

# Who Are the Cowards?

By Thomas H. Green

[From Advocate of Peace]

A somewhat distinguished friend of mine, for whose judgment and versatility I have an equal respect, called the present condition of things in the United States "an American epidemic of Prussianism."

"Preparedness" certainly was one watchword of the Hohenzollern madness, and "frightfulness" has been its logical aftermath.

The transplanting into American soil of all this militarist insanity, with its inevitable and always characteristic cowardice, despite the awful warning from across the sea, threatens to become a tragedy.

"Cowardice," you say—"Militarism a breeder of cowardice?"

Absolutely yes!

The most stupendous and ridiculous cowards in the United States today are not, as we are taunted with being, the Peace people—not even the "white crow" of the Shooter's shouting sarcasm, the "peace-at-any-price-man"—if there is such a thing.

Our most pathetic coward is the expert extremist in this campaign for military preparedness.

He is afraid of everybody. He trembles and turns pale at everything. Day and night he lives in an atmosphere of abject terror.

Somebody is always going to do something. Out of the fog of his weird and grotesque delusions, like the "detective" in the melodrama, our American alarmist is always appearing with mysterious mien, and his "hist" and "shush"—his "ohs" and his "ahs"—would exhaust a double font of type.

Nothing is too absurd to be absorbed in his tearful pessimism.

Out of airy nothing he can concoct vast disaster.

Germany will surely invade the United States, because our Atlantic seacoast is defenseless, and our enormous wealth lies at the mercy of the Kaiser.

Damned if we do, and damned if we don't, any one of the belligerent nations—it matters not to him which one—offended by our past proceedings is going, so soon as peace is made, to rush pellmell across the ocean and proceed to subdue, conquer, enslave, devastate, exhaust, bankrupt, and otherwise unkindly treat the unprotected and helpless United States of America!

As if one coast were not enough to excite our lachrymal glands and arouse spasms of dread, he paints lurid pictures of vast troops of Japanese landing unresisted on our Pacific coast, and covering it from Bellingham to San Diego with a solid mass of veteran warriors marching eastward, conquering, devouring, overwhelming.

After Europe has been bled white—in this most horrible tragedy in the world's history—her men slaughtered and maimed by millions; money, credit—almost life itself—exhausted and gone, he pictures the staggering, half starved, breathless victor gathering up his fragments and sailing away for America to win and bear away rich loot of gold—when ten times our gold might be had in half the time, without the spilling of a drop of blood, by the restoration of agriculture, commerce and trade.

Never for a moment does he think it possible that out of this deluge of blood, this tempest of flame, Europe may come, weak unto death, but once more sane.

Sanity does not appeal to the mil-

itary expert; sanity and his hysteria are mutually exclusive.

"Hist! don't you know there are goblins behind every tree? Ghosts gibber and squeak where it's dark, and you mustn't go near a lamp post for fear of being shot!"

"You are not safe anywhere these awful times."

"B-r-r-r! mercy, what was that?"

"If they had only listened to me, and we had an army, so that everyone could have a bodyguard!"

"Yes, I know the sun is shining, but who wants to think of pleasant things?"

"Let us wiggle and writhe and all be uncomfortable together!"

You are not a real patriotic American unless your skin is pimply into goose flesh and your blood pressure touches two hundred.

Any man who sleeps without a pistol under his pillow is a traitor, and he who goes to rest without looking under the bed for a German or a Jap is worse—he is a cowardly peace man!

"Ha! what is coming?"

"A Japanese laundryman, you say? Poor fool! don't you know that very likely he has dynamite in that most mysterious looking bundle?"

"Don't you know that the Japanese Fruit Growers' Association is really the 1476th Regiment of Reserve Cavalry, and that they have their horses and equipment hidden in what look like innocent strawberry patches?"

"Don't you know that it has been indisputably proven that the St. Louis Deutsches Liederkranz is really a brigade of the Lanstrum, kept here to take St. Louis when the German army lands, and that they sing that way to drown the noise of the Forty men who are always shooting at targets in secret practice?"

"Oh, dear! I just know something is going to happen."

The normal sane mind hates and detests cowardice.

It becomes sometimes a disease—to be extirpated either by psychopathic treatment or often by a sound flogging.

It's a contemptible thing in an individual—but a thousand times more in a great nation, if it should borrow consternation from its brave defenders and cringe and tremble before an entirely theoretical and conjectural foe.

But there is always danger of an epidemic when infection is established.

The contagion of Fear is like a prairie fire—once it is started, it sweeps, and leaps, and becomes resistless.

And over all the land this organized effort to create a panic of apprehension is gaining tremendous headway.

We are on the edge of an epoch of gigantic expenditure and stupendous expansion along naval and military lines.

Since the demise of the loved and lamented "River and Harbor bill" there has been no pork barrel for the faithful. A couple of billion dollars, my countrymen, is a tremendous appeal to "patriotism."

It won't do to oppose the country's defense in this "hour of peril." To do so would be to brand oneself a traitor.

To venture even reasonable objection would be to put oneself, however sane his objections might be, under suspicion of being a foreign spy.

For those of us who oppose this procedure as unwise, unjustified, and dangerous, there is but one thing left

to do, and that is by voice and act and influence to try to see to it that if the people's money must be spent, the people shall at least have something adequate to show for their money.

Have they heretofore?

They have not.

During the past decade (1905-1914) there was appropriated for and spent by the war department \$1,533,018,782. With this trifle of money we reached on June 30, 1914, an army of 4,883 officers and 92,877 enlisted men, including the Philippine scouts.

During the same decade there was appropriated and spent by the navy department \$1,218,202,202.

On June 30, 1914, we had in the navy 3,711 officers and 52,667 men, and we had of all sorts and kinds, including tugs, fuel ships, and converted yachts, 336 vessels, of which 10 only were first-line battleships. During the same time Germany had built a navy second in the world, organized and maintained a naval personnel four times as large, and had spent \$500,000,000 less in doing it.

Let the mad dance begin if it must, but let the people write this on the palms of their congressmen: "For every dollar spent, a dollar's worth in return!"

As to any real danger, any tangible cause or excuse for us having 48 first-line battleships, and a doubled or trebled standing army, there are two things to say:

The first one is, that if it be really true that this great removed, almost isolated, nation is really compelled by pressure of valid danger to defend herself against attack, remembering that we have no old sores to break afresh, no vulgar old-world jealousies to inspire, no vaunting ambition to egg us on—that "what we ask we ask not for America alone, but equally for humanity"—if in spite of all this the world has really become so rabid, so bereft of moral sense, as to make merely our wealth so great an object of pirate greed and gross, grasping avarice as to compel us to hedge us round with fleets and armies to insure mere safety—then let us and let the world take leave of all our loud and raucous boasting about culture, civilization, and Christian faith.

Our lofty maxims are base illusions—our civilization a veneer so thin that, scratch it ever so little, and you find the primitive beast that man has been since the beginning—our proudly bannered faith and moral excellence the pathetic outgrowth of a lie.

If this be really true, then let us take leave of all our pretense, all our pride, all our high-sounding phrase and philosophy. Let us confess that civilization has failed, that Christianity has failed—that logic and law have no abiding place in life—that the sword is the sceptre of the world and that force is king.

But the other thing to be said is that all this is not true.

The great world conflict has been thrust upon the world by the conserving and the teaching of this very philosophy, evil as sin and false as hell. Jealousy, ambition, commercial rivalry, revenge—the worst and lowest passions in human souls—have festered and rotted into a mad insanity.

Who began, and why nation after nation caught in the wild orgie of slaughter have been swept into, the conflict that has turned Europe into a seething cauldron of foul fiends, is not germane to our present thought.

Our danger lies in yielding to this pestilence of fear, and following the same path that leads down to the gates of death.

Preparedness for what?

"Preparedness for defense" is the

new shibboleth—and that means simply preparedness for war.

Had we been "adequately and efficiently prepared," does any one presume that any human power could have kept us thus far from participation in this awful conflict?

Listen! By the time this war is ended, where will there be men or money to make war for long generations to come? Long before any nation of Europe could summon strength, courage—to say nothing of the consent of a bereaved, maimed, and outraged people—to even raise the question of an armed conflict with us, the ships we are now to build will have rusted on the junk pile of national waste, and the men who are to fill our ranks of an enlarged and ambitious army will be doddering pantaloon hobbling on the edge of the grave.

Of course, the most ardent advocate of the present preparedness program does not defend any notion of America becoming an aggressive military power. Our naval expansion and our big army increase are "for defense" and to put us in a position to become the world's peacemaker. It sounds well; only the warring nations over yonder, and all sensible men everywhere, know that battleships and armies have always, as in the midsummer of 1914, been the easy dynamics of beginning hostilities. America today is a tremendous anchor for peace. America, amply armed, particularly with an aggressive, not to say aggravating, administration, would simply be another piece of tinder for the conflagration.

Suppose that in six months or a year the belligerents of Europe are brought face to face with peace or utter ruin. Suppose that the grim necessity of rehabilitation leads to a proposition for partial disarmament—at least a check in the mad race of military and naval rivalry. Then there flashes into view America engaged with feverish activity in building battleships and recruiting armies. What would Europe do? Disarm? Reduce? Not while the richest nation in the world is arming herself. Preparedness means what it meant in Europe in 1914: it means eventual war.

Let America be brave enough to believe that the world will turn sane again—that law and order and justice will again take up the rule of the nations—and that the one chance that the United States has of leading the world to peace is by preparing for peace—and not for war.

### A GHASTLY EXAMPLE

The "preparedness" program boosted by jingo big business is probably the most ghastly example of the lengths to which human greed and avarice and love of money will lead men, in the history of the world, for it would without a thought crucify the hope of democracy in order to make and safeguard its dollar-schemes, its swollen possessions now and its trade conquests and foreign commercial "spheres of influence" of the future.—Oklahoma Farmer.

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