

OUR COURSE IN THE LIGHT OF WAR'S LESSONS

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Ninth Article in His Series on What We Should Learn from the War

BLESSED are the Peacemakers," not merely the Peace-lovers; for action is what makes thought operative and valuable. Above all, remember that the Peace Prattlers are in no way Blessed. On the contrary, "only mischief has sprung from the activities of the professional Peace Prattlers, the ultra-pacifists, who, with the shrill clamor of eunuchs, preach the gospel of the milk and water of virtue, and scream that belief in the efficacy of diluted moral mush is essential to salvation.

It seems necessary every time I state my position to guard against the counterwords of willful folly by reiterating that my disagreement with the peace-at-any-price men, the ultra-pacifists, is not in the least because they favor peace. I object to them, first, because they have proved themselves futile and impotent in working for peace; and, second, because they commit what is not merely the capital error but the crime against morality of failing to uphold righteousness as the all-important end toward which we should strive. In actual practice they advocate the peace of unrighteousness just as fervently as they advocate the peace of righteousness.

I have as little sympathy as they have for the men who deify mere brutal force, who insist that power justifies wrong-doing, and who declare that there is no such thing as international morality. But the ultra-pacifists really play into the hands of these men. To condemn equally might which hacks right, and might which overthrows right, is to render positive service to wrongdoers. It is as if in private life we condemned alike both the policeman and the dynamite or black-hand kidnapper or white slaver whom he has arrested.

To denounce the nation that wages war in self-defense, or from a generous desire to relieve the oppressed, in the same terms in which we denounce war waged in a spirit of greed or wanton folly, stands on an exact par with denouncing equally a murderer and the policeman who, at the peril of his life and by force of arms, arrests the murderer. In each case the denunciation denotes not loftiness of soul, but weakness both of mind and of morals.

In a capital book by a German, Mr. Edmund von Mach, entitled "What Germany Wants," there is the following noble passage at the outset:

"During the preparation of this book the writer received from his uncle, a veteran army officer living in Dresden, a brief note containing the following laconic record:

"1793, your grandfather at Kostheim.
"1815, your grandfather at Liegnitz.
"1870, myself—also severely wounded by French bullets.

"1914, my son, Captain in the Sixth Regiment of Dragoons."

"Four generations obliged to fight the French!" When the writer turns to his American friends of French descent, he finds there similar records, and often even greater sorrow, for death has come to many of them. In Europe their families and his have looked upon each other as enemies for generations, while a few years in the clarifying atmosphere of America have made friends of former Frenchmen, Germans, Russians, and Englishmen.

Jointly they pray that the present war may not be carried to such a pass that an early and honorable peace becomes impossible for any one of these great nations. Is it asking too much that America may be vouchsafed in a not too distant future to do for their respective lands what the American institutions have done for them individually, help them to regard each other as their true worth, blinded by traditional hatred or fiery passion?"

It is in the spirit of this statement that we Americans should act. We are a people different from but akin to all the nations of Europe. We should feel a real friendship for each of the contesting powers and a real desire to work so as to secure justice for each. This cannot be done by preserving a tame and spiritless neutrality which treats good and evil, on precisely the same basis. Such a neutrality never has enabled, and never will enable, any nation to do a great work for righteousness. Our true course should be to judge each nation on its conduct, unhesitatingly to antagonize every nation that does ill as regards the point on which it does ill, and equally without hesitation to act, as cool-headed and yet generous wisdom may dictate, so as disinterestedly to further the welfare of all.

For example, I feel in the strongest way that we should have interfered, at least to the extent of the most emphatic diplomatic protest, and at the very outset, in regard to the violation of the neutrality of Belgium, for this act was the earliest and the most important, and in its consequences the most ruinous, of all violations and offences against treaties committed by any combatant during the war.

Protest Would Have Preserved Our Self-Respect.

But it was not the only one. The Japanese and English forces not long after violated Chinese neutrality in attacking Kia-Chau. It has been alleged, and not denied, that the British ship High-flyer sunk the Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse in neutral Spanish waters, this being also a violation of The Hague conventions; and on Oct. 10 the German Government issued an official protest about alleged violations of the Geneva Convention by the French. Furthermore, the methods employed in strewing portions of the seas with floating mines have been such as to warrant the most careful investigation by any neutral nations which treat neutrality pacts and The Hague conventions as other than merely dead letters.

If, instead of observing a timid and spiritless neutrality, we had lived up to our obligations by taking action in all of these cases without regard to which power it was that was alleged to have done wrong, we would have followed the only course that would both have told for world righteousness and have served our own self-respect. The course actually followed by Messrs. Wilson, Bryan, and Daniels has been to permit our own power for

self-defense steadily to diminish while at the same time refusing to do what we were solemnly bound to do in order to protest against wrong and to render some kind of aid to weak nations that had been wronged.

Inasmuch as in the first and greatest and the most ruinous case of violation of neutral rights and of international morality this nation, under the guidance of Messrs. Wilson and Bryan, kept timid silence and dared not protest, it would be an act of deliberate bad faith to protest as regards subsequent and less important violations. Of course, if as a people we frankly take the ground that our actions are based upon nothing whatever but our own selfish—and shortsighted—interest, it is possible to protest only against violations of neutrality that at the moment unfavorably affect our own interests.

Administration Following a Wrong Course.

Inaction is often itself the most offensive form of action; the Administration has persistently refused to live up to the solemn national obligations to strive to protect other unoffending nations from wrong; and this conduct adds a peculiar touch of hypocrisy to the action taken at the same time in signing a couple of score of all-inclusive arbitration treaties pretentiously heralded as serving world righteousness. If we had acted as we ought to have acted regarding Belgium, we could have then with a clear conscience made effective protest regarding every other case of violation of the rights of neutrals or of offenses committed by the belligerents against one another in violation of The Hague conventions.

In facing a difficult and critical situation any Administration is entitled to a free hand until it has had time to develop the action which it considers appropriate, for often there is more than one way in which it is possible to take efficient action. But when so much time has passed, either without action or with only mischievous action, as gravely to compromise either the honor or the interest of the country, then it becomes a duty for self-respecting citizens to whom their country is dear to speak out.

From the very outset I felt that the Administration was following a wrong course. But no action of mine could make it take the right course, and there was a possibility that there was some object aside from political advantage in the course followed. I spoke only when it became imperative to speak under penalty of tame acquiescence in tame failure to perform a national duty. It has become evident that the Administration had no plan whatever save the dexterous avoidance of all responsibility, and therefore of all duty, and the effort to persuade our people as a whole that this action was for their interest—combined with other less openly expressed and less worthy efforts of purely political type.

There is therefore no longer any reason for failure to point out that if the President and Secretary of State had been thoroughly acquainted in advance, as of course they ought to have been acquainted, with the European situation, and if they had possessed an intelligent and resolute purpose squarely to meet their heavy responsibilities and thereby to serve the honor of this country and the interest of mankind, they would have taken action on July 29th, 30th, or 31st, certainly not later than August 1st. On such occasions there is a peculiar applicability in the old proverb: Nineteenth of wisdom consists in being wise in time.

If those responsible for the management of our foreign affairs had been content to dwell in a world of fact instead of a world of third-rate fiction, they would have understood that at such a time of world-crises it was an unworthy avoidance of duty to fuss with silly little all-inclusive arbitration treaties when the need of the day demanded that they devote all their energies to the terrible problems of the day.

They would have known that a German invasion of Switzerland was possible, but improbable, and a German invasion of Belgium overwhelmingly probable. They would have known that vigorous action by the United States Government, taken with such entire good faith as to make it evident that it was in the interest of Belgium and not in the interest of France and England, and that if there was occasion it would be taken against France and England as quickly as against Germany, might very possibly have resulted in either putting a stop to the war or in localizing and narrowly circumscribing its area. It is, of course, possible that the action would have failed of its immediate purpose. But even in that case it cannot be doubted that it would have been efficient as a check upon the subsequent wrongs committed.

Nor was the opportunity for action limited in time. Even if the Administration had failed thus to act at the outset of the war, the protests officially made, both by the German Emperor and by the Belgian Government, to the President as to alleged misconduct in the prosecution of the war not only gave him warrant for action but required him to act.

Meanwhile, from the moment when the war was declared, it became inexcusable of the Administration not to take immediate steps to put the navy into efficient shape. It is possible, not to justify, but to explain the action of the Administration in using the navy for the sixteen months prior to this war in such a way as greatly to impair its efficiency; for, of course, when the President selected Mr. Daniels as Secretary of the Navy he showed, on the supposition that he was not indifferent to its welfare, an entire ignorance of what that welfare demanded; and therefore the failure to keep the navy efficient may have been due to mere inability to exercise foresight. But with war impending such failure to exercise foresight became inexcusable. None of the effective fighting craft are of any real use so far as Mexico is concerned. The navy should at once have been assembled in Northern waters, either in the Atlantic or the Pacific, and immediate steps taken to bring it to the highest point of efficiency.

It is because I believe our attitude should be one of sincere good will toward all nations that I so strongly feel that we should endeavor to work for a League of Peace among all nations rather than trust to alliances with any particular group. Moreover, alliances are very shifty and uncertain. Within fifteen years England has regarded France as her immediately dangerous opponent; within ten years she has felt that Russia was the one power against which she must at all costs guard herself, and during the same period there have been times when Belgium has hated England with a peculiar fervor. Alliances must be based on self-interest and must continually shift. But in such a World League as that of which we speak and dream, the test would be conduct and not merely selfish interest, and so there would be no shifting of policy.

It is not yet opportune to discuss in detail the exact method by which the nations of the world shall put the collective strength of civilization behind the purpose of civilization to do right, using as an instrumentality for peace such a World League. Probably at the outset it would be an absolute impossibility to devise a non-national or purely international police force which would be effective in a great crisis. The prime necessity is that all the great nations should agree in good faith to use their combined warlike strength to coerce any nation, whichever one it may be, that declines to abide the decision of some competent international tribunal.

In a recent admirable article in that excellent weekly, The New Republic, the soundest of sound doctrine is preached on this subject. Our business is to create the beginnings of international order out of the world of nations as these nations actually exist. We do not have to deal with a world of pacifists, and, therefore, we must proceed on the assumption that treaties will never acquire sanctity until nations are ready to seal them with their blood. We are not striving for Peace in Heaven. That is not our affair. What we were bidden to strive for is "Peace on Earth and Good Will toward Men."

To fulfil this injunction it is necessary to treat the earth as it is and men as they are, as an indispensable prerequisite to making the earth a better place in which to live and men better fit to live in it. It is inexcusable moral culpability on our part to pretend to carry out this injunction in such fashion as to nullify it, and this we do if we make believe that the earth is what it is not and if our professions of bringing good will toward men are in actual practice shown to be empty shams. "Peace congresses, peace parades, the appointment and celebration of days of prayer for peace, and the like, which result merely in giving the participants the feeling that they have accomplished something and are therefore to be excused from hard, practical work for righteousness, are empty shams." Treaties such as the recent all-inclusive arbitration treaties are such empty shams, and convict us as a nation of moral culpability when our representatives sign them at the same time that they refuse to risk anything to make good the signatures we have already affixed to The Hague Conventions.

Moderate and sensible treaties which mean something and which can and will be enforced mark a real advance for the human race. As The New Republic says: "It is our business to make no treaties which we are not ready to maintain with all our resources, for every such 'scrap of paper' is like a forged check—an assault on our credit in the world."

Promises that are idly given and idly broken represent profound detriment to the morality of nations. Until no promise is idly entered into and until promises that have once been made are kept, at no matter what cost of risk and effort and positive loss, just so long will distrust and suspicion and wrong-doing rack the world. No honest lawyer will hesitate to advise his client against signing a contract either detrimental to his interests or impossible of fulfillment, and the individual who signs such a contract at once makes himself either an object of suspicion to sound-headed men or else an object of derision to all men.

"Active Step Against Peace of Righteousness."

One of the stock jokes in the comic columns of the newspapers refers to the man who swears off, or takes the pledge, or makes an indefinite number of good resolutions on New Year's Day, and fails to keep his pledge or promise or resolution; this was one of Mark Twain's favorite subjects for derision. The man who continually makes new promises without living up to those he has already made, and who takes pledges which he breaks, is rightly treated as an object for contemptuous fun. The nation which behaves in like manner deserves no higher consideration.

The conduct of Messrs. Wilson and Bryan in signing these all-inclusive treaties at the same time that they have kept silent about the breaking of The Hague Conventions has represented the kind of wrong-doing to this nation that would be represented in private life by the individuals who sign such contracts as those mentioned.

The Administration has looked on without a protest while The Hague Conventions have been torn up and thrown to the wind. It has watched the paper structure of good will collapse without taking one step to prevent it, and yet foolish pacifists, the very men who in the past have been most vociferous about international morality, have praised it for this position. The assertion that our neutrality carries with it the obligation to be silent when our own Hague conventions are destroyed represents an active step against the peace of righteousness. The only way to show that our faith in public law was real was to protest against the assault on international morality implied in the invasion of Belgium.

Unless some one at some time is ready to take some chance for the sake of internationalism, it will remain what it is today, an object of derision to aggressive nations. Even if nothing more than an emphatic protest had been made against what

was done in Belgium the foundations would have been laid for an effective world opinion against international cynicism.

Pacifists claim that we have acted so as to preserve the good will of Europe and to exercise a guiding influence in the settlement of the war. This is an idea which appeals to the thoughtless, for it gratifies our desire to keep out of trouble and also our vanity by the hope that we shall do great things with small difficulty.

It may well be that the settlement will finally be made by a Peace Congress in which the President of the United States will hold titular position of headship. But under conditions as they are now, the real importance of the President in such a Peace Congress will be comparable to the real importance of the drum major when he walks at the head of a regiment. Small boys regard the drum major as much more important than the regimental commander, and the pacifist grown-ups who applaud peace congresses sometimes show as regards the drum majors of these congresses the same touching lack of insight which small boys show toward real drum majors.

United States as "International Drum Major."

As a matter of fact, if the United States enters such a congress with nothing but a record of comfortable neutrality or tame acquiescence in violated Hague Conventions, plus an array of vague treaties with no relation to actual facts, it will be allowed to fill the position of international drum major and of nothing more, and even this position it will be allowed to fill only so long as it suits the convenience of the men who have done the actual fighting. The warring nations will settle the issues in accordance with their own strength and position.

Under such conditions we shall be treated as we deserve to be treated, as a nation of people who mean well feebly, whose words are not backed by deeds, who like to prattle about both their own strength and their own righteousness, but who are unwilling to run the risks without which righteousness cannot be effectively served, and who are also unwilling to undergo the toil of intelligent and hard-working preparation without which strength when tested proves weakness.

In this world it is as true of nations as of individuals that the things best worth having are rarely to be obtained in cheap fashion. There is nothing easier, and normally nothing more futile, than to meet in congresses and conventions and pass resolutions in favor of virtue, unless those passing the resolutions are willing to make them good by labor and endurance and active courage and self-denial.

Readers of John Hay's poems will remember the scorn therein expressed for those who "resoloot till the cows come home," but do not put effort back of their words. Those who would teach our people that service can be rendered or greatness attained in easy, comfortable fashion, without facing risk, hardship and difficulty, are teaching what is false and mischievous. Courage, hard work, self-mastery, and intelligent effort are all essential to successful life. As a rule, the slothful ease of life is in inverse proportion to its success. This is true of the private lives of farmers, business men and mechanics. It is no less true of the life of the nation which is made up of these farmers, business men and mechanics.

As yet, as events have most painfully shown, there is nothing to be expected by any nation in a great crisis from anything except its own strength. Under these circumstances it is criminal in the United States not to prepare. Critics have stated that in advocating universal military service on the Swiss plan in this country I am advocating militarism. I am not concerned with mere questions of terminology. The plan I advocate would be a corrective of every evil which we associate with the name of militarism. It would tend for order and self-respect among our people.

Not the smallest evil in America among the many evils that exist is due to militarism. Save in the crisis of the civil war, there has been no militarism in the United States, and the only militarist President we have ever had was Abraham Lincoln. Universal service of the Swiss type would be educational in the highest and best sense of the word. In Switzerland, as compared with the United States, there are, relatively to the population, only one-tenth the number of murders and of crimes of violence. Doubtless other causes have contributed to this, but doubtless also the intelligent collective training of the Swiss people in habits of obedience, of self-reliance, self-restraint and endurance, of applied patriotism and collective action, has been a very potent factor in producing this good result.

As I have already said, I know of my own knowledge that two nations which on certain occasions were obliged, perhaps as much by our fault as by theirs, to take into account the question of possible war with the United States, then planned in such event to seize the Panama Canal and to take and ransom or destroy certain of our great coast cities. They planned this partly on the belief that our navy would intermittently be allowed to become extremely inefficient, just as during the last twenty months it has become inefficient, and partly on the belief that our people is so wholly unarmilitary, and so ridden to death on the one hand by foolish pacifists and on the other by brutal materialists whose only god is money, that we would not show ourselves either resolutely patriotic or efficient even in what belated action our utter lack of preparation permitted us to take.

I believe that these nations were and are wrong in their estimate of the underlying strength of the American character. I believe that if war did really come, both the ultra-pacifists, the peace-at-any-price men, and the merely brutal materialists, who count all else as nothing compared to the gratification of their greed for gain or their taste for ease, for pleasure, and for vacuous excitement, would be driven before the gale of popular feeling as leaves are driven through the Fall woods. But such aroused public feeling in the actual event

would be wholly inadequate to make good our failure to prepare.

We should in all humility imitate not a little of the spirit so much in evidence among the Germans and the Japanese, the two nations which in modern times have shown the most practical type of patriotism, the greatest devotion to the common weal, the greatest success in developing their economic resources and abilities from within, and the greatest far-sightedness in safeguarding the country against possible disaster from without.

In The Journal of the Military Service Institution for the months of November and December of the present year will be found a quotation from a Japanese military paper, The Comrades' Magazine, which displays an amount of practical good sense, together with patriotism and devotion to the welfare of the average man, which could well be copied by our people, and which is worthy of study by every intelligent American.* Germany's success in industrialism has been as extraordinary and noteworthy as her success in securing military efficiency, and fundamentally has been due to the development of the same qualities in the nation.

At present the United States does not begin to get adequate return in the way of efficient preparation for defense from the amount of money appropriated every year. Both the Executive and Congress are responsible for this. It is really less a question of spending more money than of knowing how to get the best results for the money that we do spend. Most emphatically there should be a comprehensive plan both for defense and for expenditure.

The best military and naval authorities—not merely the senior officers but the best officers—should be required to produce comprehensive plans for battleships, for submarines, for airships, for proper artillery, for a more efficient regular army and for a great popular reserve behind the army. Every useless military post should be forthwith abandoned; and this cannot be done save by getting Congress to accept or reject plans for defense and expenditure in their entirety. If each Congressman or Senator can put in his special plea for the erection or retention of a military post for non-military reasons, and for the promotion or favoring of some given officer or group of officers also for non-military reasons, we can rest assured that good results can never be obtained. Here again what is needed is not plans by outsiders but the insistence by outsiders upon the army and navy officers being required to produce the right plans, being backed up when they do produce the right plans, and being held to a strict accountability for any failure, active or passive, in their duty.

Moreover, these plans must be treated as part of the coherent policy of the nation in international affairs. With a gentleman like Mr. Bryan in the State Department it may be accepted as absolutely certain that we never will have the highest grade of efficiency in the Departments of War and of the Navy. With a gentleman like Mr. Daniels at the head of the navy, it may be accepted as certain that the navy will not be brought to the level of its possible powers. This means that the people as a whole must demand of their leaders that they treat seriously the navy and army and our foreign policy.

Pacifist Assaults on Army Efficiency.

The waste in our navy and army is very great. This is inevitable as long as we do not discriminate against the inefficient and as long as we fail to put a premium upon efficiency. When I was President, I found out that a very large proportion of the old officers of the army and even of the navy were physically incompetent to perform many of their duties. The public was wholly indifferent on the subject. Congress would not act. As a preliminary, and merely as a preliminary, I established a regulation that before promotion officers should be required to walk fifty miles or ride one hundred miles in three days. This was in no way a sufficient test of an officer's fitness. It merely served to rid the service of men whose unfitness was absolutely ludicrous. Yet in Congress and in the newspapers an extraordinary din was raised against this test on the ground that it was unjust to faithful elderly officers!

The pacifists promptly assailed it on the ground that to make the army efficient was a "warlike" act. All kinds of philanthropists, including clergymen and college Presidents, wrote me that my action showed not only callousness of heart but also a regrettable spirit of militarism. Any officer who, because of failure to come up to the test or for other reasons, was put out of the service was certain to receive ardent Congressional championship; and every kind of pressure was brought to bear on behalf of the unfit, while not the slightest effective championship was given the move from any outside source.

This was because public opinion was absolutely uneducated on the subject. In our country the men who in time of peace speak loudest about war are usually the ultra-pacifists, whose activities have been shown to be absolutely futile for peace, but who do a little mischief by persuading a number of well-meaning persons that preparedness for war is unnecessary.

It is not desirable that civilians, acting independently of and without the help of military and naval advisers, shall prepare minute or detailed plans as to what ought to be done for our national defense. But civilians are competent to advocate plans in outline exactly as I have here advocated them. Moreover, and most important, they are competent to try to make public opinion effective in these matters. A democracy must have proper leaders. But these leaders must be able to appeal to a proper sentiment in the democracy. It is the prime duty of every right-thinking citizen at this time to aid his fellow-countrymen to understand the need of working wisely for peace, the folly of acting unwisely for peace, and above all the need of real and thorough national preparedness against war.

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