

CHAPTER XVI

AFTERMATH

“THESE are the things that ye shall do: speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates:”

—Zechariah.

It is difficult now to make the people of Britain and America understand we did not declare war against Germany because her methods of warfare are not conducted according to the Hague rules; neither did Britain declare war on Germany because Louvain, Malines, and Dinant have been destroyed, and the Belgian people have had almost every kind of atrocity inflicted upon them. It is, however, vitally necessary that the public mind should be brought back now to an appreciation of the true position of European affairs as they were before August 3rd, 1914 — if the people are to take any effective part in peace negotiations. Statesmen may find it convenient to fill their minds with all that is now taking place on the battlefields, to the exclusion of what really happened before August, 1914, and what the position of essential interest to the people will be when the war is over. Governments will look after their own interests; but with people it is different, for no Government will do anything really worth while for them unless they keep clearly in view all those factors which have caused so much suffer-

ing and death, and firmly decide to rid themselves of pernicious systems which foment wars.

Let there be no mistake this time. In the past certain officials and writers strove during wars to make people forget the issues which made wars; the reasons given to the public for entering on war were seldom the real reasons; usually the real reasons never reached the mind of the general public. Hence the ease with which Governments launch nations into wars. It is all very proper to express indignation at ruthless acts inflicted on defenceless persons and towns; but it would be most unwise to forget the issues which brought about the strife. Real sympathy with the victims in all countries now suffering from the ravages of war must extend so far as to make a recurrence of these horrors improbable. It is only to be expected that men and women of refinement should be deeply incensed at the destruction of Rheims Cathedral; but that the act should blot out of mind the events which brought the war about is a poor service to art and humanity.

To those who cannot understand why certain people should be horrified at the burning of the Louvain library, the ruination of beautiful buildings, and not be just as deeply shocked at the loss or mutilation of a soldier, it must be pointed out that it is the custom of the world to regard the body and soul of a man as something inferior in value to a rare volume or a grand cathedral. There is nothing so cheap as human life. It is the popular notion that men are easily replaced; and so long as men permit certain sections of their fellows to think they are cheap, not worth the interest bestowed on a building or a book, the world will have little rest from war, and only

very few men will ever have the chance of learning how to appreciate the architecture of their own country, or why the art of Elzevir should be revered.

The people must think clearly this time. They can very well conduct the business of war imposed by the Government, and at the same time keep in mind every circumstance, political, social, diplomatic, military, and naval, which forced us into the conflict. Whether we suffer defeat on land or sea, whether we gain great victories, we all must decide resolutely not to let any event turn us aside from the great work of protecting future generations from the evil which present systems have wrought. The greatest triumph will be won in vain if we forget our duty to the children of the future. To every man who sacrifices his life in this struggle, the people owe, not monuments in stone, but a certain escape for those who live after him from all the secret systems, armament rings, and economic wrongs which compelled his sacrifice.

War is so awful, so terrible, that some men are driven to excuse it by saying it is a biological necessity; they can account for its consequences in no other way. But no war kills so many men as there are children killed year after year by involuntary poverty. Poverty thrusts all the travail of war into millions of homes at all times. Poverty is with us so much, however, that we have become used to it. War, on the other hand, being an intermittent effect, catches our attention. It takes possession of our thought and sways us with a force not compatible with reason. It assails the mind and will not let it dwell long on anything else. War is arrogant, imperious, and vindictive: it will push all thoughts not

of it aside, it will rule over the mind, it hits back if you try to drive it out.

During a war it is no easy task to prevent your sympathy clouding your reason. The whole social system seems to be organized against any individual attempt to concentrate the attention dominantly upon the causes of the war. Governments, churches, theatres, the press, and local authorities, direct their efforts, in the main, warwards; the whole thought of society and commerce seems to be occupied with war; and all desire to question the reasons given by statesmen for participating in the war must be suppressed. It has been ruled already by certain "leaders of thought" that it is unwise, unpatriotic, and un-English, to suspect the motives of Governments, or waver for a moment in swearing whole-hearted allegiance to the authorities: you must think only of the war. If you dare ask for the truth, you are helping the enemy; if you suggest an early peace, you are hindering the militarists who desire no peace until their enemy is utterly crushed. Insidious, bewildering, and plausible, are the reasons given by statesmen and journalists for inflicting a humiliating defeat; without it, they tell us we must not hope for disarmament. No patriot is supposed to ask if disarmament is at all probable. No one must ask if a single statesman really believes such a blessing will follow if the enemy be annihilated. But is it believable? What does disarmament mean? Does it mean that all arsenals and depots will be scrapped, that all yards and ordnance works will be closed, that all ships of war will be dismantled, that all naval and military weapons, plant and ammunition will be destroyed, and that all soldiers and sail-

ors will be dismissed? Impossible! of course! One has only to think of all the commercial and economic consequences of disarmament, to realize how utterly wicked it is for any one to lead people to believe they intend to bring any such change about. Besides, we have our Essens, we have our Krupps, we have our war-party, we have our Jingo press; and if only a reduction of expenditure on armaments is to take place, it must be Britain that must lead the way.

An American writer says, "nothing less than total disarmament will satisfy the people." Has that writer asked himself these questions: "Will Russia disarm? Will France disarm? Again, what power will Britain, after she disarms, have of making Germany, after she is crushed, not follow the example of France in the 'seventies? How long after 1870 was France content to remain quiet? There is this, too, to be considered: Are the men who conducted the negotiations before the war to be the makers of peace terms? Will the old heads serve for radically new ideas? After the war it is quite probable there will be greater Governmental reasons for building up massive armaments than ever before. One has only to think of the position in Central Europe if Germany be utterly crushed. Will she be satisfied to let Russia become the greatest Power in Europe? Will Britain, within ten years, be satisfied with Russia as the dominant Power? What military and naval strength will Britain require to insist on nearly 80,000,000 of the Teutonic race in Europe remaining quiet? If in a comparatively few years France could rise again out of the dust of 1870, to be a Power great enough to seek alliances with Britain and Russia, surely any one with a grain of sense must realize

what Germany will do in a far shorter space of time. It is not meet that statesmen should be expected to perform miracles of that nature. Let us then have done with the silly notion that a crushing defeat of Germany will mean disarmament.

It will, however, be possible to reduce to some extent expenditure on our army and navy if we insist on radical changes taking place in our Foreign Office system. In the first place, the people must make the Government amenable in every particular to Parliament. Legislation must be enacted that all territorial acquisition, treaties, alliances, ententes, understandings, all negotiations with foreign Powers, shall be submitted to the House for ratification. There must be no more secrecy, no more Foreign Office strategy, no more "Commander of the Forces," and no more Cabinet rule. Parliament, and Parliament only, must be responsible, primarily and finally, for all affairs affecting the lives of the people.

Then in connection with the navy and army, all orders for all material must in detail be submitted by the experts to a Parliamentary Committee made up from all sections of thought in the House; and estimates must be tendered, as was done recently in America, so that there will be competition strong enough to break all rings. It is also necessary to make the Minister for War and the First Lord of the Admiralty the servants of Parliament, and deliver them out of the hands of the experts. Democratization of all the services must follow these changes.

Some reduction in armaments might then be made; but let it not be imagined that these changes will be sufficient to preclude the probability of war. They

will only give the people a chance to know what is taking place, and, perhaps, let them have more time to think before they engage in war. No more can truthfully be said in their favour.

Another important change might be made with advantage to the people. There should be a fixed period for a Parliament, so that all members may vote fearlessly at all times. It is a debasing system which influences a member to vote for legislation or supply which he dislikes, solely to keep a Government in office to carry measures he does like. There is not proper freedom for members who, in the main, support the Government; and if the people are to be truly represented, if the opinion of the House is to be accurately expressed, members must be free to vote as they conscientiously desire, without fear of losing some measure on which they have set their hearts.

But the problems of armaments and war are not to be solved by merely making changes such as are suggested above. These problems lie deep, away down at the base of the social system; and they must be considered in relation to the composition of armies and navies in times of peace. Big battalions and great crews mean that soldiers and sailors have no better way of facing the struggle for existence. Grant all the exceptions, admit all the attractions, concede all that military and naval writers say about courage and patriotism; still, the economic character of the problem cannot be explained away. And it does not matter whether the name of the system be voluntary or compulsory, compulsion is the driving force which gives Governments armies and navies; without it in times of peace comparatively

few men would enlist. It is compulsion of a vital kind that lies at the back of the problem; with the rank and file indeed, choice scarcely ever enters in. Choice denotes freedom to decide, liberty of action, an alternative. As was said by a soldier in the House of Commons, only a little while ago, "Recruiting is good when trade is bad." Yes, it is hunger, lack of a home, of decent clothes, of means of keeping clean, which are the chief reasons for men joining the ranks. Who has watched recruiting stations at different seasons, in times of prosperity, and in times of depression, and not seen how powerful are the needs of men in affecting the work of recruiting sergeants? When trade is booming, only a weedy, wizened lot of wretched youths are, as a rule, to be seen reading the posters, or chatting with the men with the "ribbons and the cane." But when depression sets in, quite another type of man is seen about the stations; fellows out of work, hungry, homeless labourers, sometimes artizans seeking the army or navy as a refuge, not with zeal, but with reluctance.

To those who imagine there are numbers of adventurous spirits who prefer life in armies and navies to the monotony of a factory or a farm, it should be pointed out that generations of workers under unfavourable conditions must have had a great effect on many youths who see no better prospect in life than their forebears had; and it is not to be wondered they seek relief in other directions. But if it were possible to make young men understand that the land of their birth was in fact their heritage, that the gifts of God were theirs to enjoy equally with their fellows, they would prefer a life of production and usefulness rather than the discipline of the barracks

and the tyranny of the drum. Uncertainty of work, low real wage, high prices and rent, all tend to cloud the prospect for young men. Even in seaports, wise old men tell the economic tale of how the navy is easily recruited. There is no alternative, they say; sharp young chaps look for something more exciting than a shop or a mill or a farm, with little or no chance to rise.

It is opportunity that is required for the mass of men — equal opportunity for all, indeed — if the problems of armaments and war are to be solved. There is no other way! Arbitration will not prevent the nations arming, and Mr. Bryan's notable expedient, of a year's consideration will in no way alter the economic system, nor limit the growth of armies and navies. It is justice that is wanted, if men are to live in peace.

Citizens who desire peace can indulge in no greater folly than that which is summed up in the phrase, "the best way to preserve peace is to prepare for war." That rotten expedient has been shattered completely. The position of the nations warring in Europe proves conclusively that no amount of "preparedness" can stem the rush of militarists once they get out of hand. Nothing could stop Russia and France, who over a period of years spent over £100,000,000 more on their armies than the central Empires. The "armed peace" of Europe, during the thirty-seven years before the war began, cost her peoples £22,200,000,000; £22,200,000,000 for "insurance"; that is, £600,000,000 a year. The two countries whose estimates in the year 1914 were largest for military and naval "preparedness" were the very countries to be invaded and

great areas of their territory laid waste. These countries, France and Russia, estimated, in round figures, for an expenditure of at least £165,000,000 on army and navy, while Germany and Austria estimated for £122,000,000 for both services. Add Britain's estimates to those of France and Russia and let those who still believe in “preparedness” understand that, round figures, the Triple Entente estimated in 1914 to spend the enormous sum of £123,000,000 more on “preparedness” than Germany and Austria. (Italy was not counted in the Triple Alliance by Bernhardt, when he wrote his book, *Germany and the Next War*.)

The pacifist has triumphed: armaments create wars, and militarism is at all times inimical to the real interests of the people. This war seems to be a great subconscious protest against territorial aggrandizement, bureaucratic tyranny, governmental privilege, imperial dogmatism, and gross commercialism. It is, in a vague strange way, a challenge against a discredited Christianity. While society can build up armaments, pauperize the poor, “bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne and lay them on men's shoulders,” “shut up the kingdom of heaven against men,” “devour widows' houses,” and “strain at a gnat and swallow a camel,” Christianity has not done its work. The record is extant: territorial aggrandisement violates the first law of the Creator, by Cæsar taking what belongs to God; bureaucratic tyranny forces the people to support Governments in maintaining that system; governmental privilege is the power which keeps people in subjection through iniquitous taxation and other restrictive laws; imperial dogmatism asserts the

colossal lie, that the State is the people; and commercialism keeps on as an industrial system, thriving on cruel land laws which force labour to compete for jobs and thus lower wages to subsistence-level; making life for the toilers a ceaseless grind in murk and stench, stunting the life of the young, filling the aged with sorrow, and driving our sisters into the sweat-shops and the brothels of our towns.

This war, begun by diplomatists and militarists, has made the peoples of Europe conscious of all these dreadful evils; in no other way can the seeming unanimity of all the forces fighting in all the stricken countries be explained. Each people, now the war is in progress, is actuated subconsciously by the notion that the end of the war will bring the freedom that will raise them up out of the sloughs of the past. The vision of the men in the trenches is one of peace and disarmament; but whether the close of the strife will open an era of an unarmed enduring peace is a question which will depend entirely on the people themselves. Governments have made the war; only the peoples can make an unarmed peace.

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