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WAR AND WORK.

THE early years of the nineteenth century saw the close of the Great War which was the aftermath of the French Revolution, which, beginning with the promulgation of the doctrine that all men are born free and equal, was ended by the united efforts of Europe to prevent one of the greatest of the world's conquerors from becoming the master of the whole of civilised Europe.

A year only separates us from the centenary of the great battle the outcome of which was to bring to Europe the peace which had been denied to it for twenty-five years, and, in spite of the theories of idealists and the growth of democratic feeling all over Europe, we are brought face to face with a struggle which may alter the frontiers of Europe, bringing into being new conditions and changing the course of history.

In the history of nations, as in the life of individuals, there occur epochs in which, to use the picturesque expression, mankind "sees red," and when nations act like automata controlled by an unseen and compelling will.

It is difficult at present to see that any of the nations of modern Europe can gain as much as they lose by war; it is hard to understand how any one of the five Great Powers can without fear appeal to the arbitrament of war. Were we all believers in the philosophy of Mr. Norman Angell, we might be happier, for, according to his belief, the losers in a war are the gainers, a theory which rests on arguments which do not seem to us to be entirely conclusive, though we are quite willing to believe that the material results of success cannot be estimated by the amount of a war indemnity or the area of ceded territory.

All arguments against war fail to do justice to the fact that the actions of nations, to an even less degree than those of the individuals who compose them, are controlled by logic or common sense, and that a conviction of the universal brotherhood of mankind frequently arises from a dislike and disinclination to do anything for that section of humanity which is akin to us in race or nationality.

But, if the balance of evil as opposed to good is great in the moral aspect of war, the latter has always had a distinctly beneficial effect in convincing men that there are greater considerations than personal safety or gain, and more important aims than personal and individual ones. The legacy of Jena was the creation of that national spirit which has made Germany a Great Power, and which has enabled her people to lead Europe in education, discipline, and endurance. In this respect, rather than in the narrow and more restricted outlook of Mr. Norman Angell, we may say that the losers in a great conflict are often the gainers in the end, for it was the effect of the humiliation of Prussia by Napoleon which, after many years had passed, governed the outcome of the wars of 1866 and 1870, just as the effect of L'Année Terrible made the regeneration of modern France possible.

And one result of external war is to remind all classes of every country that they have interests in common which permeate every class and override their sectional differences, so that war may be said to bring in its train unifying and beneficent effects which are to be placed in the balance against the loss of life, misery, and destruction of property entailed by it. In our own country we already see these influences at work in the presence of possible national danger, in the union of sharply-opposed party differences which almost seemed irreconcilable, and, once united in the face of a common danger, it is hard to believe that something like a common agreement may not be possible when the time arrives for their rediscussion and settlement.

And in the same way it is difficult to believe that the labour differences between the opposing forces of capital and labour will not seem smaller and more easy of solution after a great national crisis has been jointly met by all.

We are told by some Socialist leaders that war happens because of the capitalist and millionaire effort to distract the attention of the working classes from more immediate and closer issues; but the fundamental fallacy of this theory is shown whenever great national issues become acute, and we have long passed the days when rulers could use mercenary armies as pawns in their game, irrespective of the feelings or wishes of the people.

Whatever the form of government a modern State possesses, a great war only becomes possible when a nation feels roused by the common unifying power which moves all its members in the same direction and degree.

The loss of wealth and the stagnation of trade which accompanied the Great War are things no longer remembered, but the expansion of industrial England and the foundation of Greater Britain which arose in its wake have been the marked features of a century, and no man can say that the present struggle will not be succeeded by rest and prosperity such as modern Europe has not known, and perhaps a peace such as distinguished the Roman Empire in the height of its prosperity.

It is true that the wave of good trade which followed both the Franco-German War and the South African War in this country may not be our lot; but a greater sense of security and the relief from the burdens of excessive armaments may be the ultimate outcome of the present struggle.

It is only from the standpoint which will be afforded us in the future that we can judge rightly of the present, and we may see that the present dark hour in Europe was necessary in its progress towards better things. For the present we can only be glad that party strife is silent, and that the nation shows its willingness to take its part of common burdens without finching.

We cannot yet tell what effect the present situation may have on the internal trade of the country, and more especially on the great industry of building. We shall probably have to face a certain restriction of activity in the field of building of a more or less speculative character; on the other hand, we should expect to see greater harmony prevail between the rival forces of labour and capital, and so adverse external influence may act in a measure for good. Nor shall we be able to import foreign building material with the usual freedom. Our timber supply may be partially curtailed or raised in price, and, if so, an additional impetus will be given to fire-proof construction and methods. The curtailing of foreign supplies of manufactured iron and steel may give us a practical example of the effect of a tariff on manufactured goods, and will certainly afford our manufacturers help by eliminating rivalry and competition.

Such may be some of the results of a political position which is without parallel in our times, and, though we cannot assume the rôle of the prophet, we think we may be justified in holding that there is no necessity for unmitigated pessimism, as there is none for unwise optimism. It is necessary for the units who compose the nation to work on steadily in their various occupations, and the greatest help to our Government and armed forces is that civilians should pursue their avocations without panic and with energy and determination.

We are continually finding in our daily life that the dangers and difficulties which we anticipate are not those which we actually have to meet, and that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in our philosophy.