

# The Bryan Peace Treaties

Mr. Bryan's peace treaties, which the senate ratified the other day, have been subjected to much taunt and ridicule by men who, if they have no lust for war, have neither that instinctive horror of it which commands encouragement for any proposal that offers hope, however feeble, of averting warfare. These treaties are simple in their provisions, and easily understood. That is one of their chief merits; for being so simple, it would be correspondingly difficult to invent pretexts for violating them, so that the nation which did violate them would stand forth nakedly exposed as a defaulter on its deliberate promises. They provide merely that in case two nations parties to these treaties become involved in a controversy that does not yield to diplomatic treatment they shall refer their controversy to an international commission, binding themselves to commit no hostile act meanwhile, up to the limit of nine months' time. The commission is to inquire into the merits of the controversy and report its conclusions. Neither party to the controversy is obligated to accept its findings. If it wishes to reject them and resort to war to enforce its contention, it is free to do so, or at least free to the extent of its readiness to scorn the judgment of disinterested men and go to war to enforce a contention which they have held unjust. It is questionable if there are many nations which would have the temerity to incur the reproach they would

bring on themselves by making war to enforce a contention judicially held to be unsound and unjust. But even if the treaties did not have the full effect of enforcing acquiescence in the judgments thus rendered, they would at least, in every human probability, stay an outbreak of hostilities for the prescribed time, and thus minimize greatly the chance of war.

The News' faith in the efficacy of this simple expedient is at least great enough to embolden it to express the opinion that if Austria and Serbia had been parties to such a treaty, the world would not now be witnessing the spectacle forced on its gaze. That controversy, infinitely petty when measured by its consequences, would have been easily susceptible, The News believes, to the treatment prescribed by these Bryan treaties. What, in that case, would have happened? The diplomatic negotiations began with the demands made on Serbia by Austria. All these demands were acceded to except one, and that one was denied only conditionally. Assuming their parties to such a treaty, the moment the diplomatic negotiations came to this impasse, the question of whether Serbia was under duty to make the one further submission to the will of Austria would have been referred to an international commission. Regardless of what might have been the judgment, does any one imagine either nation would have begun hostilities pending the rendering of the judgment? And does any one imagine that, at the end of the nine months of enforced contemplation of the danger confronting not only those two nations, but every other in Europe, the party against whom the judgment went would appeal to war? This titanic war resulted from the impulsive decision of a passionate moment. Not months, but only a few days of deliberation, would have been enough to preclude a decision so insensate and fateful as that which was actually made. But there was no provision in the scheme of diplomacy to assure that deliberation or even encourage it. There was no obstacle in the path that led to this abyss of war, nor even a convention that needed to be observed. A decision whose consequences a century will not repair was the issue of a few frenzied hours. The time required for making it was only long enough to bring angry passions to the climax of madness.

It will be said, of course—indeed, has already been said, in effect—that the passions which were capable of this crime would have been capable of breaking such restraints as these treaties would have imposed. That view, it seems to us, is not supported, but, on the contrary, refuted by the circumstances that marked the progress of this frightful tragedy. For that is a view which implies that the most civilized nations are utterly destitute of decent respect for the opinions of mankind, and if there is one feature of this whole matter which stands out more conspicuously than all others, it has been the eagerness of every one of these nations to justify its conduct in the opinion of mankind. They show none of that contempt for the judgment of society which the argument made against the Bryan treaties implies they are guilty of. On the contrary, they manifested a lively fear of it, as is witnessed by the arguments all of them have made in the attempt to acquit themselves of responsibility. They have made arguments that are more or less admirable as feats of casuistry, some of them arguments which, though they have not per-

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sued those to whom they were addressed, have succeeded perfectly in deceiving those who made them. There is not a nation at war that is not profoundly convinced that it has the justification of being the aggrieved, and not the stigma of being the aggressive party. This self-deception was made possible by the complexity and ambiguity of the customs and conventions which existed for their observance. They lend themselves readily to any reading that serves convenience, and that is precisely the fault that is happily avoided by these Bryan treaties. Their cardinal virtue is their simplicity, a simplicity so perfect casuistry itself could conceive no two readings of the obligations they impose, so that the nation violating those obligations could not deceive even itself as to the treachery of its conduct. Even if it be admitted that nations are as cynically faithless and duplicitous as the critics of these treaties charge by implication, it could still be contended that these treaties defy their talent to excuse their wantonness. A nation which should make war during the forbidden time marked by these treaties would stand before the world in self-confessed contempt of the opinions of mankind, and it has recently been demonstrated to us that not the most arrogant and despotic war lord of Europe is capable of that hardihood.

There is a simple but cogent virtue

in these Bryan treaties that ought to enlist the active support of every man who is a sincere lover of peace, and a virtue which, we believe, will come to be Mr. Bryan's best claim to the gratitude of the world.—Dallas (Texas) News.

### REPRESENT SOLID ACHIEVEMENT

Secretary Bryan's eighteen peace treaties, now ratified by the senate with incomparable ease, are strongly indorsed by the editorial in the July number of the American Journal of International Law. "Mr. Bryan is to be congratulated," it says, "upon having secured the discussion of all disputes between the contracting parties, not otherwise provided for, by the apparently simple yet effective device of an investigation and report, which is believed to be tantamount to settlement."

These treaties represent solid achievement, and they are the more valuable because they are so simple in their purpose. The most acrimoniously criticised secretary of state in many years, Mr. Bryan has now something that will make his tenure of office memorable in the future. For the normal condition of nations is peace, not war, and when Europe again settles down to peaceful pursuits these treaties will be recognized as possessing real value in the maintenance of amicable international relations.—Springfield Republican.