

THE ILLUSION OF PEACE.

BY JAMES N. WOOD.

POPULAR discussions of international questions lack force, because founded on error. They assume a view of life that is purely fanciful. So absorbed do the participants become in their chimerical survey that any rational treatment of the subject is resented. They gravely announce that negotiations must preclude hostility hereafter, and that coming generations be assured the blessings of universal altruism. This is the imagination parading as reason. Men are not changed by war, neither does it alter the purpose behind hostility. Terms of peace are drawn to fix advantage; to further weaken a shattered enemy; to establish vantage points from which other conflicts may be undertaken.

Certainly peace is desirable at times. None seek hazard where conditions are unfavorable. Nations court war when they believe themselves ready; when they detect advantage. But what are nations? Peoples? Not at all. They are merely the vehicles of dominant personalities. It is their desires that count—and that govern the attitude of the mass.

Perpetual and intensive, war is between men of will and intelligence and its aim is not always obvious. The voice of the crowd does not proclaim it; the pronouncements of propagandists are equally irrelevant. Peace, indeed, has no place in life; strife is its one certainty. The form alters, that is all.

War is the mother of war, as ambition is the father. Only a relapse into passivity could eliminate aggressiveness. Governments are impelled by necessity, and this springs from the demands of positive elements. The man of will demands his own. He concedes the right of none other than those stronger than himself.

It is hard to conceive of a more clouded view of fact than that revealed by current debates over peace and future. The solicitude about the latter, the call for permanent quiet, neither of these has

behind it the smallest iota of good faith. The world is sick of war? To be sure, until it can prepare for another.

Witness the new budgets that already exceed, immeasurably, the vast preparations of England, France, Russia and Germany preceding the late struggle. Nor are the new armings illogical, for too many questions await replies that will take no other answer. The reorganization of Europe is only superficially an international question. The plight in which it finds itself is a repetition of others from which it has recovered. It is one which will be often enough repeated in the future, for this is a tax in permanence on every fighting race. Assuredly, it will accept what help it can. Expediency exacts no less, but its eyes are fixed—not on peace or war—but on necessity. For the time, the problem is recuperation.

The group whose ambitions and achievements carried Germany into war is quiescent. Beaten down, a lesser has replaced it. But the abler man is never defeated permanently and with his rise the possibilities innate in his particular view of the world renew themselves.

The immediate question is the issue between France and Germany, for the former finds an ancient enemy unarmed. This hostile attitude is of many days, and is not to be settled amicably. Alone, France is helpless. Powerful, for the time, through association and circumstance, she desires the utmost weakening of an adversary she dreads. Well may she view the future with concern, for it has become dependent on transient friendships. A century of democracy has thus abased her.

To England, the problem takes another form. The object of the triumvirate, Great Britain, Russia, France, has been accomplished. German commercial supremacy is no longer a threat. The status is satisfactory, and France is to be supported to the extent that she remains an auxiliary dependable in the future. For the moment, greater questions are to be faced. Germany must have some place in the commercial alignment of nations. Her obligations enforce such recognition, but if admitted it is to be with limitations. These are identical with her liabilities. The modern Sphynx propounds but one riddle: How is world exploitation to be accomplished? Freed from the menace of a Teuton challenge, England inclines towards a liberal policy. To create antagonisms between states has been a commonplace in her diplomacy, as it has been with all conquering races. These are assured, and with them a weakened

continent. For the time there is safety and certainty. Beyond, lies the world.

But if war is easily made its consequences are not so readily avoided. As a result of the ended difference the United States has become vastly rich, for to America the war was an occasion of unexampled profit. With inappreciable losses to mar the vista she, in turn, may survey a world ripe for her own projects. Thus the fall of one claimant only pushes forward another.

In a sphere of many dominions, all potent relatively, such an end is not remarkable. The causes underlying division are so similar as to be ordinary. That war should follow is not inevitable, but there persists, in the status, the active germ of possibility.

Each nation faces its own problems, and these are twofold. One, that of internal equilibrium; the other, its attitude towards the outer. Both involve friction. The commonwealth itself must be homogeneous, not otherwise can it become a purposeful instrument. Its strength must approximate, or surpass, that of the competitor that bars the way to expression in the world beyond. Each state is the symbol of a will group. It embraces the manifestation of the result of their toil and object. As a collectivity, it moves as this will directs. It can be no stronger than the governing factor. Its acts, in historical movement, are the efforts it makes to transfer to other states the ideas that have inspired it. This is its culture, the culture of a minority. It can be no higher than the will that has fostered it. Its strength is only the relative strength of this will.

Before any clarity of vision towards world problems can be possible all idea of majority intelligence must be abandoned. Majorities have no will. They move as they are impelled by superior minds. The propaganda by which they are affected never touches on reality. But, in the modern era, these majorities have to be organized and this organization involves an internal struggle that embraces issues of its own. The new industrial economy has furthered the interests of fresh claimants to political eminence, and slave masses have been divided into groups subordinated by them. This is so-called democracy.

Unfortunately, such a statement excites indignation, but this does not detract from its truth. Each modern state has experienced marked internal vicissitudes during the past few decades by reason of new tendencies, and situations have arisen that have modified the force of older dominant elements. Friction between rivals for mass control has sometimes led to a weakening of national progress of

aggression, but Europe has been more limited thereby than America. The late war brought out, at last, the consequences of a profound propaganda. Continental countries found themselves permeated by dissatisfied masses, governed by skillful leaders. Economic re-adjustment, and the setting aside of existing ruling groups were openly demanded. England learned of a radical sentiment among labor organizations, and of covetous eyes that glimpsed the very peaks of power.

These conditions have reacted on after war negotiations. Allies, militarily great, felt an impulse that hampered them in their attitude towards Russia, a country that had been boldly seized by a new caste, semi-intellectual, and for the time diverted from the manners and traditions of other lands. The extent of this spirit in countries supposed to be free from extreme radicalism was confirmed by the caution of the Allied Powers in dealing with an unpleasant dilemma, for labor pressure at home warned each that interference in Russia, on a scale of magnitude, would precipitate a serious crisis.

That this is true only brief reflection is required to confirm. Germany had proved the vulnerability of Russia and disposed of the myth of its impenetrability. Allied occupation was a simple matter from a military standpoint, but impractical from the political. As an international question it was transferred to the sphere of propaganda, and an effort was made to prove the final moral collapse of what remained of the Romanoff empire. Beyond this, the problem was left to the future. The attitude assumed was confirmatory of the strength of new power groups and of the precarious position of existing dominant castes. It is this that has marred a quick settlement of war issues along purely military lines, a course to which the nations were originally bound. The condition indicated has weakened Europe, as well as England, and the ability of the ruling caste of the latter to deal with internal issues has been taxed to the limit. But parallel movements had quite a contrary effect in America. There, the war brought into the open the real rulers of the nation and exhibited in full measure the bizarre means by which their power had been assured.

Moral propaganda had so thoroughly permeated the American system that every movement of consequence had made obeisance to it. Hysteria had become a pliant force in the hands of organizations that reached out to every part of the national structure. To these exponents of a super-morality world relations opened fresh fields, and the over-excitation of mass psyche by appeals to mere senti-

ment resulted in a frenzy such as is rarely encountered in history. Before its fury all the political, social and civil rights of non-concurring groups, or of individuals, disappeared. Of all the nations participating in the struggle it was the only one in which no minority party existed. Less concerned than any other power in the serious questions at issue, the pent up emotions of the masses turned against every manifestation of independence or manliness that appeared in any quarter. The dissolution of Congress was boldly advocated in newspaper editorials, and applauded by men who claimed they were fighting for democracy! In a written statement, a prominent clergyman demanded the emasculation of a race numbered in millions. In the period of temporary aberration, sudden assaults were made on national "immoralities"; tremendous suffrage changes were initiated in the name of patriotism; merciless war was conducted against groups that sought to voice economic discontent. Psychologically, the effects were beyond computation. For the time, at least, protest meant ruin, however intelligently expressed. The power of dominant groups, hitherto tentative, was confirmed, and theoretical democracy absolutely disappeared, although it was a crime to say so.

On the other hand, the capacity of the United States as a producer of war material was demonstrated beyond peradventure. The extent of its food resources astonished the world. The ready adhesion of its people to military demands was made clear enough to satisfy the most exacting. The disturbing factor was lack of technique in the finer lines of production. The air program was a sad fiasco. Economic waste reached new levels. In the military area new armies found few opportunities to test their efficiency against equal forces. Why a serious charge was made at the last moment against an enemy in full retreat still remains a mystery. But that the essentials of a successful military machine were present was too evident to be questioned. These, with their co-ordinate functions, were at hand in the event of the inauguration of a positive foreign policy. *

Succeeding stages in the peace negotiations reflected the relative sense of stability among the nations concerned. In Europe, weakness was patent and the cry was for international alliances, by which the advantages of victory might be assured to those not strong enough to hold them alone. France eagerly pressed for a confirmation of a "League of Nations" and England warmly advocated a course in which she foresaw her eminence. America, at

first enthusiastic over the new theory, cooled as the realization of the changes that had transpired in her international status dawned on her. Apparently, the time of great dreams had come, and in them she beheld herself, a moral paragon, directing the course of civilization and imposing on the world a new ethical culture. Her power groups faced unforeseen trade advantages, backed by a patient and submissive electorate, responsive to every demand and remorseless towards any complaining voice.

There has followed a growing aversion to extreme peace measures, and a desire to participate more actively in new commercial programs. But great financial problems still remain, and these appear almost insuperable obstacles to world equilibrium. The future position of Germany looms as a disquieting factor. Economically, that country remains a baffling interrogation. None the less, it is the only visible source from which may be gathered some part of the colossal debt that defies settlement. But ability to pay can come only from trade that will hamper the commercial unfoldment of some of the triumphant groups. The most painful feature of the whole affair is this implied revival of Germany. Within what limits is it possible to confine it? Given time, that Lethean cup, will not the world forget, and the Teuton return to strength and greatness? To reduce the German proletariat to bond slavery, a return to ancient customs, was undoubtedly considered for a time, but the power of organized discontent among some of the Allies precluded too great a latitude in this direction. To Germany, the important matter is not so much the amount of the indemnity, but its terms of payment, for in its settlement lies the real path to industrial regeneration.

The war was only one of many that must follow, each a test of the stamina of the ruling groups among the respective adversaries. It is these that fight. The people have nothing to do with it, but they always applaud it, and always believe they are fighting for themselves. No regret need be expressed about this. The statement of a palpable fact implies no lack of feeling. The world is what it is and what it has been, and it will always be what it is and what it has been. Why, indeed, should it be otherwise?

At present, the dominant forces in America and England are secure, but those of the former enjoy a more complete control of their environment. They have to do with a race trained to respond quickly to new propaganda, a race easily molded. In England it is otherwise; there acuteness and dissimulation must be exercised in a

high degree to sustain the power of the remnants of an ancient caste. That caste has been frightfully wounded and its position made precarious by the bold attitude of those directly in control of the lower industrial elements. In America there is safety. Its ruling group has nothing to fear, other than the remote and improbable possibility of defection among their own moral propagandists, or misfortune in war.

This contingency will influence America to deal more leniently with the theory of the League, and even bring about partial participation in its acts. For the time being, the position of the United States is one of unqualified independence, but the real issues to be faced in the future can scarcely escape the discerning, and a policy of preparation on a scale of the first magnitude must henceforth form part of American legislation. Nothing would so quickly strengthen the hands of the groups laboring for control of the industrial forces of the country as military reverses. The proletariat would at once become a menace, where now it is scarcely a threat. In the background there are intelligent spirits alert to their opportunities.

The future, not to speak of the present, includes an interval that may witness unlooked for changes in the system of mass control, the problem of priority in all civilizations. Success in war would make the American master wills the most powerful and independent in the world. Yet, the alternative must be reckoned with, for it is stupendous in tragic possibility. Water no longer isolates and a single naval action lost may open the way to invasion. The skies, too, have become a highway for the nations. Remote as seem such contingencies, they must form part of the reflections of serious men. Preparations can only be intelligent when directed by intelligent foresight. Whatever sentimentalists may claim to the contrary, the present era is one of force, par excellence. Strength, alone, is respected. It is the age of the wolf, and the law of the pack tolerates no weakness. They who would be great must be wary, for vascillation is fatal.