

THE INTERNATIONAL POSSE COMITATUS

By THEODORE ROOSEVELT

Sixth Article in His Series on What America Should Learn from the War

MOST Western Americans who are past middle age remember young, rapidly growing, and turbulent communities in which there was at first complete anarchy. During the time when there was no central police power to which to appeal every man worth his salt, in other words, every man fit for existence in such a community, had to be prepared to defend himself; and, usually, although not always, the fact that he was prepared saved him from all trouble, whereas unpreparedness was absolutely certain to invite disaster.

In such communities before there was a regular and fully organized police force there came an interval during which the preservation of the peace depended upon the action of a single official, a Sheriff or Marshal, who, if the law was defied in arrogant fashion, summoned a posse comitatus composed of as many armed, thoroughly efficient, law-abiding citizens as was necessary in order to put a stop to the wrongdoing. Under these conditions each man had to keep himself armed and both able and willing to respond to the call of the peace officer; and, furthermore, if he had a shred of wisdom, he kept himself ready on an emergency to act on his own behalf if the peace officer did not or could not do his duty.

In such towns I have myself more than once seen well-meaning but foolish citizens endeavor to meet the exigencies of the case by simply passing resolutions of disarmament without any power back of them. That is, they passed self-denying ordinances saying that nobody was to carry arms, but they failed to provide methods for carrying such ordinances into effect. In every case the result was the same. Good citizens for the moment abandoned their weapons. The bad men continued to carry them. Things grew worse instead of better; and then the good men came to their senses and clothed some representative of the police power to employ force, potential or existing, against the wrongdoers.

Affairs in the international world are at this time in analogous condition. There is no central police power, and not the least likelihood of having one organized. Well-meaning enthusiasts have tried their hands to an almost unlimited extent in the way of devising all-inclusive arbitration treaties, neutrality treaties, disarmament proposals, and the like, with no force back of them, and the result has been stupendous and discreditable failure.

Unpreparedness Invites Conquest.

UNPREPAREDNESS for war on the part of individual nations has sometimes, but always, averted war. Unpreparedness for war, as in the case of China, Korea, and Luxemburg, has invariably invited smashing disaster, and sometimes complete conquest. Surely these conditions should teach a lesson that any man who runs may read unless his eyes have been blinded by folly or his heart weakened by cowardice.

The first and immediately vital lesson for each individual nation is that as things are now it must in time of crisis rely on its own stout hearts and ready hands for self-defense. Existing treaties are utterly worthless so far as concerns protecting any free, well-behaved people from one of the great aggressive military monarchies of the world. The all-inclusive arbitration treaties such as those recently negotiated by Messrs. Wilson and Bryan, when taken in connection with our refusal to act under existing treaties, represent about the highest point of slightly mischievous fatuity which can be attained in international matters.

Inasmuch as we ourselves are the power that initiated their negotiation, we can do our plain duty to ourselves and our neighbors only by ourselves proceeding from the outset on the theory, and by warning our neighbors, that these treaties in any time of crisis will certainly not be respected by any serious adversary, and probably will of necessity be violated by ourselves. They do not in even the very smallest degree relieve us of the necessity of preparedness for war. To this point of our duty to preparedness I will return later.

The second point is that we ought not, and must not, rest content merely with

working for our own defense. The utterly appalling calamity that has befallen the civilized world during the last three months, and above all the horrible catastrophe that has overwhelmed Belgium without Belgium's having the smallest responsibility in the matter, must make the least thoughtful realize how unsatisfactory is the present basis of international relations among civilized powers.

In order to make things better several things are necessary. We must clearly grasp the fact that mere selfish avoidance of duty to others, even although covered by such fine words as "peace" and "neutrality," is a wretched thing, and an obstacle to securing the peace of righteousness throughout the world. We must recognize clearly the old common law doctrine that a right without a remedy is void. We must firmly grasp the fact that measures should be taken to put force back of good faith in the observance of treaties. The worth of treaties depends purely upon the good faith with which they are executed; and it is mischievous folly to enter into treaties without providing for their execution, and wicked folly to enter into them if they ought not to be executed.

Powers Must Enforce Hague Decrees.

IT is necessary to devise means for putting the collective and efficient strength of all the great powers of civilization back of any well-behaved power which is wronged by another power. In other words, we must devise means for executing treaties in good faith, by the establishment of some great international tribunal and by securing the enforcement of the decrees of this tribunal through the action of a posse comitatus of powerful and civilized nations, all of them being bound by solemn agreement to coerce any power that offends against the decrees of the tribunal.

That there will be grave difficulties in successfully working out this plan I would be the first to concede, and I would be the first to insist that to work it out successfully would be impossible unless the nations acted in good faith. But the plan is feasible, and it is the only one which at the moment offers any chance of success.

Ever since the days of Henry IV. of France there has been a growth, slow and halting to be sure, but yet evidently a growth, in recognition by the public conscience of civilized nations that there should be a method of making the rules of international morality obligatory and binding among the powers. But merely to trust to public opinion without organized force back of it is silly. Force must be put back of justice, and nations must not shrink from the duty of proceeding by any means that are necessary against wrongdoers. It is the failure to recognize these vital truths that has rendered the actions of our Government during the last four or five years impotent to preserve world peace and fruitful only in earning for us the half-veiled derision of other nations.

The attitude of our own Government during the last three months shows how worthless the present treaties, unbacked by force, are, and how utterly ineffective mere passive neutrality is to secure even the smallest advance in world morality. I have been very reluctant in any way to criticize the action of the present Administration in foreign affairs; I have faithfully, and in some cases against my own deep-rooted personal convictions, sought to justify what it has done in Mexico and as regards the present war; but the time has come when loyalty to the Administration's action in foreign affairs means disloyalty to our national self-interest and to our obligations toward humanity at large.

As regards Belgium the Administration has clearly taken the ground that our own selfish ease forbids us to fulfill our explicit obligations to small neutral States when they are deeply wronged. It will never be possible in any war to commit a clearer breach of international morality than that committed by Germany in the invasion and subjugation of Belgium. Every one of the nations involved in this war and the United States as well have committed such outrages in the past. But the very purpose of

The Hague conventions and of all similar international actions was to put a stop to such misconduct in the future.

At the outset I ask our people to remember that what I say is based on the assumption that we are bound in good faith to fulfill our treaty obligations; that we will neither favor nor condemn any other nation except on the ground of its behavior; that we feel as much good will to the people of Germany or Austria as to the people of England, of France, or of Russia; that we speak for Belgium only as we could speak for Holland or Switzerland or one of the Scandinavian or Balkan nations; and that if the circumstances as regards Belgium had been reversed, we would have protested as emphatically against wrong action by England or France as we now protest against wrong action by Germany.

The United States and all the great powers now at war were parties to the international code created in the regulations annexed to The Hague conventions of 1899 and 1907. As President, acting on behalf of this Government, and in accordance with the unanimous wish of our people, I ordered the signature of the United States to these conventions. Most emphatically I would not have permitted such a farce to have gone through if it had entered my head that this Government would not consider itself bound to do all it could to see that the regulations to which it made itself a party were actually observed when the necessity for their observance arose. I cannot imagine any sensible nation thinking it worth while to sign future Hague conventions if even such a powerful neutral as the United States does not care enough about them to protest against their open breach. Of the present neutral powers, the United States of America is the most disinterested and the strongest, and should therefore bear the main burden of the responsibility in this matter.

It is quite possible to make an argument to the effect that we never should have entered into The Hague conventions, because our sole duty is to ourselves and not to others, and our sole concern should be to keep ourselves at peace, at any cost, and not to help other powers that are oppressed, and not to protest against wrongdoing. I do not myself accept this view; but in practice it is the view taken by the present Administration, apparently with at the moment the approval of the mass of our people. Such a policy, while certainly not exalted, and in my judgment neither far-sighted nor worthy of a high-spirited and lofty-souled nation, is yet in a sense understandable and in a sense defensible.

But it is quite indefensible to make agreements and not live up to them. The climax of absurdity is for any Administration to do what the present Administration during the past three months has done. Mr. Wilson's Administration has shirked the duty plainly imposed on it by the obligations of the conventions already entered into; and at the same time it has sought to obtain cheap credit by entering into a couple of score new treaties infinitely more drastic than the old ones, and quite impossible of honest fulfillment.

Unworthy Abandonment of Duty on Our Part.

WHEN the Belgian people complained of violations of The Hague Tribunal, it was a mockery, it was a timid and unworthy abandonment of duty on our part, for President Wilson to refer them back to The Hague Court, when he knew that The Hague Court was less than a shadow unless the United States by doing its clear duty gave The Hague Court some substance. If The Hague conventions represented nothing but the expression of feeble aspirations toward decency, uttered only in time of profound peace, and not to be even expressed above a whisper when with awful bloodshed and suffering the conventions were broken, then it was idle folly to enter into them.

If, on the other hand, they meant anything, if the United States had a serious purpose, a serious sense of its obligations to world righteousness, when it entered into them, then its plain duty as the trustee of civilization is to investigate the charges solemnly made as to the violation of The Hague conventions. If such investigation

is made, and if the charges prove well founded, then it is the duty of the United States to take whatever action may be necessary to vindicate the principles of international law set forth in these conventions.

I am not concerned with the charges of individual atrocity. The prime fact is that Belgium committed no offense whatever, and yet that her territory has been invaded and her people subjugated. This prime fact cannot be left out of consideration in dealing with any matter that has occurred in connection with it. Her neutrality has certainly been violated, and this is in clear violation of the fundamental principles of The Hague conventions.

It appears clear that undefended towns have been bombarded, and that towns which were defended have been attacked with bombs at a time when no attack was made upon the defenses. This is certainly in contravention of The Hague agreement forbidding the bombardment of undefended towns.

United States Ought to Take Some Action.

ILLEGAL and excessive contributions are expressly condemned under Articles 49 and 52 of the conventions. If these articles do not forbid the levying of such sums as \$40,000,000 from Brussels and \$90,000,000 from the Province of Brabant, then the articles are absolutely meaningless. Articles 43 and 50 explicitly forbid the infliction of a collective penalty, pecuniary or otherwise, on a population on account of acts of individuals for which it cannot be regarded as collectively responsible. Either this prohibition is meaningless, or it prohibits just such acts as the punitive destruction of Vise, Louvain, Aerschot, and Dinant. Furthermore, a great deal of the appalling devastation of Central and East Central Belgium has been apparently terrorizing and not punitive in its purpose, and this is explicitly forbidden by The Hague conventions.

Now, it may be that there is an explanation and justification for a portion of what has been done. But if The Hague conventions mean anything, and if bad faith in the observance of treaties is not to be treated with cynical indifference, then the United States Government should inform itself as to the facts, and should at least put itself on record in reference thereto. The extent to which the action should go may properly be a subject for discussion. But that there should be some action is beyond discussion; unless, indeed, we ourselves are content to take the view that treaties, conventions, and international engagements and agreements of all kinds are to be treated by us and by everybody else as what they have been authoritatively declared to be, "scraps of paper," the writing on which is intended for no better purpose than temporarily to amuse the feeble-minded.

If the above statements seem in the eyes of my German friends hostile to Germany, let me emphasize the fact that they are predicated upon a course of action which, if extended and applied, as it should be extended and applied, would range the United States upon the side of Germany if any such assault were made upon Germany as has been made upon Belgium, or if either Belgium or any of the other allies committed similar wrongdoing.

Many Germans assert and believe that if Germany had not acted as she did, France and England would have invaded Belgium and have committed similar wrongs. In such case it would have been our clear duty to behave toward them exactly as we ought now to behave toward Germany. But the fact that other powers might under other conditions do wrong affords no justification for failure to act on the wrong that has actually been committed.

It must always be kept in mind, however, that we cannot expect the nation against whose actions we protest to accept our position as warranted, unless we make clear that we have both the will and the power to interfere on behalf of that nation if in its turn it is oppressed. In other words, we must show that we believe in right, and therefore in living up to our promises in good faith; and, furthermore, that we are

both able and ready to put might behind right.

As I have before said, I think that the party in Germany which believes in a policy of aggression represents but a minority of the nation. It is powerful only because the great majority of the German people are rightfully in fear of aggression at the expense of Germany, and sanction striking only because they fear lest they themselves be struck. The greatest service that could be rendered to peace would be to convince Germany, as well as other powers, that in such event we would do all we could on behalf of the power that was wronged.

Extremists in England, France, and Russia talk as if the proper outcome of the present war would be the utter dismemberment of Germany and her reduction to impotence such as that which followed for her upon the Thirty Years' War. I have actually received letters from Frenchmen and Englishmen upbraiding me for what they regard as a pro-German leaning in these articles I have written. To these well-meaning persons I can only say that Americans who remember the extreme bitterness felt by Northerners for Southerners, and Southerners for Northerners, at the end of the civil war, are saddened but in no wise astonished that other peoples should show a like bitterness.

I can only repeat that to dismember and hopelessly shatter Germany would be a frightful calamity for mankind, precisely as the dismemberment and shattering of the British Empire or of the French Republic would be. It is right that the United States should regard primarily its own interests. But I believe that I speak for a considerable number of my countrymen when I say that we ought not solely to consider our own interests. Above all, we should not do as the present Administration does; for it refuses to take any concrete action in favor of any nation which is wronged; and yet it also refuses to act so that we may ourselves be sufficient for our own protection.

We ought not to trust in words unbacked by deed. We should be able to defend ourselves. We should also be ready and able to join in preventing the infliction of disaster of the kind of which I speak upon any civilized power, great or small, whether it be Germany or England, Belgium or Hungary, Russia or Japan.

So much for questions of international right, and of our duty to others in international affairs. Now for our duty to ourselves.

International Morality Still Low and Irregular.

ASINCERE desire to act well toward other nations must not blind us to the fact that as yet the standard of international morality is both low and irregular. The behavior of the great military empires of the Old World, in reference to their treaty obligations and their moral obligations, toward countries such as Belgium, Finland, and Korea, shows that it would be utter folly for us in any grave crisis to trust to anything save our own preparedness and resolution for our safety.

The other day there appeared in the newspapers extracts from a translation of a report made by a General of the Prussian Army Staff outlining the plan of operations by Germany in the event of war with America. Great surprise was expressed by innocent Americans that such plans should be in existence, and private individuals stated unofficially that the account was incorrect—although there were no official denials. Neither the resentment expressed nor yet the denials of fact were necessary.

One feature of the admirable preparedness in which Germany and Japan stand so far above all other nations, and especially above our own, is their careful consideration of hostilities with all possible antagonists. Bernhardi's famous books treat of possible war with Austria, and possible attack by Austria upon Germany, although the prime lessons that they teach are those contained in the possibility of war as it has actually occurred, with Germany and Austria in alliance. This does not indicate German hostility to Austria; it merely indi-

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ates German willingness to look squarely in the face all possible facts.

Of course, and quite properly, the German General Staff has carefully considered the question of hostilities with America, and doubtless plans were drawn up with minute care and prevision at the time when there was friction between the two countries over Samoa, at the time when Admiral von Diederichs clashed with Dewey in Manila Bay, and on the later occasion when there was friction in connection with Venezuela. This did not represent German ill-will toward America. It represented the perfectly proper and common-sense consideration of possibilities by Germany's rulers; and the failure to give this consideration would have reflected severely upon these rulers. To become angry because such plans exist would be childish. To fail to profit by our knowledge that they certainly do exist would, however, be not merely childish but imbecile. I have myself become personally cognizant of the existence of such plans, and of the larger features of their details in two cases, as regards two different nations.

The essential feature of these plans has been the seizure of some of our great coast cities, and the terrorization of these cities so as to make them give enormous ransoms; ransoms of such a size that our own country would be crippled, whereas our foes would be enabled to run the war against us with a handsome profit to themselves.

These plans are based, of course, upon the belief that we have not sufficient foresight and intelligence to keep our navy in first-class condition, and upon not merely the belief, but the knowledge, that our regular army is so small and our utter unpreparedness otherwise so great that on land we would be entirely helpless against a moderate-sized expeditionary force belonging to any first-class military power.

Foreign military and naval observers know well that our navy has been used during the last year or so in connection with the Mexican situation in such manner as to accomplish the minimum of results as regards Mexico, while at the same time to do the maximum of damage in interrupting the manoeuvring and the gun practice of our fleets. They regard Messrs. Wilson and Bryan as representatives of the American people in their entire inability to understand the real nature of the forces that underlie international relations and the importance of preparedness.

They are entirely cold blooded in their views of us. Foreign rulers may despise us for our supine unpreparedness, and for our readiness to make treaties taken together with our refusal to fulfill these treaties by seeking to avert wrong done to others. But their contempt will not prevent their using this nation as arbiter in order to bring about peace if to do suits their purposes; and if, on the contrary, one or the other of the several great military empires becomes the world mistress as the result of this

war, that power will infringe our rights whenever and to the extent that it deems it advantageous to do so, and will make war upon us whenever it believes that such war will be to its own advantage.

In the event of such a war against us it is well to remember that the spiritless and selfish type of neutrality which we have observed in the present war will be remembered by all other nations on whichever side they have been engaged in this contest, and will give each of them more or less satisfaction in the event of disaster befalling us. These nations, if they come to a deadlock as the result of this war, will not be withheld by any sentiment of indignation against or contempt for us from utilizing the services of the President as a medium for bringing about peace if this seems the most convenient method of getting peace. But whether they do this or not they will retain a smoldering ill-will toward us, one and all of them; and if we were assailed it would be utterly quixotic, utterly foolish of any one of them to come to our aid no matter what wrongs were inflicted upon us.

It would be quite impossible for any power to treat us worse than Belgium has been treated, or to attack us with less warrant than was shown when Belgium was attacked. Bombs have been continually dropped in the City of Paris and in other cities, wrecking private houses and killing men, women, and children, at a time when there was no pretense that any military attacks were being made upon

the cities, or that any other object was served than that of terrorizing the civilian population. Cities have been destroyed and others held to huge ransom. All these practices are forbidden by The Hague conventions.

Inasmuch as we have not made a single protest against them when other powers have suffered, it would be both ridiculous and humiliating for us to make even the slightest appeal for assistance or to expect any assistance from any other powers if ever we in our turn suffer in like fashion. It would be purely our affair. We would have no right to expect that other powers would take the kind of action which we ourselves have refused to take. It would be our time to take our medicine, and it would be folly and cowardice to make wry faces over it or to expect sympathy, still less aid, from outsiders.

As I have already stated, my own view is most strongly that if we were assailed in accordance with the plans of foreign powers above mentioned, it would be our business positively to refuse to allow any city to ransom itself, and cheerfully to accept the destruction of New York, or San Francisco, or any other city as the alternative to such ransom. Our duty would be to accept these disasters as the payment rightfully due from us to Fate for our folly in having listened to the clamor of the feeble folk among the ultra-pacificists, and in having indorsed the unspeakable silliness of the policy contained in the proposed all-inclusive arbitration treaties of Mr. Taft and in the accomplished all-inclusive arbitration treaties of Messrs. Wilson and Bryan.

I very earnestly hope that this nation will ultimately adopt a dignified and self-respecting policy in international affairs. I earnestly hope that

ultimately we shall live up to every international obligation we have undertaken—exactly as we did live up to them during the seven and a half years while I was President. I earnestly hope that we shall ourselves become one of the joint guarantors of world peace under such a plan as that I have already outlined, and that we shall hold ourselves ready and willing to act as a member of the international posse comitatus to enforce the peace of righteousness as against any offender, big or small.

This would mean a great practical stride toward relief from the burden of excessive military preparation. It would mean that a long step had been taken toward at least minimizing and restricting the area and extent of possible warfare. It would mean that all liberty-loving and enlightened peoples, great and small, would be freed from the haunting nightmare of terror which now besets them when they think of the possible conquest of their land.

Until this can be done we owe it to ourselves as a nation effectively to safeguard ourselves against all likelihood of disaster at the hands of a foreign foe. We should bring our navy up to the highest point of preparedness, we should handle it purely from military considerations, and should see that the training was never intermitted. We should make our little regular army larger and more effective than at present.

In addition, I most heartily believe that we should return to the ideal held by our people in the days of Washington, although never lived up to by them. We should follow the example of such typical democracies as Switzerland and Australia, and we should provide and require military training for all our young men. Switzerland's efficient army has unquestionably been the chief reason why, in this war there has been no violation of her

neutrality. Australia's system of military training has enabled her at once to ship large bodies of first-rate fighting men to England's aid. England at the moment is saved from the fate of Belgium only because of her navy; and the small size of her army, her lack of arms, her lack of previous preparations, doubtless afford the real reason why this war has occurred at all, for there would certainly have been no war if the peoples of the Continent had had to face the fact that England could at once put in the field an army as large and effective as, for instance, that of France.

Training of our young men in field manoeuvres and in marksmanship, as is done in Switzerland, and to a slightly less extent in Australia, would be of immense advantage to the physique and morale of our whole population. It would not represent any withdrawal of our population from civil pursuits, such as occurs among the great military States of the European Continent. In Switzerland, for instance, the ground training is given in the schools, and the young man after graduating serves only some four months with the branch of the army to which he is attached, and after that only about eight days a year, not counting his rifle practice. All serve alike, rich and poor, without any exceptions; and all whom I have ever met, the poor even more than the rich, are enthusiastic over the beneficial effects of the service and the increase in self-reliance, self-respect, and efficiency which it has brought.

The utter worthlessness of make-believe soldiers who have not been trained will be evident to any one who cares to read such works as Prof. Johnson's recent volume on Bull Run. Our people should make a thorough study of the Swiss and Australian systems, and then adapt them to our own use. To do so would not be a stride toward war, as the feeble folk among

the ultra-pacificists would doubtless maintain. It would be the most effectual possible guarantee that peace would dwell within our borders; and it would also make it possible for us not only to insure peace for ourselves, but to have our words carry weight if we spoke against the commission of wrong and injustice at the expense of others.

But we must always remember that no institutions will avail unless the private citizen has the right spirit. When a leading Congressman, himself with war experience, shows conclusively in open speech in the House that we are utterly unprepared to do our duty to ourselves if assailed, President Wilson answers him with a cheap sneer, with unworthy levity; and the repeated warnings of Gen. Wood are treated with the same indifference.

Nevertheless, I do not believe that this attitude on the part of our public servants really represents the real convictions of the average American. As Charles Bonaparte in his recent admirable article has said: "A militia would afford little security to a free State if made up of poltroons or of peace-at-any-price people"; the ideal citizen of a free State must be a first-class fighting man, who scorns either to endure or to inflict wrong. American society is sound at core, and this means that at bottom we as a people accept as the basis of sound morality not slothful ease and soft selfishness and the loud timidity that fears every species of risk and hardship, but the virile strength of manliness which accepts as the ideal the stern, unflinching performance of duty, and which follows whithersoever that ideal may lead.

Theodore Roosevelt

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