

THE SKY LORD.

BY JAMES N. WOOD.

HERALDED with high-flown phrases, the Peace Conference runs its race of audacious denial. This need not excite surprise. The mystery lies in the bland popular belief in certain related ideas, none of which are true. It seems there is to be no more war; nations are to live in amity; kindness of spirit at last hold sway among peoples. The vision would be an engaging one if there was some basis for accepting it. Unfortunately, to depict the truth, even in mild terms, is to arouse angry protest and the boisterous affirmation of righteous purpose.

Yet the error is with those who cherish illusions; it is not with those who boldly face the actual. There are principles behind the relations of men and nations so simple that they are elementary. Interest is the bond between races, nor does any other motive inspire the movements of the powerful. Peace exists no longer than interest elects, it ceases when interest is threatened. So in an assembly that embraces the representatives of rival groups, it is fair that the subject nearest the heart of each should lead to a discussion of the means best adapted to future conflicts; in this attitude candor essays to manifest itself. On fundamentals all are agreed; about them there was never any discord, in fact. The weak are to remain weak, the strong enjoy the glory of strength. On a master's will, the inferior groups must wait. To explain this dismal prospect an age of antithesis compels antithetical reasons. The apologists of the executive powers indulge in language that defines altruism only. Truth conceals itself behind inversion. Power is the crown of moral excellence.

The public will continue to accept the representations of those who speak in lofty tones of a future humanity. It will applaud the prophets who tell of an order of life they have glimpsed in the

eternal heavens. Let them enjoy the expanse, while they may, for it is a day dream that will end, as all day dreams end, in the cry and jostle of the real world. Universal empire, alone, might effect a technical avoidance of war. It would then be called treason.

With due apology to those who have read the secret script on the leaves of the sybilline books, I make bold to say that the key they use unlocks no other mystery than credulity, and there has never been much question about that. The object of the conference is far from failure. It accomplishes much, for it was called by men who are accustomed to doing things. These men deal with the palpable world. They know nothing of sentiment, except that it is a useful emotion to bestir, at times. The important move of the World Conference is that which turned the delegates to a discussion of weapons, a theme made important by many overlooked tendencies. As is usual in an age that does everything in the open, the conversation is about something else. This is democratic frankness, of which much is heard. Armaments are to be scrapped, at least a part of them. Immediate dilemma alone prevents a more drastic policy. Japan and America include opposing forces upon which time is reluctant to wait. Japan, above all, hesitates. For her, the future is more obscure. Preparedness, that magic word, chimes harmoniously with her policies.

The seriousness of the transformation at hand in military method has escaped the general. The ancient and honorable art of war promises to enter upon a phase more consonant with its traditions. Confusion about it is increased by the overdone play upon horror, something that has badly shaken the nerves of the populace. Stories of future battles between vast numbers, equipped for promiscuous slaughter; cities wiped out, engagements between monster fleets, contending against sea and heaven—faith in such forecasts has drawn a shudder from those who must man the new instruments of murder. Optimism rises to palliate dread. The net result is hopeless confusion.

Nevertheless, the future may be more considerate than propagandists would have it, for, excepting the exigency already cited, there is little for the masses to apprehend.

If the invention of gunpowder made democracy possible, the appearance of more decisive factors promises its deserved relegation to oblivion. Civilization, indeed, has reached a point in the effort to use the crowd for fighting where their utility has been proved a hopeless absurdity. The days of mob armies and mob terror prom-

ise to vanish from the struggles of the practical men for whom wars are conducted. The stupendous combination of machinery and organization by which the common man was converted into a military force has revealed its own futility. In annulling that last word of engineering art, the battleship, impotence admits its weakness. Intelligent men recognize the fact, but a dispassionate statement would have no meaning to a multitude that goes behind a mirror to discover what is reflected on its face.

When and where gunpowder originated are questions that have never been answered satisfactorily, but it is certain that by its employment the gulf separating superior and inferior was temporarily bridged. A cannon ball made no distinction between a coat of mail and a jerkin. War, once a game for men of intelligence and courage, was brought within the reach of all. The simple became complex, and the strategy of armies altered. Wholesale destruction was the ideal of a benign age. The conception of means for the cold-blooded butchery of armies, en masse, was one of the early manifestations of the spirit of democracy.

To this it will be answered that men were killed as effectively under the old scheme of things as they were later. This similarity is only apparent. If the losses at the battle of Chalons were as great as has been claimed, they were incurred in contests where man met man. The catastrophe was not the triumph of a machine, designed and built to exterminate a species. The warriors who blocked the path of Attila exploited their personal valor, and staked their lives on their prowess. Today, the barrage can even stop retreat.

There is food for reflection in the thought that means for inciting mass action appeared simultaneously with the changes that have been alluded to. To inspire martial spirit among a class averse to risk intensive labor was found necessary. The further development of machine warfare, the increased danger accompanying it, made it difficult to collect the material upon which the apparatus of death was to act. Hence the widespread evocation of fear before initiating modern hostilities. The crowd must be terrified by tales of what may happen if the coming enemy is victorious. From this it is but a step to a more common-place delusion, the perception of fiendish propensities in an enemy, propensities hitherto unguessed. There follows a frenzy that rouses the mob to a final effort—the mass rush. If inglorious, the method, at least, is above criticism. Numbers were necessary in recent wars and extraordinary means

to get them were justified. It is not easy to bring the ordinary man to accept the hazard of so dubious a fortune. The superior groups that dominate societies will have their differences settled. Unreasonable though it may be in the abstract, man will never consent to surrender his place in the world without a last resort to force.

The introduction of shock troops, towards the end of the late struggle, was a desperate effort to reach a conclusion through sheer bravery. It failed, for man had become powerless against embattled machinery. Flesh and blood have limitations. Steel and bronze had crushed the spirit. It was not in the mudholes where dug-in heroes awaited respite from intolerable agony that the future cast its shadow. Above the heaps of death, it serenely beckoned to the fore-runners of more human scenes. The allusion is to aircraft. Here is something that is not merely destructive—that property, alone, would only add another to the methods of taking life, numerous enough already. A different kind of man is needed to handle them. A simple statement, but one with implications that may change the world. Above the bleak stretches of trench life events transpired that brought back memories of a fairer age. The chivalry of men who recognized their own courage and that of their antagonists as well, was blazoned in the heavens like a novel ensign of Constantine. New spirits were revealed, contending in a generous rivalry.

That what they achieved was but part of the object of the masses beneath them is a small matter. What stands out is that here were men obtained with difficulty, for a difficult business. A class found after much labor, exacting selection, grim experiment, gruesome ordeal and, once trained, left to undertake attacks against men as clever as themselves.

It will be contended that the status is temporary; the air machine is only elementary, armies may yet be transported by them. Aerial conflicts may be decided by forces relatively as numerous as the hosts that war now demands. Ships manned by combatants safely behind armored barbettes, a mere matter of horsepower. The idea of safety is popular, of course. To ride the clouds in insolent security touches the popular imagination. Unfortunately, it must remain a shadow in a land of dreams. In the air certain physical requirements must be met, and with a morale unknown to the land fighter. An iron heart, the capacity to sweep through varying densities of air at lightning speed; a poise that preserves

mental clarity where the conditions call for momentous decision under extreme strain. Such men are not gathered from the casual lists of a directory. Those states will be fortunate that can find a hundred in the million. Is the statement strong? Examine the records of the recent war. Those who attained greatness in the new sphere bore the same relation to the inferior that the eagle does to the hawk. To meet them was to meet death!

One of the errors of the United States, in so far as the aerial program was conceived as a war measure, lay in believing that great numbers of hastily manned plans could accomplish something among Gargantuan scenes. No doubt graft opportunism played its part in this doleful policy, but the trivial has no place in war; certainly not in the kind the future seems to hold in store. Two considerations must be faced. The movement of an army subject to sky attack will not be practicable. To hold such forces within protecting enclosures—if that were feasible—would render them useless. The mobility and destructiveness of air units would make maneuvering impossible. The elimination of the mob army is the only corollary.

The purpose of military operations is to strike points of cardinal importance to the enemy; to destroy manufacturing centers; to achieve a moral collapse through the capture of capitals, the keys to a psychology that strikes deep into an opponent's heart. Without motion these objects must be abandoned. No body of men could be held together in the face of resolute attack from above, and with the insidious weapons now within the reach of science. The present search for an ultimate long distance gun is nothing more than an attempt to match the air machine with the ground machine. It meets none of the conditions of the problem. Vulnerable, itself, to air assault, its own fire, effectively delivered, could only inspire fear in the city that it reached. Municipalities must be defended by their own aircraft; these defeated, death will face them from bomb and gas. Immediate capitulation would follow the failure of the aerial supports.

The argument might be continued at great length, but elaboration is not necessary. One fact stands out, and it surpasses all others in significance: the revolutionary change in the character of the men required to conduct offensives. The limitation of the quality of the acting units affirms the passing of armed multitudes. But what of the political consequences? Here is a new world for the curious to ponder over.

Modern civilization holds to one path, the destruction of individualism. The ease with which the masses that compose present day society can be converted into negative will elements has been grasped, and all the forces at the command of propaganda have centered on their ruin. However great the indignation such a statement excites, it remains true that all the tendencies of social life are towards a return to ancient slavery. The mass man seeks a master, and he may yet come from the heights, for it is there the sphere of future military power is unveiled. To military power man has ever deferred. The sky lord may only await his hour!