

H. G. Wells Declares Need of 'Follow Up' Arms Meet Evident

By H. G. WELLS.
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How are we getting on in Washington?

The general mood is hopefulness tempered by congestion, mental and physical, and by sheer fatigue. There is no rest in Washington, no cessation.

Last winter I was a happy invalid at Amalfi, I sat in the Italian sunshine, the hours were vast globes of golden time, my mind and my soul were my own.

Now I live to the tune of a telephone bell and the little feverish American hours slip through my hot, dry hands before I can turn my thoughts round. I wish I could attend to everything.

Behind Closed Doors.
The conference has evolved two committees, one on disarmament and one on Pacific affairs, which meet behind closed doors, so that one has three or four divergent reports of what has happened to choose from; delegates at hours and in devious ways call together the press men to make more or less epoch-making statements; there are particular conferences with representative business men of this country and educationists of that, and so forth; one is called upon by a multitude of well-informed people insistent upon this fact or that point of view, eloquent sidelights from South China, Albania, Czechoslovakia, clamour for attention.

And there is a terrible multitude of mere pesterers, who want to do something—they know not what. The weather here is unusually warm and inclined to be cloudy, a brew-house atmosphere, due entirely, one humorist declares to the tremendous fermentation that is going on. The fermenting vat overflows with the press of all the world. All the world, we feel, is present in spirit at Washington.

Three questions stand out as of importance and significance. The naval disarmament discussion, as one could have foretold, becomes a haggle for advantages. Each power seeks to disarm the other fellow. Great Britain detests the big raider submarine and wants none of it; it is America's only effective long-range weapon.

A clamour to us from across the ocean from the French Senate for unlimited submarines. These will be to attack Great Britain; there can be no other possible use for them. Perhaps the French Senate does not really want war with Britain, but this is the way to get it.

Japan is asking for a 7 to 10 instead of a 6-to-10 basis for herself. And so on.

So long as unsettled differences remain, disarmament discussions are bound to degenerate in this fashion.

WAR OR PEACE? Studies of the Washington Conference NO. 12.—THUS FAR.

Settlements and sincere disarmament are inseparably interwoven.

Enormous French Army.
The French, however, have led in an important pronouncement, promising evacuation and renunciation in the Chinese area on the part of France, provided Britain and Japan follow suit. Lord Riddle, on behalf of Britain, has followed suit; Britain is ready to relinquish everything, with the justifiable exception of Hong Kong, a purely British creation.

And M. Briand has explained why France must have an enormous army to overawe Europe, but that still leaves certain possibilities of military restraint open for consideration. We are still discussing whether we may not hope to see conscription banished from the earth.

When such things swim up through the boiling activities of the Washington vat, not merely as passing suggestions and happy ideas, but embodied in more or less concrete proposals, we cannot fail, however jaded we may feel, from also feeling hopeful. The conference has got only to its third session and we already seem further from war in the Pacific and nearer security there than at any time in the past two years.

Must Lay An Egg.

And these intimations of success in this world discussion, of which Washington is the controlling nucleus, turn our minds naturally enough to the continuation and final outcome of this great initiative of President Harding's. The more fruitful the conference seems likely to be in agreements and understandings, the more evident is the necessity of something permanent arising out of it, to hold and maintain, in spirit and in fact, this accumulation of agreements and understandings.

The Washington conference before it breaks up and disperses must, in some way, lay an egg to reproduce itself. In some fashion it must presently return. Because we have had to bear in mind that in the final and conclusive sense of the word, the conference can DECIDE nothing. It has produced a fine and generous atmosphere about it; it will probably arrive at an effectual temporary solution of a large group of problems, but the power of final decision rests with governments and legislatures far away. The American proposals are only suggestive and they have no value as a treaty, unless they are accepted by the powers and until the American Senate has confirmed them by a two-thirds majority.

Warlike Gesture.

M. Briand may have wished to be generous and broadminded here, but in Paris is the French sense, inspired by a mad patriotism that would even now begin to arm France for an "inevitable" war with Britain. The French senate has made a warlike gesture directly at England, has set its feet in the path that can end only in a supreme disaster for France and England, and it did so, one guesses, in order to remind M. Briand that if he dares to be reasonable, if he dares to be pacific, if he acted for Great France and mankind, instead of at the dictates of Nationalist France, he did so at his peril. He would have been accused of betraying his country. "Conspires Briand," they would have cried in their pretty way. So M. Briand has played the patriot's role.

In Tokyo and in London, it is an open secret that the same conflict goes on; the cables are busy with

the struggle between reason and fierce patriotism.

Every concession made by every country at Washington will go back to the home land to be challenged as "weakness," as "want of patriotism," as "treason." In America and Britain the ugly side of this business has still to come, the outbreak of the patriotic fanatics, of the disappointed politicians who wanted to come here, of the wrecker journalists, the dealers in suspicion, the evil minds of a thousand types. And the lassitude that follows great expectations has also to be reckoned with. What Washington decides will not be the ultimate outcome; what the world will get at last in treaties ratified and things accomplished will be the mangled and tangled remains of the Washington decisions.

For that reason, it is imperative that the Washington Conference should meet again. Its work is not done until its decisions are realized. After it has sent over its reports to the governments and parliaments, it will adjourn, but it must not cease. With perhaps rather full powers, with perhaps wider or a different representation of the world, it must come again to a renewed invitation, to restore once more that atmosphere of international good will that has been created here, and to go over the attempts to realize, or the failures to realize, the settlement it has already worked out. And there will be many questions ripening then for solution that it cannot deal with now.

Much remains to be done by the Washington conference, most of its work indeed is still to be done, but enough has been demonstrated already here to convince any reasonable man that a new thing, a new instrument, a new organ, has come into human affairs and that it is a thing that the world needs and cannot do without again.

This has to recur, has to grow. It has to become a recurrent world conference. And this being clear, it is time that public discussion and public opinion direct itself to the problem of the renewal of the conference in order that before it disperses we may be assured that it will meet again.

As a temporary transitory thing, it will presently fade out of men's memories and imaginations, but as a thing going on and living, which has gone, but which, like the king in circuit, will come again to try the new issues that have arisen and to try again the experiments that have fallen short of expectation, it may become the symbol and rallying point of all that vast amount of sane, humanitarian feeling and all that devotion to mankind as a whole, and to peace and justice, that has hitherto been formless and ineffectual in the world for the need of such a banner.

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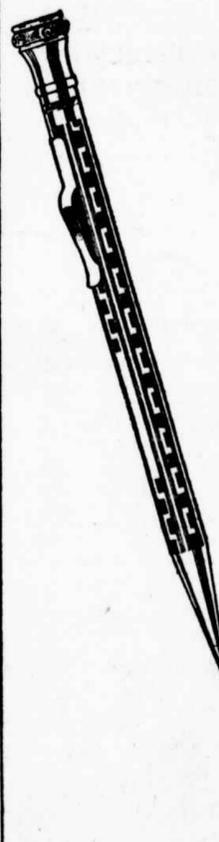
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