

THE PLEASANT PAINS OF WAR

BY LEO MARKUN

“MODERN man inherits all the innate pugnacity and all the love of glory of his ancestors. Showing war’s irrationality and horror is of no effect upon him. The horrors make the fascination.” The words are William James’s, and they are to be found in a tract issued by the American Association for International Conciliation. Recognizing that war is supposed to render a moral service by bringing about an altogether unselfish devotion to a cause larger than the private interests of any individual, James set himself the task of finding an equivalent for war inculcating the same lesson of unselfishness.

He tells us that young people should be drafted into such labors as mining, fishing, and the building of bridges, as well as more prosaic tasks like washing clothes and dishes. He hints that dangerous employments should be assigned, but his list contains some occupations in which the hazards are not extreme. If, as he tells us, horror and glory constitute the chief attraction in war, keeping dishes clean is hardly likely to prove a satisfactory substitute for battles and sieges. There are, indeed, some occupations of peacetime which offer a constant picture of horrible death: perhaps aviation is still one of these.

When Johnny shoulders a rifle and marches with his company *en route* to the avenue of war, he receives the enthusiastic applause of Mary Anne, or of many Mary Annes, on the sidewalk. Mary Anne would certainly be less enthusiastic if Johnny were shouldering a broom and going, though in a beautiful white uniform and preceded by a brass band, to perform public duties as a scavenger.

Thorstein Veblen remarks somewhat bitterly that it is the girls of nubile age for whose sake young men go to war. This is not the whole story if, as I suppose, algohedonia, the deriving of pleasure

from one's own and others' pain, is in large part independent of sexual associations. It is very likely true nevertheless that love rivalry among young men would make them fight to please young women even if they were not cruel and self-cruel on their own account.

Just now we hear sanguine voices proclaiming that peace is assured forever because some artistic representations of war emphasize the horror rather than the glory, or because of solemn pacific utterances on the part of nations that have officially abhorred warfare for centuries during which they have protected themselves against aggression every few decades. In all probability, property worth billions of dollars as well as millions of human beings are yet to be sacrificed for the sake of the battle thrill.

As civilization advances in complexity, algohedonia assumes more diversified and subtler forms. Perhaps bloodshed will some day play a very small part in it, but in the near future any true substitute for war will necessarily embody elements of danger as well as of contest. Certain forms of athletics may be able to provide a psychological equivalent for the spectacular, competitive, and dangerous elements in warfare.

War in the abstract has among us comparatively few defenders. One argument in its favor has it that the history of the world is the judicial verdict of the world, which is to say that the nation endowed with efficient industrial organization, economic vitality, courage and physical vigor, destroys or enslaves those that are weaker. It may be objected that preparedness for war is by no means an accurate test of fitness for the arts of peace. The strength of armies and navies, although now largely dependent upon a well-organized industrial system, is a poor criterion of cultural development. In truth, the desire for martial preparedness leads to wasteful efforts for the diversification of industry within national frontiers. Diplomatic skill, upon which, from time immemorial, military success has in most cases largely depended, may or may not be an index to civilization.

War provides no fair test of some things that many of us value, and under modern conditions it practically never enriches the victorious nation. A few individuals make huge profits while hostilities are going on, and there may be colonial concessions af-

terward for the benefit of speculators; but the net communal gain must be sought in *alohedonia* and glory.

Historians are not accustomed to attribute wars to the restlessness caused by a comparative peace lasting thirty or forty years. They learnedly discuss diplomatic documents and problems of national honor. Commercial rivalries and other economic causes are now usually considered, and their importance is often exaggerated, but the psychological roots of the readiness to fight are seldom touched upon. There are times when hostile propaganda touches sympathetic chords throughout a whole nation, when people are anxious to believe evil things about their alien neighbors.

In favor of tariff walls and other nationalistic acts of economic discrimination, the best that economists can say is that, after all, we are still at the stage of development by individual countries. There is a notion of American unity, for instance, to which the hobo subscribes when his national pride rises as he reads in yesterday's newspaper how wealthy his native land is. Sectional clashes may lead to bloodshed, and civil wars are not always opera bouffe, but differences in language and tradition make it easier to conceive of a foreign enemy as unfair and even inhuman.

We have seen strange dogs attack each other as if instinctively, even though no immediate rivalry with regard to bone or bitch can be involved. Much in the same way, primitive men feel that they should annihilate strange tribes. They are not actuated by *alohedonia* alone: in striking without any preliminary negotiations at all unfamiliar men and beasts, they are chiefly concerned with defending themselves. Besides, many simple peoples are not warlike. The martial spirit seems to be most strongly developed in the lower civilized communities.

The more complex human beings are, the more clearly may their propensity for fighting be considered *alohedonia*. Southey tells us of Lord Nelson that "no sooner was he in battle, where his squadron was received with the fire of more than a thousand guns, than, as if that artillery, like music, had driven away all care and painful thoughts, his countenance brightened; and, as a bystander describes him, his conversation became joyous, elevated, and delightful." Young Major George Washington described his own battle joy somewhat similarly.

Your true warrior does not think of fighting as an evil. He

likes war, and he welcomes its opportunities for glory and promotion. There was a time when even the humblest private might hope to become suddenly rich through the seizure of valuable portable spoils or the capture of a nobleman for whom a rich ransom would be paid. In comparatively recent days, soldiers of fortune skilled in political intrigue have gained splendid rewards. But the Sforzas, the Napoleons, and even the Grants have few opportunities now. The outstanding dictators of our time, although it follows a great war, are not the generals who distinguished themselves in it.

The recent adventurers who joined foreign armies in order to throw bombs from the air upon Mexicans or Riffs did not expect to become rich, were not patriotically or piously self-effacing, but in general looked upon man-killing as a noble game for bored sportsmen. Some of our military and naval officers could find more profitable employment in civil life, but are kept in the service by thoughts of the glory and the thrills of battle. Besides, the strict discipline of the fighting forces affords many pleasurable opportunities, even in time of peace, to those officers who are pathologically cruel. How large this class is I will not attempt to decide, but its existence has been commented on by military authors.

To regular army and navy men of all ranks, war means the testing of their talents, the experiencing of the dangers, horrors, and glories for whose sake, consciously or not, most of them have entered the fighting profession. The enlisted man in some countries changes from a disreputable fellow into a hero as soon as war is declared.

War not only rises out of alghedonia but creates or releases cruelty and self-cruelty. Meek conscripts and even the civilian population, which may be thousands of miles away from the scene of action, develop a lust for blood. Crimes of violence become somewhat more common immediately following a war: newspapers, anxious to hold circulations which are ebbing away, manufacture crime waves; and judges and juries are more cruel than ever.

"War is Hell," thought an American general, even if he did not use the words attributed to him. It can bear no close resemblance to an extended tea dance. But the efficient conduct of hostilities perhaps does not require that noncombatants shall be tortured and killed, that the wounded shall be torn to bits, that the

wives and daughters of the enemy shall be raped and massacred. And yet there are few wars, even in our own enlightened age, from which such occurrences are altogether absent. (They are much exaggerated, it is true, for the benefit of bloody-minded noncombatants.) Indeed, the number of people who, directly or indirectly, assist in waging a war has risen greatly; and some recent military methods and policies seem to be based upon the assumption that all persons resident in a hostile country are fair objects of attack.

Menahem of Israel, who "ripped up" the pregnant women of Tiphseh, and the mighty Assyrian monarch who boasted that he had burnt alive all the children of a revolted town, saw no cause for shame in their cruelty. Oliver Cromwell, ordering the massacre of the garrison that had defended Drogheda, believed himself to be carrying out the will of God. We are (it goes without saying) more humane, but we are not in the habit of excluding cruel weapons when they happen also to be dependable.

Personal encounters on the battlefield are comparatively rare in twentieth-century warfare. No longer do generals on white chargers stir up great clouds of dust as they wave their swords, rally their retreating men, and turn defeat into victory. Even second lieutenants are carefully guarded, for the reason that not all the members of an army (with a mental age of twelve, you know) can be trained to fill their places. In spite of all the attempts to make warfare resemble the operations of a huge industrial plant, the horrors and some of the glories remain.

Perhaps the international courts and leagues established in our generation show that the end of warfare is rapidly approaching. It is nevertheless true that plans are being made for the conscription of men and property in time of war on a larger scale than ever previously. It may be that the rays and gases now being developed, because they are capable of killing millions in a day, will soon make warfare too deadly to be invoked under any provocation whatsoever. Or perhaps the next war will kill off the civilized sections of the human race for a few thousand years. It seems, though, that defensive methods are being developed about as fast as offensive ones.

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