



WHAT DISARMAMENT MEANS

By
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91

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‘IF you wish for peace,’ runs the old Latin tag, ‘prepare for war.’ Proverbs and sayings of one sort and another can seldom be taken literally because they nearly always contradict each other. ‘A stitch in time saves nine,’ for example, does not seem quite to fit in with ‘Don’t meet your troubles half-way.’ ‘If you wish for peace, prepare for war,’ must have been fairly true in the days of Ancient Rome, when you had hostile tribes in the Alban and Sabine hills ready to come down to the plain and sack the city at the first opportunity. In those days the world, relatively speaking, was very thinly populated. But any community which settled down in a fertile valley or on slopes where the pasture land was good, tilled the soil, fed their flocks and began to build houses instead of hovels or rough tents, was in constant danger of being massacred by stronger tribes anxious to get corn and cattle for nothing. It was folly in those days not to go armed and not to build some sort of wall or stockade or trench around your camp, but the folly of yesterday has become the wisdom of today and *vice versa*. It was foolish a couple of hundred years ago to travel from London to York without a pistol or other means of self-protection in your possession; it would be equally foolish nowadays to produce a revolver

as you travel in a comfortable express train from one city to another. The same sort of thing applies to Governments to a much greater degree than many of us yet realise.

WHY CUT DOWN ARMAMENTS?

Undoubtedly the most difficult problem which faces the world to-day is the problem of the reduction of armaments. Why must it be solved? Why do we keep up armies and navies? To protect ourselves, of course, and to prevent some other Government from taking what we consider to be ours. This is surely a reasonable argument, but, in point of fact, it does not work. If we look at the world at almost any time of its history, we find a number of States all armed and all expecting war sooner or later. Generally, rivalry is particularly keen between two or more of them. One builds up a larger army in order to be safe, and the other or others, alarmed by this, build still larger armies on their side, and so it goes on until some insignificant little spark sets the whole thing ablaze. Ever since we have had democratic Governments—Governments in which the people as a whole have some say in the decision as to what their fate is to be—it has been necessary to argue that one's own Government is in the right and the other Government in the wrong. Thus, as Mr. Lowes Dickinson points out in his admirable little book, *War, its Nature, Cause and Cure*, 'in every war and for every nation the aggressor is one's enemy and the defender one's self. As soon as this is grasped, the absurdity of the

97

whole position flashes into view. You say the foreigner is the aggressor; he, with equal conviction, says you are. The truth does not enter into the question. The people concerned do not know the truth, are not in a position to know it, and do not want to know it. For, as soon as war is in the offing, the notion that one's own country may be to blame is repugnant and intolerable to every patriot.' All wars except civil wars, he goes on to point out, 'have always had a double object—on the one hand, to keep what they have got; on the other, to get more. . . . For this double reason of offence—defence, States have armed. But as soon as they are armed, and in proportion as the armaments are formidable, those armaments become an additional and independent cause of war.' All this is truer than many of us realise, and than others of us like to acknowledge. An enquiry was recently carried out by a Committee of the United States Senate into the activities of a gentleman called Mr. William Shearer, who became very prominent because he brought a law case against the big American steel manufacturers who, he said, had not paid him nearly as much money as they had promised for his attempts to wreck the Three-Power Naval Conference between Great Britain, the United States and Japan, which was held in Geneva in the summer of 1927. When Mr. Hoover realised all that Shearer had done to make relations difficult between Great Britain and the United States, he ordered this enquiry, and the evidence given at it should

provide writers of spy stories with ample material for the rest of their lives. Amongst other things, it came out that Mr. Shearer had helped a great deal to get the American Navy Bill through the Senate by handing around to Senators a wonderful document which was supposed to have been prepared by the head of the British Secret Service in the United States for the reconquest of that country by means of propaganda. When people feel suspicious about each other they will believe anything, and this document had a very considerable effect in Washington, although it has since turned out to be a pamphlet written for the fun of the thing by a satirical Irish doctor in New York. In the same way Señor de Madariaga, who is now Professor of Spanish Studies at Oxford, and was until recently Director of the Disarmament Section of the League of Nations, tells in his book, *Disarmament*, of an English visitor who complained to an American Admiral at Washington of the attacks on the British which appeared every day in the American press during this Three-Power Naval Conference. The admiral tried to reassure his English friend. 'Don't mind it,' he said, 'there is nothing in it really. We need it in order to get our Naval Bill through.'

So much for what happens in time of peace. In a little book published some time ago by Mr. Arthur Ponsonby (as he then was), there is an interesting example of the way in which this sort of thing was carried on during the war. A German paper announced that when the fall

93

of Antwerp became known, church bells were rung, but naturally it referred to German churches. A French paper took up this paragraph, and declared on the strength of it that the clergy of Antwerp had been compelled to ring their bells. A British paper—the *Times*, as a matter of fact—quoted the French paper as saying that priests in Antwerp who had refused to ring the church bells had been turned out of their offices. This, taken up by an Italian paper, was changed into the announcement that the priests had been sentenced to hard labour. Finally, the same French paper that had started the whole story, quoting the Italian paper, declared that it was confirmed that priests had been punished by being hung as 'living clappers to the bells, with their heads down.' That sort of thing is necessary in war because otherwise people would grow tired of fighting and put an end to it. You find it even in civil war. I remember, for example, how, during an attempt at revolution early in 1920 in Germany, I, as a newspaper correspondent, was with a little Communist army in Essen, which was holding out against the Government troops. The only way I could get my telegrams off was by passing through what was then enemy territory (from the point of view of the Communists, of course) to the city of Cologne. Thus I was able to pick up rumours on both sides. It was very noticeable that at first the fighting was a half-hearted sort of business—men realised that they were being called upon to shoot their own compatriots. Then, quite suddenly, rumours of

the most appalling atrocities were started, and each side believed the same rumour about the other, with the result that the fighting developed into something as bitter, beastly and cruel as anything I have ever seen.

THE RISING TIDE OF ARMAMENTS

The reason why propaganda has to be carried on even in time of peace is that armaments have now become so costly that their upkeep calls for immense sacrifices from the man in the street. Naturally, he would not make these sacrifices if he felt safe, and therefore a good deal of emphasis is always laid upon the danger of attack from some neighbouring country. This must obviously be so unless we find some other means of protecting ourselves from war. We have done it in private life by the development of Courts of Justice, and, if we wish to survive, we shall have to do it in the case of life between nations. If this sounds unpatriotic, or anything of that sort, it is only because I have not put my point very well. What I maintain and what, indeed, figures prove beyond a shadow of doubt is that large armaments certainly do not give us security. We find, for example, that in 1850, when this country was, I suppose, as secure as it has ever been, our military and naval expenditure was slightly less than it had been thirty years before. Or to go back farther still, we find that of the 130 years between 1688 and 1817, this country was at war for seventy-eight years, with the result that the amount of money spent

94
each year by the Government rose from 8% of the total national income to roughly 18%. Of this sum spent by the Government, roughly 85% went to maintaining the army and navy and to paying war debts. From 1817 to 1895 there were seventy-six years of peace interrupted only by three years of the Crimean War. During that period, the population more than doubled and the national income was multiplied by four. At the same time, the share of this national income given up to State expenditure amounted only to just over 5% of the total. After that came a period of uncertainty, and between 1908 and 1913, for example, the amount Great Britain spent on national defence jumped from just under £60,000,000 to over £77,000,000, while that of Germany went up from under £44,000,000 in 1908 to over £94,000,000 in 1913, and that of France from £59,000,000 in 1908 to nearly £84,000,000 in 1913. I am afraid I have given you rather a lot of figures, but they do serve to show that while the principal countries were spending very much more on making themselves safe, they were, in reality, making themselves so unsafe that they drifted into the war of 1914 to 1918. Even now, when the German fleet has disappeared off the face of the earth, we find that of every pound collected in taxation in this country, 11s. go to pay for the past wars, that is to say, for war debts and pensions, 3s. for the preparation of new wars, 3s. for the ordinary day to day expenditure of the Government, and 3s. for social services and education.

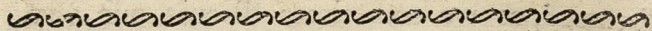
Or to give you one last figure, if the total obtained by adding up the defence budgets of all the members of the League of Nations for one year only was set aside, it would be enough to meet the present expenses of the League of Nations, the Permanent Court of International Justice and the International Labour Office for well over 600 years.

FORCE NO REMEDY

I wonder if all this helps to convince you of two things; one, that as long as we settle disputes by armaments, we are compelled to live in an atmosphere of suspicion and international intrigue, because otherwise people would not distrust each other enough to sacrifice so much money for armaments which might be devoted to education and other more constructive purposes; and, two, that armaments do not give us a feeling of security, and, indeed, rather add to the insecurity because we are always frightened that the fellow across the frontier is building more quickly than we are, or is on the point of inventing some new poison gas which will be more destructive than our own. Personally, I think there is a great deal too much sloppy and sentimental talk in this world about disarmament, but, on the other hand, it has become an obvious and urgent patriotic duty to reduce the financial burden of armaments and to develop the feeling of security between countries in every way. Hence, we are trying to develop through the League of Nations a system of round-table

95
conferences at which political disputes can be discussed, as we sometimes discuss our own private disputes when some third party can bring us together to talk things over; through the Permanent Court of International Justice at the Hague, an international law court, and through the International Labour Office, a method of smoothing out differences in the condition of working classes in different countries, because we realise that those differences are at present so great that they often lead to unfair economic competition, and, through this competition, to war.

Once we have been honest with ourselves and have admitted that the maintenance of very large armies and navies is neither the cheapest nor the most effective way of defending the interests of our country, we shall have made the limitation of armaments relatively easy.



SOME BOOKS WORTH READING

TEN YEARS' LIFE OF THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS. (May Fair Press: Simpkin Marshall, 7s. 6d.)

NAVAL DISARMAMENT, *by* H. Wilson Harris. (Allen and Unwin, 3s. 6d.)

DISARMAMENT, *by* P. J. Noel Baker. (Hogarth Press, 12s. 6d.)

DISARMAMENT, *by* Salvador de Madariaga. (Oxford University Press, 16s.)

ARMS OR ARBITRATION, *by* H. Wilson Harris. (Hogarth Press, 2s. 6d.)

THE VICTORY OF REASON, *by* W. Arnold-Forster. (Hogarth Press, 2s.)

THE FREEDOM OF THE SEAS, *by* Alec Wilson. (League of Nations Union, 6d.)

THE OUTLAWRY OF WAR, *by* Philip Kerr. (League of Nations Union, 3d.)

THE ORDEAL OF THIS GENERATION, *by* Gilbert Murray. (Allen and Unwin, 4s. 6d.)

THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS FROM IDEA TO REALITY, *by* R. Jones and S. S. Sherman. (Pitman, 5s.)

Any of the above books can be obtained from League of Nations Union, 15 Grosvenor Crescent, S.W.1, at prices mentioned, plus postage.

