

# Great World War Has Become a Religion With Fighters of Democratic Nations

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FOR the first time in history a war has descended upon humanity which has gradually, directly or indirectly, extended to all the earth. This cataclysm brought about by the military empires of central Europe, above all by Germany, is the most terrible as well as the most costly that mankind has ever known. Only a few secondary nations still remain neutral in 1918. But these neutrals themselves are hardly less interested than the belligerents in the result of the conflict, of which they feel the effects profoundly.

## I.

Economic, political, moral, even racial causes have been assigned for this general war. But there is one issue which dominates all others: It is a fight to the death of two regimes, military despotism and democracy.

All the history of humanity since the close of the eighteenth century is filled with the conflict between these two conceptions of life. It is necessary to recall how this conflict had its birth, how it developed and what were the tragic accompaniments of it.

Democracy, animated with the passion for liberty and the desire for peace among men, was menaced toward the end of the eighteenth century by imperialist nations or sovereigns. It triumphed in North America and in France. It proclaimed its principles in the United States in 1776 and 1787; in France in 1789 and later.

### Napoleon Ignored Boundaries.

But after the great French victories and the confiscation of the Revolution of Napoleon the principles of democracy were more and more constantly violated. Napoleon annexed territories without consulting their populations and passed beyond natural boundaries, such as the Alps and the Rhine. He went far beyond what the state of Europe made possible and thus prepared a general reaction, which attained the proportions of another revolution.

The great Powers, aristocratic and feudal, meeting together at the Congress of Vienna in 1815, divided a mass of territory without a thought of souls. For them there was no right between nations. "What has international right to do here?" asked a Prussian plenipotentiary. "The expediencies of Europe are the right," another proclaimed brutally. Utter arbitrariness had the force of law. Belgium was joined to Holland and Norway to Sweden without the consent of their populations. The Rhine lands, from Cologne to Treves, to Sarrelouis and Sarrebruck, found themselves handed over to Prussia despite their social and religious traditions.

Poland was cut up once more according to the interests and caprices of the dividing Powers, and Warsaw, indifferent, passed like any simple object of exchange from Prussia to Russia. Milan and Venetia were split up for the benefit of Austria, who even under the ancient regime had not been so well endowed. No justice; no thought of the liberty of nations; the most cynical materialism brooded over territories, crushing souls; the brutal triumph of might. "These are the nobles who have conquered," cried a German after Waterloo. In fact the ancient regime was reestablished everywhere.

### Despotism on Top in 1850.

The struggle between democracy and military despotism continued after 1815. Democracy appeared to triumph several times, in 1830 and 1848; but after these attempts at weakening the ancient methods despotism in 1850 again resumed complete control.

Disconcerted for a moment in 1859 and 1860 by the liberation of Italy and the formation of a new nation founded upon the will of the people, it became preponderant in the relations between peoples in 1864 by the conquest of the Danish duchies, invaded by three German armies and raised into a petty State; in 1866 by the seizure of Hanover and its duchies by Prussia; finally in 1871 by the annexing to the German Empire of Alsace and half of Lorraine.

This last was not simply a violation of

the rights of France. It was an utter denial of eternal justice. In reality it touched all humanity. But mankind did not understand this until later.

The war of 1914 was the sequence of all the conflicts for more than a century between conquering despotism and pacific democracy. For western Europe, France, Belgium, the British Empire, Italy, Portugal, it was indeed the contest of democracies against the German military autocracy, of the revolution against the ancient regime, as in the eighteenth century.

### America Could Not Refuse Aid

The entrance of the United States upon the stage in April, 1917, following the persuasive efforts of President Wilson, that noble standard bearer of the intellectual and idealistic classes of the New England, gave to the war, now become worldwide, its highest significance. The United States could not refuse to hearken to the appeal of justice and right, oppressed in Belgium, in France, in Alsace-Lorraine and in all Europe.

Since 1912 we had predicted America's part in the great conflict then preparing; it did not seem possible to us that the greatest democracy in the world, which was the first to be established, with the help of France, could remain in splendid indifference and isolation during a long and terrible war in which the very foundations of civilization would be concerned.

In March, 1912, at a conference at the conclusion of a series of studies of Germany made by our colleagues in the faculty of letters of the University of Lille, we said: "When the German people desires more territory the conflict can not be stopped by any sovereign calling himself pacific, for it will be all the nation, a really imperialistic nation, which will force it. And then it will be a universal conflagration. But if Germany triumphs it will not be for long, for she will end by being conquered by a coalition of all the European Powers and possibly even the American Powers."

It seems as if the great facts of history have their logical conclusion sometimes.

## II.

Thus the two antagonistic principles which have been in conflict for 150 years are clearly defined.

German military despotism is the oppressor of conquered nations—the Poles of Poland, the Danes of Schleswig, the Alsations and Lorrainians, the Italians of Trente and Trieste, the Czechs of Bohemia, the Slovaks of northern Hungary, the Rumanians of Transylvania, the Serbs of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Croats of Agram, the Slovenes of Istria. For these fragments of nations torn away by force, kept by force, profoundly attached to their traditions, to their heroes, to their civilization, there has been no justice but the mailed fist, sometimes disproportionate, as in Prussian Poland, al-

ways persecution, even in language and thought.

The Germanic despotism shows absolute disregard of all treaties, those "scraps of paper," as the German Chancellor called them in August, 1914. As "necessity knows no law" according to the same high authority, the German Empire did not hesitate to invade the territory of Belgium, thus erasing its own signature to a treaty three-quarters of a century old, which guaranteed the neutrality of that little independent State.

In 1907 at the Peace Conference at The Hague it refused to be a party to obligatory arbitration between nations; for its disagreements were to be settled by war alone. Moreover is not war a national industry for Prussia? It is even a divine institution.

In August, 1914, war "fresh and joyful" was let loose upon Belgium and France, amid the fires and massacres of Louvain, of Termonde, of Dinant and Senlis. It is military terrorism for the great good of humanity and at the order of God: "God so wills it! God is with us!" So German despotism sets up the violation of international law as a rule, just as it refuses to conquered peoples the enjoyment of national law. In justice is sovereign.

No liberty for nations; their will does not count; they should have no other desire than that of the master. The conqueror cries that there is no Alsace-Lorraine question; there is no Schleswig question, no Polish question. Nor is there equality between nations, for all is a matter of force.

### Seeks Supremacy of the Large.

There are large and small states; the future belongs to the large; everything in the world tends to concentration; the small nations must be sacrificed to necessity; it is the decree of fate, the end of evolution. Thus must disappear Belgium, Serbia, and awaiting their turn Denmark, Holland, &c.

And when there are only four or five great states left, or less, then Germany, having absorbed the small ones politically and economically, will conquer the large states, ruin them and dominate the world. "Deutschland über Alles!" And that will be justice, she already declares, because her kultur is superior to all others and her organization is the model dreamed of by all humanity.

Democracy has principles utterly opposed to all this. In England, in the United States, in France and in all the states of the western world which have been modelled upon these three great nations, civil and political liberty and equality are the chief motors of public life. All citizens are free and have equal rights; all are equally admitted to their functions, whether they are Protestants, Catholics or Jews.

As to other nations, democracy is profoundly respectful of all its treaties. With perfect loyalty it keeps its agree-

ment. It knows that frankness is worth more than all secret diplomacy. Democratic states do not hesitate to confirm their signatures, if need be, to reassure a loyal nation, weak and timid, situated between three powerful neighbors. Thus in 1914 France and England recognized afresh the neutrality of Belgium, guaranteed by them in 1839; and so in 1917 France gave her word of honor to Switzerland, which had been made uneasy by German propaganda.

The democracies admit the right of peoples to dispose of themselves. For them a nation is a sacred person. It is made up neither of the soil nor the fortresses, nor the rivers—natural trenches for the German who dreams of nothing but war and annexation. It is not even the language, the habits and customs; it is above all the will.

### Nation Seen as Sacred Person.

The democracies hold all nations as equal, no matter what may be the extent of their territory and the strength of their army; all are sovereign and independent; all have a right to their place in the sun.

The great democracies suffer from the attacks made upon the liberty and rights of small nations. And in 1917 we may say that this suffering became intolerable and the great American Republic, followed by the Republic of Brazil, came to the assistance of oppressed nations. Thus democracy becomes justice. It is also peace, labor, the fruitful emulation of peoples in material and moral progress.

On the one side stands force, the conquest of the world, the coarsest materialism; on the other, right, peace, idealism, founded upon that which is left to us of the noblest and most humane of ancient Greece, of Christianity, of the Italian renaissance and the French revolution.

## III.

"He will kill him." That the champions of might still think of victory after all their defeats on the Marne, on the Yser and before Verdun, is possible; in reality it is chiefly the great military heads who assert this. How can the faith of an entire nation still rest upon its militaristic kultur when forty-five years of preparation have resulted only in that miserable failure on the Marne? The Germanic peoples themselves can hardly still have blind confidence to-day in an armed force which failed in the first grand shock and which, even when delivered from Russian attack in 1918, gained some ground only by leaving on the battlefields of Picardy and Flanders a large part of its best soldiers.

### Confidence on the Side of Right.

Confidence is altogether upon the side of the champions of right. The soldier of the western democracies understands and feels more and more the living purpose of this war, and amid the fortunate or unfortunate accidents of the struggle, the solidarity of nations.

He knows, he sees, he believes that the league of democratic nations will prevail over military autocracies. And the last to enter the lists, the Americans are not the least fervent apostles of this belief, nor are they the least insistent in their demands for justice.

This war, just like the French revolution, has become almost a religion. Everywhere among the small nations of the centre of Europe and of the Orient it is exciting the same passions which were aroused in all hearts by the revolution of 1789. The Czechs of Bohemia, the Poles, the Jugo-Slavs (Serbs and Croats), the Rumanians, the Greeks, the Syrians, the Jews of Palestine, the Armenians, the Arabs, &c., all have their eyes turned toward the Occident whence have come since the eighteenth century all liberating words and deeds.

What has succeeded in giving a quasi religious aspect to this terrible war for all humanity that is really civilized is the elevated aim which the combatants of the league of democratic nations pursue; it is their faith in the eternal progress of civilization. After peace the nations, we sincerely believe, will continue to cooperate with the same generous ardor as during the war.

Then will come the reign of justice. Military despotism will disappear. That will be the end of these periodic butcheries. This war will prove the great war against war.

## Community Service Flag Stirs East Side Patriots

A NEW idea in symbolism for fostering neighborhood loyalty appeared at the Liberty festival held on the eve of the Fourth in East Nineteenth street. A community service flag, the first of its kind, called by those who planned it "The flag of a thousand stars, sewed in a thousand homes," was hung across the street and dedicated.

By request of the People's Institute and the Wingate Community Centre, the principals of Public Schools 40 and 50, which are close together in East Twentieth street, at the heart of the neighborhood in question, had called on the assembled school children for a show of the hands of those whose families have members with the colors.

Each youngster thus distinguished was given a square of white bunting to take home, with as many blue bunting stars as the home service flag was entitled to. The children were asked to get their mothers or big sisters to sew the stars on. The squares returned were pieced together, making the field of the flag, and a three foot red border was added.

The resulting emblem of service measures roughly sixteen feet by twenty-two.

It does bear a thousand stars and the sewing was actually done in as many homes or nearly. It does not of course begin to represent all the men in service from the East Side area that sends children to the two schools. But it gave at least a thousand wives and mothers a personal contributive interest in the festival.

A few of the children had to bring their bunting back unsewed with the message that mother was sorry, but hadn't time now that one of the breadwinners was away and would somebody please do the sewing for her. On the other hand, one woman, a widow with two grown up sons in khaki, volunteered to help!

The festival, under the auspices of the institute and the centre, was a block party. East Nineteenth street was closed for it between First and Second avenues. The climax of the programme was the unfasting of the flag.

The district that turned out for the festival includes citizens of several racial stocks, notably Italian, Jewish, Irish and Polish. It was their party, not the institute's, according to the community movement policy of assisting a neighborhood to genuine self-expression.