

The Silent Voices

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"It is now our duty to make good what they offered their lives, their blood to obtain."
—President Wilson.

DURING the winter of 1917-18, I lived in a little French village just outside of Chalons-sur-Marne, within sound of the guns and sight of the passing troops. All night long I could hear the patient little blue-covered French wagons passing along our village street, and the marching feet of the patient little blue-clad French soldiers behind them, going to the front. And from the railroad at the end of the town, I heard the trains endlessly steaming night after night, innumerable trains of box cars, loaded with French soldiers and our soldiers, on their way to the front. And from the distant battle lines I heard the guns booming steadily and continuously and knew that with every boom our men and enemy men were being killed.

And picturing the horrors that these men were going to and other men were facing every moment made sleep impossible. Often, I paced the brick floor of my damp little room in agony of thought through the night watches. And often, at such times, I turned to my Bible, and again and again the leaves would open to that twenty-first chapter of Revelations to the lines: "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." And with these blessed words of comfort, which seemed to me literally to picture the ideal new world for which our men were fighting, I would return to my bed and fall asleep, dreaming of precious peace and the New Democracy.

God alone knows how many hundreds of thousands of men and women had these same anxious vigils and calmed their tortured souls by these same dreams through all the four nightmare years of war, nor how many millions died, buoyed up by the hope that their death was making more sure a new world order where war would be no more.

When President Wilson's great speech of the fourteen points that America would demand as the price for peace came out on January 8th, 1918, a glow of exultation thrilled the fighters from France, Italy and England, as well as our own American troops who were just starting into the battle line. All of the Allies seemed lifted to higher ground spiritually by this clear-cut enunciation of ideals and visions for the future. Such principles, such constructive statesmanship made a world worth fighting for. If old wrongs were to be righted and future ones prevented, if, indeed, the burden of armament increase was to be removed from the shoulders of the poor and a society of Free Nations organized for the prevention of war in the future, then no present sacrifice was too great to make. The cries: "Make the world safe for Democracy," "This is a war to end war!" inspired, alike, the soldiers to face death and those who loved the soldiers better than life to endure their loss.

The statesmen of Europe lit their oratorical candles from our President's flame, thus making a light to cheer their troops. Said Lloyd George in popular speeches to the workers all over England: "The world after this war is not going to be the world of any one class. It must be fit for everybody to live in. Out of this agony we must see that no deformity is born. Militarism? No. Nor anarchy either. The future of the land and the British Empire has been committed to Democracy already. Before this war it was difficult to see that fair play was done to the people. I believe hearts have been softened. There is a greater sense of community. The people have gone through a fiery furnace together. This is a land that boasts that it is Christian. It was not Christian to see men rotting, women and children rotting in poverty with no sin on their souls except that they were children of the same Father. That was a libel on Jesus of Nazareth. We must not have that again in the world. Millions have not died for a world of that kind."

CLEMENCEAU of France and Orlando of Italy spoke with equal fervor on the New World state and the banishing of class rule. And everywhere men went with "lifted eyes and freshened spirits, following the vision" unto death, and women staid at home bearing a triple burden of earning the living, taking care of the children and suffering for the fighting loved ones, but bearing it more easily because of this same glorious vision. America, indeed, had pointed the way, the hope, and the life for all the agonized world. President Wilson had given voice to the yearning thoughts of millions who dared not speak; and now these millions went gladly forward, feeling that their personal sacrifice was nothing compared to the future safety of Democracy and Peace.

Thus hearts were buoyed up through the terrific fighting of last spring and summer. Through our cantonment passed Italians, French, Canadians, English—all with the new gospel on their lips and in their hearts. When the Germans made their drive toward Paris, we women were ordered to Troyes to help with refugees and wounded. One afternoon I was sent to the Canadian Hospital there to write letters for the dying. One young fellow's message is indelibly fixed in my memory. He had but an hour or little more of life. He lay weak but smiling on his cot and greeted me gladly. In firm clear voice he dictated a letter to his mother. He told her of his cheerful room, of the kindness of the nurses, of the gay bouquet of flowers on the table by his bed, even of me, "the American lady" who was writing for him. He knew that he was dying and I knew it, but he said no word concerning his condition—just love to "sister and Bob and Billie," and to his girl sweetheart next door, as he laughingly explained to me. But these words ring out clearly for me still: "Oh, Mother, whatever happens don't worry about me. Don't ever think of me except with joy. Remember that your boy has been in the biggest fight for freedom the world has ever seen. Remember,

I'm in a war to end war, Mother! Just think! My sister's little kiddie and no other little kiddie will ever have to go through this hell again. It's a war to end war, Mother! Be proud your son had his share in it." That was all.

Not long after that, a letter was shown me. It was found on the body of an English soldier who died at Gallipoli. It was written to his wife with an inclosure for his baby girl. It said: "Will you keep this statement, until my child is old enough to read it and to understand its meaning? I want her to know why her father died. I want her to know that he gave his life not to make any king more powerful nor any cou try richer, but that men might have freedom all over this world and that the tyranny of war might cease." May that daughter live to see the realization of her father's dream!

Such dreams America's coming into the war so quickened and increased that she literally became the pillar of fire by night and the pillar of cloud by day for all of Europe. Our President's message gave spiritual leadership, and our troops in the field material proof of that leadership. After Château Thierry, all the Allies leaned upon us. Our men became shock troops for every offensive.

The last of August of 1918 I was at Aix les Bains, one of the largest and most beautiful leave areas for the Americans. Thousands of men were there taking a few days respite from the strenuous fighting of the weeks before. Marshal Joffre was also having a brief vacation in a château not many miles away. He was asked to allow our soldiers to call on him and Madame Joffre one afternoon. Graciously he consented, and many hundreds marched to his gardens where he and his wife and daughter stood to greet them. A huge bouquet of flowers for him and a corsage bouquet for Madame Joffre were presented by one of the soldiers, chosen because of his knowledge of French. But when the momentous occasion was upon him, the embarrassed lad forgot his French and could only thrust the flowers into the hands of his host and hostess and hasten back to his place in line. But Marshal Joffre cried out:

"No, No, American, wait! I must shake your hand. I must send a message to your brothers. I have been in your country and I loved you then, but now I cry to you from my heart 'that you have saved France, that you are the hope of the world.' My sons, my heart is at your feet, not only because of my own bleeding country but for Democracy."

Tears were running down the old man's cheeks and he gripped both hands of the tall young fellow who towered above him. Then in marching file, we all passed by to shake his hand.

Signor Orlando, Prime Minister of Italy, expressed much the same sentiments. When one of our newspaper correspondents asked him what he thought of our soldiers he replied:

"When America declared war, I thought in my heart: 'They can do little with their arms for us, an army is the result of long processes of thought and centuries of military training and discipline.' And even while I was so thinking, lo! a miracle came to pass. I saw your men, thousands of them, marching down the streets of Rome under your Stars and Stripes. As I watched them, perfect in their martial array, my soul cried: 'Here is the ideal army; for these men have come thousands of miles across sea and land to face death in gory battle, not for the sake of wealth nor home, not for money, fame nor power. They have come for the sake of Democracy. They have come to put an end to war. They are the ideal army, for their goal is a spiritual one. They are following a gleam, the brightest that the world has ever seen.'"

We were, indeed, followers of a gleam, leading the other nations in that spiritual idea of a future democratic world in which war would be no more. Our very army was in itself a proof of that for which it fought. We were of all nationalities, all tongues, yet one in ideals and fighting power. Any worker with the troops had this fact demonstrated innumerable times. I recall a visit made at a hospital in the old town of Vitry le Francois. A boy had asked me to go to see his wounded Buddie there. I walked between the long rows of French and Italian wounded, till finally I came to the bed where lay our American boy. His olive drab coat hung above him and he had the typical soldier grin. "How do you do! What is your name?" I asked, putting out my hand.

"My name is Garibaldi Domboli," he answered, placing his left hand in my outstretched one. "I'm an American all right. Of course my mother and father are Italians. They were born in Italy. But I was born in New York." And then, putting his left hand where his right one ought to have been, only it wasn't there, he added: "I'm an American and I've given my right arm for what America stands for."

"Yes, you've done more. You offered your life as well. Of course you are an American and we are proud of you," I replied.

And one night after I had finished my talk on The Womanhood of France, a boy came up to me fairly quivering with intensity of emotion. As he gripped my hand he said: "I know that the French women have morale. I know that they are brave and pure. I know, because my mother is a French woman." Then with a tightening of the lower jaw: "My mother's a French woman and my daddy's a German. But I'm an American all through and I'm going over the top for what she stands for." He did the next week and was killed.

And the men who led the attack on Fismes, those whose blood was first spilled there, were of German

origin. It is said that one of the young lieutenants who died in most gallant action there had a German mother. A single glance at the names winning the distinguished service medals is enough to show that our heroes came from among the nations of the whole earth.

One of our orators of the day, speaking for the American Legion, declared recently that whole-hearted Americanism was what we must all stand for, that America should come first and be written in capital letters always. Then he called attention to the fact that a small town near Wichita, Kansas, has a great signboard reading:

"We speak one language here. If you don't like it, get out."

I surmise that that small town speaks one language mightily poorly and is as barren of ideals as of tongues.

In contrast to this motto, I am minded of an incident that occurred in my canteen more than a year ago. A boy came up to the counter and asked: "Lady, do you know if I can send a letter home in Greek?" For the moment I was too surprised to think. The boy was in olive drab and looked a perfect American type. "What in the world, son, do you want to send a letter home in Greek for?" I exclaimed.

The boy got red behind his ears at my stupidity, but replied politely, almost apologetically: "Well, you see my mother and father are native born Greeks. They speak English a bit, but they can't read it very well. I want to write home to them in a language they can understand."

"Of course you do," I said, blushing for my denseness, "and you write to them in Greek. There'll be somebody in the base censor's office that can read it." Not long after that there was an article in *The Stars and Stripes*, telling of censorship difficulties over the many languages in which our soldiers' home letters were written. The number was greater than that of the Allied nations in the war, I remember.

THERE would be a far better understanding and more cordial relationship between the French and Americans today, had more of our men been better linguists, had they possessed even the rudiments of the French language.

I recall conversations with many intelligent French officers about the study of German. Several of our American leaders were vociferously demanding that German be removed from all our school curricula at the time. Said these Frenchmen:

"Cease studying German? Why, Madam, that would be very stupid for us. If ever we are to make the Germans our friends, we must know their language to understand them. If they are to remain our enemies, all the more reason for studying their language in order to be able to watch them at every turn. Many of our best officers speak German fluently and it has been a blessing often in this war."

In the French schools, English and German are studied with almost as much zeal as their own tongue. It is a vital need of the future, this linguistic knowledge, and the keen French minds recognize the fact. A world democracy, international understanding, a League of Nations to put an end to war—all these fervently to be hoped for achievements for which millions of youths have died—can be furthered by language study. By intelligent reading of the literature of other nations, we learn to know their mind and soul; for literature is an expression of the ideals, national and racial, of a people.

Is it not the accusation hurled oftenest at the stupid diplomacy of the past, diplomacy that led us into this frightful world cataclysm, that our world diplomats did not understand the spirit of the nations with which they were dealing? Are not we Americans told by those who know that our greatest fault in dealing with Latin America is our ignorance of her language and, therefore, of her customs, traditions and manner of thought? A race's language holds much of its psychology.

And so, if we are truly American in the highest sense, loving our country so much that we wish her to be a moral and spiritual leader of this poor, broken world, to heal the sick, feed the starving and, above all, prevent such another future suicide of civilization, then we should ardently advocate the study of languages for our boys and girls, for all our citizens, especially the languages of the nations whom we suspect of being our enemies.

Where is the gleam that led us all a year ago? Where are the high hopes and ideals of our fourteen points? They were our New Commandments, graven not on tablets of stone but written in the blood of our sons upon the battlefield and on the hearts of grief-wrecked mothers in the homes. Are they, too, buried underneath the myriad crosses in the fields of France and Flanders? The League of Nations was the last and greatest of them.

From the horror of dead and wounded that I saw in just my little corner of war work, my mind is constantly seeking to escape. Again I see the sad, appealing eyes of the terribly disfigured men in the face and jaw hospital in Paris. Again I hear the call: "Clear the way for the blind!" and see our sightless boys slowly making their way down the gangplank to their homeward-bound ships at Brest. And the armless ones and legless ones! And the insane! How many thousands of such has this war made!

I read the other day of an organization of young mutilated Italian officers formed for the purpose of doing propaganda work for the League of Nations. Having lost so much in this struggle for freedom, they wish to do all that is possible to keep their sacrifices from being useless.

Several books of war poems lie beside me—poems written by fighting men while facing the bare truth of death's constant presence. I choose one by a French-

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