The Lust of Empire

THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE PRESENT WAR-METZSCHE AND BERNHARDI AND THE GRRMAN PHILOSOPHY OF MIGHT-ENGLISH OPPORTU-NISM AND ITS VARIOUS ASPECTS-THE COM-PARISON.

There has been, one suspects, a certain change in the attitude of many thoughtful Americans towards the countries that are held most immediately responsible for the war. Their first feeling was a natural one of outrage against the titular rulers of those lands. As the Nation exclaimed, in words that have been widely quoted:

Whatever happens, Europe-humanitywill not settle back again into a position enabling three Emperors-one of them senile another subject to melancholia, and the third often showing signs of disturbed mental balance-to give, on their individual choice or whim, the signal for destruction and massa-

But it did not take much reflection to see that, however these crowned bogeys might give the signal, the really maleficent spirit was the militarism which held the governments in its mailed fist and bade emperors and chancellors speak as it wished. And so the Nation of October 1, drawing a kind of forlorn hope from history, denounced this "terrible obsession":

Because Stein and Bismarck drilled and organized, thereby succeeding, everybody must be given over to a passion for drilling and military organization. That this should have finally resulted in the elevation of the soldier above all his fellows, and the apotheosis of war, is a fearful thing, no doubt, but one can understand it. So could one understand the domination of slavery in this country. . One long and bloody war made an end of slavery. May we faintly trust the larger hope that another will rid the world of the curse of militarism?

And only a week later we were moved by reading a kind of deprecatory tribute to the patriotism and community of feeling aroused by the war in the whole German peoplethe enthusiasm of the soldiers, the loyalty of those that stayed behind and their readiness to sacrifice all, "the great uplifting of soul on the part of German women."

There, I think, we touch the bottom of the matter. It may be true that the Kaiser and his ally of Austria might have stayed for a while the flaring up of the great conflagra tion; but sooner or later the spirit of militarism was bound to assert itself pragmatically, and the fiames would leap forth. Nor does it seem to me that by militarism we should understand the mere dominance of the military caste, or their levying and drilling of armies in time of peace under the plea of "preparedness for war." It is at least a plausible thesis that these vast preparations rather in themselves retarded than hastoned the conflict; just as two quarrelsome boys are quicker to fight than two trained athletes who know the cost of such an engage- of Nietzschelsm may be summed up thus: A finite existence, to sympathize with all that

ment. But however that may be, and there is much to say on both sides of the question, it ought to be clear that, for whatever reason, the so-called spirit of militarism has not been confined to a clique of Prussian officers, but has sunk deep into the hearts of the German people. The unanimity of the German press, the documents sent to this country by the most eminent scholars of the universities, the readiness of the leading poets and moralists of the land to condone the worst vandalism of the army-such things as these make it clear that something more is at work here than the machinations of a group of self-seeking soldiers and armament-makers, and that this marvellous unanimity is something different from the patriotism that is solidifying other countries.

All this we of America, who are so far from the contest as to stand as it were in the position of judging posterity, are beginning to perceive and to wonder at; and with the perception our condemnation of German policy grows wider than a mere democratic antagonism to the phantom of arbitrary power, and deeper than abhorrence of the ruthlessness of the Kaiser's troops under the plea of efficiency. This change, if I am right in suspecting its existence, is coming about from late acquaintance, mostly, of course, at second hand, with certain authors who, with almost incredible frankness, give voice to the inner creed of the nation. Above all, the name of Nietzsche is beginning, by the aid of the daily press, to take on a sinister meaning for the man in the street. Now, the gospel of that fanatic is nothing new. It has a respectable following in Russia and France, and through the efforts of a little body of propagandists in London and this country his works have been translated into English and expounded among us with great fervor and some cunning. But we of the English tongue are pragmatists by blood, endowed by nature with a plentiful scorn of philosophical speculation, and only the hammer of events could drive into us a suspicion that a metaphysical theory of life might have a serious influence on a national policy, and. as at once cause and effect, enter into the moulding of a people's character. And doubtless Nietzscheism itself would not have got such a hold in Germany had not a part of the doctrine been haunting the popular ear ever since Luther pronounced war to be "a business, divine in itself, and as needful and necessary to the world as eating or drinking, or any other work."

Nietzschelsm is indeed more than a glorineation of war. It is in one sense almost anything you choose to make it, for its author was a master of the various epigram, with little care for verbal consistency, so that from his works the devil or the angels may quote texts with equal conviction, as they are said to quote from better books. But out of his broken discourses, taken as a whole, there does stream a pretty definite tendency of thought and feeling, and this is what has acted dynamically on so many practical minds of his Fatherland. Briefly, the force

violent repudiation of any faith or tradition which recognizes a power in right of justice lying beyond our impulsive nature and pronouncing a vete on the wilful expansion of that nature: an identification of sentrestraint with degeneracy and of self-assertion with health, resulting in a deadening of the response to the value of harmony and proportion and voluntary moderation; a search for happiness in the conquest of others rather than in self-conquest, and a hatred of all sympathy for the weak which would involve even a partial surrender of the privilege of strength; a sharp distinction between the superior individual and the servile horde; a substitution of the Will to Power for the Darwinian Will to Live, with the consequent intensification of the unconscious and instinctive struggle for existence into a battle for conscious mastery; a sharpening of the competition of life, with its self-observed rules of fair play or its traditionally imposed limitations, into a glorification of war as the supreme test of strength, obtaining its justification in success.

Such, then, is the essence of the philosophy distilled by a master mind out of the pragmatism of Luther (whom he praised for his "depth and courage," but denounced for his religiosity), and Frederick the Great (whom he regarded, only less than Napoleon, as the "genius for war and conquest"), and out of the romantic delfication of emotional expansion (himself a product of Rousseauism, though writhing in his fetters).

One thing has tended to obscure the influence of Nietzsche. He was no patriot; he even condemned modern Nationalism as a neurose nationale, and, for very personal reasons, was most vitriolic against the particular Teutonic brand of chauvinism. "'German intellect," he exclaimed at the end of his life, "is my foul air: I breathe with difficulty in the neighborhood of this psychological uncleanliness that has now become instinctive—an uncleanliness which in every word and expression betrays a German, etc., etc. Now, there is something that sounds illogical in glorifying war and cosmopolitanism in the same breath, and certainly there is something not nice for German ears in Nietzsche's vituperative epithets: another mind was needed to make his philosophy thoroughly digestible for the home stemach. and Herr von Treitschke was the man to add the necessary ingredient of chauvinism. This he did in his "Deutsche Geschichte" and in his many lectures and essays, in all of which he really preaches a form of Nietzscheism while denouncing Nietzsche for his betrayal of the Fatherland. The essence of Treitschke's message is thus a tremendous chauvinism, facing the world unveiled and unabashed, facing with particular grimness across the Channel towards the centre of the British Empire. Germany, in his view, has been the great civilizer of mankind and the vigorous purger of shams. "Depth of conviction," he declares, "idealism, univerity, the power to look beyond all the limits of ϵ

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is human, to traverse the realm of ideas in Germany was, with a vengeance, seeking for companionship with the noblest of all nations and ages-this has at all times been the German characteristic." Germany should be the leader and ruler of the world, and such she would now be, were it not that, while she has been indulging in dreams of the spirit, England has slyly and treacherously been laying her hand on the outlying regions of the globe and degrading mankind with her materialistic opportunism. But real power cannot always be concealed, and "a thing that is wholly a sham [that is, England, "the great robber-state"] cannot in this universe of ours endure for ever." War is the last revealer of power, and "God will see to it that war always recurs as a drastic medicine for the human race"; it is something more than a purge; it is, in the words of another militarist, the schaffendes Weltprinzip. With England, then, the war will come, the sooner the better; and might, which is also right, will prevail.

Such, it appears, are the ideas that dominate the whole school of what are called the Prussian historians, with Treitschke as their coryphæus. Their works have never really reached English readers, but since the outbreak of war their spirit has become sufficiently known across the Channel by the writings of a retired general of cavalry, Friedrich von Bernhardi,* who is an avowed disciple of Treitschke's. The deep-rooted Nietzscheism of this flamboyant militarist will be clear enough from a few sentences taken at random out of the pages of "Germany and the Next War":

War is a biological necessity of the first importance. . . "War is the father of all things." The sages of antiquity long before Darwin recognized this.

"To supplant or to be supplanted is the essence of life," says Goethe, and the strong life gains the upper hand. The law of the stronger holds good everywhere.

It is a persistent struggle for possessions, power, and sovereignty, which primarily governs the relations of one nation to another. and right is respected so far only as it is compatible with advantage.

"Justice," says Goethe aptly, "is a quality and a phantom of the Germans."

The end-all and be-all of a state is power. Might is at once the supreme right, and the dispute as to what is right is decided by the arbitrament of war. War gives a biologically just decision, since its decisions rest on the very nature of things.

Such statements as these would no doubt have passed unnoticed in England as being merely ideas and "academic," as would even the repetition of Treitschke's distribes against British cant and senility, were it not that Bernhardi's most direct and audacious forecast of a war between Germany and Austria on the one side with France, Russia, and England on the other was so suddenly fulalled and his theory of its strategy so largely carried out. The most impervious British mind could no longer overlook the fact that

herself "a place in the sun," and attempt ing, as Frederick the Great once said, to corriger la sigure de la Prusse. And events are proving that the military prophets were right in predicting that, whatever might be the immediate cause of hostilities and whoever might be the allied contestants, the struggle in the end was to be between Germany and Great Britain for empire, for Weltmacht oder Niedergang. At least that is overwhelmingly the passion of Germany at the present moment. Every report from that land shows that her desire to make an end forever of the French longing for revanche and her need to set a limit to Slavic expansion are almost swallowed up in a fierce hatred of England as the inaccessible obstacle to her lust of empire. Nor should old causes of detestation be forgotten. Long ago I asked a very intelligent German why he so hated England. His answer implied more than he said in words: "Do you remember Thackeray's picture of court life at Pumpernickel in 'Vanity Fair'?" England must be not only crushed but humiliated.

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And what of England herself? In a word, the matter lies thus: while in Germany the lust of empire has produced a tremendously efficient instrument of war, her rival, without any such avowed purpose and with no such efficiency, has somehow created an empire. I would not say that the vision of world-power has not floated before the minds of individual Englishmen, and at times stirred vaguely in the popular consciousness. Even in the early eighteenth century a minor poet, Thomas Tickell, could be lifted to eloquence by such a theme:

Accept, great Anne, the tears their mem'ry draws

Who nobly perish'd in their sov'reign's cause: For thou in pity bid'st the war give o'er, Mourn'st thy slain heroes, nor wilt venture more

Vast price of blood on each victorious day! (But Europe's freedom doth that price repay.) Lamented triumphs! when one breath must teli

That Marlborough conquer'd, and that Dormer fell.

Great Queen! whose name strikes haughty monarchs pale.

On whose just sceptre hangs Europa's scale; Whose arm like mercy wounds, decides like fate.

On whose decree the nations anxious wait; From Albion's cliffs thy wide extended hand Shall o'er the main to far Peru command, So vast a tract whose wide domain shall run, Its circling skies shall see no setting sun.

That note is not altogether uncommon in English literature; but it is not prevalent, and above all it was never developed into a practical and widely accepted philosophy. As a matter of fact, the history of the British Empire shows little purpose or guiding policy, but rather a blind following of chance and opportunity. Her great increase of powwhen the navies of Spain were checked, and a tale of treachery and underhand deal-

again when Marlborough stood against Louis XIV, and when Wellington put a stop to the Napoleonic dreams-and so it may happen to-day with Prussia, and to-morrow, who knows? with the sluggish Bear of Europe. She lost half a continent when her Government tried to enforce a theory of empire on her subjects of America; whereas her vast gains in India were rather thrust upon her by the greed of merchants at home and the independent vigor of distant agents beyond her control, just as the conquest of Africa was brought to her half-willing hands by the audacity of two or three irresponsible megalomaniacs.

There has never been anything in the intelligence corresponding English Nietzscheism or Treitschkeism, and there is nothing like it to-day save perhaps in a few isolated minds, and that for reasons at once a credit and a discredit to the people. For the discredit we shall not hesitate to say, as Matthew Arnold and Bagehot and other good patriots have said very emphatically, that the English as a people are just, not intelligent, if by intelligence one means an interest in ideas for themselves or a pleasure in the operations of the mind apart from immediate utility. From the days of the Reformation to the present the only philosophy that has gained any genuine ascendence in that land is the doctrine of Bacon and Locke and Bentham, which has worked itself out logically in the creation of "comfort" and in the increase of "ingenious trade." Such writers as Nietzsche and Treitschke could not be national powers for this reason, if for no other, that, after all, those men were absorbed in ideas and in subjecting the crude material of life to a rigid theory.

That ever-growing indolence of the brain in England is discreditable; and, to mention a single symptom of the case, if the war can succeed in manifesting to London the hollowness of the mountebanks and decadents and hysterical women who are now supposed there to be making literature, it will have done one good thing at least. But there is a creditable side to British opportunism also—a glory, if you will, in the operation of instinctive, unreasoned character, and in the ready response to the call of duty. Jameson, a physician in far-away Africa, stung by the spirit of adventure and bringing about great international changes by his daring, is characteristic of his people. But more characteristic is the activity of a clerk like Clive, who, under the spur of necessity and without training, takes up the burden of government and creates an Empire.

The German mind, and to a certain extent the world at large, has never been able to understand this opportunism, which is mothered by lack of intelligence and purpose and fathered by a mute or magnificent response to the claim of the thing to be er has come oftener from opposition to the done now and here. So it is that to a ambition of some other nation than from a philosophical historian such as Treitschke conscious ambition of her own. So it was the whole record of the British Empire is

² Fermany and the Next Wor. Translated by Allen E Powler New York: Chan A. Eron.

a War of To-day. Translated by Hugh Rees. How Germany Makes War. (A condensation of On War of To-day.) New York: George H. Doran Company. \$1.25 net.

ing, and the basis of British character is something that transcends reason; that in women" who share no forme. sham and lying pretence. This, too, is the source of that imputation of cant which is so often retorted upon British pride. And -such is the tangle of good and evil in human nature—the imputation is in part true. When the smug Briton arrogates to himself the virtues of his greater compatriots, when he attempts to give a reason for what his race has irrationally accomplished, when he wraps himself up in a vulgar self-complacency, he does sometimes fall a victim to an unpicasant simulacrum of righteousness Cant is the sham of morality that confronts the sham intellectualism of Germany-for withat we must not forget that an intellectualism which honors purpose and intellect to the dishonor of the traditional sense of what is right, and which starts from a fundamental disregard of truth, is itself also a sham. But cant is only the shadow and not the substance of British character. The real contrast to Nietzscheism is patriotism. Now it need scarcely be said that patriotism is not exclusively British, nor is all the socalled patriotism of that land admirable. Was it not Dr. Johnson who denounced the word as the last resort of acoundrels? But patriotism as a kind of philosophy opposed to Treitschkeism, if the paradox may be allowed, the profound emotion that accompanies the lack of reflection and the sense of duty, is peculiarly English.

If any one cares to see what is meant by this comparison of Treitschkelsm and patriotism, let him read the little book which contains the lectures of the late Professor Cramb.* It is an eloquent piece of writing, informed with deep feeling, a trumpet call, one might almost say without metaphor, to rouse his countrymen to an understanding of what has been going on across the Channel and to the necessity of preparing for the war which has, since these lectures, actually broken out. Let me quote the words that must be engraved now in the heart of many of his hearers. After telling the story of the perishing of Capt. Scott and his comrades in the Antarctic snows, he continues:

And then pass to the last stage in the drama-to that other death. There in the tent beside his dead the leader sits, still alive; there he sits, unvanquished and unappalled, his head propped against the tent-pole to ease his fatigue in the last slow dreadful vigil, whilst down over his magnificently English features a night deeper than the Polar night descends. And what are the thoughts which then flicker in front of him? We know them; we have them written in his own hand in that priceless record-priceless because authentic. "The greatness of England—my nation!" It is the greatness of England which uplifts him as death steals over his features like a marble mask. . . .

Now I suggest to you that one explanation of this extraordinary paradox in human history-the persistence of war in spite of what seems its unreason—is that there is something in war, after all, that is analogous to this heroism there in the Antarctic zone,

war and the right of war man has a possession which he values above religion, above industry, and above social comforts; that in war man values the power which it affords to life of rising above life, the power which the spirit of man possesses to pursue the ideal. In all life at its height, in thought, art, and action, there is a tendency to become transcendental; and if we examine the wars of England or of Germany in the past we find governing these wars throughout this higher power of heroism, or of something, at least, which transcends reason.

The lecturer's illustration of patriotism is clear and forcible; but his glorification of war becomes misty and transcendental, and when he attempts to reproduce for his hearers something corresponding to the Nietzscheism of Germany he begins to speak a language of which he has no understanding. For the clean-cut, shrill ideas of the German he has only a misty sentiment. Perhaps it is better that we should not try to reason too logically about some things; certainly it is better so, unless we are sure of our premises. And one thing we are longing for now is to see German militarism and its philosophy of empire fall before the power of British opportunism, however unreasoning that power may be, and however unlovely in its baser forms.

P. E. M.

Correspondence

MR. WELLS AND "VERNON LEE."

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NATION:

SIR: I will not trouble your readers with a lengthy reply to the remarkable "message" apropos of myself which Miss Paget ("Vernon Lee") has written you. For the most part she answers herself, or what she has to say has been quite adequately counteracted by other articles and letters in your columns. But most of your readers will not have read the article by me in relation to which she writes, and as manifestly she has misread it in her excitement, you will, I know, permit me to correct her upon certain specific points.

She declares I want America to "starve" the German people. There was no such suggestion in my article. So far as the internal Austrian and German food supply is concoined. Germany can, with a little economy. go on feeding herself without importation for an indefinite time. But feeding her armies at the front is a different matter. As my article pointed out—a thing "Vernon Lee" has either overlooked or ignored-the Rhine is a natural supply canal for these armies. and the peculiar position of Holland renders it much more convenient to supply them from America via Rotterdam, if America sees fit to play in such a game, than from the threatened granaries of Pommerania and Silesia. In the long struggle that is now reaching its climax, the question of supply is a dominating factor, and so I have no quarrel with the editor who threw up my phrase of Victualling Our Enemies into large type. That is exactly what I meant, our enemies, the German army, and exactly what "Vernon Lee" failed to grasp in her haste.

As for the "thousands of English men and disgust at the proposal Mr. Wells has ven-

"shome and disgust" at my proposais, I ask you not to believe in their existence. Probably not a score of them have misread me, as "Vernon Lee" has done. I am indeed puzeled and distressed by these onslaughts of hers apon me, by her scarcely sane abuse of republican France, by her quotation, with approval, of such mere abuse as Professor Harnack's description of Russia as a "Byzantine and Mongol semi-barbarism." She even accuses me of flattering America, in spite of the fact that I sent her my little book upon 'The Future in America" when it appeared. She will end, I know, by calling me "pro-British"-the last sin of which a true-born Englishman is capable. Whatever other lesses or gains this war brings about, it has, I fear, lost England "Vernon Lec." But we shall do our best to reconquer her for the sake of many precious things that she gave us before she was won from us by Berlin. H. G. WELLS.

London, October 2.

DR. CONYBEARE'S REPLY TO "VERNON LEE."

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NATION:

Sir: May I pass some criticisms on "Vernon Lee's" "Message to Americans" in your issue of September 17? Her contention is that she speaks on behalf of English Liberals; I, too, am a Liberal, and come of a family distinguished during two centuries for its liberal-

ism. Nor am I ill-disposed to Germany. I ewe my Weltanschauung, such as it is, to Kant and the great German Idealists of a hundred years ago; I owe more to German than to English intellectuals, to the teaching, and-I am proud to be able to add-to the friendship of such men as Harnack, Hermann Ugener, Krumbacher, von Dobschütz, Diels. Albrecht Dieterich, and many others, some of whom have been spared the fate of witnessing this terrible war.

"Vernon Lee" singles out for attack Mr. H. G. Wells, who may be the contemptible lightweight she supposes, but whom I anyhow decline to recognize as more than an ingenious imitator of the French author of "A Voyage Round the Moon." It appears that he wishes to see Germany starved into surrender. My opinion is that even in war she can probably stand years of starvation without being obliged by it to surrender; but I would fain ask "Vernon Lee" what she imagines Germany would do to England in this matter, had she the power. Were our oversea supplies of food stopped, we should be starved out in six months. Would Germany, therefore, scruple to stop them, if her fleet were strong enough to do so? Unto what end and against whom has she strained her every nerve and spared no expense to build her deet? Had "Vernon Lee" made the most superficial study of newspapers read by her people, of the Militär Wochenblatt read by all her officers, she could entertain no doubt that Germany's aim is to starve us into abject surrender to her will. She finds it "atrocious" and "hideous" in Mr. Wells to contrive famine for Germany, but would apparently approve if Germany could inflict it on her own fair land of England; she is prepared to see the Prussians, after invasion of our shores, mete out to us the measure they are meting out to their Belgian victims.

We learn that "there are thousands of English men and women who feel only shame and

[&]quot;Germany and England. By J. A. Cramb. New York: E. P. Dutton & Company. \$1 net.