

What Can We Do?

[Extract from a speech delivered by William Jennings Bryan before the Economic club of Washington, D. C., March 4th, 1916.]

We can set an example by not adopting the false philosophy that preparedness will prevent war—the false philosophy that has led Europe into the present war.

But we can do more than set an example. We can play the part of friend by tendering our services, not once or twice, but continually until our offer is accepted. Humanity demands it; when has humanity been so offended as during the last eighteen months? The neutral nations demand it; every one of them is bearing a burden of taxation that would not be necessary but for this war, and suffering loss of life and interruption of trade. Our own interests demand it; we have not only suffered in common with other countries, but the attention of our people is being taken from domestic problems to issues raised by the war, and we ourselves are dragged to the very verge of the conflict by violation of our rights by both sides, and injuries committed against us by both sides. These violations and injuries are not intended against us, but are merely incidental to injuries that each side intend against the other, and must be dealt with with patience and a spirit of forbearance. It would be bad enough to go to war with a nation that hated us and wanted war with us; it would be inexcusable to compel any nation to go to war with us when it is not an enemy and does not want war with us. But these constant interruptions are a menace to our peace as well as an interruption of our nation's work, and we have a right to ask, either by ourselves or in conjunction with the other neutral nations, that the nations at war state definitely what it is that they are fighting for, which is but another way of stating the terms upon which peace is possible. They must know what they are fighting about, and it would be a reflection upon them to assume that they are unwilling to state to the world clearly and definitely the reasons for the war and the conditions upon which it can be terminated.

Neither can we assume that there is ANY dispute which must of necessity be settled upon the battlefield. The thirty treaties which we have made with nations representing three-quarters of the world are framed upon the theory that ALL disputes between nations are proper matters for investigation with a view to peaceful settlement, and since this principle has been embodied in treaties with four of the belligerents—Great Britain, France, Italy and Russia—and has been formally endorsed by three other belligerents—Germany, Austria and Belgium—it offers a basis for approaching these nations with a view of restoring peace. Who can say that an offer made in the proper spirit would be rejected?

Pointing to the friendship for us existing among the people of Belgium because of American contribution, Rev. Dr. Hardin, of Chicago, suggests that we can do more to prevent war by contributing to relieve the sufferings which this war has caused than by spending money in preparation for future wars. I believe that his reasoning is sound, and I venture to suggest that an offer of mediation presented earnestly and in the spirit of sincere friendship and accompanied by an expression of the willingness to show our friendship by a liberal contribution to the sufferers on both sides, would be likely to receive favorable consideration. How much better to spend fifty or a hundred million for relief of the victims of the present war than to spend that amount getting ready to increase the sum of human woe by other wars. At least it would be worth trying, and it would put this nation in a position where its advice would be potential in laying the foundation for an enduring peace. The plan embodied in our thirty treaties, if adopted by the European nations among themselves would probably go farther than any other plan, now possible, toward preventing future wars. A year's time for investigation would make war a remote possibility—a month's time for investigation would in all probability have prevented the present war.

In the discussion of machinery, however, it must be understood that no machinery is of value unless there is back of it a sincere desire to promote peace, and the only real progress we can make toward an enduring peace lies in the

cultivation of the spirit that desires peace, that is, the spirit of brotherhood. Carlyle in the closing chapters of his "French Revolution" declares that thought is stronger than artillery parks and at last moulds the world like soft clay; and then he adds what is of even greater importance, namely, that back of thought is love. This nation can not assist the old world out of its troubles or aid in the hastening of universal peace unless its supreme passion is brotherly love, and this love will compel us to keep out of the present conflict. This would seem to be an imperative duty, and it is not inconsistent with the protection of our rights or the maintenance of the nation's honor. If any disputes arise which can not be adjusted without concessions which it would be improper to make, we are at liberty to use the treaty plan which has been offered to all the nations. If that plan is not used or if it fails to bring a peaceful settlement, we still have a choice between entering this war and postponing the final settlement of the dispute until the war is over. If we are compelled to choose between those two alternatives, I believe it to be the part of wisdom to postpone final settlement until the war is over, first, because we could then secure settlement without war, the only difficulty being the fear of the effect of the settlement of the war; second, if postponement of final settlement did not prevent war, it would be better to have our war after this war is over than during this war, for then it would be our own war with the nation with which we had our dispute—to enter this war would be to enter a war which is not ours but is everybody's war, the side taken would depend upon the nation with which we happened to have our dispute, and while in the war we would be compelled to fight for the things that other nations were fighting for. **SURELY NO ONE WOULD DESIRE TO PUT OUR ARMY AND NAVY AT THE SERVICE OF ANY EUROPEAN MONARCH TO BE USED FOR THE SETTLEMENT OF HIS QUARRELS.**

The proposition that we must not enter this war might be defended on pecuniary grounds. No one knows how much it would cost us to take part in this war, but to judge by what it has already cost the nations of Europe we could not hope to avoid placing a heavy mortgage upon the next generation. The proposition might also be supported on the ground that it would call for an enormous sacrifice of life. If nearly three million have already been killed, we could hardly expect to escape without a proportionate loss, for if it is manly to go into this war it will be manly to play a man's part and be prodigal in men and in money. I do not believe that the American people would be willing to sacrifice a half-million men or even one hundred thousand men for the injuries that have been inflicted, whether they arose from the use that has been made of submarines injuries or from our trade with neutrals.

But there is a third reason of more weight than the argument based upon possible expenditure of money or possible loss of life, namely, that we can not become a belligerent nation and at the same time remain a neutral nation. We stand at the head of the neutral nations; the world looks to us to act as mediator when the time for mediation comes. If, for any reason, no matter what the reason may be, we enter this war, we must step down from our high position and turn over to some other nation an opportunity which never came to any nation before and may never come again.

Then, too, we are the next of kin to all the nations now at war; they are blood of our blood and bone of our bone. Not a soldier boy falls on any battlefield over yonder but the wall of sorrow in his home finds an echo at some American fireside, and our people have a right to expect that this generation will remain the friend of all, and be in a position to play the part of a friend when a friend can aid.

Some nation must lift the world out of the black night of war into the light of that day when an enduring peace can be built on love and brotherhood, and I crave the honor for this nation. More glorious than any page of history that has yet been written will be the page that records our claims to the promise made to the peacemakers.

This is the day for which the ages have been waiting. For nineteen hundred years the gospel of the Prince of Peace has been making its

majestic march around the world, and during these centuries the philosophy of the Sermon on the Mount has become more and more the rule of daily life. It only remains to lift that code of morals from the level of the individual and make it real in the law of nations, and this, I venture to believe is the task which God in his providence has reserved for this nation. We are less hampered by precedent than other nations, and, therefore, more free to act. I appreciate the value of precedent—what higher tribute can I pay to the law of precedent than to say it is as universal as the law of gravitation and as necessary to stability? And yet the law of gravitation controls only inanimate nature—everything that lives is in constant combat with the law of gravitation. The tiniest insect that creeps upon the ground wins a victory over it every time it moves; even the slender blade of grass sings a song of triumph over this universal law as it lifts itself up toward the sun. So every step in human progress breaks the law of precedent. Precedent lives in the past—it relies on memory; because a thing never was, precedent declares that it can never be. Progress walks by faith and dares to try the things that ought to be.

This, too, is the leading Christian nation. We give more money every year to carry the gospels to those who live under other flags than any other nation now living or that has lived. The two reasons combine to fix the eyes of the world upon us as the one nation which is at liberty to lead the way from the bloodstained methods of the past out into the larger and better day.

We must not disappoint the hope which our ideals and achievements have excited. If I know the heart of the American people, they are not willing that this supreme opportunity shall pass by unimproved. The metropolitan press is not the voice of the nation; you can no more measure the sentiment of the peace-loving masses by the froth of the jingo than you can measure the oceans silent depth by the foam upon its waves.

The republican publicity bureau, the standard organization maintained at Washington, gives an interesting hint of the future. It says that Roosevelt never can get the republican nomination this year if it is fought out at conventions and primaries, but adds: "If Roosevelt heads our ticket this year it will be because the delegates at Chicago, after going thoroughly over the ground, decide that he is 'the best man,' and can defeat Wilson. Leaders like Barnes and Penrose would be compelled to use something for their throats in order to swallow T. R., but this sounds as though they were getting ready."

If congress decreed that Americans must remain off belligerent vessels traversing the war zones, every cause of irritation that now exists with other nations would vanish and the chances of America being involved in any war would be ended. If the war scare subsided, however, what reason would the big army and navy boosters have for creating a big army and navy. Putting two and two together, in this instance, might bring an interesting result.

The Pennsylvania railroad is inviting its patrons to answer the question it has itself propounded: "What causes the lack of confidence in railroads?" It is to be regretted that the directors of the New Haven and of the Rock Island were not invited to contribute from the wealth of their personal information.

EXPENSIVENESS OF PREPAREDNESS

One 14-inch cannon and equipment costs \$170,000. One target-practice shot costs as much as President John Adam's education at Harvard university.

"Whether your shell hits the target or not, Your cost is six hundred dollars a shot. You thing of noise and flame and power, We feed you a hundred barrels of flour. Each time you roar. Your flame is fed With twenty thousand loaves of bread. Silence! A million hungry men Seek bread to fill their mouths again."

One broadside from a modern "dreadnaught" costs almost \$20,000.

"Were half the power that fills the world with terror,

Were half the wealth bestowed on camps and courts,

Given to redeem the world from error,

There would be no need of arsenals and forts."
—from "War—What For?" by George R. Kirkpatrick.