

The War and Ourselves

By ROBERT HERRICK

RECENTLY in rearranging my library I came across that extensive shelf which houses my war books, a shelf much too long for the intrinsic value of the publications (including my own contributions). Yet it contains but a very small fragment of the enormous total of what was published about the war, even of that produced on behalf of the victorious combatants. On the other side, so largely unknown to us still, there must have been an equal if not greater mass of "war literature." If both sides could be induced to read and ponder the outpourings of "the enemy," much enlightenment would result even now, and a wholesome wonder in the realization that the hated enemy felt almost precisely as we did in the crisis and considered their emotions also holy and irrevocable. In my collection are "The Ordeal of Battle" with that monumental composite of fiction, "The Bryce Report on Belgian Atrocities," Romaine Rolland's plaintive cry in the whirlwind, "Above the Battle" (so universally ignored by those superior spirits of letters and learning to whom it was addressed) and, together with bitter defamations of "the Hun" in "Such as They Are," "The Barbarians," etc., etc., are Barbusse's drab pictures of the actualities of modern war, and Masfield's epic of "Gallipoli,"—one of the very few books from the war that can endure because with the poet's sense of indestructible beauty he celebrated youth's magnificent courage and sacrifice. There are many volumes of war poetry, their glow fading from Allen Seager and Rupert Brooke to the sardonic disillusionment of Sassoon; many fictions and many "histories" already become fiction; then the "revelations" from which bit by bit may be pieced together the dirty cobwebs of diplomatic intrigue; and finally the prolific apologetics for the crowning infamy of the whole business,—the books about the peace treaties. Almost the only ones that still glow are the collections of letters from soldiers at the front during the first two years. These men knew little of the coil in which they were caught: they fought and died in the ardent faith that they were giving their lives to found a new and better world, as they were abundantly told by journalists and politicians.

As my eye runs over this long shelf there is a notable decline in the emotional content of the volumes chronologically arranged, in the quality of sincere conviction, until the lot runs out into a marsh of apocryphal history and muddy controversy over the legalistic and economic aspects of treaty iniquities.

The grandeur and beauty of the war—whatever it had—was largely confined to those first two ignorant years. The further the light of fact and of reason penetrated its murky cloud the less that was memorable or creditable to the hu-

man race remained of its early myths—until in the wrangle over the peace treaties we seem to reach absolute zero in human mentality and morality. This progressive devolution of the war record symbolizes for me quite accurately the course of my own reactions to the war, out of which have come such perceptions of its lessons as I have been able to comprehend.

I welcome this opportunity of summarizing for myself the answer to that question so often put to me: why did my attitude on the war change from that of the fervid partisan of the Allies and their cause as expressed in my signed articles written for the editorial page of the *Chicago Sunday Tribune* (1914-1917) and in my war book, "The World Decision" (1916) to that of hesitation and doubt—a "defeatist"? I was sometimes called in 1917, 1918—to that of pacifist, flat and plain, as at present? Why do I no longer see the cause of the Allies as the "Holy War," "the war to end war," the struggle of "right against might," "civilization against barbarism," etc., etc. (how terribly rancid those old cries have become in a few short years!)? Why was it that after spending the best part of two years in Italy and France urging with all the strength of conviction in the rather pro-German columns of an American newspaper that my country should join the Allies in fighting "autocracy," I should gradually lose my faith in the cause I had championed as the possible salvation of humanity from the materialism of a too sudden wealth? At the moment when the United States after infinite debate and hesitation had decided to enter the lists! The answer is simple: I had seen too much, heard too much, knew too much.

I had seen at close range the dramatic process of putting an unwilling people into the war (superbly staged in Rome) after the dirty bargain had been signed and sealed a month previously in London—though until the last the Austrian ambassador argued at the Consulta while his train was being held in the station, offering a few more concessions if Italy would reconsider the decision of her rulers to take the Allies' bribe. I had learned some of the terms of the secret treaties, agreements between the allied powers as to the division of booty which did not accord with the pious protestations of their statesmen and publicists. Who did not

know them in Europe? although President Wilson seems to have preserved a stainless ignorance of these fundamental conditions of the peace, when he led his country to Armageddon.

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And from personal observation, fairly extensive on the Front and behind, I had come to realize what war is, how it is organized and run, and what it means to the little man and his people, who bear its burden directly and pay for it with their blood and happiness.

I saw—it did not require the vision of a prophet—how

unlikely it was that any just or clear solution to the issue would come out of the bottomless sink of hatreds and greeds. I realized with a strange forboding that spring day in Rome when the first news of America's participation in the war reached me how mentally and spiritually unprepared my people were for the European mess. Well, we know now what they did in the war and what they failed to do at the peace conference, and how, befogged and disillusioned, they drew away from Europe just when they might have been of some real use to the world, because of their fundamental ignorance of the situation confronting them.

And this thought leads me back to that shelf of obsolete literature. For four years and more it seemed that every person who knew how to write and was not engaged in active service was trying to convince somebody of something about the war. The immense importance of the printed word in influencing modern societies became evident within a few weeks of the fatal débacle of diplomats and statesmen in Europe. Patently, this is a cerebral age, and operations of society on a large scale must depend upon the support of a public opinion that can be created and moulded more swiftly by the press and allied agencies than in any other way. Hence the sudden revival of that engine of the Jesuits (first used, I believe, to convert to Christianity the Teutonic tribes) whose college in Rome I have so often passed irreflectively, with its motto in large black letters,—“*Propaganda pro Deo et fidei.*”

Men's minds fell an easy prey to war propaganda, whose object it need hardly be explained was not truth but action. I had too much to do with propaganda during the war delirium to respect this method of control of the national mind. It used to be bread and circuses, then rum and dollars, now it has become “the press” and the publicity bureau, psychological agencies no more respectable and infinitely more dangerous than the others.

One inevitable result of the virulence of war propaganda has been to weaken popular faith in the printed word, in ideas themselves, because the instrument of intelligence has been so shamefully abused. It will not be possible for a long, long time to “put a nation into the war” by skilful propaganda,—to “sell America the war”! Because men have become conscious of the forces brought to play upon them. Moreover it has led to a more intensive study of the processes of thought, psychologic laws, and to a greater awareness of the dangers of rationalization by means of which passions and prejudices become justified, even sanctified. The generation now growing to maturity may appear to their elders more cynically agnostic, less capable of “generous enthusiasms” than their own—also perhaps less gullible, less duped by their own emotions, let us hope!

One of the things that most troubled tender minded Americans, who took any real concern in the war those first years, was the spectacle of their own people wrangling and disputing, victims of a multiform propaganda, while

their busy business men said nothing and sawed wood, very profitably. Here was the paradox: the Allies must have the material, the provisions and munitions and money, that Americans were providing so profitably, and yet there was something morally repulsive in the idea of a great people sitting safely on the side lines in what we believed was a moral conflict of the first magnitude and busily making money out of the world tragedy. Even more repulsive, when from various reasons, high and low, we found ourselves at last in the maelstrom to have our large business organizations doing business with their own government at huge profit, and in company with organized labor holding up the *res publica* for their private gain, while other men because they happened to be younger were losing their businesses and their

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lives in fighting—for which moral obliquity we are now to pay sentimentally in vicious bonus schemes. The plain fact is, one that even such a conservative as our late President could perceive (also the platform makers of the present Democratic convention) there should be no profiteers in war, not a one, either nation or individual. It is already pretty well understood that war profits are largely paper profits, illusory, but even the illusion of profiteering must be impossible in another war. If that truth becomes incorporated in common conviction, as seems likely, one incentive to war, still more to the “bitter ending” of war, will be removed.

There are of course other sorts of war panderers than the simple profiteer. The lessons of a predatory peace and subsequent incidents, especially concerning valuable “mandates,” have not been wholly lost upon the public mind. At least there has been revealed even to the moderately intelligent the biggest secret of secret diplomacy—the close connection of private capitalistic enterprise with government policies and the making of wars. In the effort to control raw materials and markets modern states have become partners or trustees in the business enterprises of groups of their nationals. Americans, for example, are rapidly learning the extent to which their government is becoming “involved” in the Caribbean and Central America through the operations of private bankers and corporations. They will be able to make up their minds whether the proper function of government in international affairs is to represent the interest of special groups or not. They will know, thanks to the trend of events since Versailles, exactly what the term “preparedness” covers in the minds of militarists and of big business, so that it will hardly be possible to window-dress the next “defensive” war in the same specious terms of patriotism as the last.

Perhaps the one most depressing revelation of the past ten years has been the failure of democracy plus plutocracy to provide great leadership in crisis. The war was bungled into and largely run by opportunist politicians—mediocrities who crumbled altogether under the test of peace and reconstruction, and fortunately have almost to a man dis-

appeared from the world scene. The blame for this lack has been commonly put upon the working of democracy; the parliaments of European democracies were closed at the outbreak of their struggle with Teutonic autocracy and as far as possible were kept shut through the war, their rulers afraid of their own institutions. This disbelief in the democratic principle, in representative government, has grown woefully since the Armistice, both among the masses who feel that representative institutions are too easily manipulated to their oppression by the privileged classes and among "our best minds" who find "the mob" too difficult and dangerous. Hence the paradox that in a brief half dozen years since the conclusion of a world war waged professedly by the victors to save the world for democracy from the tyranny of autocracy the autocratic principle has temporarily triumphed throughout the world. We now have two forms of autocracy to choose from instead of one: the Tory mind takes refuge in some form of facism—and force, while the proletariat mind seeks communism—and force. A bitter choice for the peaceable-minded! Such a situation, however, explodes the silly anthropomorphism of war psychology, which created the myth of German diabolism. The Hun, we can see, is in our midst in every nation, not conveniently grouped in a single unit of sixty-five millions to be excoriated and exterminated. The war, we discover, was not between democracy and kaiserism, as we were told, but is and always will be between the hun-minded and the free-minded.

If the chief concern at Versailles had been for the preservation and development of "free institutions," through a peace of reconciliation and disarmament, instead of for "mandates," "reparations," and "national aspirations" for other people's possessions, there would be more wealth in the world today and a better prospect of enduring peace. Even the peace-makers themselves and those who sneered most cynically at "Wilsonian idealism" would admit the fact after a five years' experience with the results of the vindictive and predatory settlement of the war. An astounding crop of antagonisms—national, racial, religious—has sprung from the war and the peace, carrying in them the seeds of new wars. Our best minds, with the same instincts and the same fears that made the world war and the peace that was no peace, are inclined to use the same measures of repression—upon "the Red," the "inferior race," etc. and to distrust democratic institutions,—what they call the "mob mind."

The Whites when they get the upper hand are as ruthless and almost as bloody as the Reds, as in Italy: they care for law and order only as long as they make the laws and keep the order. So, in sum, it would seem safer not to trust the leadership of "the strong man," the "best minds," the aristocratic few, but to blunder on in a dark world with the broadest possible suffrage in the delegation of power. In spite of the lugubrious comments of our legalists and politicians we should welcome the appearance of multiple parties

and legislative blocs as evidence of the individualizing and clarifying of purposes in the public mind—of growth to a new order of things.

For that some kind of reorganization of society is on the way seems beyond doubt, too vast in its reach for us to comprehend who see but the first phases, the chaos with no clear drift on its surface. The old order where President

Harding could complacently declare in his last utterance on foreign relations that property rights alone are subject for international treaties must give place to some larger conception.

The efforts of right-minded men and women to outlaw war or regulate it as an institution of society arouse mingled feelings of sympathy and despair. The agitation over the process, whether World Court or Bok plan or League of Nations with or

without reservations, savors of the quackery that treats elaborately the symptoms of disease without searching for the cause. It is a misfortune that our one contribution to the peace treaties should have been cast in the set forms of eighteenth century thought, that it should have been rejected by its own people after a constitutional wrangle supplemented by a muddled election campaign. What English opinion favored, a flexible association of peoples to provide an opportunity without narrow limitations for a full parliament of nations, had more promise in it of growth—as societies grow by perception of possibilities, by weight of accomplishment. If the wise ones of Versailles had agreed to cancel all war debts, refusing to burden future generations with the sins of the past, instead of creating a reparations commission as an instrument of interminable extortion, something more real than the debating society at Geneva might well have resulted.

As it is, the world waits not only for the final disappearance of the leadership that perpetuated war in peace but also for a change in its own spirit of which it is becoming conscious. Every now and then there is a gleam of hope. When a socialist and pacifist becomes prime minister of England, even for a few months on sufferance, it would seem that a new generation is knocking at the door. One that desires to forget the follies of its fathers and start over. This generation may create instead of a League of Nations that Parliament of Peoples—if the spirit of men has changed sufficiently to use it.


In such a world as ours the pacifist would seem to be the anomaly that the militarist calls him, but he is really the only logician left. That war rarely achieves any good was sufficiently understood by a wise minority before 1914. But that war can accomplish nothing whatever but evil, to victor, vanquished, and neutral alike, was never so widely acknowledged, so honestly believed as now.

Nobody wants war, any more than typhoid or other human affliction; the only difference of opinion is whether war can be prevented, whether or not it (*Continued on page 525*)

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Seven Roads To Peace

By JAMES G. McDONALD

HE peace forces of the country are again militant. Vastly increased in numbers, well organized and well informed, they are waging an intensive offensive on many fronts. They have learned well the bitter disillusioning lessons of the war and the peace treaties. They are challenging vigorously all of the hitherto generally accepted shibboleths of our militarists.

They know that criticism is easier than constructive accomplishment. They realize more and more the complexity of present-day international relations. They do not underestimate the stupendous difficulties inherent in the task of abolishing the war system. Yet they face it courageously.

The very recent but now common use of the phrase "the war system" is indicative of this deeper understanding of the problems of war and peace. It implies that war is not an accident, not usually the result of the whim or caprice of a ruler or military clique, nor even usually the deliberately chosen weapon of ambitious imperialisms. Peace seekers now believe war to be the result basically of:

- (1) Distorted conceptions of national sovereignty, honor, rights and duties
- (2) Fundamental social, racial and economic maladjustments in modern society
- (3) The lack of adequate international cooperative machinery to assure to all peoples fair access to the resources and markets of the world.

How to eliminate these causes of war? Only a few unrepresentative groups believe that there is an easy path to peace through simple formulas or comprehensive panaceas. On the contrary, the prevailing belief is that the war system will be ended only through the gradual and painful creation of a world opinion which recognizes war as murder and which substitutes for the habit of organized slaughter the habit of judicial and other peaceful methods of adjusting the causes of friction between peoples.

How is it proposed that our government or we as citizens can best help towards the achievement of these ends? The answers which come from organizations and leaders are many. But seven plans are especially significant because they are inherently sound and because in different ways each is beginning to quicken the conscience and enlighten the intelligence of the masses of our people. These include:

- (1) Revision of the peace treaties
- (2) Referendum before declaration of war
- (3) Refusal to sanction or participate in war
- (4) Adherence to the Permanent Court of International Justice and membership in the League of Nations
- (5) The outlawry of war and the codification of international law
- (6) The American Draft Treaty of Disarmament and Security
- (7) An informed public opinion on all major questions of foreign policy.

It is interesting that this long list does not include "Self-Determination," "Democracy, a Guarantee of Peace," "The Freedom of the Seas," "War to end War." These favorite war-time slogans have in practice been proved either so vague as to be inapplicable or so capable of abuse

as to be almost valueless. Self determination has created as many problems as it has solved. Democracies are by no means invariably pacific. Freedom of the seas, short of complete scrapping or international pooling of naval and aerial armaments, is an empty phrase. The war-time propaganda that a smashing military victory makes for permanent peace has been sadly disproved by events since 1918.

Popular sentiment here for treaty revision is limited for the most part to radicals and liberals. It is none the less a force to be reckoned with. Its latest expression is in the platform on which Senator LaFollette is running for the presidency. "We favor an active foreign policy to bring about a revision of the Versailles Treaty, in accordance with the terms of the armistice." Whether such revision is in fact effected through formal action or by indirection as through the Dawes Report is immaterial. Certainly treaty revision is an essential first step towards European peace and, therefore, towards world peace.

That the people themselves should have the right to vote on the questions of war and peace is a belief of widening influence. It is insisted upon without qualification in the LaFollette platform; it appears in attenuated form in the Democratic platform. Its growing popularity is symptomatic of the deepening conviction among the mass of the people that international affairs cannot safely be left to the sole control of politicians, but instead that those who must bear the brunt of war should themselves make the final fateful decision.

THOSE who pledge themselves to refuse to bear arms or to perform any service in support of a future war are the shock troops of the peace army. Their courage and devotion to principle is an invaluable asset to the cause. The number of absolute pacifists increases daily, especially among young men and women. One significant manifestation of this was the vote of seven hundred students at the Indianapolis Student Volunteer Convention in December, 1923, "not to sanction or participate in any future wars." A direct outgrowth of the action of these students was the formation of the Fellowship of Youth for Peace. The members of this Fellowship adopt the following pledge:

Recognizing that the method of war is self-defeating, involving greater evils than it can remove, and is contrary to my understanding of the spirit and principles of Jesus, I am impelled to turn from it and to rely instead upon the creative power of love. . . .

And since war inevitably involves violation of these principles [of Jesus] I find myself unable to take part in it.

Prompt adherence to the Permanent Court of International Justice is almost universally supported. At the recent hearings on this subject before the sub-committee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, more than forty state and national organizations represented by their official spokesmen, urged immediate action by the Senate. It is significant that the organized churches, organized labor, organized women voters, organized members of the Bar, organized university women, organized merchants, or-