-home politicians and publicists seek to mitigate or annul the rigors of his problem. For him politics and statesmanship are powerless to put an end to war and powerless, consequently, to foreshadow the reconciliation of his moral antinomy. If wars are to be prevented, the agency of prevention will not be leagues of peace and political democracy, but a chastening of the human spirit, a profound conviction of the inability of government, even when infused with good will and enlightened by science, to heal the spiritual distempers of mankind. The one perfect expression of the deepest moral experience of the war should be a humility of mind of which the prevailing propaganda of democracy and internationalism form a conspicuous defiance.

I hope the interpretation of my correspondent is true and I would be the last to deny that, if it be true, the future captains of the nation's mind would show some impatience with the presumptuous claims now being made on behalf of internationalism and democracy. The conflict in the soul of the citizen soldier between his clear obligation to fight and his abhorrence of war is a moral tragedy, of which the only fitting immediate expression is humility of

mind: and no doubt such humility should bring with it among other things a disposition to distrust the efficacy of merely political remedies, which one rarely finds among international democratic propagandists. But surely in placing so much emphasis upon the withering effect which the "developing faith" of the citizen militant will have upon cocksure democratic formulas, my correspondent is allowing his irritation with the Philistinism of democracy to hinder him from tracing such stiff formularizing to its cause. In the second paragraph of his letter he classes jingoism with pacifism as the type of thinking which fills the returning soldier with helpless despair, but later when he comes to talk of "gospels of human mastery" which breed a ruthless and loveless intolerance he separates the jingo from the pacifist and confines his rebuke to the latter. In my opinion this separation falsifies his attitude toward the excessive claims of internationalism and democracy and prevents him from drawing the truer inference from the possible future possession by the citizen soldiers of a Franciscan humility of mind.

The exaggerated value which internationalist democrats attach to political remedies must surely be traced to the exigencies of their situation as propagandists and as controversialists. They are engaged in seeking a remedy for an admitted social evil, which in many of its manifestations is chiefly political and which, at least in part, can be reached by political remedies. The opposition to these remedies, which comes both from people who believe in war as a necessary agency of moral discipline and political change and from people whose exclusive preoccupation with their domestic policies and business interferes with their sense of international responsibility, is powerful and stubborn. Between them these two classes pretty much control the government of the world, and their "gospel of mastery" is not only quite as intolerant as that of the democrats but does not hesitate to secure its domination by the exercise of moral and physical force. No doubt in fighting such an enemy international democrats claim more for political remedies than such remedies alone can ever accomplish and assert their claims with active intolerance; but if they expect too much from politics, my correspondent seems unnecessarily fearful of the results of their exaggeration. They are only propagandists. It is less dangerous to overestimate the ability of international institutions which do not exist to prevent war than to ignore or underestimate the ability of war and preparation for war which are firmly established national institutions to pervert political values. The trying out of the proposed political remedies and the agitation associated therewith is necessary as an indication of

good faith. Until they are tested we cannot be sure how much they will accomplish, and we cannot test them without seeking to destroy the prestige of those interests, so powerful in every large state, which believe in war as a desirable political instrument and moral discipline.

Internationalist democrats when they show a presumptuous confidence in political remedies and, consequently, in the creative power of human contrivance, are allowing themselves to be infected by the arrogance of their opponents. It is existing states and governments, no matter whether they are more or less democratic, which encourage presumption and intolerance by claiming impeccability. The legal and moral sovereignty on which they insist is, if it is followed through, bound to result in the imposition, so feared by my correspondent, of "governmental principles" as "principles of life and thought"; and the spokesmen and agents of state sovereignty at the present time are so fully convinced of the righteousness of these state decrees that they are only too ready to coerce troublesome protestants. These things, as my correspondent says, are evil. They express the state of mind which makes for war. Their effect on the national education was a "more potent factor" in this war than international anarchy, because international anarchy is the inevitable result of the existence of states which put forth such presumptuous claims and which educate officials and subjects as willing servants of their presumption. If the citizen militant does return from the trenches fully determined to introduce humility into politics and to do away with governments and governmental principles which claim impeccability and breed intolerance, he will begin not with the still remote and shadowy international government of a possible future, but with those existing embodiments and sources of "active intolerance," the governments as they exist today in all neutral and belligerent countries.

No matter how sincerely and justifiably the militant citizen may now be filled with "helpless despair" by the formulas of internationalist democracy, he will if he seeks to do away with political presumption, adopt as the most promising expedient, at least a part of the internationalist democratic program. The effect of that program, in so far as it works, will be to moderate the sovereign arrogance of existing states by increasing the penalties of national wilfulness and the rewards of successful international accommodations. But the value of these international institutions, even if they are successful, will not consist in any absolute assurance of the prevention of war. If they did provide such an assurance, they might well bring with them, as my correspondent fears, a cheerless, offensive and domineering world stateism. Their

value will be measured by their ability to liberate within existing states voluntary economic, professional, technical propagandist and religious associations, which could be allowed a larger measure of autonomy, a more explicit license to compete with the state, than would be safe under a condition of international anarchy. The increase in the number and power of such free associations, the increasing recognition of their independence in the legal system, the increasing delegation to them under properly safeguarded limitations, of public administrative functions—all such measures of “reconstruction” would constitute the convincing possible testimony to the truth of the principle that at its best politics was not enough. It would be equivalent to the liberation of other faiths and hopes, to which my correspondent attaches so much importance. The state, by renouncing its absurd claims to impeccability and omnipotence in its relations with its own people, would be the more likely to eschew offensive arrogance in its transactions with other states. It would be more likely to provide an hospitable mansion for the accommodation of those who are lively, humble, patient and faithful in spirit.

My correspondent proposes as the most promising means of preventing future wars a fundamental revision of national education. By all means let us revise national education, but does not educational reform suffer as a remedy for war from a drawback analogous to that of political institutions? How far can it overcome that incapacity for righteousness on the part of human beings which is always baffling the reformer, and which is always calling for ministries of reconciliation rather than ministries of reconstruction. How can the state, whose necessarily imperfect rules fall so far short of the supreme commandment and whose political programs are either indifferent expedients or dangerous counsels of impeccability; how can statesmanship born of such a state devise an educational system which is more than a matter of secular information and less than a propaganda of state dogmatism and righteousness? German statesmen organized a system of national education which was supposed to make for moral character and social amelioration but which actually facilitated rather than prevented war, and any state whose spokesmen are profoundly convinced of its moral sovereignty will, when it proposes to organize a national system of moral or social education, seek as did the Germans primarily to cultivate loyalty to the state and intolerance of any competing interest or faith or hope. May we not, consequently, be obliged to seek a better system of national education by improvement in statesmanship rather than to seek a humbler and more tolerant statesmanship

by means of a better system of national education?

As a matter of fact, the two processes are supplementary and go hand in hand. The political expedients which my correspondent contrasts with a revision of the national education system are as a matter of fact part of it. Their value consists not in any pretence of overweening accomplishment, not in any justifiable expectation of overcoming by international documents man's incapacity for righteousness, but in their quality of being honest and pertinent experiments. The civilized world, as it will be left by the war, will need to try an experiment of international organization just as it will need to try experiments in social readjustment. These experiments will work well or ill. If they work ill, they will be modified quickly. If they work well they will be modified more slowly and may bring with them new and unexpected evils, which in their turn will have to be exposed and overcome. But in any event their value is chiefly educational, and these educational fruits will be gathered more completely and quickly by the nations who can combine stability of purpose with inquisitive openness of mind. Our existing states have never dared to organize schools which sought to develop such a mixture of irreverence, humility and faith. It has never dared to remove the curse from disloyalty, because it was afraid of the effects of the resulting flexibility and inquisitiveness on its own attempt to be at one and the same time an anointed King and an impossible Pretender, but perhaps under the influence of this new captaincy of our mind it will reform. If only it will afford legal recognition to those foreign and domestic competitors which challenge and seek, not to displace but to share its sovereignty, the way will be cleared for a system of national education, which, if it cannot alleviate man's incapacity for righteousness, can at least make less intolerable some of its effects.

HERBERT CROLY.

A Fear

The yellow bird is singing by the pond,
And all about him stars have burst in bloom,
A colonnade lurks pallidly beyond,
And under that a solitary tomb.
Who lies within that tomb I do not know;
The yellow bird intones his threnody
In notes as colorless as clouded snow,
Clashing with the green hush, and out of key.

O cease! your frenzied song is out of tune
Where all these strange forgotten things are sleeping,
Give back to silence's eternal keeping
The stagnant pool, the hanging colonnade,
Lest in the wane of the long afternoon,
The dead awake, unhappy and afraid.

ROBERT SILLIMAN HILLYER.