

# The War Guilt

By FRANCIS NEILSON

Fourteen months of war, and England stands alone—the last democratic trench in Europe! What was this Europe which is now passing away? What gave it birth? From what wells of wisdom did it spring?

After the fall of Rome, benighted Europe lay for centuries in the hands of what were called barbarians. But our historians forget, in writing their accounts of what are known as the "Dark Ages" that a spirit lived—in England and in Ireland—which kept aglow the light of Nazareth. That spirit reflected the light of what we call the Christian message. Out of the gloom and despair came men who turned their thoughts to learning. These missionaries of the gospel passed the tradition and legend on to their followers who, again, spread the light wherever they journeyed.

The great revival which came to England in the days of Alfred and to France in the days of Charlemagne, though suffering many vicissitudes and heart-breaking setbacks, struggled on until the glory of Gothic culture was founded. This was no movement initiated by any government; it was the work of individual souls. Men, not officials, made Europe the cultural center of the world.

That Europe has been destroyed in fourteen months. It took many centuries to build. This is what war can do and does do. No one can read the histories of the great empires of the past and fail to be impressed with the utter recklessness of politicians who commit their peoples to war.

No matter whether we are pro-this or pro-that, we must now look with clear eyes upon the ruin and desolation. Empires pass, but the deeds of their makers live on. Persepolis, Luxor, Babylon are remains of glories which their builders imagined would never end.

What now for Europe? We must think of the days to come because men go on, though politicians fail. Will the new Europe be without

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We present herewith the epilogue to "The Tragedy of Europe: A Diary of the Second World War" by Francis Neilson, C. C. Nelson Publishing Co., Appleton, Wis. (\$10.00). In times like these, charges and recriminations pass with the time of day. We heard them in 1918, and in 1920 wondered what they had meant. Mr. Neilson's epilogue is a challenge; how many of us dare to meet it?

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spirit? Is the new order to be based upon a crass materialism enslaving the producers of wealth? Only the future can tell—but the man who cannot use his spirit might as well be dead, for the slave cannot find a channel through which he may exercise the impulses of his soul. The shackled man never did anything for himself or his fellows. What brought Europe, in the days gone by, out of the night of barbarian gloom was the freedom of the spirit. This light in the darkness gave man courage to meet great adventure, to suffer hardship, to front the horned hand of authority with valiant calm.

Where must we look for this opportunity that made Europe a glory? With all her sins of politics and war, of social upheavals, of disease and famine, during at least fifteen centuries, Europe gave to the world the master builders of religion, science and the arts. Her contribution to culture permeates every quarter of the globe.

It may be that new order which is spoken of by the totalitarian Powers is a phase through which we have to pass, so that our souls may be tried by the iron of adversity. Such periods have been endured many times before our day, and man has emerged from them stronger because of the test. It is the way with those who miss the path to wander into marshes or jungles. Undoubtedly, we of this period have taken the wrong road, but there is no going back directly to the right one. We are obliged to take the punishment for our carelessness and endure the pains of our folly.

Every prophet has been wrong, and this should remind us that it is time for us to think things out for ourselves. Even Hitler, himself, cannot plan a war. This war was not planned by him any more than it was planned by Chamberlain or Daladier or Mussolini. Everything has gone wrong. We are reminded by the partisans that not one of these men wanted war. Yet they blame one another for having started it. The English say Hitler must take full responsibility; the Germans say Chamberlain is to blame, and Churchill must bear the responsibility for prolonging the conflict. Many Frenchmen blame Daladier; and, here in America, Mussolini is not spared by millions who believe that his attack on Abyssinia was the initial step. No partisan realizes for a moment his own responsibility.

The pragmatists of the political schools of democracy have come to the end of their tether. Their shallow slogans are demolished. Even their feeble attempts to camouflage their defeats by the use of concepts alien to their actions no longer deceive anyone who thinks.

Recently I read a tract published in the "Times" by a religious society at Oxford: "Why Does Not God Intervene?" I wish it could be circulated widely in this country, for we have nothing like it here. This tract, read by the thousands, brings the matter of war-guilt straight to the individual. It is solely his affair. This expresses the attitude I have taken and opinion I have cultivated for over forty years, in connection with national affairs.

The individual is to blame. At every turn he has shirked his manly obligations, ignored his duties, and permitted the politicians to use him for their purposes. In no other way can it be explained how people are committed to war. I firmly believe that this tragedy of Europe could have been averted if men had kept the light burning and had realized their duties to the full.