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Some Tendencies of Militarism

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SOME TENDENCIES OF MILITARISM

Walter C. Phillips.

Class of '99

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"War," said Thiers to Senior just after the close of the Crimean conflict, "is mainly a question of money at the present time." The French historian and president uttered a truth that has been growing more apparent year by year. War is a question of money because it is a question of organization and equipment. The day when the hero could turn the tide of battle by setting a val-
orous example in the front rank is as surely past as is the age of flintlocks.

The failure to comprehend the honors of modern warfare has two causes, ignorance of the efficiency of the newly-invented destructive engines and the inability to conceive the gigantic size of the armies of to-day. No one but military men and close followers of mechanical improvements knows anything about the terrific power of the latest and most approved weapons. And even to these two classes the actual capacity in real service is largely problematical. When we think that the standing armies of the continental powers consist of more than five hundred thousand each, we say, "Enormous!" But the figures do not convey to the mind the least idea of their true size. The gallant army commanded by

William of Orange which made possible the Dutch Republic numbered not more than a twentieth of one of these colossal forces in time of peace. The Grand Army that Napoleon buried with his imperial possibilities under Russian snow was scarcely one-fourth as large as Russia supports to-day to maintain her exalted position in the East. It is evident, in view of the wonderful improvement made in weapons, that the carnage on a modern field would be inconceivably greater than half a century ago. If Russia and Germany were engaged in a war and the outcome should depend on a single battle, the number of men killed, taking the percentage of death of those engaged at Waterloo, would be three-quarters of a million.

War considered in the abstract is wholly wrong. It is justified only as a means to an end which could not be otherwise obtained. It is not the instrument of arbitration in an age of moral culture. In the nineteenth century it is an evidence of imperfection in our much exalted civilization. There was an age when war was not only natural but necessary from the construction of society. It was the corollary of barbarism. And here is the difference between war and peace; between barbarism and civilization; between passion and reason. The only explanation for the existence of this anachronism lies in the fact that human nature

at bottom does not change. The same passions that impelled men centuries ago are as strong as ever. But war being in itself bad cannot directly produce good results either for nations or individuals. Its object being the destruction of life and property it justifies any subterfuge or stratagem that accomplishes its purpose. Protracted war means, then, viciousness and misery. Any long war will show this. The effect of the Thirty Years' War on Germany well illustrates the ravages on virtue and decency caused by it. "In character and intelligence the German people had been put back two hundred years."

But in the face of facts whose truth history has proved time and again, Europe has three and one-half millions of men in her standing armies. Any power would gladly reduce its force, but international distrust and jealousy have made even the present state of affairs preferable to humbling national pride or losing national prestige.

It costs Europe annually more than \$1,000,000,000 to support her armies and navies. The nations that stand for Christian principles in the enlightened nineteenth century are paying ten times as much for machines of destruction as for education.

This condition obviously means an excessive taxation of the people. Moderate taxation may be a benefit, but when it becomes as heavy as in some countries of Europe its effect is terrible. The Russian peasant is an example of what may result. His product is taken from him to support military pomp. Count Tolstor is authority for the statement that the inhabitants of the black-earth region have about one-third of the food required to keep them at normal health. These people could produce enough to make them independent of want if not wealthy. But why should they? Anything more than they require for subsistence is taken from them. This has gone on until population has noticeably decreased. And the physical organization has been affected. The stature of the peasantry has decreased until the locality promises to become an actual Lilliput. Bad as are the physical effects, the mental organization is equally impaired. The conditions have caused a stolidity and despair which banish all hope of improvement. The peasants struggle only to live and exert themselves only in so far as instincts of self-preservation absolutely necessitate. Their implements and methods of work are a century old, but they do not seem to wish anything different. Not only is efficient work impossible to them; but religion, patriotism, all that is best and holiest in life, is equally so. Between the two fires of absolutism and nihilism the

common people have been kept in frightful ignorance. Militarism is the immediate, but not sole cause of this awful plight of the Russian people. Partly responsible are the traditions and natural characteristics which have created the state that militarism has so aggravated. While Peter the Great stood for progress, he stood for absolutism as well, and although he introduced religious reforms, the savage superstitions of the primitive Slavé clung to the masses.

And this money wrung from an oppressed people which is used so lavishly means difficulty for the government just as it means misery for the people. A large percentage of the money that goes for armament is absolutely thrown away. The improvements in military equipments are made so fast that the invention of to-day is displaced, even rendered worthless, by that of to-morrow. This cost of having the latest improvement depends on the real cause of the system. Militarism subsists on international jealousy. England and France have a score that Agincourt or Waterloo never settled. Their ambitions as well as their old rivalries constantly throw them together. All powers look askance at Russia's aggression in China. France waits for the chance to erase the blot on her pride made by Germany. In this mad dash in which prudence has been thrown to the

winds the powers have kept on raising their expenditures. Russia owes more than \$5,000,000,000 and increased her appropriation from \$900,000,000 in 1891 to \$1,300,000,000 in 1897, an increase of 45% in six years. Not even Russia's great financial strength is equal to such extravagant increase as that. France has encumbered herself with a debt that absorbs 38 1/2% of her revenue in her efforts to keep peace with Germany. And yet 27% of the remainder goes for armament.

Expensive as militarism is from a financial point of view, it is equally injurious in its direct effects on soldiery and indirectly on the people who are its victims. Directly its influence is weakening even degenerating in many cases. A soldier is a machine whose efficiency depends on his perfection simply as a mechanism. His function is the execution of commands.

"Theirs not to question why,

Theirs but to do or die"

expresses exactly the soldier's duty. This blind obedience tends to weaken the power of initiative, and takes away that of exercising independent thought. And on this power rests our hope of future civilization. Improvement in future ages depends on developing the mental instead of the physical side of human nature. Civilization has always advanced after a moral or spiritual reform. The weakening of the reasoning power is a step backward.

It is asserted by men of veracity that barrack life among European armies is permeated with vice of every sort and that the soldier's life is one of licentiousness and arrogance. It is certain these features are fostered by army life generally and after a while a civilian and his tame and ordinary way of living are equally distasteful. In Germany and France it has come to such a pass that an officer's garb is the guarantee of his character and he feels as little compunction in running a civilian through as Dumas' famous musketeers. In the case of Capt. Dreyfus it has been apparent how feeling that originated in military circles has spread.

To be a great military power, a highly centralized government is necessary. The tendency of militarism is toward autocracy from this fact. Celerity is a necessity in all military operations. It was the real cause of Napoleon's success. And a truly great warrior or a warlike nation demands this very quality, which a republic from its organization cannot have. These two forces, militarism and autocracy, are reciprocally related: the one springs from the other. In the case of Rome militarism made the Empire. In the case of Russia the Empire made militarism. The almost irresistible tendency of a highly centralized government is towards tyranny. And tyranny is the father of anarchy.

The cure for anarchy is enlightenment, and enlightenment means an end to despotism and despotic institutions.

"Force still rules the world" is a phrase much repeated and much abused, the past year. This is the philosophy of militarism in brief. Spain is one of its victims. The Roman Republic ended through its influence. France stands on the verge of civil strife and bankruptcy. Russia robs her peasants to maintain her pomp. Italy in her idiotic attempts to ape Germany sits on a thin crust of anarchy that threatens to break through at any moment.

Still the increase goes on. At the opening of the present year 400,000 tons, more than one-half of all the ships building in the United Kingdom was for the navy. The French budget calls for \$78,000,000 for the present year to be used for purposes of armament. Germany intends to add 27,000 more men to her army.

While these preparations go on, the nineteenth century is slipping away. With all its successes it has had its failures, and enormous ones too. The past is always a source of more or less dissatisfaction and regret. It is the future that ground for hope and speculation. So this century with its heritage of war. This is the century that saw Napoleon's sun set behind the 60,000 corpses of Waterloo; that looked upon the Pennsylvanian hillsides drenched with America's best blood at Gettysburg. But the wars of Christendom are nearly past. Soon the battle field with its revolting honors

will exist only on history's page and nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn to war any more."