



***EDWARD
CARPENTER***

***THE HEALING
OF NATIONS AND
THE HIDDEN
SOURCES
OF THEIR
STRIFE***

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INTRODUCTORY

The following Studies and Notes, made during the earlier period of the present war and now collected together for publication, do not—as will be evident to the reader—pretend to any sort of completeness in their embrace of the subject, or finality in its presentation. Rather they are scattered thoughts suggested by the large and tangled drama which we are witnessing; and I am sufficiently conscious that their expression involves contradictions as well as repetitions.

The truth is that affairs of this kind—like all the *great* issues of human life, Love, Politics, Religion, and so forth, do not, at their best, admit of final dispatch in definite views and phrases. They are too vast and complex for that. It is, indeed, quite probable that such things cannot be adequately represented or put before the human mind *without* logical inconsistencies and contradictions. But (perhaps for that very reason) they are the subjects of the most violent and dogmatic differences of opinion. Nothing people quarrel about more bitterly than Politics—unless it be Religion: both being subjects of which all that one can really say for certain is—that nobody understands them.

When, as in the present war, a dozen or more nations enter into conflict and hurl at each other accusations of the angriest sort (often quite genuinely made and yet absolutely irreconcilable one with another), and when on the top of that scores and hundreds of writers profess to explain the resulting situation in a few brief phrases (but unfortunately their explanations are all different), and calmly affix the blame on "Russia" or "Germany" or "France" or "England"—just as if these names represented certain responsible individuals, supposed for the purposes of the argument to be of very wily and far-scheming disposition—whereas it is perfectly well known that they really represent most complex whirlpools of political forces, in which the merest accidents (as whether two members of a Cabinet have quarrelled, or an Ambassador's dinner has disagreed with him) may result in a long and fatal train of consequences—it becomes obvious that all so-called "explanations" (though it may be right that they should be attempted) fall infinitely short, of the reality.[1]

Feeling thus the impossibility of dealing at all adequately with the present situation, I have preferred to take here and there just an aspect of it for consideration, with a view especially to the differences between Germany and England. I have thought that instead of spending time over recriminations one might be on safer ground by trying to get at the root-causes of this war (and other wars), thus making one's conclusions to some degree independent of a multitude of details and accidents, most of which must for ever remain unknown to us.

There are in general four rather well-marked species of wars—Religious wars, Race wars, wars of Ambition and Conquest, and wars of Acquisition and Profit—though in any particular case the four species may be more or less mingled. The religious and the race motives often go together; but in modern times on the whole (and happily) the religious motive is not so very dominant. Wars of race, of ambition, and of acquisition are, however, still common enough. Yet it is noticeable, as I frequently have occasion to remark in the following papers, that it only very rarely happens that any of these wars are started or set in motion by the mass-peoples themselves. The mass-peoples, at any rate of the more modern nations, are quiescent, peaceable, and disinclined for strife. Why, then, do wars occur? It is because the urge to war comes, not from the masses of a nation but from certain classes within it. In every nation, since the dawn of history, there have been found, beside the toiling masses, three great main cliques or classes, the Religious, the Military, and the Commercial. It was so in far-back ancient India; it is so now. Each of these classes endeavours in its turn—as one might expect—to become the ruling class and to run the government of the nation. The governments of the nations thus become class-governments. And it is one or another of these classes that for reasons of its own, alone or in combination with another class, foments war and sets it going.

In saying this I do not by any means wish to say anything against the mere existence of Class, in itself. In a sense that is a perfectly natural thing. There *are* different divisions of human activity, and it is quite natural that those individuals

whose temperament calls them to a certain activity—literary or religious or mercantile or military or what not—should range themselves together in a caste or class; just as the different functions of the human body range themselves in definite organs. And such grouping in classes may be perfectly healthy *provided the class so created subordinates itself to the welfare of the Nation*. But if the class does *not* subordinate itself to the general welfare, if it pursues its own ends, usurps governmental power, and dominates the nation for its own uses—if it becomes parasitical, in fact—then it and the nation inevitably become diseased; as inevitably as the human body becomes diseased when its organs, instead of supplying the body's needs, become the tyrants and parasites of the whole system.

It is this Class-disease which in the main drags the nations into the horrors and follies of war. And the horrors and follies of war are the working out and expulsion on the surface of evils which have long been festering within. How many times in the history of "civilization" has a bigoted religious clique, or a swollen-headed military clique, or a greedy commercial gang—caring not one jot for the welfare of the people committed to its charge—dragged them into a senseless and ruinous war for the satisfaction of its own supposed interests! It is here and in this direction (which searches deeper than the mere weighing and balancing of Foreign policies and Diplomacies) that we must look for the "explanation" of the wars of to-day.

And even race wars—which at first sight seem to have little to do with the Class trouble—illustrate the truth of my contention. For they almost always arise from the hatred

generated in a nation by an alien class establishing itself in the midst of that nation—establishing itself, maybe, as a governmental or dominant class (generally a military or landlord clique) or maybe as a parasitical or competing class (as in the case of the Jews in Europe and the Japanese in America and so forth). They arise, like all other wars, from the existence of a class within the nation which is not really in accord with the people of that nation, but is pursuing its own interests apart from theirs. In the second of the following papers, "The Roots of the Great War," I have drawn attention to the influence of the military and commercial classes, especially in Germany, and the way in which their policy, coming into conflict with a similar policy in the other Western nations, has inevitably led to the present embroilment. In Eastern Europe similar causes are at work, but there the race elements—and even the religious—constitute a more important factor in the problem.

By a curious fatality Germany has become the centre of this great war and world-movement, which is undoubtedly destined—as the Germans themselves think, though in a way quite other than they think—to be of vast importance, and the beginning of a new era in human evolution. And the more one considers Germany's part in the affair, the more one sees, I think, that from the combined influence of her historical antecedents and her national psychology this fatality was to be expected. In roughly putting together these antecedent elements and influences, I have entitled the chapter "The Case *for* Germany," because on the principle of *tout comprendre* the fact of the evolution being inevitable constitutes her justification. The nations cannot

fairly complain of her having moved along a line which for a century or more has been slowly and irresistibly prepared for her. On the other hand, the nations do complain of the manner and the methods with which at the last she has precipitated and conducted the war—as indeed they have shown by so widely combining against her. However right, from the point of view of destiny and necessity, Germany may be, she has apparently from the point of view of the moment put herself in the wrong. And the chapter dealing with this phase of the question I have called "*The Case against Germany.*"

Whatever further complications and postponements may arise, there will certainly come a time of recovery and reconstruction on a wide and extended scale over Europe and a large part of the world. To even outline this period would be impossible at present; but in the sixth chapter and the last, as well as in the intermediate pieces, I have given some suggestions towards this future Healing of the Nations.

* * * * *

The Evil—huge and monstrous as it is—is not senseless, one may feel sure. Even now here in England one perceives an extraordinary pulling together and bracing up of the people, a development of solidarity and mutual helpfulness, a greater seriousness, and a disregarding of artificialities, which are all to the good. These things are gains, even though the way of their manifestation be through much of enmity and ignorance. And one may fairly suppose that similar results are traceable in the other nations concerned. Wounds and death may seem senseless and needless, but

those who suffer them do not suffer in vain. All these shattering experiences, whether in a nation's career or in the career of an individual, cause one—they force one—to look into the bases of life and to get nearer its realities. If, in this case, the experiences of the war, and the fire which the nations are passing through, serve to destroy and burn up much of falsity in their respective habits and institutions, we shall have to admit that the attendant disasters have not been all loss—even though at the same time we admit that if we had had a grain of sense we might have mended our falsities in far more economical and sensible fashion.

If in the following pages—chiefly concerned as they are with Germany and England—I have seemed to find fault with either party or to affix blame on one or the other, it is not necessary to suppose that one harbours ill-feeling towards either, or that one fails to recognize the splendid devotion of both the combatants. Two nations so closely related as the Germans and the English cannot really be so hopelessly different in temperament and character; and a great deal of the supposed difference is obviously artificial and class-made for the occasion. Still, there *are* differences; and as we both think we are right, and as we are unable to argue the matter out in a rational way, there seems to be nothing for it but to fight.

War has often been spoken of as a great Game; and Mr. Jerome K. Jerome has lately written eloquently on that subject. It is a game in which the two parties agree, so to speak, to differ. They take sides, and in default of any more rational method, resort to the arbitrament of force. The stakes are high, and if on the one hand the game calls forth

an immense amount of resource, skill, alertness, self-control, endurance, courage, and even tenderness, helpfulness, and fidelity; on the other hand, it is liable to let loose pretty bad passions of vindictiveness and cruelty, as well as to lead to an awful accumulation of mental and physical suffering and of actual material loss. To call war "The Great Game" may have been all very well in the more rudimentary wars of the past; but to-day, when every horrible invention of science is conjured up and utilized for the express purpose of blowing human bodies to bits and strewing battlefields with human remains, and the human spirit itself can hardly hold up against such a process of mechanical slaughter, the term has ceased to be applicable. The affections and the conscience of mankind are too violently outraged by the spectacle; and a great mass of feeling is forming which one may fairly hope will ere long make this form of strife impossible among the more modern peoples.

Still, even now, as Mr. Jerome himself contends, the term is partly justified by a certain fine feeling of which it is descriptive and which is indeed very noticeable in all ranks. Whether in the Army or Navy, among bluejackets or private soldiers or officers, the feeling is certainly very much that of a big game—with its own rules of honour and decency which must be adhered to, and carried on with extraordinary fortitude, patience, and good-humour. Whether it arises from the mechanical nature of the slaughter, or from any other cause, the fact remains that among our fighting people to-day—at any rate in the West—there is very little feeling of *hatred* towards the "enemy." It is difficult, indeed,

to hate a foe whom you do not even see. Chivalry is not dead, and at the least cessation of the stress of conflict the tendency to honour opponents, to fraternize with them, to succour the wounded, and so forth, asserts itself again. And chivalry demands that what feelings of this kind we credit to ourselves we should also credit to the other parties in the game. We do cordially credit them to our French and Belgian allies, and if we do not credit them quite so cordially to the Germans, that is *partly* at least because every lapse from chivalrous conduct on the part of our opponents is immediately fastened upon and made the most of by our Press. Chivalry is by no means dead in the Teutonic breast, though the sentiment has certainly been obscured by some modern German teachings.

While these present war-producing conditions last, we have to face them candidly and with as much good sense as we can command (which is for the most part only little!). We have to face them and make the best of them—though by no means to encourage them. Perhaps after all even a war like the present one—monstrous as it is—does not denote so great a deviation of the old Earth from its appointed orbit as we are at first inclined to think. Under normal conditions the deaths on our planet (and many of them exceedingly lingering and painful) continue at the rate of rather more than one every second—say 90,000 a day. The worst battles cannot touch such a wholesale slaughter as this. Life at its normal best is full of agonizings and endless toil and sufferings; what matters, what *it is really there for*, is that we should learn to conduct it with Dignity, Courage, Goodwill—to transmute its dross into gold. If war *has* to

continue yet for a time, there is still plenty of evidence to show that we can wrest—even from its horrors and insanities—some things that are "worth while," and among others the priceless jewel of human love and helpfulness.

Footnote

[1] Some people take great pleasure in analysing White Books and Grey Books and Orange Books and Yellow Books without end, and proving this or that from them—as of course out of such a mass of material they can easily do, according to their fancy. But when one remembers that almost all the documents in these books have been written with a *view* to their later publication; and when one remembers also that, however incompetent diplomatists as a class may be, no one supposes them to be such fools as to entrust their *most* important *ententes* and understandings with each other to printed records—why, one comes to the conclusion that the analysis of all these State papers is not a very profitable occupation.

II

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WAR-MADNESS

September, 1914.

How mad, how hopelessly mad, it all seems I With fifteen to twenty million soldiers already mobilized, and more than half that number in the fighting lines; with engines of appalling destruction by land and sea, and over the land and under the sea; with Northern France, Belgium, and parts of Germany, Poland, Russia, Servia, and Austria drenched in blood; the nations exhausting their human and material resources in savage conflict—this war, marking the climax, and (let us hope) the *finale* of our commercial civilization, is the most monstrous the old Earth has ever seen. And yet, as in a hundred earlier and lesser wars, we hardly know the why and wherefore of it. It is like the sorriest squabbles of children and schoolboys—utterly senseless and unreasoning. But broken bodies and limbs and broken hearts and an endless river of blood and suffering are the outcome.

III

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THE ROOTS OF THE GREAT WAR[2]

October, 1914.

In the present chapter I wish especially to dwell on (1) the danger to society, mentioned in the Introduction, of class-ascendancy and class-rule; and (2) the hope for the future in the international solidarity of the workers.

Through all the mist of lies and slander created on such an occasion—by which each nation after a time succeeds in proving that its own cause is holy while that of its opponent is wicked and devilish; through the appeals to God and Justice, common to both sides; through the shufflings and windings of diplomats, and the calculated attitudes of politicians, adopted for public approval; through the very real rage and curses of soldiers, the desperate tears and agony of women, the murder of babes, and the smoke of burning towns and villages: it is difficult, indeed, to arrive at clear and just conclusions.

When the war first broke out no one could give an adequate reason for it. It all seemed absurd, monstrous, impossible. Then arose a Babel of explanations. It was that Germany desired to crush France finally; it was that she was determined to break Great Britain's naval and commercial supremacy; it was that she must have an outlet on the sea through Belgium and Holland; that she must force a way to the Mediterranean through Servia; that she must carry out her financial schemes in Asia Minor and the Baghdad region. It was her hatred of the Slav and her growing dread of Russia; it was her desire for a Colonial Empire; it was fear of a revolution at home; it was the outcome of long years of Pan-Germanist philosophy; it was the result of pure military ambition and the class-domination of the Junkers. Each and all of these reasons (and many others) were in turn cited, and magnified into the mainspring of the war; and yet even to-day we cannot say which *was* the main reason, or if we admit them all we cannot say in what exact proportions their influences were combined.

Moreover, they all assume that Germany was the aggressor; and we have to remember that this would not be admitted for a moment by a vast number of the Germans themselves—who cease not to say that the war was simply forced upon them by the hostile preparations of Russia, by the vengefulness of France, by the jealous foreign policy of England, and by the obvious threat embodied in the *Entente* between those three nations; and that if they (the Germans) made preparations for, or even precipitated it, that was only out of the sheer necessity of self-preservation.[3]

Thus we are still left without any generally accepted conclusion in the matter. Moreover, we are struck, in considering the list of reasons cited, by a feeling that they are all in their way rather partial and superficial—that they do not go to the real root of the subject.

Out of them all—and after the first period of confusion and doubt has passed—our own people at home have settled down into the conviction that German militarism in general, and Prussian Junkerdom in particular, are to blame, and that for the good of the world as well as for our own good we are out to fight these powers of evil. Prussian class-militarism, it is said, under which for so long the good people of Germany have groaned, has become a thing intolerable. The arrogance, the insolence, of the Junker officer, his aristocratic pretension, his bearish manners, have made him a byword, not only in his own country but all over Europe; and his belief in sheer militarism and Jingo imperialism has made him a menace. The Kaiser has only made things worse. Vain and flighty to a degree, and, like most vain people, rather shallow, Wilhelm II has supposed

himself to be a second and greater Bismarck, destined by Providence to create the said Teutonic world-empire. It is simply to fight these powers of evil that we are out.

Of course, there is a certain amount of truth in this view; at the same time, it is lamentably insufficient. The fact is that in the vast flux of destiny which is involved in such a war as the present, and which no argument can really adequately represent, we are fain to snatch at *some* neat phrase, however superficial, by way of explanation. And we are compelled, moreover, to find a phrase which will put our own efforts in an ideal light—otherwise we cannot go on fighting. No nation can fight confessedly for a mean or base object. Every nation inscribes on its banner *Freedom, Justice, Religion, Culture* versus *Barbarism*, or something of the kind, and in a sense redeems itself in so fighting. It saves its soul even though bodily it may be conquered. And this is not hypocrisy, but a psychological necessity, though each nation, of course, accuses the other of hypocrisy.

We are fighting "to put down militarism and the dominance of a military class," says the great B.P., and one can only hope that when the war is over we shall remember and rivet into shape this great and good purpose—not only with regard to foreign militarism, but also with regard to our own. Certainly, whatever other or side views we may take of the war, we are bound to see in it an illustration of the danger of military class-rule. You cannot keep a 60-h.p. Daimler motor-car in your shed for years and years and still deny yourself the pleasure of going out on the public road with it—even though you know you are not a very competent driver; and you cannot continue for half a

century perfecting your military and naval organization without in the end making the temptation to become a political road-hog almost irresistible.

Still, accepting for the moment the popular explanation given above of Germany's action as to some degree justified, we cannot help seeing how superficial and unsatisfactory it is, because it at once raises the question, which, indeed, is being asked in all directions, and not satisfactorily answered: "How does it happen that so peace-loving, sociable, and friendly a people as the great German mass-folk, as we have hitherto known them, with their long scientific and literary tradition, their love of music and philosophy, their lager beer and tobacco, and their generally democratic habits, should have been led into a situation like the present, whether by a clique of Junkers or by a clique of militarist philosophers and politicians?" And the answer to this is both interesting and important.

It resolves itself into two main causes: (1) the rise of the great German commercial class; and (2) the political ignorance of the German people.

It is obvious, I think, that a military aristocracy alone, or even with the combined support of empire-building philosophers and a jack-boot Kaiser, could not have hurried the solid German nation into so strange a situation. In old days, and under an avowedly feudal order of society, such a thing might well have happened. But to-day the source and seat of power has passed from crowned heads and barons into another social stratum. It is the financial and commercial classes in the modern States who have the sway; and unless these classes desire it the military cliques